

Bodo Tribal in Assam: History, Culture and Education

Subhagya Das

Assistant Professor, Hatidhura College, Hatidhura

ARTICLE DETAILS

Article History

Published Online: 25 May 2019

Keywords

Bodo Tribal, Culture, Education, Language, History

ABSTRACT

India is a home to large variety of Indigenous people. The Scheduled Tribe population represents one of the most economically insolvent and marginalized groups in India, with a population of more than 10.2 crores, India have the solitary largest tribal population in the world. The Bodos are a Tibeto-Burman speaking, Indo-Mongoloid ethnic group. In the present times, the Bodos are well known to be the largest plains tribes of Assam. The Boro people are supposed to be the migrants of Chinese origin by the scholars, and their language belonging to the Tibeto-Burman language family. From mythological to historical period hundreds of Boro kings ruled under diverse dynastic. The Asura dynasty, the Kirata dynasty, the Mlecha dynasty, the Varman dynasty, the Pralambha dynasty, the Sala Stambha dynasty, the Kachari dynasty ruled before British came. Culture of the society of the Bodo tribe includes dancing, singing etc. They practice a culture recognized as Bathouism. The plant called Siju is worshipped as a symbol of Bathou emblem. To worship, a clean ground near the home or the courtyard of the habitat is chosen. One pair of Betel nut called Gol betel leaf called pathwi is presented. The offering even included milk, rice and sugar. For the Kherai puja an alter is placed in the rice field. The Bodos do not have the custom of dowry and caste system as per their rules of Brahma Dharma. In Assam, in respect of education the tribal are facing a lot of calamity. Bodo tribes live in forest and plain areas and hence their percentage of education is almost low in Assam. And if there are any chance; but their economic conditions stops them going school. Education acquires special attention for the Bodo communities in Assamese society, which is facing a multiplicity of old problems leading to stern exploitation. Education helps in setting the process expansion by helping them not only to adjust themselves properly to the changing conditions but also provide them an opportunity to demonstrate their mental faculties. For Bodo community, education is an input not only for their economic upliftment, but also for promoting towards education. It helps them for budding in built strength to face new challenges confronting them. This study is based on different relevant research paper, books, national and international journal from websites. To find out the study on Bodos history, Bodos culture and Bodos educational status in Assam.

1. Introduction

The Boro people are one of the indigenous ethno-linguistic groups of the current North Eastern India belonging to Indo-Mongoloid origin of Tibeto-Burman language family. Though spread in different parts of this region, as well as, in the neighboring countries, majority of their inhabitants is found in Assam. The Boro people are the dominant indigenous group in the present demography of the region. Linguistically the Garo the Dimasa, the ajong, the Sonowal, the Deori, the Rabha, the Tiwa and the Borok of the Twipra (Tripura), and many other cognate tribes are component of this great Bodo race.

The Epics i.e., the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are believed to be written from 2500 to 3000 B.C. This proves that the Boro people had powerful kings and kingdoms even before 3000BC in the eastern piece of present India at the time while the Aryans were confined to the Indus valley. The extension of Aryan culture and their resolution in this region began only in the last part of the first century of Christian era. This itself amply speaks regarding the historicity of the Boro being the origin of this part of present India. From mythological to historical period hundreds of Boro kings ruled under altered dynasties. The Asura dynasty, the kirata dynasty, the Mlecha dynasty, the Sala stambha dynasty, the Varman dynasty, the Pralambha

