



Research Paper

Traditional Culture of Bodos and Its Changes

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ABSTRACT: Culture is the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people; encompassing language, religion, dance, art, designs, handicrafts, cuisine, social habits, music and arts. It is a most effective media to any community to express and expose their strong century traditional cultural heritage before the world community. Bodos are the major tribe inhabiting in Assam. Since Bodos are living around the forest and nature; they have rich traditional cultural heritage. The colorful life of the people, their traditional customs, festivals and dances are some of the components of the rich cultural diversity of North-East India. Society and Culture is not static and keeps changing. The lots of changes of traditional cultural practices have also been observed among the Bodos. The Bodos are undergoing the process of modernization, acculturation and urbanization, and the impact of these factors on them is resulting in erosion of their traditional life and folk culture.

KEYWORDS: Traditional Culture, Bodos, Changes, Modernization and Acculturation

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I. INTRODUCTION

Culture is the aspects of life that people value and enjoy. Traditional culture is share experiences that are transferred from generation to generation. It is considered a defining characteristic of humanity that includes things like language, art, music, architecture, customs, rituals, pastimes, festivals, cuisine, fashion, history, stories and myth. The human being can exist at the level of a nation or community and can transcend borders.

Assam is a symbolized of multi-ethnic groups with multi cultural and historical background with their unique traditional cultural heritage which are very rich and varied and socially mingling into the mainstream of the India. It is the only region to see the unity and diversity of India where natural beauty, calm atmosphere, crowd and splendid strife of different tribes has originated. Though their culture may be different with each other but originally the charms and beauties are reflecting deeply through their dances, music, dresses of hills and plains areas in the heart of the tribal people of North-East India.

Among the indigenous groups of Assam, North-East India, the Bodos are the largest tribal indigenous group. Of course, the Bodo tribe is one of the prominent and the oldest inhabitants of North-east particularly in Assam. Racially they are belonged to the Mongoloid stock of the indo-Mongoloid or Indo-Tibetans. Linguistically, they are speakers of the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Tibeto-Chinese family who belong to the Mongoloid group. Majority of the Bodos are found on the Northern Bank of the Brahmaputra valley but now they spread all over Assam, North Bengal and in some parts of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, etc. They have rich traditional cultural heritage to ensure a healthy ecological balance in the society. The holistic cultural approach to reality finds its expression in the way of life of Bodos and their natural surroundings, in their names and social institutions, in their feasts and festivals, signs and symbols, rites and rituals etc. The idea of creation and its relation to man and nature is shown through their socio-religious life. The economic life is centered around the agriculture for which they completely depend on the providence of mother earth and its creator.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Bodo people are still living in the near of forest and hilly areas with traditional culture. We have been seen that the modern civilization has highly influenced in many aspects of their tradition and culture. Although majority of them are still living in rural areas, it is noticed that for better socio-economic conditions, employment opportunities, accessibility, etc. rural to urban migration either temporarily or permanently is gaining ground among the Bodos in recent times, which have resulted in adoption of new urban culture. Even though, Bodos are maintaining their own traditional culture; some changes have been noticed in their socio-cultural lives which are affecting the core of their culture. The modernization and globalization has also brought

about drastic changes in the traditional socio-cultural life of the Bodos. We have found that they are failing to preserve and dissemination their own traditional culture. In respect of the above, the present study entitled “Traditional Culture of Bodos and Its Changes” which is trying to be highlight and understand the drastic changes of traditional cultural practices among the Bodos.

III. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the present study are:

1. To analyze the traditional cultural practices among the Bodos.
2. To study about the preservation of the traditional socio-cultural life of Bodos.

IV. METHODOLOGY AND DATABASE:

Methodology depends on the availability of the sources. Mainly Analytical method is employed for collecting data. The data collected are analyzed and synthesized on this study. Generally, the secondary and primary sources are the main data for this paper. The secondary data related to various attributes of population among the Bodos in particular. Besides, existing literature available in various journals, books, thesis and dissertations related to the topic has been consulted with a view to develop a broad theoretical framework of the present research in right perspective. Important primary data have been collected from different household through sample survey.

V. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

5.1 Religion:

Religion is an integral part of traditional culture. Religion, as we know, is a fundamental set of beliefs and practices generally agreed upon by a group of people. The traditional religion of the Bodos is “Bathou” or “Bathou Dwhwrm”, an animistic type characterized by magical elements. The traditional religion of the Bodos which is current among the Bodos since time immemorial is invariably linked up with the worship of “Bathou brai” or “Sibrai”, the supreme God of the Bodos. After the name of supreme God Bathou brai, their religion is known as ‘Bathou’ religion. ‘Bathou’ word denotes the five principles of creation which must be followed by every devout member of the race. In every Bodo household can see a ‘Siju’ plant (Euphorbia) as worship symbolic tree on the Bathou altar.



