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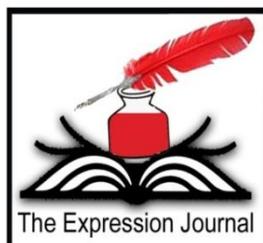
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MARRIAGE SYSTEM OF THE BODO TRIBE IN SONITPUR DISTRICT OF ASSAM

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Abstract

Bodo is one of single largest tribal community of Assam who resides in both north and south side of mighty Brahmaputra River. Besides Assam they are found in some adjacent areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, North Bengal as well as in Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. Since immemorial times they have been living those places maintaining their rich culture and identity as marriage is one of the important cultural items among them. They perform it as a great ceremony maintaining its own various social customs. Marriage is a kind of relationship which is established within man and woman for their mutual rights and duties. This new relationship is established by some specific social and religious recognized procedures in respective societies. Marriage creates new kin as well as the children when born to the woman are recognized legitimate rights of both parents. In Bodo marriage is called 'Haba', 'ha' means 'soil' or 'earth' and 'ba' means 'to bear something on the back'. It means to bear great responsibilities in their conjugal life. After marriage a person has become great responsibility of the family. With the marriage ceremony the Bodo society give the newly married couple a new lesson on life which is full of duties and responsibilities. The marriage system of Bodos in some places is seen as something difference. These differences are mainly seen on account of district area. Some district's marriage system is difference from another district. In this paper I attempt to discuss the marriage system prevalence in Sonitpur district of Assam.

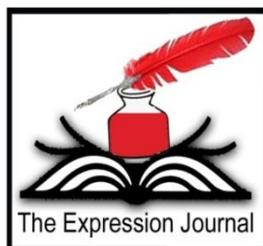
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Bodo, Marriage, Its Types and Performences.

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MARRIAGE SYSTEM OF THE BODO TRIBE IN SONITPUR DISTRICT OF ASSAM

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Introduction

The Bodos are the one of the popular tribe of Assam. Racially they belong to the Mongoloid family and linguistically Tibeto-Burman group of greater Sino-Tibetan language family. The Bodos are mainly scattered fairly large area of the North bank of the mighty river Brahmaputra and also some parts of South bank of the river. Besides that Bodos are found in some adjacent areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, North Bengal as well as in Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh.

Marriage is a social system that every community performs it for their better life. The Bodos also perform it as an important ceremony in the society. "Marriage has been defined as a union between a man and a woman such that children born to the woman are recognized legitimate offspring of both parents. Marriage creates new social relationships and reciprocal rights between the spouses, between each and the kin of the other, and establishes what will be the rights and status of the children when they are born. Every society has recognized procedures for creating such relationships and rights, and for making it known that they have been created"(Mair, 1972: 90-91)Marriage is a "Special type of personal relationship, involving mutual rights and duties" (Hutchison, 1989:1). Another renowned scholar also gives the meaning of marriage as a "Civil and religious contract by which a man is joined to a woman for the purpose of civilized society."(Ayier, 1993: 741)From the above definitions it can be summarized that Marriage is a kind of relationship which is established within man and woman for their mutual rights and duties. This new relationship is established by some specific social and religious recognized procedures in respective societies. Marriage creates new kin as well as the children when born to the woman are recognized legitimate rights of both parents.

2. Area of the Research

The area of this the Research is the Marriage System of the Bodo tribes with special reference to the Sonitpur District of Assam.

3. Aims and Objectives of the Research

i) To give a general concept of the marriage system.

ii) To explain widely regarding the Bodo marriage system of Sonitpur district.

iii) The main objective of this study is to preserve the great traditional marriage system of Bodos.

4. Methodology of Research

The present study is based on Descriptive method. Primary and secondary data collection methods were used. To collect primary data the researcher went to the field, meet the informants and conduct the interview. Asked regarding the marriage. Apart from this the researcher also used observational method. Participant and non-participant both the observational methods were used in the primary data collection. In this way the green data was collected. Secondary data are gathered from the individuals and institution through personal diaries, letters and survey documents etc. and also have been collected through records, census reports, books, manuscripts, magazines, journals and various information published in newspaper.

Moreover, I used audio-visual equipment like camera to take photographs, videos and recorder to record the interview during the field survey.

