

SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF THE BODOS

Manaj Kumar Brahma
Assistant Professor
Deptt. of Bodo
Fakiragram College, Fakiragram
Kokrajhar, Assam, India

ABSTRACT:

The Bodo tribe is the prominent and oldest tribal groups in North East India. Since the days, the Bodos have been maintaining their distinctive cultural traditions, customs, belief system, dresses, ornaments, songs, music, etc. the main occupation of the Bodos is agriculture. They cultivate like Bawa Mai, Ashu Mai and Maisali Mai. They also observed festivals like Bwisagu, Domashi, Kathi Gasa Saonai, Amthisua, Kherai Pwrwbw, Garja Hwnai, etc.

Keywords: Bawa Mai, Ashu Mai and Maisali Mai, Bwisagu, Domashi, Kathi Gasa Saonai.

INTRODUCTION:

A typical Bodo village is generally comprising with 35 to 65 or more families surrounded by abundance of various kinds of orchards. Some villages are beautiful to see. The natural beauty like bamboo trees, betel nut trees etc. beside a river or a stream having sufficient open cultivable fields attached to the village. In every village there is a village headman called Gaonbura. He controls the village council which is a typical institution of the Bodos. The Gaonbura occupies a high position in Bodo society of Judge and exercise his power to dispose off the many cases ranging from theft, quarrel, land dispute, marriage dispute and divorce to the violation of traditional laws of five principles among the Bodos viz, Agorbad, Fongslotbad, Daokibad, Khaoliabad and Khoulbwbtbad. A Halmaji (a person who inform villagers about the meetings, news, etc.) holds the village council at the directives of the village head. Generally, Bodos are very simple, honest, truthful, sincerity and straight forwardness. The moral character of the Bodos is of high standard. The young one respects the elders and the elders treat the young with love and tenderness. Naturally Bodos are peace leaving people. The social structure of the Bodos is primarily Patriarchal in character. In patriarchal system father is the supreme of the family. He is the ruler, controller, adviser and care taker of the family. In the Bodo society after the father death the eldest son inherits the rights exercised by him. After the death of the father the entire properties is distributed among the sons only. It is seen that if there is no son in the family the daughters have right to have property. The Bodo villages are look like a joint family. They are co-operative in nature. They live together and work collectively and unitedly. It is observed that many developments work in the field of social and cultural are performed in many villages by the Bodos themselves. (Brahma, 2002: 1).

OBJECTIVE:

The objective of the study is to highlight and study the social structure of the Bodos associated with their traditional beliefs and customs. With the sole objective of understanding the social structure of the Bodo villages and the families of the Bodos 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 transition and changes of traditional dresses 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.

ANALYSIS:**ECONOMIC LIFE:**

Agriculture is the main economy of the Bodos since the early days. Different kinds of rice are cultivated. They also cultivated several crops like mustard, jute, cotton, tobacco etc. and vegetables like potato, cabbage, cauliflower, radish, cucumber, gourd, green leaves, pulse, beans, small-beans, sweet potato, turmeric, pumpkin, melon, brinjal etc. including varieties of spices like chili, onion, garlic, coriander, ginger, etc. till today. Goi Biphang (Mondal, 2011: 199) (areca tree) is another important fruit tree which brings more economy to them. It is the most essential for them in day-to-day life including the religious functions. No social function or ritual can be performed in their society without areca nuts and betel leaves. (Hazowary, 1998: 30).

The Bodos used different kinds of agricultural utensils specially made of bamboo and wood at agricultural activities. Nangal (ploughshare), Jungal (yoke), Suken (a kind of straw separator made of bamboo), Mwi (harrow), Mwi Dangur (a kind of land equalizer made of bamboo), Beda (made of bamboo and wood with spikes to remove the grass), Hasini (rake), Royna (made of bamboo and wood to make collectively the rice), Khasi (sickle), Khodal (hoe), Hulabari (a kind of bamboo stick for the collection of bundle rice on shoulder) etc. are the agricultural tools of the Bodos. (Allen, Gait, Howard, 1979: 63).