Figure –1 ‘Siju’ plant (Euphorbia) on Bathou Alter

5.2 Fair and Festivals:

Fairs and festivals are essential aspects of cultural life of the people. Since the Bodos are agrarian, most of their festivals are connected to their occupation. The Bodos celebrate one festival or the other all throughout the year. The supreme God Bathou Borai is worshipped along with its pantheon (attendants) for three days and nights. It involves a great number of animal sacrifices which infuses in people lot of enthusiasm and spirit.

Along with Bathou Borai and Bathou Buri is also worshipped. Besides, Garja is another important traditional socio-religious festival of Bodos.

Boicagu means the beginning of the year is a great social festival of the Bodos. It is celebrated in the month of Baisakha (mid April) for seven days beginning from the day of Sankranti of Chaitra, which is also the last day of the passing year. "Domachi" is another important agricultural festival of the Bodos. A special feature in the process of celebrating this festival has been construction of Bhelaghar on the river bank by cowherds who spend the night in the Bhelaghar on the river bank by the cowherds amidst much merriment.

5.3 Food habits:

Traditional food is the symbol of identity of a culture. Rice is the main food for their day to day life. The consumption of wine is a common practice among the Bodos. Traditionally, they have been found to consume traditional drinks rice-beer "Zumai" or "Zow". Originally, they are lovers of non-vegetarian dishes. Especially, food is boiled, steamed and the garnished with wild spices. In the earlier times they had no use oil. Various type wild plants were used for seasoning and as ingredients in various dishes. The most favorite and prized possession is the pig. Every Bodo household has a pigsty and we can see them everywhere in a Bodo village. The non-vegetarian like dried fish and meat are made and stored for long days. Dried fish and meat known as "Na-gwran" and "Bedor-gwran". The jelly made by fish is a traditional dish of Bodo community. This is known as "Napham" in their society. They are very fond of the locally prepared alkali potash which they call "Kharoi". The Bodos special dish of "Ondla khari" that is prepared with rice powder, the chicken and the shoot of bamboo.

5.4 Dresses and Ornaments:

The Dresses and Ornaments is another important part of culture of which is the symbol of the traditional Bodo culture. The dresses of Bodo people are unique and full of colors, with style and attractiveness. The traditional attire is always hand-woven, which is also a testimony of Bodo women's talent in weaving. Bodo girls and women are very good weavers as they learn to weave from young age. Weaving has become a known culture of Bodos. Actually, they have wonderful closed attachment with nature since early times. So, they are expert to present it on their dresses with creativity.

They weave different kind of clothes like- Dokhna, Jwmgra, Gamsha, Phali, Hishima etc. The Bodo menfolk used to wear male garment which is called 'Gamsha'. The Bodo women represent their distinct cultural feature through the unique colourful dresses. Anybody can easily identify Bodo traditional culture seeing dresses. Generally, Dokhona is made of varied colours and designs. Bodo women wear various colours of scarf with full of 'Agor' (handy work design) to make beautiful themselves. There are various types of Agor (handy work design) which bloom in the art of Bodo women cloths, like – Phareo Megon (Pigeon eye), Daorai Mwkhrab (Winkle of peacock), Daosha Mwkhrab (Winkle of chicken), Maoji Agan (Footprint of cat), Dingkhia Mohor (A design representing fern of Dhekia), Thaigir Bibar (A design representing the flower of Thaigir plant and it also feeling of failed love), Gandoula agor (A design representing an insect dragonfly), Muphur Apha (A design representing the footprint of bear), Agor Gidit (A design representing a Diamond shape), Gorkha Gongbrai Agor (design representing twill), Hajw agor (A design of Hills) etc. The favourite colours of the Bodos are generally yellow, green and parrot.

Traditionally, Bodo have used different types of ornaments for nose, ears, neck and hands, e.g., Phulkhuri, Japkhiring, Dul, Boula (For upper ear), Nakhaphul (nose), Chandra Har (A heavy neckless), Bisa Har (A neckless), Thanka Siri (A roundneck ornament), Jibou Zinziri (A snake like chain) and Ashan (bangle).

5.5 Musical Instruments and Dances:

The Bodos have unique traditional musical instruments. The 'Kham', 'Shipung', 'Serja', 'Jotha', 'Jabkhiring', 'Gongona' and 'Tharkha'. These are the most important and popular traditional folk musical instrument of the Bodo society. These were used in the festival and ceremonial occasion, like 'Baisagu', 'Kherai puja', 'Garja puja' and 'Marriage ceremony'.

