

# A study on the universal faith of traditional society; "The concept of AFA, Sibnai in traditional Bathou faith"

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Bathou is a traditional ethnic faith prevalent among the Bodo - Kacharies of North-East India and parts of West Bengal, Sikkim, Bhutan, Nepal and Myanmar. This ancient traditional faith is practised in different form and manners in various regions. As Bodo-Kacharies had to lose their homogeneity due to truncated living in different parts and in view of the influence of various faiths, believes and practices; people in their distant habitation developed differently.

In Bathou faith, two similar views have been witnessed in this faith known as trantrik or orthodox faith influenced by Braja-jan and Hinduism since 8th A.D, this section of followers adopted occulted practices in the name of practicing faith. The Traditional part of Bathou, they offered non-**vegatable** puja with meat and drinks but they never take beef.

Other section of people modified the rules / principles of Bathou faith. At present an Organisation of pundits of Bathou took up a movement to rationalize and modernize the ritual and practices of the faith. A considerable research works have also been done on this faith. They believe on sanshkaras with vegetable puja. So, both the parts of Bathou it is similar to all Hindu sets or cults in religion and other. Some changes have been found in religious practices and among the followers. On the other hand some challenges are also coming into the devotees as a part of the modernization.

The aims and objective of this paper is :- i) To make a primary search on the concept of AFA and its various manifestations in Bathou faith with reformative concept.

ii) To identify the changes found among the Enthusiasts.

During the studies of the both Primary and secondary methods were followed to collect data, mainly different places of Darrang and Udalguri

Districts were visited, met the priests, devotees and collect the primary data and some books, epics, articles were followed for the secondary Data.

The concept of Bathou - it appears that **AFA-AFA** Bwrai Bathou or Almighty or param Brahma is the supreme God. Secrete hymn conceptualizing and concentrating on AFA, the Param Brahma. The AFA is invisible soul, having no shape and size, but spirit of supreme soul. It is "Mwdai", which is already spreading everywhere means air, water and land of the earth also in the cosmos.

However, Bathou is a natural believe. It has its own philosophy, and universal character. On the concept of origin of Bathou faith has no specific idea has to be found. It is also very old to be developed among the Bodo community like Sanatan Hindu religion.

The five original divine elements of God being having soul and faith of five principle of all works of life which is known as Big-Mantra, the natural words "**oung-hring-khling-fwt-se**" used by Bathouist, similarly Hindus also believe in the five basic elements of all creation of universe. Those are also worshipped along with Bathou by different names like Khiti, Aopa, Tejya, Mourant, Boum, it may belongs to "Vedas" of Hinud's; the "Ba-Raja", he is AFA the almighty who control five elements of soul.

The Bathouist believe the concept of binding of life is also of five elements. Such as Birth, Happiness, Sorrow, Marriage cum Procreating and Death; while the faith gives guideline for regulated behaviour and normal happy life. The worshipping and prayer aiming to Bathou, AFA, believed to have blessings for normal life. It is almost similar to Hindu faith.

The soul never dies, they have firm credence that the present distress is nothing but the aftermath of previous and present actions of life will also ascertain its consequences on the rebirth. The rebirth concept, purely developed in Veda's of Hindus, by which Bathouist also followed the same.

The five principles of life of person must have attitude of living and promising good life are: (i) Truth, (ii) Harmony, (iii) Love and Mankind, (iv) Holiness, (v) Forgiveness.

Being a natural concept of Bathou, they believe on trees, plants and animals. The "Sizu" (Euphorbia neriifolin) tree is sent as holy tree of AFA on earth. They do keep Jatracay and tulshi as holy tree; mainly behind sizu they offered puja to AFA. The "Sizu" is an epitome of Param Brahma, the powerful pantheistic symbol, the sizu has five edges and it refers to five elements of life,

five spiritual sounds and five norms of ideal character of life. Accordingly, AFA, the Sibnai indicates to control of our five instincts (Ripus) to achieve heavenly life similar to Hindus, dominating the five ripus a life may feel or concentrated the existence of almighty or soul. In Hindus, sizu plant also used for the purpose of puja of Goddess Manasha and Padma as per Purans, the holy book of Hindus.

