

CHANGES IN MARRIAGE CUSTOMS, RITUALS AND BELIEFS OF THE BODOS AS REFLECTED IN ABARI

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ABSTRACT

The Bodos are the earliest inhabitants of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam. Bodos are the largest tribe of Assam. Racially they are Mongolian. Hence, the Bodo culture is a part of the Mongolian culture. The Bodos have six types of traditional marriage systems. Relating to marriage ceremony they have own traditional customs, rituals and beliefs. Moreover, relating to marriage ceremony they have own decoration materials, dress, ornaments, musical instruments, food items, furniture etc.

However, the traditional marriage customs, rituals and beliefs are changing gradually in course of time the. Moreover, various fields of marriage ceremony, such as- traditional dress and ornaments, traditional musical instruments, traditional furniture, traditional food items etc. have changed significantly. It is seen that some of the traditional practices performed earlier at the time of marriage ceremony are not performed nowadays. Ishan Mushahary has vividly reflected the changes on traditional marriage customs, rituals and beliefs through his short story called Abari.

Thus, this paper aims to study the changes on marriage custom, rituals and beliefs of the Bodos based on selected short story called Abari. This paper also aims to study the factors responsible for changing the marriage customs, rituals and beliefs. Moreover, this paper aims to highlight the factors as well as the changes.

KEYWORDS: Society, Customs, Rituals and Beliefs

INTRODUCTION

The Bodos are one of the indigenous tribes of India. The Bodos are one of the most important tribes of Assam. Besides Assam, they are also found Meghalaya, Nagaland and West Bengal. Moreover, they are found in some pocket areas of neighboring countries like Nepal, Bangladesh etc. Earlier they were known as Kiratas, Asuras and Danavas etc. G.A. Grierson mentioned that the generic name 'Bodo' was first given to them by B.H. Hodgson. He observes, "The generic name 'Bodo' was first given to them by B.H. Hodgson."

The Bodo language is one of the ancient languages of India. However, the Bodos did not have written literature until the second decade of the twentieth century. The Christian missionaries started first publishing books on grammar, dictionary, religion, tales, rhymes and songs. According to many writers, '*Boroni Phisa O Aiyen*', a book on traditions and customary laws is the first book of Bodo language. It was published by Habraghat Bodo Sanmilani in 1915. '*Bibar*' is the first magazine of Bodo language. In 1920 Satish Chandra Basumotary brought out *Bibar* magazine editing in the manuscript form. The first printed form of *Bibar* magazine appeared in 1924 in the editorship of Satish Chandra

Basumatary. 'Abari' is the first short story of Bodo literature. It was written by Ishan Mushahari, the most talented romantic poet of Bodo language. 'Abari' was published in *Hathorkhi Hala* magazine in 1930. Pramod Chandra Brahma was the editor of *Hathorkhi Hala* magazine. Since 40s decade of 20th century the Bodo short story has been flourishing with a literary flower in which social life has been reflected to a great extent. With the passing of time, the Bodo literature has recognized in the eighth scheduled of Indian constitution. As a result the Bodo language and literature has gained a status in the context of literary discipline. Thus, the literary texts have been taken into account greatly for discussion from multifarious aspects.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Review of literature is an integral part of scientific research. In his book called *The Kacharis*, S. Endle described about the traditional Bodo society and culture. In a book called *Aspects of social customs of the Bodos*, K. Brahma has elaborately discussed about the traditional marriage systems of the Bodos as well as customs, rituals and beliefs relating to marriage ceremony. In a book called *Social Mobility*, Binoy Kumar Brahma has discussed about the transition of Bodo society and culture elaborately. Sekhar Brahma has discussed about the transition of Bodo society and culture in a book called *Religion of the Boros and their Socio-Cultural Transition*. C.N. Shankar Rao has discussed about society and culture elaborately in a book called *Sociology*. Anil Kumar Boro has discussed about the cultural changes of the Bodos in a book called *A History of Bodo Literature*. Phukan Ch. Basumatary and Swarna Prabha Chainary have discussed about the social as well as cultural transition of the Bodos in a book called *Monograph of the Boros*.

