

Socio-Cultural Life of the Bodos of Assam : A Study

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Received: March 01, 2020

Accepted: April 05, 2020

ABSTRACT: *The Bodos are one of the major ethnic community that settled early in the Assam state of north-eastern India. Their custom, food habits, religion, faith, use of herbal medicines dresses etc. are different from other people lived in that state. They are rich in tribal cultura. In this sense Bodos are occupying a distinct position in the history of Assam. They have been enjoying certain political rights by comprising autonomous district council (known as B.T.A.D) with four districts namely Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri since 2005. In our discussion here effort is made on to study the socio-cultural life or social system of the Bodo tribe of Assam.*

Key Words: *Custom, dress, food-habits, herbal medicine, socio-cultural.*

Introduction :

Kirat culture is very old. Ancient records like ‘Atharva-veda’, ‘Ramayana’, ‘Mahabharata’, ‘Kalika Purana’, ‘Har –Gauri Sangvad’, ‘Yoginitantra’, ‘Kachari-Buranji’ tell in details about the *Kirati* people. These people are best known as ‘Kirati-Mongolians’. As Rajmohan Nath claims, “The word *kirata* therefore is a general term referring to the people of the Mongolian origin and it refers specially to the Bodos.” From the anthropological viewpoint it is found that the Bodos were the inhabitants of the Hwang Ho and the Yang-Tse-Kiang river valley of China. It is believed that the word ‘Bodo’ is derived from the name of a place called ‘Bod’ situated in the north of Himalayas and west of China. In the words of Kameswar Brahma, “The Bodos are a race of the Mongolian people who are described to be the inhabitants of the country north of the Himalayas and west of China. The land is known as ‘Bod’. The word ‘Bod’ is supposed to mean a home head.”

Different scholars have different opinions about the classification or clan of Bodo people. According to Bhaben Narzy, Sydney Endle and Kameswar Brahma there are twenty three clans or classes of Bodo race as follows-

1.Swargiary, 2.Basumatary, 3.Narzary, 4.Muchahary, 5.Gayary, 6.Woary, 7.Khakhlyary, 8.Daimary, 9.Lahary, 10.Hazowary, 11.Kherkatary, 12.Sibingary, 13.Sabayary, 14.Bibaiary, 15.Mohilary, 16. Mawmayary, 17. Ramchiary, 18. Champramary, 19. Phadangary, 20. Islary, 22.Ganjeldary, 23.Bargayary, 23.Thalibary.

Objectives of the study:

Here main intention is to focuss on the following objectives:

- A.To study the cultural aspects of Bodo people.
- B.To study the socio-economic aspects of Bodo people.
- C. Pointing out the various problems of Bodo people.

Methodology :

The Descriptive and Analytical methods are used to carry the study on ‘Socio-cultural life of the Bodos of Assam.’ Further field study, personsl contact to different people are taken as primary sources whereas the information gathered from various books, magazines, and some historical articles are used as secondary sources.

Socio-culture of the Bodos :

The culture of the Bodos is very rich in Assam. The Bodo culture is found as a part and parcel of the Indo-Mongoloid culture that has greatly influenced the culture of Assam. Tradition of fishing, rearing poultry, piggery, cultivation of rice are vital parts of their social life. Although they have noticed drastic changes in their traditional livelihood with the flowing of time yet there is still intact in various spheres of socio cultural life. A brief study on their various aspects of livelihood is presented below-

A. **Language of the Bodos :** Bodo language is a language of the Tibeto-Burman branch of Sino-Tibetan language family. Regarding their settlement in different areas of the region the differences in

their spoken languages are also seen. There are four main types of Bodo language used by the Bodos of Assam or north-east India- a) Language of Kokrajhar district area, b) Language of Goalpara district area, c) Language of Nagaon district area, and d) Language of Darrang district area.

The Bodo language is officially written using the Devanagari script. It is also introduced as a medium of instruction in some school-colleges of Assam. Even Bodo language is one of the 22 major languages recognized as constitutional language by the Indian constitution.

B. Religion of the Bodos : 'Bathouism' is the ancient religion of the Bodos. They believed 'Bathouism' as one of the major religions prevailing in ancient time in the world. In this religion the plantation of *sijou* tree is done and worship it as the symbol of Almighty. They worship 'Shiva' (believed as an Indian deity) as their ritual God. The adoration is performed by establishing a round stone and hen eggs under the *sijou* tree. Along with performing the *deodhani* and *kherai* dance local rice wine and meat are also offered so as to satisfy the deity.

