

Bodo Cosmogonic Myths

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Abstract:

Like other tribal people of the world, the Bodos have a rich tradition of myths and their richness undoubtedly depends on its continuity which again depends on the functions these myths play in the lives of Bodo people. One such myth is the cosmogonic myth related to the creation of the world and human beings. As the title suggests, this paper attempts to explore one of the cosmogonic myths of Bodos related to the creation of the world and human beings.

Keywords: Bodo, Myths, *Bathou*.

Introduction:

The Cosmogonical myths describe the origin myths. Everything has its origin; without an origin, nothing can exist. The term 'origin,' however indicates a causal relation which is not limited to a moment of the temporal process, but is co-extensive with it. Man's quest for origin, since time immemorial, can be said to be most sincere in myths that tell or try to tell of origin. The English word cosmogony refers to the Greek *Kosmogonia* (*gonos* derived from the word for 'producing' and *kosmos* meaning cosmos, the universe, or world), (Leeming 2010:392). In fact, the cosmogonic myth furnishes the model for all myths of origin. A culture cosmogony is always a creation myth because it deals with the creation of the world and is related to cosmogony. It is a narrative that describes the original ordering of the universe. They explain the origin of the world, the birth of gods and goddesses, and the creation of man.

In trying to understand the significance and meaning of any myth, it is important to note that meaning in myths is culturally dependent. One has to take into record the cultural aspects of the people before venturing into myths to cull out any possible meaning because various modes of interpretations are possible, each potentially rewarding, but none culminating. As and when the culture of the folk is given due importance, the task of interpretation becomes a lot easier. This would also go a long way in deconstructing the myths meaningfully and giving further impetus to images and symbols which would amplify a better understanding of the myths in general. Since the Bodo myths deal with fundamental questions about the universe, gods and the human world, their all-embracing quality can illuminate many facets of the Bodo culture.

Myth of Universe and Human Beings:

In the dim past, there was merely a significant void in which the Supreme Being God *Aham Guru Anan Gosai Binan Gosai Obonglaori* formlessly existed. The infinite God became tired of his formless existence and desired to live in flesh and blood. So, he thought of creating the universe. Accordingly, God *Aham Guru* descended on this great void with all his human characteristics, viz., five faculties of action and five faculties of knowledge. As he appeared, a heavenly voice echoed in the universe (Narzary 2018:78-79):

Laoba - Laosum,
Khaoba - Kaosum.
Ada Gwsom,
Doiao Barsom.

Translation:

Laoba - Laosum: Five faculties of knowledge, such as *koma* (ear), *gonthong* (nose), *megon* (eyes), *shallai* (tongue) and *bigur* (skin) respectively,
Khaoba - Kaosum: Five faculties of action, such as *akai* (hand), *ating* (foot), *kuga* (mouth), *kibu* (anus) and *hasugra* (phallus) respectively.
Ada - literally means elder brother but signifies the first and noblest; *Gwsom* means heart,
Doiao means water, a reference to the ocean of worldly life or social life; *Barsom* means jumped into, which signifies to endure.

The complete meaning of the above expression is thus: The Infinite God of supreme wisdom with the noblest soul and purest heart assumed the form of a man with all human ramifications and descended on this Earth to lead a social life. In other words, it implies that the infinite deity though transcendent of the world is yet immanent in all his manifestations.

God *Aham Guru*, the Infinite God in his embodied form calls himself *Bathou Bwrai*ⁱ or *Sibrai*. From the mouth of Lord *Bathou Bwrai*, the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, the air, water, fire and all emanated. After the creation of the universe, Lord *Bathou Bwrai* created deities and human beings. According to mythical tradition, Lord *Bathou Bwrai* first created his consort Goddess *Bathou Bwri*ⁱⁱ (*Sibrwi*) as his companion from his own immaculate self. Subsequently, they created the first man on the earth called *Mwnsingsing*, a name derived from the Bodo word *mansi* meaning 'man.' *Mwnsingsing*, however, opted for lifelong celibacy. So, Lord *Bathou Bwrai* and Goddess *Bathou Bwri* procreated another couple named *Darimuba* and *Singridoba* to propagate the human population in this universe. This is how human lives debuted on this terrestrial earth (cited in Basumatary 1955:2-3; Mosahary 1986:128-129).

The significance of the recounted cosmogonical myth lies in the fact that this tale answers to the descriptive definition of a myth as a story set in the time before the world came into existence, whose dramatis personae - God *Aham Guru* is a divine being, whose actions are

exemplary or at least explanatory of the subsequent state of things and affairs in the world today. The phrase, 'in the dim past' with which the tale opens is clearly another expression of the *illo tempore* (Latin for in that time), which Eliade (1998) has pointed out to be characteristic of myth-telling. In other words, the context of the tale is environed in eternity, in those strong and powerful times when the man had not yet come upon the scene.