OBJECTIVES

The traditional marriage customs, rituals and beliefs of the Bodos are gradually changing. According to many critics, Ishan Mushahary has vividly reflected these changes in his short story called *Abari*. Thus, this paper aims -

- To study the traditional marriage customs, rituals and beliefs of the Bodos,
- To study the changes *on* marriage customs, rituals *and beliefs chiefly based on the short story called* Abari,
- To study the factors responsible for changes in marriage customs, rituals and beliefs as well as to highlight the factors and the changes.

METHODOLOGY

The study is based on literary text. The short story called *Abari* is the primary data for the chosen topic. *Abari* is written by Ishan Mushahary. The data is collected from the anthology of short stories. Thus, the topic has been analyzed critically based on *Abari*. For analyzing the proposed topic, the secondary data which are directly related to the study are used. Thus, help is taken from related published books, journals, magazines etc. for analyzing the topic. Moreover, observation method has been used for analyzing the topic. The data has been analyzed extensively from sociological perspective, though the data is purely literary text.

THE SHORT STORY

Abari

Ishan Mushahary was considered the first and foremost creator of the Bodo short story. Ishan Mushahary wrote only one short story called *Abari*. *Abari*, written by Ishan Mushahary is taken as required data for this present study. The story called *Abari* is based on a traditional peasant family of the early 20th century. In this story, the writer has brilliantly depicted the marriage custom, rituals and beliefs of traditional Bodo society. Moreover, the writer has depicted the customary practices and attitude of the agro-based society.

Abari is the central character of the story called *Abari*. The other important characters are Gugri, Uli, and Maiphri. Besides them, there are more other characters. They are- youth of Sikhar village, youth of Jajiguri village and youth of Sumliguri village. As revealed in the story Gugri, a widow, is the mother of Abari, Uli and Maiphri. Gauri's family is a peasant family. When Abari becomes eighteen years old and attains marriageable age, a groom party from a far village called Sikhar village visits Gugri's family with a proposal to get Abari as bride of the house. The party tucks silver bracelet at the thatch roof of veranda of the main house (*Noma No*) of Gugri to get Abari as their bride. The groom of Sikhar village is a major lame and hunchback. Thus, Gugri, the mother of Abari was not interested to accept the proposal. But, the villagers advise Uli to accept the silver bracelet saying-

"Jerwi hinjao eri hwa jananggow"

(Eng. Translation: As the bride, so will be the groom.)

Abari is a lame girl. The villagers think that no person of good health will marry Abari. Uli, elder brother of Abari has a deep-rooted thought that no one of good health will marry his sister. Thus, Uli accepts the silver bracelet. Abari was busy in serving the guests while her marriage tie was fixed with the groom of Sikhar village. So, she did not know anything about the groom of Sikhar village. The groom of Sikhar village is a major lame and hunchback boy. Moreover, he cannot do any domestic work. Thus, Abari strongly compels her brother to return the silver bracelet when she comes to know the facts that would be groom of Sikhar village is a major lame and hunchback as well as a burden of the family. Abari is a slightly lame girl, but she can do all domestic works like other normal girls. Moreover, she is very expert in domestic works as well as in weaving and embroidery works. Thus, Abari wants to get married according to her choice. She wants get married with a person of sound health. Abari is confident. Thus, she fights against the will of her brother as well as the marriage customs of the society. Abari strongly compels her brother to return the silver bracelet to cancel her marriage agreement. Finally, Uli understands the feelings of Abari and returns the silver bracelet as her wishes. After three years of this fact, marriage tie of Maiphri, a younger sister of Abari was fixed with a handsome boy of Jagiguri village, who reads up to middle school. The required materials of marriage ceremony like- *Dokhona thaosi* (elaborately designed female garment of the Bodos), *Sona* (gold earring), *Kheru* (earring), *Ashan sangkha* (bangle) and *Oil* are purchased from market. Accordingly, Maiphri got married with the boy of Jagiguri village. The marriage of Maiphri brings depression and frustration in Abari's life. Abari starts thinking always about her marriage. As a result Abari's physical beauty starts to decline. Abari wants to get married with a handsome and fit boy of Sumliguri village whom she chooses. Accordingly, one day, at full moon night she enters in to the bridegroom's home of Sumliguri village with some materials brought from market like- *Ashan* (bracelet), and *Enti* (a small ear-ring). Finally, she got married, as she desired. Here the story ends.