5. Marriage Systems of the Bodos

The Bodo word for 'marriage' is 'Haba'. The word 'ha' means 'soil' or 'earth' and 'ba' means 'to bear something on the back'. It means to bear great responsibilities in their conjugal life. It is quite interesting to note that the Sanskrit word for marriage 'bivaha' also has a similar etymological meaning. (Brahma, 2010: 76) After marriage a person enters into a circle of great responsibility. With the marriage ceremony the Bodos give the newly married couple a new lesson on life which is full of duties and responsibilities.

The Bodos have a very high regard and dignified concept of chastity and they live by it. "The standard of chastity among the Kacharis, both men and women, is by no means a law one. As a rule the young people, in the villages at least, lead pure lives before marriage, and are faithful to their marriage vows." (Endle, 1990: 30)

There are five types of marriage system are prevalent in Sonitpur district. These are:

- i) SwngnanwilainaiHaba (Arrange marriage or marriage according to standard practice)
- ii) KharsonnaiHaba (Marriage by entrance of Bride to the Bridegroom's house)
- iii) DwnkarlangnaiHaba (Marriage by elopement)
- iv) DongkhaHaba (Marriage by a man living with widow)
- v) GwrjiaHaba (Marriage by adopted son-in-law)

These are discussed under the following in details:

A. SwngnanwilainaiHaba (Arrange marriage or according to standard practice)

Swngnanwilainaihaba is an arranged marriage. It is the very much common and socially accepted marriage custom of the Bodos. Therefore normally this system of marriage is celebrated with great solemnity and honour. According to this system the bride is selected by the parents of the bridegroom and then the marriage is settled after negotiation of both the parents. In this marriage system some customs are to be practiced. These customs are divided into three parts namely pre-marriage ceremony, proper marriage and post-marriage ceremony for convenience and thoroughly discuss. These processes are taken to discuss after discussing of all kinds of marriage system.

B. KharsonnaiHaba (Marriage by entrance of Bride to the Bridegroom's house)

In this type of marriage the bride enters into the house of the bridegroom before the settlement of the marriage. It takes place when there is a delay in the arrangement of the marriage or the parents are not happy with the bride. It is possible if there is mutual understanding between the bridegroom and the bride. The consent of the parents is not taken into consideration. Society frowns upon such marriages but they are tolerated. The pre-marriage activities are not applied in such a marriage but full marriage solemnizes activities and Athimongal are applied.

C. DwnkarlangnaiHaba (Marriage by elopement)

DwnkarlangnaiHaba system of marriage is not socially approved and yet it takes place in the Bodo Society. This marriage is by elopement of both bride and bridegroom. The mutual understanding between the bride and bridegroom is enough for this type of marriage. When there are objection from both the house of bride and bridegroom then the bride and bridegroom go to other place and manage their marriage. Sometimes it is seen that the both family recall them and give them socially marriage. But if their parents do not call and consider they go their relatives to get marry. It is also regarded as an irregular marriage. In this type of marriage only marriage solemnization activities are performed.

D. DongkhaHabnaiHaba (Marriage by a man living with widow)

This system of marriage is approved by the Bodo society. In this marriage the bride is a widow. If a man comes and lives with a widow and the society recognizes this co-habitation, then the man and woman should regularize the marriage according to the social custom called DongkhaHabnaiHaba. In this marriage too, the marriage solemnizes activity is performed properly but pre-marriage and post-marriage activities are not performed as standard marriage or swngnanwilainaihaba. This system of marriage is very rare.

E. GwrjiaLakhinaiHaba (Marriage by adopted son-in-law)

It is solemnized at the house of the bride. It may be called a marriage by service, because the bridegroom has to give service at the house of the bride before the marriage and if the parents satisfy his services they will give marry by their daughter. After marriage also the Groom will remain at Bride's family. This form of marriage is prevalent almost tribal societies. This type of marriage is celebrated when in a family there are only daughters and there are no sons or male members to inherit the family property. In this marriage system the marriage solemnize activity is performed but pre-marriage and post-marriage are not performed.

5.1 Pre Marriage Ceremony

Generally in pre-marriage the parents of the Bridegroom look for a Bride through their close friends, relatives and neighbours. This process is called "Khwinasongnai" (tracing of Bride).