dynasty, the Kachari dynasty and the Borok or Tripuri dynasty ruled before British came. Even under British kingdom Kochbehar and Tripura remained as independent princely states. The princely states the Kochbehar and the Tripura were annexed forcibly by India on August 28, and October 15, 1949 respectively. The first mentioned king of Pragiyotishpur (old name of Assam) was Mairong (Sanskritised as Mahirang) of Asura Dynasty. A number of kings of the Asura Dynasty ruled. The Asura kings and their subjects are none but the Boro. Then came the Kirata Dynasty. Narkhw (Narkasura) and Fogdonzo (Bhagadatta) are two famed kings of the dynasty. The scholars have recognized the 'Kirates' of ancient Assam, who was involved in the Mahabharata war, with the Boro. Sanskrit literature of the 'Epic Era' have immensely mentioned about the 'Eastern kirates' predominantly the kingdom of Tripura has been mentioned as the 'Kiratadesha' of the North East, the ancient time. The Boro people are believed to be the migrants of Chinese origin by the scholars, and their language belonging to the Tibeto-Burman language relatives. G.A.Grierson in his the linguistic survey of India-1903 has given a table of tribes which shows the inclusion of a large number of tribes of his language groups of which the Boro and the Dimasa of Assam and the Boroks of Tripura are foremost components.

The date of migration from their original abode, namely, Northwestern China, to this part of present India is debated and needs further research. However scholars agree that the Bodo people settled in this region much before the Aryans. The first mentioned king of Pragiyotishpur (ancient name of Assam) was Mairong (Sanskritised as Mahirang) of Asura Dynasty. A number of kings of the Asura Dynasty ruled. The Asura kings and their subjects are none but the Boro. Then came the Kirata Dynasty. Narkhw (Narkasura) and Fogdonzo (Bhagadatta) are two well-known kings of the dynasty. The scholars have acknowledged the 'Kirates' of ancient Assam, who took part in the Mahabharata war, with the Boro. Sanskrit literature of the 'Epic Era' have immensely mentioned about the 'Eastern kirates' particularly the kingdom of Tripura has been recognized as the 'Kiratadesha' of the North East, the ancient time.

2. Review of Related literature:

Krishna Verma (1986) studied on the factor affecting literacy programmed in tribal areas of himachal Pradesh. She observed that poverty of the tribal parents is responsible for low enrolment of children at the elementary stage. Through different steps taken by the government are not properly implemented.

Malhotra, O.P. (1992) studied the impact of education on nicobarese tribal life and regulation at the post-doctoral level. This study examined the impact of modern education on the cultural, economic, political, social and religious life of the community, including its family structure and organization. The study revealed that the spread of education has brought about changes in the conventional occupations, in the cultural life, in nicobares languages (dialectic), and in their political perception, and has also made them more respective to new ideas. And Ramkrishna Nair, (1997), findings showed that (1) It was found that the conventional beliefs and customs discouraged and discouraged any change in educational pattern. (2) The traditional life styles were not contributing for the cause of education. (3) Cultural patterns were coming in the system of education and they were not contributing for education. (4) There were no back-up for education from tribal families.

Mr. Suraj Phukan (2001) the study concluded that, (i) The superstitions and prejudices among the people have been decreasing regularly. (ii) The people are at present acquainted with the contemporary means of living. (iii) Though the parents are illiterate yet they want to educate their child. (iv) Due to underprivileged economic conditions, the parents are unable to provide indispensable facilities to the students. and Talukdar, R. (2012) studied on "women education and rural economic improvement of the Bodo community of Assam". The findings of the study revealed that woman literacy level among the Bodo community have gone up but they are not able to maintain the same pace of progress with the women of non-tribal groups. The poor programme and communication; drop out of girl students, lack of inspiration towards higher education were defined as the problems of poor educational performance. The study also revealed that maximum Bodo women are working in diverse types of agriculture and allied activities. Their modes of operation are primitive that is why revenue generation from such activities is not reasonable.

Objectives of the study:

- (1) To study the history of Bodo tribal in Assam.
- (2) To study the culture of Bodo tribal in Assam.
- (3) To study the educational status of Bodo tribal in Assam.

3. History of Bodo Tribal in Assam:

The Boro people are one of the indigenous ethno-linguistic groups of the present north eastern India belonging to Indo-Mongoloid origin of Tibeto-Burman tongue family. Though spread in different parts of this area, as well as, in the neighboring countries, majority of their population is found in Assam. The boro people are the largest indigenous group in the current demography of the region. Linguistically the Garo the Dimasa, the Hajong, the Sonowal, the Deori, the Rabha, the Tiwa and the Borok of Twipra (Tripura), and numerous other cognate tribes are part of this great Bodo race.

