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# The Social And Cultural Aspects Of Bodos In The North-East India

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## Abstract

Bodo is one of the major tribe in Assam. They live with their own customs and traditions and a large part of plains in Assam. The physical structures of the Bodos are square set face with flat nose, wide chest, broad shoulders and light brown or yellow skin. The objectives of study are to know the historical background of Bodo tribe and understand the ethnic identity of Bodo tribe and also study the social and cultural life of the Bodo tribe. The study depends on secondary data. The traditional Bodo culture is a part of the great Mongalaid culture. Festivals are the symbol of happiness and enjoyment. Like every ethnic groups the Bodos have unique features and values. From the above discussion it is quite clear that the Bodos one of the important tribes of Assam is rich in their socio-cultural life. A changing trend is seen in Bodo culture in different times.

**Keywords:** North-East, Bodo, Background, Festivals, Baisagu, Domashi, Bagurumba.

## 1.Introduction

The North-East India is a mosaic floor of different tribal and non-tribal communities. Assam is also a unique example of North-East India. Where lives various tribes and non-tribes with their ethnic identity. Bodo is one of the major tribe in Assam. They live with their own customs and traditions and occupy a large part of plains in Assam. They are the aboriginal inhabitant of Assam and settle in the plains of Assam since 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C. Prof. Suniti kr. Chetterji mentioned that the Bodos are one of the branches of Tibeto-Burman group of the Sino Tibetan speaking tribes. They had lived in North-East of China before migrated into the North-East India. The physical structure of the Bodos are square set face with flat nose, wide chest, broad shoulders and light brown or yellow skin also indicate the Mongoloid features of Tibetans. The Ahom Buranji had contained some trustworthy information about the Kachari kingdom in the Brahmaputra valley of 13<sup>th</sup> century. Some historical Monuments at Dimapur and Maibong of N.C. hills also introduce the glorious past of Bodo kingdom in those places. But Ahom invasion bound them to migrate towards south as they failed to resist them.

Now the Bodos are mainly found in the four districts of Assam kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri districts under the Bodoland Territorial Council Area (BTCA). A large number of Bodo people are also scattered in the districts of Barpeta, Nalbari, Darrang and undivided Sivasagar district since British period. They were migrated from lower Assam searching new site for settlement. A huge number of Bodo populations are also concentrated in Charaideo district of Assam. They have assimilated with the neighboring communities without losing their own ethnic identity.

## **1.2 Objectives**

- a) To know the historical background of Bodo tribe.
- b) To understand the ethnic identity of Bodo tribe.
- c) To study the social and cultural life of the Bodo tribe.

## **1.3 Methodology**

The study depends on secondary data. Those are collected from different sources like journal, book, library and internet.

## **1.4 Discussion**

The traditional Bodo culture is a part of the great Mongoloid culture. But in course of time changing trend of social outlook of traditional Bodo society can be visualized in the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to the close contact with different culture. In different times different changes are visible in the traditional institution like religion, marriage, economy, and social customs and also in their social status, food habit, dress and other spheres of life. Yet the Bodo society moves upward through these changes without losing their basic values, norms and identities. In this present study our main focus will be on the religious beliefs and festivals of the Bodos of Assam.

The Bodos are the followers of their traditional Bathou religion. They make an alter of Bathou at the North-East corner of the courtyard and regard it as supreme power. A Siju plant is planted at the middle of the alters as the symbol of Bathou. They light an alaribathi (earthen lamp) on the alter every day. They believe the siju plant as the first creature of vegetables. The literacy meaning of the term siju is si means soul or atma and jou means supreme God in Bodo language. It also symbolizes the five numerals of Bathou religion. Those are the five elements of creation like ha (earth) dwi (water) bar (air/wind) san (sun/fire) and okhang (eather).

Festivals are the symbol of happiness and enjoyment. Like every ethnic groups the Bodos also have some significant festivals which have unique features and values.

Those are the religious and seasonal festivals and all are closely connected with agricultural activities. Khaeri, Baisagu, Domashi, Kati Gasai etc. are their most interesting and popular festivals which they observe whole heartedly and with a pure mind and soul.

## **Baisagu**

It is spring festival. The term Baisagu, Baisa means year or age and Agu means start in Bodo language. Hence Baisagu means starting of the year. The first day of Baisagu, the traditional Bodo celebrate as Masau Thakhaina; ceremonially bathe their cattle's like the Hindu neighbor. In the second day they offer food and drink in the worship of Bathou and their ancestors. From the next day the young boys and girls alams from door to door singing and dancing in the musical time traditional Bihu dance of Bodo is known as Baisagu Mousumi.

### **Domashi or Domahi**

The next popular seasonal festival is the Domashi, the harvest festival. This Bihu is observed by taking different type of food items and also entertaining the relatives. The traditional Bodos observe the festival by sacrificing fowls to the name of Bathou. The young boys and girls enjoy it by constructing Bhalaghar or Bilagur and bonfire with a ground feast.