After getting information about Bride the parents of the Bridegroom arrange to visit Bride's house with a five members (three males and two females) and the party carries a pair of betel nuts, two bottles of rice-beer and a pair of golden bangles (Asansankajorase). When they reach at Bride's house they explain their main purpose by chanting the traditional Bodo proverb "Jeraoturinywbeaonwbathigardwng" (A piece of stick is dropped where there is thatch). After

that a lunch is eaten among them and discuss about the marriage. During returning time they keep the golden bangles at the east-south corner of Noma no (Main house) which is called "Ashantebnai" (Keeping of bangles). If Bride's parents do not want to give marry then within 7 days should return the bangles and go to Bridegroom house taking of rice-beer and betel nuts. It is called "Ashanfinnai" (returning of bangle). On the other hand if they do not return within 7 days Bridegroom parents believe that the marriage will be held and they get ready to precede the next steps.

The relatives of the Bridegroom along with tree members of the village will go to the Bride house. They discuss with Bride's parents about the marriage and make fix to do the pre-marriage activities. The pre-marriage ceremony consists of Swmwndwfirmainai, goikhaonai, kobortangkhaonai, no nainai, BibanLangnai etc.

5.1.1 Swmwndwfirmainai (returning of kinship)

Swmwndwfirmainai ceremony will be held at Bride's home. In this ceremony old relation is broken up and new relationship is established between the two families. For holding this ceremony they go to bride's home taking rice-beer, betel nuts abundant. The bride's family also has to arrange some materials to start the ceremony. These are a pair of new metal disc, a pair of betel nuts, a pair of earthen light, a pair of new gamosha, a pair of incense stick, a match box, a pair of banana leaf, a pair of bowl, a pair of gwranjou (filtered wine) and rice-beer, small amount of mustard oil and yarn, 4 rupees etc. Now at the middle of courtyard a village man wipe and clean the place where custom will be done and it called ashon. A Pair of earthen light and incense stick is placed near the ashon and lights them and a pair of banana leaf is also placed separately. Two new metal discs and new gamosha are kept on each placing banana leaf along with rice-beer's bowls, a pair of betel nuts and two rupees separately. Now Bride father will sit to the east of ashon and Bridegroom father will sit to the west side of ashon on each placed gambarikamflai (A low tool of wood). A village old utters some words about the kin changing and new relationship after that both fathers will lift each given disc and round it over the head by each other five times from right to left then they offer gamosha and feed the rice-beer each other, lastly they will stand up and bow the assembled villagers and the ceremony come to an end. After this ceremony the marriage date also makes fix by discussing both the family.

5.1.2 Khobortangkhaonai (keep visiting bride's house)

Khobortangkhaonai means take visiting sometimes to bride home. In this ceremony any customs are not performed just Bridegroom party goes to the Bride home by taking betel nuts, a pair of jougwan (filtered wine) and rice-beer. They will keep query about the Bride's health whether coming days her health will be suit or not for marriage solemnization. A lunch is eaten among them.

5.1.3 No Nainai (House Visit)

No Nainai is a query visit of Bridegroom's house. The Bride's parents go to Bridegroom house and hold discussion among them. A lunch is eaten and rice-beer is drunk among them.

5.1.4 Goikhaonai (Cutting areca nut):

After the final settlement the members of the bridegroom party go to the house of the bride with the bundles of areca nuts and betel leaves. This ceremony is known as 'Goikhaonai'.

5.1.5 Bibanlabwnai (carrying the bundle of commodities)

This ceremony is performed compulsory by the bridegroom party. In this ceremony the villagers including selected three men and two women called Barlangpha and Bwirathi will go to the Bride home by carrying of bundle of commodities. In the bundle of commodities there will be fourth earthen pitches, the pitches which are belonging to men are to be painted by the lime as the symbol of sun and women are to be as moon and areca nuts and betel leaves, two rupees coins are banded in a banana leaf (four pieces) and keep them on the each pitches and some betel nuts, lime, rice-beer and filtered wine (jougwran) are also included with the bundles. Again these bundles are banded by the bamboo string in a long bamboo rod on both the top. Generally the bundles of commodities are two but with cowboy bundle it will be three bundles. The general bundles are carried by the Barlampha and another bundle will be carried by a village man.

When they reach at the Bride home the village head man will open the commodities and the Bridegroom party will give him betel nuts, rupees as honour. A lunch will be made by omakapthang which was brought by Bridegroom party just after the carrying of main bundle of commodities. Sometimes a pig and sometimes half of pig is carried to Bride home. If a full pig carries then half will be brought back to Bridegroom home. Areca nuts and betel leaves are also eaten among them then Bridegroom party get ready to bring the Bride. They give new cloths such as dokhna, blouse, phasra and ornaments to wear and before come out from the bride home they throw out the areca nuts covers and bamboo strings on the roof and drop the Sun painted pitches at Bride's home then come by welcoming her. The Bridegroom party will sing marriage songs and cheer by performing of kham (big drum), jotha (cymbals), siphung (flute).