From mythological to historical phase hundreds of Boro kings ruled under different dynasties. The Asura Dynasty, the kirata dynasty, the Kachari dynasty, the Mlecha dynasty, the Varman dynasty, the Sala stambha dynasty, the Pralambha dynasty and the Borok or Tripuri dynasty ruled before British rule. The term Bodo and Boro had been used synonymously by different writers in diverse times. Bodo, the term was first used by B.H.Hulgonson as generic term to refer the Meches, the Bodo speaking folks of Darjeeling district in 1846 while writing about them. Since then, the term Bodo has been useful to denote the Bodo group language. Bodo group of language comprises of Mech or Mes, Lalung, Dimasa or Hills Kachari, Garo, Hojai, Koch, Rabha, Chutiya and Tripura (Grierson, 1912). The exact sound of Bodo is superior represented by spelling it Bada or Bara. Like other tribal name in Assam, the name probably once meant a male associate of the tribe.

In the closely related Tripura Language Bara still means a man and a Kochari or Mech will call himself as Boro Fisa, a son of Buras to distinguish him from e.g. a Simsa that is Bhotia or Chinsa, a son of China. Rev.Sydney Endle who came to Assam in 1864 and had worked on the kacharis (Boros) since 1869 did extensive study on these groups of people. On the basis of studies, he wrote a monograph named 'The Kachars'. In this book he mentioned that the Bodo group of citizens were known as kacharis to others and Bada or Bar to themselves. They proceed of calling themselves as Bara or Bara phisa (children of the Baras). J.D. Anderson in the starting chapter of Endl's book 'the kacharis' write that in Assam proper the Hindus call them kacharis, in Bengal they are known as Meches. Their own name for their pursuit is Boro or Bodo (the o has sound of English o in 'hot'). Ajoy Roy in his book 'The Boro Imbroglio' has also given same argument with Anderson. He state that the notorious spelling of the word is Bodo the letter 'd' is pronounce not as 'd' but as hard 'r' corresponding to in Assamese and Hindi Debnagri. This dispute can be proved with the help the terms like arum in English is tharun or thadun in Bodo, skin in English is 'bigud or bigur' in Bodo. Similarly, kiladi is pronounced as kilari, Boda is as enunciate as Bora. Dr.S.K.Chatterji has also acknowledged the generic term Bodo in his book 'kirata jan kriti' he has stated that the Bodos, who spread over the whole of the Brahmaputra Vally

and North Bengal as well as East Bengal forming a rock-solid block in north eastern India were the most important Indo-Mongoloid people in Eastern India and they form one of the main bases of the present day inhabitants of these tracts, judging from the wide range extending west into North Bengal (in Koch Bihar, Rangpur and Dinaspur district), they may have pushed into North Bihar also, and the Indo-Mongoloids who introduced into North Bihar might equally have been either Bodos or 'Himalayan' tribes allied to the newer.

In Assam there are altogether 23 tribal communities which constitute 12.82 percent of the total population of the state. The tribes of Assam may roughly be divided into two categories; plain tribes and hill tribes. The plain tribes mainly inhabit the plain areas of the state and the hill tribes are mainly concentrated in the hilly areas. Bodo-Kacharis constitute the prevalent tribal group in Assam, who account for 38 percent of the total population of the state.

4. Culture of Bodo tribal in Assam:

Culture plays a vital role in the development of any nation. It represents a set of shared attitudes, ethics, goals and practices. Culture and creativity manifest themselves in almost all academic, economic, social and other activities. A country as diverse as India is symbolized by the plurality of its culture.

Culture of the entire society of the Bodo tribe includes dancing, singing etc. One can find the surnames of Bodo tribes as Bargayari, Boro, Bodosa, Ishwary, Goyary Ovary, Wary and Dwimary. They use the attractive language of Bodo and some people in primitive age used Roman and Assamese script. Bodos have quite superb dresses which are exhilarating the beauty and glamour of women. Dokna is the dress worn by Bodo women which they themselves knit on their personal hands. Shawls form the most important fashion among Bodos and thus loom is the major thing used in the courtyard of the Bodos house. Bodos in the ancient times used to pray to their forefathers.