In early days, the Bodos have been reliant on other economic activities such as hunting-gathering, animal husbandry, handicrafts etc. The economic life of Bodos was very much impacted by their habit of frequent migration. They gave much importance to the foods of day-to-day life. They were self-sufficient with some degree of necessities and led to a simple rural life without much knowledge of earning and accumulating wealth and property in those days. The economic life of the Bodos can be studied such as hunting, fishing, (handicraft), Si Danai spinning and weaving and trade and commerce. (Informant: Janabhir Brahma, Age- 62, Occupation- Priest, Vill-Santinagar, P.O.- Dotma, Dist- Kokrajhar, BTC, Assam on 17/02/2017.)

HUNTING:

Bodos are fond of hunting. In Bodo the hunter is called Polan (Brahma, 2009: 8) from the ancient time. Hunting can be done both group and individual. Bwrla (bow), Thir (arrow), Thop (made of bamboo), Jong (spear), Je (net), Rua (axe), Sika (dao) etc. are the tools used in the hunting.

In the hunting, more or less 15 to 25 persons are engaged which mainly base on the nets that to be used. If the used of the nets are very few, less people will involve and more nets will be more people. In a hunting party to trace the animals there might be two or three leaders. The foot prints and stools of the animals are detected by examining the presence of animals in a particular area. (Narzi, 2006: 105).

Rev. Sydney Endle stated that deer and wild pigs are very oftenly caught in hunting. For hunting purpose, they also used net for hunting wild animal and regular hunting parties are organized. Among the Bodos, the practice of offering right leg of the trap animal to the owner of net is prevalent. Meat is distributed among the villagers who joined in hunting and half or less share of meat is received by the villagers who do not participate in hunting because of his engagement to village work. Sick person and widows are also apportioned a little share of hunted meat. (Endle, 1911: 16).

FISHING:

Fishing is also one another occupation of the Bodos. Though, fishing is not considered as an occupation of the Bodos but at least 5% families run their family by fishing in the rural areas. From the ancient days fishing is regarded as a hobby and it is done by both man and woman. Jekai which is a triangular basket made of bamboo with open at one end and three triangular sides are closing with each other to the point and having a handle which is fixed to the whole body is the female used implement. Jekai (a fishing scoop), Kobai (a scoop for keeping fish), Sen (a kind of fish trap), Koka (a kind of fish trap), Pholo (a kind of fishing trap), Je (fishing net) and Mushari are the fishing implements used by the Bodos.

HANDICRAFT:

Since the ancient days, the Bodos are very expert and skillful in the field of handicraft. All Bodo male members are talented craftsman. To meet the needs of their day-to-day life they collected raw materials from the forest and produced different kinds of handicrafts. The whole work of handicraft is confined to male members only. From the point of view, it can be understanding that all the required things of the family are made by male but not by the female. Abwi Dangi, Kamplai, Don, Duli, Sandanga, Dahra, Kada, Songrai, Sandri, Sagong, Uwal, Gaihen, Kadwo, Jantha, Laothai, Dwihu, Maldang, Dabka, Mwkra Koro, Kopri, Goi-Batha, Baoka, Suken, Mwi, Mwi-Dangur etc. are the household utensils used by the Bodos which are made of clay, bamboo, wood, cane, etc. (Hodgson, 1847: 120-121).

WEAVING:

The Bodos have their own traditional dresses which produced by themselves which shows their artistic skill of weaving traditional dresses like Dokhna, Jwmgra, Aronai, Phali, Indi etc. (Informant: Gunabati Brahma, Age- 54, Occupation- Housewife, Vill- Kwdwmthola, P.O.- Dotma, Dist- Kokrajhar, BTC, Assam on 21/10/2016.) Spinning and weaving are only reserved for the women not for the men because all Bodo female acquire the knowledge of art of weaving. The Bodos rears silk-worm. For personal use and later on for the commercial purpose, they produce various clothes from the cocoon of silk-worm. Muga rearing is one of the most important economic activities and very common among the Bodos which is considered a high level economic earner. (Hodgson, 1847: 121). The women produce the clothes for the use of the family members on free of cost. This indicated that the women contributed a lot in the society as well as the family to save extra expenditure. In fact, Assam was famous for the production of varieties of silk clothes like the China and silk trade was very profitable. (Brahma, 2009: 86). A device called Thakri is used by the women for the spinning of yarn both from raw cocoon and cotton.