When they reach at Bridegroom's home campus, another party from Bridegroom home comes out with two new Bwirathi to welcome her. During this time each Bwirathi lift the banana shell's made round things which one is painted by sun symbol covered with earthen light, small amount of paddy, sesame, white flowers, betel nuts, banana leaf and another is painted by moon symbol to be filled by banana leaf, small amount of rice, sesame and red flowers. By these things bwirathi welcomes the Bride and the villagers follow them, the handmade bamboo fan is also fanned over there. The Bride's foot is cleaned on the Gambarikamflai (a low seat), then put inside the Noma no (Main home) and ask her to pray the Goddess Mainao by offering a pair of betel nuts. By this long customs are performed the Bibanlabwnai (carrying the bundle commodities) ceremony come to an end.

5.2 Proper marriage or marriage solemnization

In proper marriage or marriage solemnize system some activities are performed. These are discussed as follow.

5.2.1 Hinjaogwdankounomanonifraiboronnaiarwgtarjulinimondophaofojonai (take out the bride from main home and place her on sacred marriage seat)

When the marriage solemnize time is come the bwirathi and deuri will be taken out the new bride and welcome with cheers from the main home to marriage place and ask both new

bridegroom and bride to round the marriage place from right to left three or five times then give them to sit on marriage seat or in front of Bathou place by facing on east. They have to wear the marriage special dresses. But now these are not compulsory. Now a days Bridegroom may wear pajama, kurta and Bride wears general dokhna, blouse according to own choice. Now it seems that the dress code is nor compulsory as earlier marriage system.

5.2.2 Habamondopbanainai (Preparation of marriage place)

The marriage solemnization place is prepared to the side of west or south of home at courtyard. The villagers will make ready this kind of preparation; at first they will bring soil and make the selected place high then clean and sweep the place. The Mondop (place) should be five angles. Five small banana trees and bamboo rod to be planted and one trisul will be there. Colour papers are fenced on the bamboo to be like flag of Bathou as blue, red, green and yellow.

The Bathou fenced (Prayer place) will be made within mondop by fencing with the bamboo sticks and paste on there the colours papers. The banana planting beside the Bathou are also designed by the different flowers. At first when the Bathou fenced become ready there will be keep some amount of flowers, earthen light and place incense sticks. The main elements that should be offer are one ripped banana set, two pieces Prasad, cutting pieces of areca nut, new betel leaves one pair, and one pair dhona (a kind of bucket) and these will keep on banana leaf and pouring milk there. On the set of banana one pair of areca nut, betel leaves, two rupees, one pair red flowers are kept again on the right side and one white and red flower is kept o left respectively. Five incense sticks, one holly water glass and dowry dhon are also kept thereon. Rice will keep in the dhon as full along with one areca nuts, betel leaves and two rupees. On beside the Bathou fenced there should be kept one flower dhon by cutting small pieces for convenience to spread over there.

During evening, the family should pray in Bathou, main home, orchard and street campus by giving earthen light, incense sticks and flowers as making purify before arriving bride party at the function.

5.2.3 Gwtharjulinihabafari (Activities of marriage solemnization)

It is the main stage of marriage ceremony where Bridegroom and Bride are given marriage solemnize in front of the assembled of relatives of both the family and the villagers. During the first time of this stage the deuri who will perform all the activities of marriage solemnizations has to explain about the marriage solemnization and pray the God Bathou by lightening earthen light and incense sticks; beg blessings to make grand successful all stages of the event. Now deuri will call Bride's father and ask him to pray in Bathou and beg blessing for both new Bridegroom and Bride. After this father will give the hand of Bride to the hand of Bridegroom which is called in Boro 'Akhaihomnahwnai' and they will bow down him; the supporters or second Bridegroom and Bride also bow down along them.

Again deuri will call Bridegroom's father and ask him to pray in front of Bathou to beg for welfare of the new couple. He will tie up the scarf of both by three knots then both couple will bow down him and beg blessing.

