

THE BWISAGU FESTIVAL OF THE BODOS

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Abstract

The Bodos are the largest and the important tribe of Assam. They are racially belonging to the Mongoloid tribe and the Sino-Tibetan speech community originated in the plains areas of China Yang-Tse-Kiang and Hoang-ho valley. The Bodos are entered in Assam through the courses of the Brahmaputra, Testa, Sankosh, Subunsiri, Dibang, Dihong valley and mountain passes of Assam and Burma through the North-East and South- East and settled in Brahmaputra valley as well as hills areas of Assam. They also spread the neighboring state of Assam such as- Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura, and West-Bengal. The Bodos have rich and glorious cultural traditions. They celebrate different festival. The Bwisagu is a greatest and popular festival among the Bodos. The aim of the study is to highlight the celebration of Bwisagu festival and its changing trend. Bwisagu is a spring time festival observed by various community of Indian nation by various names. In this paper discussed about the Bwisagu festival i.e. how to observe, relation with religion, relation with agriculture, costume and dresses systematically and thoroughly.

Keywords: Festival, Culture, Religion, Agriculture.

1.0 Introduction

The Bodos is the ethnic group of Assam which is the major branch of Mongolian race migrated from China Tibbot-Burma. The Bodos like to live peacefully and merry making. They celebrated different festival in different occasions. The Bwisagu is one of the important festivals celebrated in the time of spring season. The Bwisagu festival related with agriculture and religion. In the time of spring season, the nature become beautiful, the heart and soul of the Bodo people are becomes joyful. In this situation singing, dancing are comes out from the hearth of the Bodo peoples. This way, Bwisagu festival is comes out in Bodo society.

This 'Bwisagu' festival have been seen a prime manifestations of their cultural elements and how are the related with their religion. Because the Bodos have rich in the traditional culture and it have been seen the social pictures of the Bodo community through this festival. However, celebration of this festival among them comes certain changes due to the influence of globalization. Like other society of the world, the Bodos also try to shown their cultural elements through the celebrate of Bwisagu festival.

2.0 Objectives

The aim of the paper is to highlights the culture, religion and the changing trends of the Bwisagu festival. To explain its etymology, how and when are celebrated the Bwisagu festival. Otherwise, the discussion is limited to only one festival is 'Bwisagu'.

3.0 Methodology

The paper is analytical by both primary and secondary sources. In primary source, I have the knowledge about the festival because I have same community too. For the secondary source, it used reference books for the clearance of the paper topic. The discussion section is divided into two sub sections.

4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1 The Bwisagu Festival of the Bodos

The Bwisagu festival is the popular festival among the Bodos of Assam. In Assamese language it is called as Bihu. The Bodos call this popular festival as Bwisagu, which means the start of the new year. This Bwisagu festival is observed at the starting part of the first month of the Assamese year.

4.1.1 Etymology of 'Bwisagu' word:

The etymology meaning of the 'Bwisagu' word is not found properly still today. The Bwisagu festival is observed by Bodo folk society since the immemorial time. Even that it is not found clearly meaning of Bwisagu word. Many critics and authors has given different view for Bwisagu word. The following are given some view point of critics:

According to Mr. Kamini Narzari, “ ‘Bwisagu’ is a Bodo word which has origin the word ‘Bwisa’ means year or age and ‘Agu’ means start. Hence, Bwisa + Agu>Bwisagu, the starting of the year of age.”

According to Lakheswar Brahma, “the word ‘Bwisagu’ derived from Bwisag+hu>Bwisagu, which means worship to deity or offering to deity. Because every Bodo people offered to deity of family in assamese new year Bohag.”

According to Dr. Kameswar Brahma, “this spring time festival at the Assamese month Bohag which they call Bwisag. It may be started that as it is observed at the very early part of the first month of the year, it is called as Bwisag + Agu >Bwisagu.”

According to Dr. Mangalsing Hazoari, “Bwisagu means bwswrni agu Bwisagu means front of the year.”

This spring time festival is observed at the starting part of the Assamese month Bohag, which is they called Bwisag. It may be stated that as it is observed at the very early part of the first month of the year, it is called as Bwisag + Agu > Bwisagu. Such Bodos call this Bwisagu as Bihu like their neighbouring non Bodo Assamese people.

From the above discussion it is observe that, all critics are related etymology of Bwisagu word with Bwisakh or Bohag, the first month name of Bengali and Assamese. But before the year counting systems of Bodos are observe so many festivals. So the views of critics are not accepted by Bodo peoples.

4.1.2 When and how celebrated

The Bodos celebrated the Bwisagu in the first date of the month Bohag or Bwisakh year of Assamese or Begali calendar, in the mid April. The Bwisagu festival celebrated from the first day to seven days. But in the time of traditional the Bodos celebrated the Bwisagu whole month of Bohag. The Bwisagu festival celebrated in two parts i.e.