Today Bodo tribal community has changed drastically and has accepted Hinduism as their main religion. They practice a culture known as Bathouism. The plant called siju is worshipped as a symbol of Bathou. To worship, a clean ground near the home or the courtyard of the quarters is chosen. One pair of Betel nut called Goi betel leaf known as pathwi is offered. The offering even included rice, sugar and milk. For the Kherai puja an altar is placed in the rice field. The Bodos do not follow dowry and caste system as per their rules of Brahma Dharma.

The legendary folk dance of Bodo tribe such as Bardaichikhla and Bagurumba are really colorful. The Bodo tribal community follows a familiar system of marriage in all villages, elder in the village put right the bride. Bride money is rewarded and they do not marry from other communities, Sunday is the most excellent day for a Bodo wedding. There have prohibited against marrying within the same clan. The groom is asked to stay with his father-in-laws family. The customs of Bodos have a unique naming ceremony, when a cock is offered to the Gods for the welfare of the day.

The culture of Bodo people in Assam is influenced by the land and the suburb areas where they currently live, Bodos are known as farmers, agriculturist community with a

strong tradition of rice and jute cultivation, betel nut plantation, fishery, poultry, and piggery. Bodos also cultivate mustered and cereals. Bodos also make their own cloths starting from scratch, such as traditional attire. In recent decants, Bodos are influenced by modern social reforms under Brahma Dharma, Assamese Sarania, Islam and the spread of Christianity.

Festivals of Bodos: The Bodos of Assam celebrate different festivals at different periods of time. Some of the main festivals of the Bodos of Assam are Bwisagu, Domashi, Kherai puja and Garja puja.

Bwisagu: 'Bwisagu' festival which is celebrated in the Bengali month of Bwisak is regarded as the foremost festival of the Bodos. The word 'Bwisagu' is composed of two words i.e. 'Bwisa' means Bwisak and 'agu' means near the beginning. Therefore 'Bwisagu' means 'early part of the month of Bwisak'. This festival is also known as 'Bihu' and has similarity with 'Bishu' festival of Chakmas of Tripura and 'Busu' festival of Dimasas (Bordoloi, Sharma, Thakur and Saikia. 1987:53). 'Bwisagu' festival starts from the last day of the month of Chaitra with cow worship which last for at least seven days with lots of merrymaking like singing and dancing. This event is welcomed by each and every Bodo people with overwhelming happiness and joy and regarded as the beginning of the year. The traditional instruments they used in the festival are jotha (cymbal), 'Kham' (Bodo drum), Siphung (flute), Cherjha (violin-like) and Jabkring (a musical instrument made of wood with some pieces of tins). Actual social gathering starts from the first day of the month of Bwisak with the children of each household respectfully bowing down to their parents or elders. They are then blessed by the elders wishing them good health and wealth throughout the year that has just started (Bordoloi, Sharma Thakur and Saikia op cit:9) their supreme god 'Bathou' is also worshipped on this day.

Khatigasha Saonai: 'Khatigasha Saonai' or 'Khati Bihu' is an additional seasonal festival of the Bodos. It begins from the last day of the month of Ashin and continues up to two days. In this festival they burn gasa (Lamp) in their paddy field and pray to their Goddess of wealth for more yields in their crop growing.

Domashi or Magw Bihu: 'Domashi' or 'Magw Bihu' is celebrated by Bodos of Assam with lots of enjoyment and happiness. It begins in the last day of the Bengali month push and lasts up to seven days. During 'Domashi' festival Bodo people prepare diverse kinds of food and drinks made out of rice like sourai (fried rice-like), phitha (rice cake), sithao (rice rothee), jou (rice beer) etc. As the festival starts just after the end of harvesting time of year. Juvenile boys and girls of the community used to collect different kinds of foods like phitha, sithao, sourai, rice, eggs etc. with lots of festivity like singing and dancing on those days.

