

BWISAGU FESTIVAL OF THE BODOS

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ABSTRACT:

The Bodos have their own traditional festivals which are indeed very rich and varied. The Bwisagu festival is the most important festival among the Bodos. The Bodo women wear red colour of Dokhna and Jwmgra for this purpose. The Bodos produce Dokhna and Jwmgra in various colours and designs. The male members of Bodo used Gamcha, a traditional dress cloth of male. They also put Gosla (shirt) and Aronai on their body.

Keywords: Bwisagu, Dokhna, , Jwmgra, Aronai, Gamcha, Gosla.

OBJECTIVE:

The objective of the study is to highlight and study the traditional Bwisagu festival of the Bodos. Bwisagu is the New Year of the Bodos which is the most important and popular seasonal festival among them. It is celebrated during the time of spring season with effect from the 1st to 7th Bwisak of Bangla Calendar. With the sole objective of understanding the transition of traditional dresses has been developed in this paper.

METHODOLOGY:

The methodology adopted in this paper is inter-disciplinary approach which included consulting number of written sources as well as interview method. The people who have knowledge of traditional festival of the Bodos and various associated with information. The technique of anthropological data collection, participants, interview method are adopted. The collection of data has been analyzed both quantitatively and the qualitatively wherever necessary.

INTRODUCTION:

The festival is an essential part of any society which is emanated from beliefs and rituals of the ancient communities. (Dutt, 1994: p. 151) The festivals of the Bodos can be studied under the following heads: (Informant: Sameswar Brahma, Age- 67, Occupation- Cultivator, Vill- Boragari, P.O.- Dotma, Dist- Kokrajhar, BTC, Assam on 16/04/2014.)

Bwisagu is the New Year of the Bodos which is the most important and popular seasonal festival among them. It is celebrated during the time of spring season i.e. from the 1st to 7th *Bwisak* of Bangla Calendar. (Devi, 2007: p. 108.) During the festival, all the Bodos irrespective of age and sex take part with merriments of singing, dancing, feasting, etc.

ANALYSIS:

Kamini Narzary termed *Bwisagu* as *Bwswrni Agu*. *Bwisagu* is a combination of two words i.e. *Bwisa* and *Agu*. *Bwisa* means year and *Agu* means beginning. So according to Narzary *Bwisagu* means beginning of the year. (Brahma, 2008: p. 47.) In Assamese, *Bwisagu* is called Bihu. Dhuparam Basumatary viewed that Bihu is a Bodo word with the combination of two words Bi

+ Hu. Bi means to beg something and Hu signifies to hand over something to other. As a result, Bihu may be termed as to hand over something what is begged. (Basumatary, 1955: p. 21.) Dr. Kameswar Brahma also stated that the *Bwisagu* festival of the Bodos has some specific features. They are as follow: (Brahma, 2015: p. 105.)

- (a) *Gwkha-Gwkhwi Janai* (eating bitter and testing sour wild vegetables on the day of *Sangkranthi* or day before the first day of the *Bwisagu*). (b) *Mwswu Thukwinai* (cattle rites). (c) *Iswrkwo Khulumnai* (worshipping the gods and goddesses). (d) *Sigangnikao Gswskangnai* (remembering or recalling the ancestors) (e) *Gwdan Bwswrao Rongjanai* (merry-making during the *Bwisagu*).

Rev. Sidney Endle informed that the celebration of *Bwisagu* was lasted for seven days among the Bodo people of Darrang. (Endle, 1911: p. 50.) During this period they stopped their work and fully enjoyed by dancing, feasting, etc. They celebrated whole seven days naming differently each of the days which consists of *Mwswu Bwisagu* (for cattle), *Mansi Bwisagu* (for men), *Swima* (for dogs), *Oma* (for swine), *Dao* (for fowl), *Hangsw* (for ducks), *Alasi Linghornai* (receiving or welcome for relatives and friends) and *No Pwsabnai* (cleaning the houses ceremonially). (Brahma, op. cit., pp. 49-50.)