- Mwsou thukhwinai (Cattle rites).
 - Mansini Bwisagu (Humen's Bwisagu).
- *Mwsuo Thukhwinai (Cattle rites)*: The Mwsuo Thukhwinai (Cattle rites) is one of the main parts of the Bwisagu festival. The Mwsou Thukhwinai (cattle rites) is celebrated the last day of the month Chait, mid April. In the day of cattle rites, the Bodos are bathed all the cattle following some rites and rituals. In the day of cattle rites all the cattle took away for bath in the tank or river. For the cattle bathed some materials are need. So these materials are collect before a day of cattle rites. The important materials are- some flowers i.e. Khathri bibar, (lingam black turmeric plant's flower), Mwkhwana bibar, (a kind of plant's flower), Digiliti laothi, (a stick made from plant), Raidwng bilai (leaves of cane), Lao (gourd), Phanthao (brinjal), Haldwi (turmeric) etc.. in the early morning of the cattle rites the family member of the house took all the materials in a place and cut in round shape the gourd, brinjal, turmeric and made garlands with bamboo ropes. The garlands put on all the cattle's neck and the black color spotted on the body of cattle by the stem of the Eri tree. The black color prepared mixed by black ashes and mustard oil. Then the cattle took away from the cowshed beating slowly by Digiliti stick and near the pond or river bank, cowherds are throwing the piece of gourd, brinjal on cattles body. In this time cowherds are sing a song and cows are bathed. The song to given below:

“Lao ja phanthao ja,
 Bwsr bwsr er hanja hanja,
 Bimani khithir, phiphani khithir,
 Nwngswr jagwn halua gidir,
 Bima gaide badi daja,
 Phipha bolod badi ja,
 Bari khonani embu bongla,
 Bebadi ja gidir jangila.”

English rendering: Eat gourd brinjal, Grow year to year, as your mother and father you will big bullocks, do not be short statured like your mother, be big like your bull father, may you be sleek and long like the frog in the corner of the garden.

After taking away the cows from the cowshed, main family member of the family coudungs are thrown away and the shed is cleaned. In the evening time, the old ropes are replaced by new ones. In this way, the Mwsou thukhwinai (cattle rites) are comes to end. Then the Mansini Bwisagu start from next morning of the cattle rites.

The Bodos have a rites to eating the bitter-sour vegetable curry in the Bwisagu. This bitter-sour curry is a special curry for the Bodos prepared in the day of cattle rites or after seven day of the Bwisagu. The varieties vegetables are collected from the forest in evening time they cooked by meats [pork or chicken] and curry served it by rice-beer and offered other also who is present there. The Bodos who reside in the forest village go to the deep forest for hunting. In the evening, they use to take some bitter tastes vegetables collected from the forest. A special curry known as 'gwkha-

gwkhwí khaji' prepared with meats [porks or chicken]. This is called gwkhá- gwkhwi khaji janai (eating bitter-sour curry). It signifies that the old year is led farewell.

- *Mansini Bwisagu (Humen's Bwisagu)*: The next day from first Bwisag started the Mansini Bwisagu (Humen's Bwisagu). The Mansi Bwisagu (Humen's Bwisagu) seven days celebration are divided in different parts i.e. the first day is Mansini Bwisagu (Humen's Bwisagu), the second day is called Swimani Bwisagu (dog's Bwisagu), the third day is called Omani Bwisagu (swine's Bwisagu), the fourth day is called Daoni Bwisagu (Fowl's Bwisagu), the fifth day is called Hangswni Bwisagu (Duck's Bwisagu), the sixth and seven day are receiving relatives and friends.

As the tradition the Bodos started the Bwisagu celebration by beating drum or flute. In the starting day of the Bwisagu early morning a drummer or flutter given a Bwisagu massage by beating the drum or fluting the flute to all villagers. The village people hearing this massage comes out and gathering in the village headman's home or the public place along with their all the instruments. All the instrument are take place in front of the Bathou and pray to Bwrai Bathou [God] for well. It is believed that if praying to God, all the instrument is going to be well in the time of Bwisagu celebration. Then, they start to celebrate the Bwisagu from the village headman's home or public place by dancing and singing along with their traditional instruments. They also start to drink the rice-beer with meats etc. from the village headman's home. Because rice beer is one of the main drinking elements in the Bwisagu festival. The villagers form in groups as old age, young and child separately for dancing. From the first day they start to singing and dancing house to house and the house member offered them drinks with meats and some eatable things. Besides this, some valuable things like, rice, cash money etc. are also offered to dancers. In tradition the Bodos have a Bwisagu dance form called 'Mainao Sokhnonai' means begging the wealth. The Bwisagu celebrator's while proceeds ones house to another house than they sing a song commonly-

Daodwi nangou.....

Daodwi daodwi daodwi.....

Daodwi gwiya bla.....

Ising khonani zou bidwi.

English rendering:

We want egg, if there is no egg then we want rice-beer of the kitchen corner.