Secondly, it tries to answer the most difficult and the most fundamental questions of human existence in the universe, i.e., this cosmogonical myth tells us how through the deeds of a supernatural being, Lord *Bathou Bwrai*, a reality came into existence, i.e., the cosmogony, a composite of the senses conveyed by the Greek words *kosmos* (order) and *genesis* (birth), (Leeming 2010:xx). Thus, it recounts that the universe and human beings have been solely created by the great Lord *Bathou Bwrai*. As narrated above, Lord *Bathou Bwrai* first created his consort Goddess *Bathou Bwri* as his companion from his immaculate self and subsequently created the first semi-divine man on the Earth, the great *Mwnsingsing* and the first semi-divine couple *Darimuba* and *Singridoba*. That is, this myth tries to inherently answer the fundamental human questions: where did we come from and who were our primal parents? In other words, it recounts the events that took place at the time of origin - *in illo tempore*. According to the Bodo people, if the world exists, if man exists, it is because Lord *Bathou Bwrai* exercised his creative powers in the beginning. Furthermore, it is as a result of Lord *Bathou Bwrai*'s intervention that they are today mortal, sexed and cultural beings, i.e., 'a man himself is what he is today; he is the direct result of those mythical events, he is constituted by those events' (Eliade 1998:6-11). This aspect of myth can also be found in almost all cultural traditions where people seek to clarify their origins and describe their cultural identities through cosmogonical myths.

However, the most important aspect of this myth lies in the fact that the world comes into being because of the infinite Lord *Bathou Bwrai*'s wisdom, and he is able to actualise the world because of his power. Moreover, the mode of creation is conscious, deliberate, and orderly. This aspect again reminds of Lord *Bathou Bwrai*, the creator's all-powerful wisdom and superiority. In other words, this cosmogonical myth narrates and justifies the sequence of events relating to the creation of the universe or the Earth, the birth of gods and goddesses and the existence of human beings. Furthermore, through this cosmogonic myth, Lord *Bathou Bwrai*, the creator has progressively unveiled the structures of reality and his own proper mode of being. What happened in the beginning, depicts at once both the absolute perfection and the destiny of human beings. In a word, this cosmogonic myth portrays the creator and the created. It is also worth noting that a Bodo *Ojha*ⁱⁱⁱ invariably begins his chants (incantations) with the word *Aham* as a tribute to the supreme creator *Obongloari*, the *Bathou Bwrai*.

Since this myth speaks of the divine manifestation of Lord *Bathou Bwrai* in this world, the myth correspondingly illuminates the genesis of the *Bathou* religion of the traditional Bodos. Therefore, their religion is presided over by Lord *Bathou Bwrai* and hence their religion is invariably called the *Bathou*. Ever since then, the Bodos have been worshipping the great Lord *Bathou Bwrai* as the absolute head of the *Bathou* religion. Accordingly, the supreme Lord *Bathou Bwrai* is the father of all, the creator, preserver, and destroyer. He is the Great Lord of Immortality and Supreme Consciousness. The teachings of the *Bathou* religion constitute a paradigmatic template that every Bodo individual has to follow and repeat to assure the continuity of their world, life, and society; it becomes an exemplary model for all significant human activities. It may be referred to that the belief in the existence and conception of one supreme god is also prevalent among the Khasis of Meghalaya in their traditional religion and their supreme God is called *U Blei*. According to their religion, the supreme God *U Blei* is almighty, all-powerful, omniscient, and omnipresent. In a similar vein, Lord *Bathou Bwrai* is also an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent God of the *Bathou* religion.

In contemporary times, this cosmogonical myth vindicates that the world, man, and life have a supernatural origin and history and that this history is significant, precious, and exemplary (Eliade 1998:19). It validates the established order by explaining that it was laid down by a sacred force, i.e., Lord *Bathou Bwrai* and correspondingly justifies the current state of affairs in the traditional Bodo society. As mentioned, this myth among others recounts the evolution of human beings and the Bodo people believe that the offspring of this primal couple are the antecedents of all the different clans of human beings on the face of the earth, the Bodo people being one such group. In other words, the first human couple *Darimuba* and *Singridoba* may be regarded as the founders of conjugal union among the Bodos. In addition, this myth also represents man's awakening toward consciousness. That is, this myth bears testimony to people's understanding of the universe, God, and humans, and also the relationship between these three. Thus, this myth acquaints the Bodo people with the primordial events that have constituted them existentially and everything connected with their existence and their legitimate mode of existence in the cosmos.

More plausible is the fact, that the purpose of this cosmogonical myth is 'to waken and maintain in every Bodo individual a sense of awe and gratitude to Lord *Bathou Bwrai*, the supreme God in connection to the mystery dimension of the universe or to elicit and support a sense of awe before the mystery of being. In short, the Bodo cosmogonical myths describe the various and sometimes dramatic breakthroughs of the sacred (or the supernatural) into the world. They form the symbolic narratives connecting the past and present.

Conclusion:

Myths in Bodo society reflect the life of the traditional folk and thus bring into focus the rudimentary philosophy of the Bodo way of life as it depicts the birth and nature of gods, the creation of the earth, human beings, the rites and ritual practised. They bring alive to the present moment the past of the community and provide us with clues to its culture. In other words, the various aspects of Bodo culture and religion are reflected through the complex characters of Bodo myths, because myths, whatever their disposition is always a precedent and an example not only for man's actions (sacred and profane) but also the condition in which his nature places him. Thus, the study of Bodo myths becomes indispensable in order to learn how the Bodo people evolved a particular social and religious system with its beliefs, customs, and ways of life.

Notes:

ⁱ The chief God in the *Bathou* religion.

ⁱⁱ The chief Goddess in the *Bathou* religion.

ⁱⁱⁱ The head priest in the *Bathou* religion.

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