Kherai Puja: Kherai puja is one of the most essential religious festivals of the Bodos. The main purpose of the festival is for the benefit of the individual live as well as the society. For individual welfare they perform Kherai puja separately and for the welfare of the villagers they perform collectively. The word 'Kherai' is composed of two words-'khe' and 'rai' meaning 'kneeling' down and 'recite'

respectively. Thus the absolute meaning of the word 'kherai' is to kneel down before the Lord Bathou and chant mantras for the welfare of the family unit or the villagers (Mugani Sakhi, 2011: 227). The sacrifices of creature like goat and birds like pigeon, chicken and cock is found essential in the kherai puja. It has similarities with 'kher' puja of tripuris, 'kherang' puja of dimasas and 'kheraima' puja of Meches of Nepal (Ibid).

Garja Puja: Garja puja is a different religious festival of bodos particularly the followers of the Bathou religion. The meaning of the word 'garja' means 'expulsion' or being isolated. During this puja some evil gods or the evil spirits are excluded or discharged out of the village by throwing them into the streams or rivers as they thought that those evil spirits and evil deities are the cause of all their sufferings and diseases. There are many types of Garja puja. Among them Asu garja, Borai raja garja, Dahan kubir garja, Lothi garja, Othoro shanti garja, Thia garja and Bathou garja are the most important.

5. Educational Status Bodo Tribal in Assam:

Education is a process of development from the cradle to the grave. Man becomes a ideal man through proper education and he alone can be educated while the other living organisms are trained. While his life is guaranteed by food, it is overvalued by education. However, it is an indisputable fact that no community or society or district or state or nation can flourish and shine without having educated manpower. Education is the most powerful appliance of bringing about social, political, economic development and cultural transformation of a society and country. It develops a child to be person who is physically powerful, mentally well-equipped, sensitively balanced, with a right attitude towards life and work; and success of the nation is determined by the eminence of its citizen. Nation is not built by bricks and mortars but by the excellent quality of men. It does not require any proof to say that society and its development are definitely correlated to the development of education.

In Assam, in high opinion of education the tribal are facing a lot of crisis. Tribal live in hilly and forest regions and hence their acquiring education is almost low in Assam. And if there are any chance; but their economic conditions stops them going school. Education acquires special significance for the tribal communities in Assamese society, which facing a variety of previous problems leading to severe exploitation. Education helps in setting the process development by helping them not only to amend themselves properly to the changing conditions but also provide them an opening to prove their mental faculties. For tribal community, education is an input not only for their economic progress, but also for promoting attitude towards education. It helps them for developing in built strength to face emerging challenges confronting them. The governments of state and central pump large amount of money for the tribal development, but significance of advantageous outputs are far from visibility. A basic change needed is to develop optimistic attitude towards the importance and benefits of education. But due to the marginalization and deprivation in the course of centuries has resulted in a subsumed state of tribal 'self'.

A critical mass of Bodo intellectuals realized the need for preservation of bodo language after Indian independence. scores of early authors studied in schools and colleges, where the medium of instruction was either Assamese or Bangla. Bodo intellectuals felt that Bodo language must be conserved and developed at par with Assamese and Bangla language. Bodo people realized very late the education was the essential component to the overall development of bodo people and their language.

Bodo Sahitya Sabha (Bodo Literacy Organization), the bodo language was introduced as a medium of tutoring of primary level in 1963 and then at secondary level in 1968. Bodo language and literature has been documented as one of the Major Indian Language (MIL) in Gauhati, Dibrugarh and North-Eastern Hill University. In 1985, bodo has been recognized as a connected state official language of Assam.

The bodo struggled for self-determination in late 80s under the leadership of Upendra Nath Brahma, who is at this time regarded as the father of the bodos (Bodo-fa). After a protracted struggle to save tribal belts and block, bodo culture, language and characteristics, the bodos have been granted the Bodoland Territorial Council and autonomous administrative body that will have within its jurisdiction the present locality of kokrajhar and adjoining areas. The movement for autonomy was headed by the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) and an armed militant group famed as Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT).