5.6 Arts and Crafts:

The arts and crafts are part of the traditional culture which is originally transmitted generation to generation among us. Cane and bamboo are the two most commonly used materials in daily life in Bodo society. Traditional Bodo society made products ranging from household implements to construction of dwelling houses to weaving accessories to musical instruments and to construction of houses and fencing etc. are made in bamboo. Specially, whole range of household and fishing implements are also made of bamboo and cane, like-Sieves (Songrai, Sandanga, Sandri), Fishing traps (Kokha, Sen, Zekhai, Kobai), Hand fans (Gisib), Spinner (Danganata) Stool (Khamphlai) and Head gear (Kopri) etc. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood for the Bodo people and processes of cultivation are based on the primitive instruments which are made of bamboo and

wooden e.g., Plough (Nangwl), Yoke (Jungal), Horrow (Mwi) etc. The Bodo women are traditionally expert in weaving. Looming and weaving materials, like- weaving post (Khuntha), post bar (Salbari), Warp roller (Gandwi), Reed (Rasw), shuttle (Makhu), pedal (Gorkha), Bobbins (Musura), Spinning wheel (Jenthar), spindle (Jenthar) Gonsa-gonsi etc. generally these weaving materials are made of bamboo and wood. The bamboo, cane and wood are also used in construction of traditional houses, cowshed, piggery house, poultry house etc. among the Bodos.

VI. CHANGES OF TRADITIONAL CULTURE

6.1 Changes in Religion: The Bodo religion becomes admixture of different types of religion. They have become Hinduism because they worship Hindu deities and observe Hindu religious celebrations, etc. But at the same time they also profess animism. We found some educated Bodo people converted themselves into different sects of Hinduism such as “Ek Charan Nam Dharma” preached by Srimanta Sankardeva. It is also found some of the Bodo community is being converted to Christianity. In the early part of 20th century Kalicharan Brahma preached the “Brahma Dharma” among the Bodos. Even some of the Bodos converted themselves into Islam. The adoption of religion, however, has led to the abolition of their traditional beliefs and practices. In this way, the Bodos are converted into different religions and as such the modern Bodo society has become a multi-religious society. As a result of these changes, the traditional religion of the Bodo is losing its original characteristics.

6.2 Changes in Fair and Festivals: This festival took shape either as a pre-harvesting and post harvesting festivals. The rites and traditions of this festival are therefore related to the fertility cult. There are three types of Bihu namely Baicagu, Domachi and Katigasa. It is found that due to the cultural assimilation and adoption of different religions, they also celebrate different types of religious or social festivals e. g., Budha purnima, Tithis of anniversaries of Sankardeva and Madhabdeva, Shiva ratri, Ambubashi, Saraswati puja, Christmas etc. Apart from the agricultural and religious festivals, some non-tribal Hinduism social ceremonies take place among them may be due to the impact of modernization. These ceremonies mark the occasions of marriage, birth etc. so one can come across common social festivals like – Annaprasana (Feeding grains to an infant), Churakaran (Shaving of hair), Tuloni biya (A monk marriage at puberty), Upanayan (Thread ceremony of Brahmins), Juron (Adorning ornaments on the bride the day before marriage), Aath mongola (Return of the bride to her parents home on the eight day after marriage), etc.

6.3 Changes in Food habits: The food habit is very important in shaping a community and its personality. So, the study of traditional food habit system makes to understand the history of traditions as well as changing cultural practices of the community. Though the gradual adaptation is taking place in this respect by the mainstream Bodo people to accept the food system of the non-tribal communities. It is found lots of changes food items among them. Now a day, due to the impact of modernization they also used butter, wheat, Ghee, Milk, and different types of factory made spicy foods which are recognized as modern food items. It is seen that impact of Christianity and Islam some Bodo people have used beef but as per traditional Bodo society it is recognized as sin or taboo. However, in the recent times it have been seen that they consume the foreign wine instead of ‘Zow’ or ‘Zumai’. Cooking among Bodos in villages was earlier done only with firewood. Today cooking is done with cylinder gas as well as with electrical appliances. Cooking with firewood can hardly be seen now. At present, spicy and oily foods are taking major place in Bodo society.