### **Kati Gasa Sonai or Kati Bihu**

The Kati Bihu is another seasonal festival of Assam. This festival is observed on the last day of the month of Ahin for good agricultural product. The festival is also known as kongali Bihu, The Bihu of crisis. The Bodo people observe it very simply by burning Gasa or the earthen lamp at the paddy field. At the alter of the Bathou, at the cowshed and at the granary.

### **Religious festivals**

Among the religious festivals the Khaeri puja is the greatest festival of the Bodos. It is a symbol of hope and desire which has been prevailing among them since the time immemorial. Before and after cultivation they perform kheripuja and propitiate different gods and goddesses for the success in cultivation. Bathou Brai is their supreme god along with many other gods and goddess. A pig is sacrificed to Bathou Brai along with areca nuts and betel leaves. Ailing is another god who is known as the bodyguard of Bathou Brai. A cock is sacrificed to him. Arrang, khoila, karji, Rajkhandra, sang puja, Alai khungri, Bandari, Ramchandri, Bulli Buri Laokhan Gosai are the many gods and goddess of the Bodos. Goat, pig, cock etc. are sacrificed to those figures. Two holy persons a deuri and Deudini perform all the religious rites under the guidance of the oja.

This festivals holds with certain sacrifice of fowls and animals continuously for three days and nights. Throughout the tree days and nights kheri dance are performed by Deudhoni and followed by the worshipers. Deudhoni performs different dances to appease the god and goddess. These are so many types of khari dance, like Bathou gidignai, chotrali, krapri, chipnai, khoijama, phonai, gandoula bannai, changalaw banai etc. and all these dances have special characteristics.

### **Garja puja**

It is another important religious ceremony of the Bodos. Some Bodo scholars define the meaning of the word Garja as a way of making one free from danger. They perform Garja puja to purify themselves after any seasonal festival. They believe that at annual festivals

the participants of the village become impure due to free eating, drinking rice bears and the like. So, they propitiate it.

## **Dances of the Bodos**

### **Bagurumba Dance**

This dance is an important dance of the Bodos of Assam. This dance is usually performed during Baisagu festival. It is instituted after the plantation work. And it does much to relief them from their pain of the work. The Bagurumba dance is also called a butterfly dance.

This attractive folk dance resembles the movement of birds and butterflies. It is a captivated dance of the Bodos.

It is instituted to propitiate 'Bathou' the supreme god of the Bodos. Now a day it has got two variations. Natural Bagurumba which is performed without song and Royal Bagurumba which is accompanied with song.

### **Dress and ornaments**

The spinning and weaving is an important traditional activity of the Bodo society. The Bodo women are traditionally expert weaver. They weave cloths not only for their own use but also for all the members of the family. The Bodo women still wear their traditional dresses Dakhana a home spinning product around the waist extending down to the ankles. Generally the size of Dakhana is about ten feet long and four to five feet wide. The Dakhana has border on both sides and design is based on nature, birds, animals, trees, hills and others. Red and orange are dominated colours of the Bodos along with white and green. But, now a day's so many colours are found in Bodo textiles. The men folk have also some traditional dress.

Arnai a decorative muffler and gamacha wrap by the men folk around the waist are regarded ad male garments. Now-a-days though they wear all modern dress of different verities but always prefer to wear the traditional dress in any socio-religious function.

The Bodo women are fond of various ornaments like bracelets, necklace, earring, finger ring and others. They have some traditional ornaments of gold and silver which are known as katabazu, Chandrahar; Hasan etc. the ornaments have occupied a very important place in Bodo society and culture.

## **2.Findings**

The Bodo people have enlivened the original tone in their festivals yet in case of religion some reformation has been noticed. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the traditional religion Bathou suffered a jolt when the enlightened section of Bodos opposed to practice the 'traditional practices and converted themselves into different religions like Hindu, Christian, Sarania, Vaisnavi, Sat song, Brahma Dharma etc.

In course of time though the Bodos have converted themselves into different religion but they always feel that the religious conversion would eliminate their ethnic identity. They believe that the traditional religion and culture both are co-exist for the survival of the great

Bodo race. Therefore the educated sections of Bodos always try to revive their traditional religion Bathou with some modification.

As a part of the religious reformation the Bodos have consisted the all Bathou religion s union (ABRU). The religious union has started to modify the sacrifice of fowls and animals by offering flowers, fruits and Prasad in the worship.

### **3.Conclusion**

From the above discussion it is quite clear that the Bodos one o9f the important tribes of Assam are rich in their socio-cultural life. A changing trend is seen in Bodo culture in different times, with the development of communication, economic conditions and educations. No doubt the Bodos of Assam has rich culture and has contributed to create Bor Asom. In spite of all that, still too much extent Bodo people succeeded in keeping their ethnic identity intact through their customs and traditions.

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