Mwswu Bwisagu (Devi, op. cit., p. 109.) (cattle *Bwisagu*) is observed on the last day of the Chaitra month of Bangla Calendar. It is known as Sangkranti (Ibid. p. 108.) by the Bodos. In the morning, cattles are decorated with garlands made of slices of raw gourd and brinjals. Their bodies are also spotted with the black mixture colour prepared with mustered oil and black substance of cooking pot with the stem of the Eri tree. The horns and hoops are smeared with muster oil mixed with turmeric and the powder of pulses. Then, they are taken to a nearby river or tank for their ritual bath. While taking them for bath the cowherd throws some pieces of gourd and brinjal on the back of the cattle recites the chants. (Narzi, 2006: p. 179.)

Premalata Devi asserted that the womenfolk of the family keep busy in washing their clothes; utensils and cleaning the houses with cow-dung while men folk are remain busy with the cattle. In the evening, the head of the family places a pair of earthen lamp at the courtyard, washes the legs of the cattle and replaced the old ropes with new one. (Devi, op. cit., p. 110.) The whole day ends with ceremonial eating of fowl, cooked meat with *Gwkha-Gwkw* (bitter and sour leaves) which indicates disconnection of old year. (Informant: Pardha Brahma Karzee, Age- 54, Occupation- Housewife, VillKwdwmtola, P.O.- Dotma, Dist- Kkrajhar, BTC, Assam on 24/03/2015.)

The *Mansi Bwisagu* is observed on the 1st of *Bwisak*. (Informant: Tunu Basumatary, Age- 58, Occupation- Housewife, VillBaganshali, W/N- 7, Dist- Kokrajhar, BTC, Assam on 12/03/2015.) On that day, the Bodo people in their particular villages gather in *Bathousali* to worship *Bwrai Bathou* i.e. the Supreme God for their safety, security and good fortune in the *Bwisagu*. In the early morning, the womenfolk clean the houses, cooking utensils, courtyard, the gate of the house, the cowshed, granary, etc. and decoration is done with beautiful flowers binding by the slices of cane. (Hazowary, 1997: p. 154.) The family members take bath after the completion of the decoration work and proceed to the *Bathousali* (place of worship) for worshipping.

In this ritual, all the villagers irrespective of sex worshiped *Bwrai Bathou* and other traditional gods and goddesses with the help of *Oja* for welcoming of New Year. While offering is made, all the members present used to seat in the position of kneel down and recited the following words along with *Dwori* or *Oja*. (Gwthar Mwikhun, 1992: p. 187.)

As and when the worship is over, the villagers bow to the *Dwori* or *Oja* as a mark of respect. Elderly persons as well as parents are also honoured by young boys and girls for their better life in the coming New Year. Replacing of old *Khobos* (amulet) with the new one is also act upon with the help of *Oja*. Married women also pay respect to their father-in-laws, mother-in-laws and elderly relative members to take blessing from them. (Khaklary, p. 50.) After that, Saha (tea) and *Muri* (fried rice) are consumed altogether in the name of *Bwisagu*. Then, preparation is made to beg alms from each and every house of the village with the traditional musical instruments like *Kham* (drum), *Siphung* (flute), Serja (violin), *Jotha* (cymbal) and *Gongona*. Whatever they receive alms like rice, eggs, vegetables etc. from households are cooked on the last day of the *Bwisagu* and consumed together. (Informant: Manaj Basumatary, Age- 64, Occupation- Retired Teacher, Voll- Baganshali, W/N- 7, P.O.- Kokrajhar, Dist- Kokrajhar, BTC, Assam on 24/03/2015.)

By wearing the traditional dresses and using the traditional musical instruments, the Bodo children and youths both the sexes go from door to door for alms which is called *Mairong Maginai* by singing and dancing to beg alms with the song. (Brahma, 2009: p. 5.)

CONCLUSION:

Each family provides *Jwo Gisi* (rice bear) to the party who come for alms as a mark of kindness and charity. In return, the party equally bless to the member of the family for prosperity in the New Year. Kameswar Brahma advocated that during the time of *Bwisagu* festival, the Bodos are forbidden for fighting each other otherwise they will be punished by god and take birth like cow or dog in the next life. During the time of *Bwisagu*, sitting on the four-legged-tool is also prohibited believing that sitting on the heads of the parents. (Narzi, op cit., p. 181.) The traditional beliefs and customs signified sowing respect to the elder which is the attitude and manner of a civilized society.

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