C. Food- Habits : The main food of the Bodo people is rice. Different kinds of paddy rice like *aahu*, *Sali*, *joha*, *bora*, *aaijong*, *ranjit* etc. are cultivated by them and used to eat usually three times in a day. *Khar*, the so called assamese word for a liquid food is one of the favourite foods of the Bodos. It is produced by burning the arid bark and root of banana tree. They basically love to collect leaf vegetables like curry leaf, skunk vine, fern, water spanish and arum so as to add those to their favourite food lists. Besides being eating those collecting direct from nature (as they live in such a naturally rich land in India) the Bodo people also prefer to eat meat. Even they have been developing a tradition of rearing poultry, piggery, fishing for their own consumption as food. They prepare local rice wine and drink it as traditional food. Various types of mash ricipies, a well known food of Assam are also preferred by the Bodos.

D. Dress- Habits: The dress habit of the Bodos is so humble. They always prefer to wear their traditional tribal dresses. Whereas the tribal *gamosa*, weaved at homewith different design or colour to cover the portion from waist to knee, is usually used by the male; the women wear *dokhona*, their main traditional dress, to cover the whole body from chest to legs by tied one round at a time in the waist. To cover the upper portion of the body a dress called *Jwmgra* (scarf) is wore by Bodo women. The Bodo people use to put *Aronai* (small scarf), the sign of their tradition, and is used to felicitate people with honour. It is wore on neck to tie the neck. All these clothes are weaved of different *Agar* (design or flower) and are available in a variety of colours like *Gwthang* (green), *Gwja* (red), *Neel* (blue), and sometimes mixture of more colours.

E. Custom or Tradition: Custom or social tradition plays an immensely important role so far as the strong social unity of a society is concerned. The Bodo people have their own culture, tradition, beliefs and custom. Their tradition, myths, and numerous folklores are closely associated with different ritualistic practices and performances. They believe that a new born baby brings defilement to the family. In connection to this they have to perform a holy ritual called *Awathi*, two days after the baby is born. If the baby is born at home different rituals are performed to separate the baby from the mother regarding the sex of the baby.

The marriage ceremony of the Bodo people is also carried out observing all religious rites and customs, which have been practiced since the time immemorial. Their traditional marriage system is known as *Hathasuni khurnai*. The so called *Biban*, a part of the *Hathasuni khurai*, consists of areca nuts and betel leaves, milk etc. in abundance is carried to the residence of the bride on the fixed date of the proper marriage.

There is a custom in Bodo society according to which they have to eat a bitter tasty dish called *Sukta* made from soft jute leaves just to cut relation or forget the person after his/her death. The family of the dead person is also used to eat *Kharmas* prepared by a widow and *Anglaru* (laddu) is offered in the name of the dead for the peace of the dead soul.

F. Traditional Medicine or Folk Medicine: The use of traditional medicines or treatment is a common phenomena in Bodo society. They rarely used to run after a doctor or medical store for every now and then. Instead they prefer to treat with traditional herbal medicine that available in the land they live. For instance the juice of tuls leaves with honey in cough and cold; use of aloe vera to speed up healing and reducing the risk of infection for minor cuts, wounds, or burns; use of jasmine flower in fever; and use of centella to treat skin injuries are commonly included in their medicinal plants' lists. The Bodo people even deny to take doctor's advice in some major diseases; instead they call an *Ojah* (medicine man) for treatment. The *Ojah* is supposed to be competent to deal with the ordinary ailments of village life using *mantras*, formulae and ayurvedic medicines.

G. Economic Activities: The economic condition of the Bodo people is extremely low, as if they mostly depend on natural resources. They have to do hard work day after day just to fulfil their needs of food and dress. They are far far away from the global economic market of the modern world. Agriculture is their main

traditional occupation and they used to work in the field and sell those agricultural produces in market to maintain their household needs.

The practice of rearing poultry, piggery, domestication of animals, catching fishes, weaving clothes, gathering firewood etc. are also characterise their mode of living. A major contribution of their economic needs is come from such sources of living. Except some service holders most of the Bodo youths (even educated ones) are accepting agriculture as their way of self-dependence. This is because there is no any remarkable industry established in Bodoland till now.

Conclusion:

The Bodos are peace- loving people of Assam. They are very simple and straightforward kind of people. It goes without saying that the Bodo people possess a very old and rich culture to support the traditional identity of their own. Modern globalization has not put any special influence on them. For which the Bodo people are still success in keeping intact their ethnic identity. Actually there are enough sources to research about the socio-cultural aspects of the Bodo tribe. And so it is immensely needful to study about the socio-cultural life of the Bodos in this time of rapid development of modern technology. Or else the real charm of their unique cultures or social system will loss in the weaves of time.

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