6.4 Changes in Dress and Ornaments: In earlier they used to wear vests made of Cotton or Endi which is rare nowadays. The Christian Bodos use white colour Dakhana for marriage purpose in conformity with the western style of dressing. The men wear suits during the occasion. It is found that at present, they have started using Sari, Mekhela Chador and Gamocha occasionally. Some of the new generation Bodo population is not found to wear their traditional dresses like Dokhna, Aronai, gamcha etc. for which there looms are threat of losing their own traditional dresses in the near future. Now-a-days they do not want to keep staying to old generation fashion styles. New or young generation adopted new modern innovation fashion regarding their dresses. But due to wave of modernity they use different types of dresses like – Long pant, Shirt, Coat blazer, Shouridar, Kurti etc. But Women’s dresses are almost unchanged in the rural areas. We have seen male costumes are easier to trace the influenced of the Western dresses which result is the traditional Gamsha and Aronnai are gradually replaced by long pant and shirt.

Similarly, old style of ornaments has lost the popularity where most of the women seen to wear modern fashionable ornaments. Even, the fiber or plastic made ornaments are surprisingly growing popular among the Bodo girls and women. Besides, the weaving is one of the greatest folk industries that develop to the economy status of the Bodos. But the rural folk weaving industry can’t make competition with new technology weaving industries. Hence, the economic status of rural folk weaver’s has gradually changing and declining.

6.5 Changes in Musical Instrument: However, we have seen that due to influence of modernity traditional musical instruments are rarely used among the Bodos. Instead of these musical instruments, they have started to use the modern instrument, like- Tabla, Harmonium, Band party, Tape recorder, Musical band etc.

On the other hand, we have found that Bodo have some indigenous dances like - Bagurumba, Bardwisikhla dance, Dahal Thungri sibnai dance, Daosri Delai dance, Khopri sibnai dance, Sikhri Shikla dance etc. which are traditionally inherent to one generation to another generation. Generally, Bodo people like to stay in a green environment. So, lots of different symbols in these traditional dances, which are imitated from other natural environment like - butterfly dance, dance of plants, dance of animals, birds, wave of flowing river, wind etc. Nowadays, it is seen that due to impact of modernization wave, lots of changes come up towards modern dancing style.

6.6 Changes in Arts and Crafts: The members of Bodo society are no longer dependent upon their traditional craft skills. Of course, they have moved out of their traditional ideas to modern technology and gradually transiting towards the modern way of life. At present, we have found a few bamboo and wooden crafts are using in a Bodo society. Eventually, fiber and plastic made crafts take the place of the bamboo and wooden utensil. We have seen that traditional arts and crafts folk skills are slowly vanishing among them. Therefore, traditional income sources are stopped and new ways of earnings are found.

Culture	Traditional	Modern
Religion	Bathou	Brahma, Ekasarana Dharma, Christianity and Islam
Fair and Festivals	Baicagu, Domachi, Kherai, Garja	Ambubachi, Sankardeva Tithi, Durga puja and Christmas
Food habits	Zow (Rice Beer) Na-gwran (Dried Fish), Oma bedor (Pork), Napham (Jelly made fish), Ondla khari (Rice Powder Curry)	Wine, Butter, Wheat, Ghee, Milk and different types of factory made spicy foods.
Dress and Ornaments	Dokhna, Aronai and Gamcha	Sari, Mekhela Chador, Gamocha, Long pant, Shirt, Coat, blazer, Shouridar, Kurti, Bracelets, Necklace etc.
Musical Instrument	'Kham', 'Shipung', 'Serja', 'Jotha', 'Jabkhring', 'Gongona' and 'Tharkha	Tabla, Harmonium, Band party, Tape recorder, Musical Band etc
Arts and Crafts	Bamboo and Wooden Utensil	Fiber and Plastic Utensil

Figure: 2 Sources: Field Study (Changes of Traditional Bodo Culture)

Thus, lots of changes of their traditional culture have been found among the peoples of the urban area. Mentioned may be made here, it is also seen that most of the members of younger generation of the society have maintaining distance from their own language and culture which is a serious hazard for the traditional cultural scenario.

VII. CONCLUSION

The cultures are what make us different from others with a unique identity. So, it is a very important task that we understand the value and beauty of our culture and make them grow among ourselves and carry them to the outside world as well, hence making our society proud. Our culture defines our unique beauty and we should do our best to preserve it. Preserving or dissemination doesn't mean disrespecting or abolishing other cultures, but we should adopt first our own.

Although, Bodos are maintaining the traditional cultural patterns including their traditional beliefs and practices, but some changes have been noticed in their life and culture to some extent. As an outcome of these influences, different sects of Hinduism like Bathouism, Vaisnavism, Brahma Dharma and Christianity and Islam emerged in the Bodo society. As a result of adopting and practicing new faith they have given up some age old traditional cultural traits. It is seen that many valuable rites and rituals have already been lost from society. We have found that lots of changes and rare on their traditional socio-cultural practices due to the embraced of different religion and the impact of modernization. It may be totally lost their traditional socio-culture within a few decades unless or until active preservation and dissemination to keep it alive.

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