TRADE AND COMMERCE:

The Bodo word Falangi Kalamnai means trade and commerce. For trade and commerce as well as money economy the source materials for the Bodos are very limited. The Bodos live self-sufficient and self-defendant economic condition. Like other ancient societies, they produced only for consumption purpose or to meet their needs only of their own family. But, later on, they also began to produce more food grains and other commodities required by them and surplus products were made exchange which led to the emergence of trade. In the early days, barter system or exchange of goods for goods was a common practice in the Bodos society. The Bodo society was not encouraged trade and commerce in early days believing that trade or business involved telling untruth. Speaking of lie was regarded as a sin by the Bodos, so trade and business were not done by them. (Brahma, 2006: 37). As a result, the selling of a cow for making profit within unpermitted period or earning of profit by means of business was not allowed. But, to compare to that of the early days, today many changes have been noticed in the economic life of Bodos due to the impact of modernization.

SOCIAL GROUPS:

The main social groups of the Bodos are Swargiari, Basumatari, Narzari, Mushahari, Gayari, Wary, Khakhlari, Daimari, Lahari, Hajoari, Kherkatari Sibingari, Sabairiari, Bibairiari, Bingiari, Mahilari, Ramsiari, Sangphramari, Phadangari, Islari, Ganjlerari, Bargawari, Shalimar, etc. (Brahma, 1992: 34-40).

The groups of the Bodos seem to signify some kind of kinship. It is believed that these were mainly created on the basis of certain specific duties entrusted to a group or a clan to perform certain functions by the Monsing-Sing-Bwrai (supposed to be the first human being by the Bodos on the earth). This resulted in a disciplined society with a healthy atmosphere.

1. Swargiari: Swarga (heaven) + ari (group)

R. S. Endle illustrated Swargiari as a heavenly folk. The priesthood Dauris and Ojas are selected among them. From this class the Bodo society entrusted the duty of worshipping gods from among the Swargiaris.

2. Basurnatari: Baisamata (mother earth) + ari (group)

Basurnatari classes of people are known as the landlord. Solving the land problem, distribution of land, settlement of any disputes relating to land holding is entrusted to this group with the responsibility.

3. Narzari: Narzi (dry leaf of jute plant) + ari (group)

It is stated that the people of Narzari group were delegated with the duty to collect and supply Narzi Gwran (dry jute leaves of the plant) during the sraddha ceremony. People chew Narzi Gwran (dry jute leaves) to sever relations with the dead person after cremation is takes placed. In the present Bodo society of West Bengal, the people of this group use the surname Narzinari.

4. Musahari: Musa (tiger) + ari (group)

The safety of the domestic animals from the danger of the attack by tigers is the duty of this clan. It is also believed that people with magical powers could transform themselves into tigers and kill the domestic animals. However, some of Bodo people use their surname as Baglari instead of Mushahari.

5. Gayari: Gay (areca) + ari (group)

Gayary groups of people are traditionally associated with the planting of areca trees which is very essential in any kind festival of the Bodos.

6. Wary: Wa (bamboo) + ari (group)

It is believed that Wary group of people are planted bamboo trees for the first time in their boundary. Bamboos are collected by this group for the elaborate festivals like Kherai and Garja.

7. Khakhlari: Khankhala (a plant) + ari (group)

Khankhala is a long grass plant which is used during the Kherai festival. It is the belief that people of this group were engaged to collect Khangkhala plant for the Kherai festival.

8. Daimari: Daima (big river) + ari (group)

It is implicit that some people who lived by the banks of the river got their livelihood by fishing.