In this way Bodo people celebrate Bwisagu till to seven days with singing and dancing the traditional musical instruments also used in the sometime. In the celebration of Bwisagu, Bodo people are sing a song rigorously. These songs are classified as follows:

- Mithingani mohor berkhanghwnai methai [the song occurs natural scenery].
- Maonai dangnaini methai [working song].
- Gwsw thwnai methai [love song].
- Danai lunaini methai [song of weaving].
- Jongkhailainai methai [joking song]
- Daha methai [sad song]
- Bigumwi bibwnang jongkhailainai methai [joking song of brother-in-law with sister-in-law].
- Bibajwikhou jongkhainanwi khonnai methai [the song of joking to sister-in-law].
- Mego khebnai sengra sikhlakhou khonnai methai [the song of young boy love with young girl].

- x. Beowaikhou jongkhainanwi khonnai methai [the song of joking to husband's brother].
- xi. Bikhunjw bijamadwi jongkhailainanwi khonnai methai [the song of joking between mother and son-in-law].

The Bodo people are sung these songs in the time of Bwisagu festival till to seven days with dancing and drumming. In this time every house holder invites the Bwisagu team and offer rice-beer and meat. In the time of return, the family members offered something e.i. rice, cash money etc. and Bwisagu team give blessing to family members. After the seven days all the materials of every groups collected by village headman and prepared rich beer with rice and purchases pork with cash money. Then after they made a feast with singing, dancing and drumming everyone in a common place. In this way Bodo peoples are celebrate the Bwisagu festival traditionally.

4.2 Dress and costume of the Bwisagu festival

The Bodos have a traditional dress which is made by Bodo women. In the Bwisagu festival also they wore their traditional dress. Bodo women wear Dokhona [women traditional]. It may be red, yellow, pink, green colour with various design. In early days Bodo women are not used blouse. Now days they use blouse also. Before using blouse the Bodo women used one kind of long upper garment namely Phasra or jumgra. Phasra or jumgra is used now a days also. But length and broad is minimized. The phasra or jumgra are made multi designed.

The Bodo males are used 'Gamsa'. Normally the gamsas are green, yellow and multicolor. They used it in the middle portion of body. In early age no upper garments are used by male. But now a days males are also used upper garment. A kind of lucrative coat namely 'Aronai' is used by male. Aronai is used as head gear. Some people used it in neck. Women are also use Aronai multi ways.

The ornaments are less used in Bwisagu Festival by the Bodos. They used very simple type of ornament in the Bwisagu occasion. The name of some ornaments used by Bodos in Bwisagu occasion are, 'phurkhuri' or kheru [a kind of ear ornament made by gold], 'Japkhiring' [ear ring of gold], and some small flower on a plug attached to the ear lobe. Some Bodo women wear on nose ornament is called 'Nakhaphul' [a small flower made of gold]. Some necklace also used by the Bodos in Bwisagu occasion but not heavy. Basically simple necklace, made by gold or silver are used. For the hands ornament is simple bangle made by gold or silver.

4.3 Instruments of the Bwisagu festival

The Bodos have special traditional instruments i.e. 'Kham' [drum], 'siphung' [flute], 'Jotha' [cymbal], 'Thorkha' [a kind of instrument made by bamboo]. The Harmonium also used now. Now a day, also used same instruments in Bwisagu festival.

4.4 The changing trends of Bwisagu

The celebration of Bwisagu festival is also became change due to the other community's influence as well as globalization. At present Bwisagu festival is observe only three days in place of seven days of traditional system. The method of celebration also completely changed. In the first day of the Bwisagu festival in Mansi Bwisagu early morning the family member especially women are cleaned all the house and bathed herself then cleaned the 'Bathou sali' [Alter place]. The earthen lamp lighted in the 'Bathou Sali' and offered some eatable fruits to God Bwrai Bathou. Then all the

member of family prayed to Bwrai Bathou [God] for their well. After that, the villagers joint together in public place and the younger people respect to elder person by offering 'phali gamsa' [a small long plain cloth]. Then they started to celebrate the Bwisagu festival. Now a day the Bwisagu festival is celebrated in the stage or common place through the competition. Various types of songs and dance competition are held in the stage. in competition the best ones are prized by the organizer.

In Bwisagu festival, used the eatable things are also changed. Now a day, varieties eatable things are used to made by the Bodos such as phithas [cakes], narikholni ladu [round shape made by coconut], sourai ladu [made by sticky rice] etc. Milk and black teas are used to drunk now and offered to guest also. It has been observed that some are given up the habits of taking rice-beer on the occasion of the Bwisagu festival as well as other occasions also. They simply enjoy by singing and dancing together.

4.5 Conclusion

In this paper, what is the Bwisagu festival, etymology of Bwisagu word, when and how it celebrated, how many kinds of songs is sung, dances, used of musical instruments, dress and costume and changing trends all are discussed thoroughly and systematically. Finally, finished with conclusion.

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