Followers of Bathou do practices some of sanshkaras institutionalize Hinduism. Bathouist do consider Tuesday as most auspicious. It is in the view of their legendary faith that on Tuesday AFA the Param Brahma created "Mun-Sin-Bwrai" a devine God took in doctrines the human beings and pure faith and practices of Bathou.

Next to Bathou, Mainao, as an epitome of wealth and property i.e. in agriculture rice etc. who considered as Goddess "Lakshmi" in Hindu wellbeing prosperity and property protection. To pray her, a rice full of jar is sanctified with Holy water and kept on a sanctum made in north east corner of cooking house of the family. Normally the house wife or head of the family is advised to light earthen lamp with mustered oil after sun set.

Kherai is a devotional song, music and dance with pose, posture and humility with devotion to dedicate the self at the feet of AFA, the Param Brahma. The Kherai, the devotional song and dance performed basically for five purposes. But Kherai prayers maintain and represent in 18 ways for 18 nos. of duties as well as manifestation of perfect life to feel the soul of Param Brahma.

The five kind of Kherai are:-

- (i) Kherai Sangasari:- it is carried out on 1st Baisagu, the Bodo month of starting of new year's.
- (ii) Garja Kherai:- on the 1st Jetha of Bodo month for appearing the evil spirit, so that people be healthy and free from disease.
- (iii) Amthi Kherai:- it carried out on 7th of month of Ahar for the prosperity of the seasonal fruits and crops.
- (iv) Mainao Kherai:- it is carried out on 1st day of Kartik month to please Mainao the Goddess of prosperity and happiness.
- (v) Bathou Kherai:- it is celebrated on first full moon day of Magha, to AFA Bwrai Bathou.

The 18th items of Kherai's with their meaning are:-

- (i) Bathou Tharnai : Clean your mind, avoid sin
- (ii) Laijam Barnai : Devoted yourself to the AFA
- (iii) Kherai Golaw : Pray to AFA for long result, faith for long
- (iv) Kherai Gushung : Pray to AFA where you like.
- (v) Dwathwi Lung nwi: Self control
- (vi) Awr Salai Janai : Control your energy to maintain cool
- (vii) Thungri Ganai : Sign of Holiness
- (viii) Khwjema funai : Show your unity
- (ix) Dahal Sibnai : Self defence
- (x) Raigoung Sibnai : free from sins
- (xi) Gandwalai Bondai : Make five-time changes of life during pregnancy
- (xii) Utha Bathou Gidingwai: Maintain physical changes birth to old
- (xiii) Bathou ginding nai : Rebirth and replace for good works
- (xiv) Nwo Bwinai : The body is not permanent, God observing movement and resettle you may in heaven or on earth
- (xv) Sat hungrai sifanai : become free from greediness for you success
- (xvi) Garai Dabranai : There are lot of changes in your life, but it depend upon your level of works.
- (xvii) Khamao-Barkhwnai : Respect to your culture
- (xviii) Mainao thisonai : Welcome to your property and prosperity

During Kherai dance and music, they use the Sizu tree, elephant fruit and other fruits, drums and traditional Instruments etc.

Kherai in Bathou is universal. All teen girls with sound, clean body and soul can participate and offer songs and dance of humility and devotion keeping pace with the rhymes of drums, flutes and other musical instruments. Deodhini, Deodhai and Bailung, the priests offered the devotional domle pray to AFA, Sibnai.

In orthodox Hindu societies the Doodhanies or Debadashies were a class by themselves. They were honoured only at the time of devotional dance; but in general and normal society they were treated as outcaste. Deodhonies or devadashies could never get a married life during their life time.

But Bathouist not only honour the dancer, but they can marry them without any prejudices. However, the dancer of Kherai after marriage may



function as teacher for the future dancers and may sing devotional song for the younger generation.

Thus, it appears that the participants in Kherai of Bathou religion are always having high or general social status which were very much lacking in sanaton Hindu Society.