Now the language has attained a position of satisfaction with the opening of the pos-graduate courses in bodo language and literature in the University of Gauhati in 1996. Moreover, under the sponsorship of the commission for scientific and technical terminology, HRD Ministry, the Govt. of India, the Bodo Sahitya Sabha prepared more than forty thousand scientific and technical terms in bodo language.

Further, it is promised, the Sahity Academy would accord "Bhasa Sonman" (respect of language) to the bodo language and literature as a primary taken of full-fledged recognition to it. Furthermore, the Govt. of India, in principal, has recognized the necessity of insertion of the bodo language and literature in English schedule of the constitution of India.

Scheduled Tribes status under the Indian constitution has nominated as reserved seats for tribals in political forums, such as the parliament, along with job reservation in the civil service and academic institutions.

The researcher conducted the study on Bodo tribal secondary school students findings of the present study help us to know the history, culture and education of Bodos in Assam. Within the limitations of their achievement, they prefer to lead a traditional pattern of life by practicing their rites and rituals. Academically they are typical due to a 'traditional mind-set', not being able to cope with the competitive environment. Traditionally Bodos have been honest and spotless. Though they live in interior rural places, they always try to keep their house and villages as a tribal group maintain the higenic cleanliness, which has been tallied with the research evidence. They like to live a plain and natural life remaining in remote places. They have hesitation to think about monetary gains; from their actual life

it is also found that they are economically not so rich. So, they do not have any complicated life-style.

The investigator mentioned some outcomes of a research work which is impact of attitude and awareness on academic achievement of Bodos secondary school students.

- There was a relationship between attitude and academic accomplishment of Bodo secondary school students. It implied that thoughts could impact on academic achievement of the Bodo students. It can be said that academic achievement was high as their attitude level was also high.
- There was a relationship between consciousness and academic achievement of Bodo secondary school students. It implied that awareness could impact on academic achievement of the Bodo students. It can be believed that academic achievement was high as their awareness level was also high.

6. Conclusion:

Bodo tribal are the weakest segment of Indian population. Bodos are one of the most important plain tribal

in Assam. Bodos are undersized on their socio-economic status lack of livelihood supports, lack of capacity building, lack of skill development, lack of educational infrastructure and lack of development in rural school. This is the picture found predominantly in Boro areas. The work culture is very poor in the rural areas. Moreover there are superstitions of various types, religions, customary tradition, which are the major obstacles for the steps forward and prosperity of the people. All the sectors of culture, education and history the tribal people are at dissimilar levels of development but, on the whole, formal education has made very little impact on tribal groups. In the light of the past efforts it is not scandalous because prior to 1950, the Government of India had no direct programme for the education of the tribals, with the implementation of the constitution, the promotion of education of Scheduled Tribes has become a special responsibility of the central as well as the state government. Education is almost certainly the most effective instrument for ensuring quality of opportunity, the tribal people are lagging far behind their more fortunate fellow countrymen due to lack of education.

References

1. Baruah, B.K. (2003). "A Cultural History of Assam". Early period. Volume-1, Guwahati: Bina Library.
2. Brahma, K. (1995). Aspects of Social customs of the Bodos. Kokrajhar: Chiranjib Brahma.
3. Buch, M.B. (1991). Fourth Survey of Research in Education. 1983-1988, Volume-1, New Delhi: NCERT.
4. Buch, M.B. (ed). "Fifth Survey of Research in Education." New Delhi: NCERT. 1988-92.
5. Endle, S. (1997). The kacharis (Bodo). Delhi: Low price publication.
6. Thakur, D. and Thakur D.N. "Tribal Education", New Delhi Deep and Deep publications. Ed, 1995.
7. Thakur, G.C. Sharma. (1972). The plains Tribal of Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar and Nowgong Tribal Research Institute. Government of Assam
8. Web Sources:
9. Tribal to India, Assam: Culture:History of Assam. Bharatonline.com