Now the deuri ask to stand up the couple and give them the flowers garlands; white to

Bridegroom and red to Bride. The Bride will bow Bridegroom and put on him the red flowers garland and the Bridegroom also put on her white flowers garland and again Bride bow him. After this they will take oath in front of Bwrai Bathou (God). The deuri will give them oath taking; at first Bridegroom will take the oath then the Bride. After this the Bridegroom will give the vermilion on bride's forehead and again she will bow him.

The Bridegroom's parent prays in Bathou God welfare for their son and new daughter in-law and offer blessings.

After completing marriage solemnizes activities the deuri ask them to go in noma no (main home) and will explain widely over the future life how to lead and live.

On the other hand from the very beginning of the marriage ceremony i.e. before Bride's brought to Groom's home, the marry making, entertainment and pork, rice beer, lunch dinner feast have been going on. The assembled villagers will strongly take part. The girls and the boys will entertain whole nights by dancing and singing.

5.3 Post-marriage ceremony:

In Bodo marriage there are some customs to be practiced after the marriage solemnized. These are discussed below.

5.3.1 Athimangal

Athimangal is performed within the eight day of the marriage ceremony at the house of the bride's parents. It is the ceremony of first time visit of Bride to her house after marriage. For this the Bridegroom must bring one cock and one hen to the bride's house. The parents will present a sheet of hens, a cow and a pig to them for their conjugal life.

5.3.2 Momaimara

Momaimara is one kind of Bride price taken by uncle. In this custom Bridegroom and Bride offer a feast to her uncle. Bridegroom offers this feast to bride's uncle as honoured. After some days Bridegroom is invited to Bride's uncle house and he offer pig in the feast. If a pig is offered half of portion will be shared with Bride's uncle. Bridegroom family, Bride's uncle family and villagers assemble in the ceremony and have the feast and entertain. During the time of feast uncle announce to give some permanent and temporary wealth.

5.3.3 Kholargothainai

In Bodo marriage custom, if the husband expires suddenly after the marriage, the bride is returned to her parents and the amount of Malsa (bride price) is given back to the parents of the deceased husband by the parents of the bride. This act is known as 'Kholargothainai'.

But this custom is not maintained by all. Every family does not follow or returns their daughter in-law after expired of husband. However sometimes it is also seen that younger brother of husband will have the rights to marry his sister in-law with negotiations.

5.4 Divorce

In the Bodo marriage we should bring into discussions the Divorce system because it also takes place in the Bodo marriage. After the marriage if within the couple frequents quarrel is taken place and they decide between them to separate, the village community is called and tearing of betel-leaf (fathwilaibisinai) ceremony is performed. The betel leaf is kept in the presence of the

village elders in the house of 'gamibwrai' (village headman) and then betel leaf is torn into two pieces by the husband and wife. By this act the relation of husband and wife is come to an end. In this way the SwngnanwilainaiHaba or arrange marriage is performed among the Bodos.

6. Conclusion

Through this discussion it is tried to highlight the whole marriage system that prevalence in Sonitpur district of Assam. In Sonitpur district only five types of marriage systems are prevalent where in other districts of Assam's Bodo are performed six types. The marriage by taking away of Bride forcefully (Bwnanwilainaihaba) is not performed in Sonitpur district as legal marriage which is performed by other district's Bodo people however whole processes are almost same. The Bodo performs many processes from the Bride consultation to marriage solemnization or it's after too many processes has been done. Therefore whole system is divided into three part i.e. pre marriage, proper marriage and post marriage and each part has been done with Bodo social customs but whole are not performed in all marriage system except the SwngnanwiLainaiHaba (Arrange marriage). In Bodo marriage Bride is highly honoured and demand as they are looked for by man when getting matured for marriage. Until the consultation is not over or final response is not found the Bride groom party keep visiting the Girls home. This is cleared by this proverb "Lamanidubribilayarwmwlangjwbgwn (The bent grass will be died)" it mean that how many times will have to visit it could not be count. But today this process is not followed by all, once the bride groom party tells the coming purpose the Girl's family also gives the final response on that time as yes or not. Besides these during marriage many entertainment and feast is held by the assembled villagers and the relatives of the Bride groom. During Bride's entering to home the villagers welcome her by dancing and cheering up and during night also they dance and sing up to morning. In Bodo marriage decoration is not importance they give more stress on the feast with pork meat. Minimum three- four pig has been killed in every marriage. Because they wish the meat should be abundant and available. In this way the Bodo marriage is held and come to an end.

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