ANALYSIS OF THE STORY

The Bodos have own traditional marriage systems as well as customs, rituals and beliefs relating to marriage ceremony. Among the traditional marriage systems, the arranged marriage (*Swngnani lainai haba*) is most common socially accepted marriage system. It is solemnized with great solemnity and honour. Arranged marriage (*Swngnani lainai haba*) involves number of formalities. The formalities are divided into three stages. They are - *Pre-marriage ceremony* (Selection of bride), *Proper marriage* and *Post marriage ceremony*.

Gongkhon Hwnai or Ashan Thebnai (Formal negotiation) is one of the most important parts of the pre-marriage formalities. Traditionally, the bride is selected by the parents of the bridegroom and then the marriage is settled after negotiation. In traditional Bodo society, the parents of boy and girl do not allow their son or daughter to select their own partner. Generally, the marriage tie is made by the parents in consultation with the elder village persons. Generally, the head of a family do not take consent from own son and daughter for finalizing a marriage tie. Once the marriage tie is settled by the parents, then the son or daughter is bound to obey the decision taken by the head of a family. As a traditional belief of the society a lame girl weds a lame boy, a blind girl weds a blind boy and a dumb or deaf girl weds a dumb or deaf boy. However, from an extensive analysis of the story, it is observed that Abari, the central character of the story did not follow the traditional marriage customs, rituals and beliefs of the society. Moreover, the guardians of Abari's family also did not follow the marriage tradition. As revealed in the story it is seen that Uli, the head of the Abari's family keeps the silver bracelet in consultation with the elder village persons to tie Abari's marriage with a major lame and hunchback groom of Sikhar village, who is a burden of the house. Abari is a slightly lame girl. However, Abari strongly compels Uli, the elder brother of Abari to return the silver bracelet to cancel her marriage agreement, the agreement with a major lame and hunchback groom. As a result, Uli returns the silver bracelet to the groom party of Sikhar village as wishes of Abari. Abari thinks though she is slightly lame, but she can do all domestic works like other normal girls. Moreover, she thinks that she is expert in domestic works as well as in weaving and embroidery works. Abari wants to live on her earning. Thus, she wants to marry whom she chooses. She is optimistic and confident in her decision. Abari wants to get married with a boy who is handsome and physically strong. Accordingly, one day, at full moon night with *Ashan* (bracelet), and *Enti* (a small ear-ring) she enters in to the bridegroom's home of Sumliguri village as she chooses. Thus, it is seen that Abari goes against the decision of the family as well as socially established marriage customs and beliefs of the era, which indicate changes of traditional marriage customs and beliefs. The marriage of Abari with a physically sound boy of Sumliguri village also signifies the changes of mindset as well as traditional marriage customs and beliefs.

Accordingly to traditional practice of the Bodos, the elder son and daughter always get married first. However, from an extensive analysis of the story, it is seen that Uli returns the silver bracelet to the groom party of Sikhar village and cancels the marriage agreement of Abari, the agreement with a major lame and hunchback groom. But, after three years from the Abari's marriage cancellation Uli, the guardian of the family settles Maiphri's marriage tie with a boy of Jagiguri village before the marriage of Abari. Accordingly Maiphri got married with the boy of Jagiguri village who reads up to middle school before the marriage of Abari. Maiphri is a younger sister of Abari. Thus, it is observed that the guardians of Abari's family also violated the marriage traditions of the society. Thus, it is observed that the traditional customs, rituals and beliefs relating to marriage ceremony are gradually changing in due course of time.