9. Lahari: Lai (leaves) + ari (group)

Lahari group of people are the people who collected leaves in large quantities for the festival.

10. Hajoari: Hajo (hill) + ari (group)

The name of the Hajowary clan was derived from the habitat people who lived in the hills or the foothills might have been called Hajoari.

11. Kher Katari: Kherkata (cutting of thatch) + ari (group)

The people of this group are very few in number among Bodos. They are generally found in the districts of Kamrup in Assam.

12. Sibingari: Sibing (sesame) + ari (group)

This commodity is essential in Assam who were engaged in collecting or supplying sesame were called Sibingari.

13. Bingiari: Bingi (string instrument) + ari (group)

Bingiari clan is supposed to have made this traditional instrument to play during the religious festivals. At present people of this community is rarely found. (Brahma, 1992: 35-40).

Many Bodo scholars have research on the clans but many more are no more found anywhere. The reason is that most of the duties and functions of the community barring a few are defunct in the society. However, the status of the groups or the clans is of equal status. The Bodos who are living Assam and West Bengal have been maintaining their connection with the groups through their surnames only.

CONCLUSION:

Though the characteristic and certain structures of the Bodos are still tribalistic in nature, it has been observed that strong community orientation is experienced distinctly at the Bodo village society. In the nature of people's assembly, a few institutions (Raijani Afat or Raijani Mithing) are formed with the community elders as its members. The duty of institutions is to take decision regarding any welfare issue of the village like rendering service for the construction of roads, bridges, community buildings, dongs, etc. It can also take the decision on some crisis confronting the village; small cases, the culprits, etc. are punished accordingly. An institution which is called public granary (Raijani Bakhri) is also instituted of collectively. From there they helped the helpless and offered the minimum interest which is meant for the entire village earning source. At the end, they collect the landing money in the New Year and audited for which the left-over money is spent by organizing a feast.

References:

1. Brahma Choudhury Laxmi Bijaya, Bodo (Kacharis) at a glance, 2002, p. 1.
2. Mondal Satyendra Nath, History and Culture of the Bodos, Edited by Bonny Narzary, Jalpaiguri, West Bengal, 2011, p. 199.
3. Hazowary Mangal Singh, Gwjam Mugayao Boro Harimu Sibirinaini Bidinti in Rupesri, Edited by Padmashree Madaram Brahma, Kokrajhar, 1998, p. 30.
4. B.C. Allen, E. A. Gait, C.G.H. Allen and H.F. Howard, Gazetteer of Bengal and North East India: Delhi, Reprint, 1979, p. 63.

5. Informant: Janabhir Brahma, Age- 62, Occupation- Priest, Vill- Santinagar, P.O.- Dotma, Dist- Kokrajhar, BTC, Assam on 17/02/2017.
6. Brahma Binoy Kumar, op. cit., p. 8.
7. Narzi Bhaben, op. cit., p. 105.
8. Endle, Rev. Sydney, op. cit., p. 16.
9. Hodgson B.H., Essay the First; on the Kooch, Bodo and Dhimal Tribes, In Three Parts, Part III.-Location, Numbers, Creed, Customs, Condition and Physical and Moral Characteristics of the People, Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta, 1847, pp. 120-121.
10. Informant: Gunabati Brahma, Age- 54, Occupation- Housewife, Vill- Kwdwmthola, P.O.- Dotma, Dist- Kokrajhar, BTC, Assam on 21/10/2016.
11. Hodgson B.H., op. cit., p. 121.
12. Brahma Binoy Kumar, Boroni Subung Harimu, N.L. Publications, Kokrajhar, BTC, 2009, p. 86.
13. Brahma Sekhar, Religion of the Boro and their Socio-Cultural Transition, DVS Publishers Guwahati, 2006, p. 37.
14. Brahma K, A Study of Socio-Religious- Belief, Practices and Ceremonies of the Bodos. Punthi Pustak, Calcutta. 1992, pp. 34-40.
15. Ibid., pp. 35-40