Further it appears in the undivided Darrang and Kamrup districts "Devi Manasha" or "Padma", the goddess of snakes is not only worshipped by a priests in sanskrit language but a long relic of puran writer on medieval Assamese language by Sukabi Narayan Dev and Durga Bar is coached with songs and dance by belling, a metal instrument and on occasion by beating drums. Though the worshipping of snake Goddess said to be of Austric origin, it has also adopted some features of Kherai dance. The movement of head and hair by the deodhani or lady dancer in the process of worshipping goddess "Manasha" and "Padma", and some of the body languages are very much similar with dancing grammar of Kherai, in pleasing AFA by the Bathouist.

The followers of Bathou, conceptually believe that the bathou in eternal and infinite power with character and colours . Bathou transformed to a combined male and female power, which can be defined as Ardha-narisware, mainly it is symbolic presiding deities of Ardha- Nariswar, very much worshipped in different places. In Hinduism it is known as combine of Siba-Parbati which is seen in different place of Assam for example in Kedar in Hajo of Kamrup District, Pingleswar at Guwahati and Patidarrang in Darrang District etc.

In Bathou faith param Brahma is a male who live in "Kailash" and also, he is the expert of Dance and music, a peace loving and creative God. The Sibnai is the symble of beauty, where Hindus known him as Siba-Nataraj, Nataraj is nothing but symbol of Art and Culture.

However, Bathou has manifested one God, but there are 18 nos of Guru and 36 nos of power, these 36 nos of power of God are as follows –

- 1) Mun-Sin-Sibnai 2) Sibnai 3) Deba Bwrai 4) Khurai Bwrai 5) Mainao Bwrai 6) Khamaikha 7) Mao thousiri 8) Bhandarai 9) Alai khungur 10) Bilai Khungur 11) Mwnasw Khumrai 12) Sodrilwingri 13) Raj Khungur 14) Raj Khundra 15) Song Raja 16) Abwla Khungur 17) Bwrai 18) Aham Bwrai.

The Aham Bwrai is the highest Guru among the other Gurus.

The concept of Ardha Nariswar, there are 18th male power as well as 18th female power and they prayed for different purposes.

The different powers of deities of Gods and Goddess are in process of sanshkar. Hence the basic concept of practices of deities are akin to institutionalization of Hinduism. So, Bathou is a mainstream, roots of Hinduism and perfect ethnic sanshkar of Hindu religion and culture. Hence Bathou is a universal faith of Bodo karacheries traditional society. it may consider as absolute identity.

In conclusion: -

- 1) In Bathou faith there does not exist any believe on caste system among followers
- 2) It is not allowed to divorce of marriage, not allowed to break couple life, whether happiness or sorrowfulness.
- 3) They allow Priest or Deory to perform puja but not honoured to any high place in the society.
- 4) They offered puja in perfect place or open place as well as every home set a worshipping place in their eastern side of the boundary.
- 5) Basically not allowed to sacrifices of life for puja, they believe on vegetarian God. However traditional orthodoxes still support sacrifices
- 6) Rice, elephant fruit, tulshi and sizu highly respected fruits and plants.
- 7) They become the way of sanshkar of unholy and unsocial behaviour, accordingly reform the badowa system and ask to purify form baad or sin.
- 8) Dikshya system still practised among the followers of Bathouist.
- 9) Bathouist follows the easy prayer system and collective praying to AFA for unity of society.
- 10) There are many rituals, rits, customs, and customary laws that has contributed for the enlightenment and gradual changing of the society.

With these observations it appears that Bathou is a self-cultured logical, ethical faith, which does not outway the Hindu religious and cultural belief in the South East Asia in general and the North east India in particular. By the advent of Christian Missionaries to the North East India a number of Bodo Kasachari people has converted themselves to the Christianity leaving their traditional life. At the same time Globalization and digitalization also have significantly impacted the Traditional way of living of the people. Numerous

changes have taken place but the young generation has found to be interested to revive and research on AFA, Sibnai in traditional Bathou faith.

**Source of Articles:**

- (i) A field study at Harisinga, Udalguri areas of Udalguri district, Assam.
- (ii) Different writings of Sijou Jwngma edited by Dr. Leladhar Brahma.
- (iii) Articles written by Dr. N.N. Sarma on Bathou faith of the Bodo Kacharies of Assam a starlet in the Galaxy of Hinduism.
- (iv) Article written by Dr. Anil Boro on Bathou Religion from traditional practices to institutionalization.