It is observed that majority of the present society; mainly educated and urban living persons as well as economically independence persons choose their partners. Today, in Bodo society also the concept of dating, including online dating and pre-marital relationships has become more prevalent, allowing individuals to explore compatibility before committing to marriage. It is seen that majority of modern generations give more emphasis on personal fulfillment and mutual respect in marital relationships. Abari is the representative of thousand girls those who wants to marry accordingly to their choice. She may be the symbolic representative for bringing a reformation in the traditional marriage customs, rituals and beliefs of the Bodos.

The Agents of Changes in Marriage Customs, Riruals and Beliefs

Several agents are usually considered as responsible for changes in marriage customs, riruals and beliefs of the Bodos. Some of this are-

Modern Education

Modern education is one of the most influential agents of changes on traditional marriage customs, rituals and beliefs. Anil Kumar Boro writes, "*A spirit of self awakening and enlightenment gradually came under the impact of western education and the enthusiasm created by the orgnsisations like Bodo Chattra Sanmilani and Habraghat Bodo Sanmilani.*"

Brahma Religion

Brahma religion is one of the major factors for which a great change is seen on traditional marriage customs, rituals and beliefs. Change in the traditional marriage customs, rituals and beliefs began with the preaching of Guru Kalicharan Brahma. Thus, Anil kumar Boro writes," *Kalicharan Brahma declared a crusade against illiteracy, social malpractice, habit of drinking and brewing country liquor. The reform movement also included religious programmes.*"

Bodo Social Organizations

It is observed that certain changes have come in traditional marriage customs, rituals and beliefs due to emergence of Bodo social orgabizations. The social organizations strongly participated in mobilization with reformation mission to uplift the entire socio-cultural, socio-economic, socio-religious and socio-political condition of the Bodo society.

Christianity

The traditional Bodo society, which met Christianity in the twentieth century, underwent through a great change that is visible in their outlook and traditional institutions. It is seen that certain changes have come in traditional marriage customs, rituals and beliefs due to impact of Christianity. Sekhar Brahma writes, "*The spread of Christianity among the Bodos has brought some remarkable changes in their pattern of living, customs, habit, belief and values.*"

Towns and Semi-Towns

Emergence of towns and semi-towns is also one of the major factors for changing the traditional marriage customs, rituals and beliefs of the Bodos. The emergence of towns and semi-towns has transformed the agrarian Bodo society into modern--bureaucratic--rational society.

Modern Communication

Development of modern communication is also one of the factors for changing the traditional marriage customs, rituals and beliefs of the Bodos. Sekhar Brahma opines, “*Good transport and communication helped in changing the pattern of the society of this region.*”

Science and Technology

Science and technology is one of the major factors for changing the traditional marriage customs, rituals and beliefs of the Bodos. Emergence of science and technology has been playing an important role in changing the traditional Bodo culture in many aspects.

CONCLUSION

From an extensive analysis of the selected text called Abari, it is observed that Abari, the central character of the story did not follow the traditional marriage customs, rituals and beliefs of the Bodos. Moreover, Gugri and Uli, the mother and elder brother of Abari respectively also did not follow the traditional marriage customs. It is seen that Abari goes against the decision of the family as well as socially established marriage customs and beliefs of the era while she compels Uli to cancel her marriage agreement with a lame and hunchback groom of Sikhar village, which indicate changes of traditional marriage customs and beliefs. Moreover, she chooses her own partner and finally got married as she chooses. Uli, the guardian of Abari's family settles Maiphri's marriage tie with a boy of Jagiguri village before the marriage of Abari, the elder sister of Maiphri. Maiphir, younger sister of Abari got married before her elder sister. Thus, it is seen the traditional marriage customs, rituals and beliefs are changing gradually. It seen that the changes of traditional marriage customs, rituals and beliefs has been nicely reflected in this selected short story.

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