

‘MARRIAGE SYSTEM OF BODO: A STUDY’

Author Name: Jyoti Rani Das

Department: Assamese

Ex Student : Cotton University, (Assam)

(Permanent address: Vill- Pub Chechamukh, P.O.-Kulhati, Pin : 781104, Dist –Kamrup (rural), State : Assam, Country-India)

ABSTRACT

Bodos are the oldest and largest tribe of Assam. They trace their origin from Mongoloid species and their language originates from Tibet-Burma language group. Bodos live in every district of Assam. Bodos celebrates various rituals and festivals, ranging from building house, beliefs, social norms, rites of passage etc. They also possess many methods of marriage system. Marriage is a very sacred ceremony among the Bodos tribe. We can see influence of patriarchy rules and matriarchy rules upon their marriage system. Bodos prefer to marry within their same tribe. They usually refrain from having matrimonial relation with other tribes. The social structure of Bodos may seem complicated but it is rather autonomous and democratic.

We shall discuss about various marriage systems of Bodos through the research paper.

KEY WORDS

Bodo, Society, Marriage, Family, Wedding.

INTRODUCTION

Bodo society and their culture are inseparable part of diverse culture and society of the North East India. Bodos mainly live in Kokrajhar district of Assam. They are spread across all districts of Assam as well. Some groups of Bodo people also live in neighboring states viz, Nagaland, West Bengal, Arunachal Pradesh. They live even in some areas of Bhutan and Nepal also. Bodos also worship “Bathou” deity, a sect of Slavism. Some Bodos also believe in Vaishnavism, Sanatan Dharma and even Christianity. Bodos have successfully kept their culture and society roots strong. They are a social tribe and so they endeavour to maintain societal relations well. Like any other tribal society of Assam, in Bodo society too men and women enjoy equal status. In Bodo society marriage plays an important role in molding their social structure. They have various types of marriage systems. Marriage is a socially accepted ceremony. Through marriages, Bodos maintain cordial relations among their own society.

SCOPE

Bodos are the largest and most progressive tribes of Assam. They are culturally, literally very enriched. Their social structures, festivities, folklore, wardrobe etc. plays an important role in their culture. Marriage system also adds dimension to their culture. There is much diversity in the marriage system of Bodos as well. In our research paper, we shortly try to study the entire dimension related to the marriage system of the Bodos.

PURPOSE

- To briefly discuss various marriage systems prevalent in Bodo society.
- To study various rituals to marriage system in Bodo culture.
- To analyses the relation between Bodo society and their marriage system.

METHOD

We have adopted descriptive and analytical method of study for the research work.

THEME

The rituals, rites and social norms of Bodo people are very conservative in nature. Earlier it was believed that Bodo society is matriarchal in nature but with deep study we came to know that Bodo society is mixture of patriarchy and matriarchy. Men are the head of the family and inherit property rights. But in the absence of male member female head of the family occupies the position. Bodos are primarily agricultural tribe. The bonding in the Bodo society is very strong. Bodo people maintain their cordial relations through matrimonial alliances. Marriage is considered to be an experience through which an individual transforms his or her identity of social being. Marriage helps in communicating with different type of people within the same tribe.

Bodo society observes many rituals of marriage. Archeologist and Anthropologist have divided marriage custom into two categories- one matriarchal and the other is patriarchal. The Aryans and Dravidians perform marriages through patriarchal system. On the other hand, Mongloid and Austric origin people perform marriages through matriarchal norms. But Bodos in the North-East are heavily influenced by Aryan culture both matriarchal and patriarchal norms. There are 6 types of marriage system prevalent among Bodos. They are -

- Societal marriage (Haba-Gaulai)
- Son-in law marriage (Gwrajia Lakhinai)
- Dhoka thakhi marriage (Donkha Lakhinai Hava)
- Girl's consent marriage (Jarhannai)
- Forced marriage (Bonou Noi Haba kharsonnai)
- Elope marriage (Dounkhar Langnai)

Societal Marriage:

It is a socially accepted marriage system. This type of marriage is executed with the consent of both boy and girl and their respective families. Bodos neither consider astrology important factor nor believe in Vedic tradition for this type of marriage. But they believe on auspicious of the day when the boy's family visit the girl's house. During their visit, if they observed the girl arranging rice crops on the courtyard or arranging her long hair, they consider it to be a good sign. The boy's family eagerly looks at her footsteps, long hair, bright eyes, posture and health for consideration of marriage. On the other side, girl's family looks for a brave boy for their daughter. One significant fact associated with this type of Bodo marriage system is that parents do not like boy and girl themselves look for life partners on their own choices. Parents consider the best decision for their children with respect to marriage. According to local proverb, when boy's family enters into the girl's house for marring proposal, they need to express their feelings towards the girl. But the girl's family does give their consent immediately. In order to please them, the boy's family offers one pair of silver bangles and put in the courtyard. In Nagaon region, the Bodo Kacharis have another custom, during the return of boys family from the girl's house, the girl offers GAMUSA woven by herself to her fiancé. If that custom is not observed, it is believed that the girl's family did not accept their offer of marriage.

Like other tribal communities of Assam, Bodos also have a tradition of pre wedding ceremony. There are two sects of Bodo community - Adi Bodo and Adhunik (modern) Bodo. AdiBodos a traditional Bodos went for pre wedding ceremony with two same sized beer pot. But modern Bodos carry two beer pot use with different substances. They bring the pot by binding it on a stick carrying on shoulders. It is the main symbol (bhar) of pre wedding ceremony. To help the man carrying the symbol, two married woman go with him. After giving all the gifts, bride's side makes arrangements for sitting. That sitting space is called "AFAT" in Bodo. A ritual is conducted after this, the bridegroom side offer betel nut, one biha betel to the girl's family and pay respect to them. There is no ritual of feast in pre wedding ceremony. But from 3 pm to 9 pm on that day, betel nut is offered to the guest. After the pre wedding ceremony, wine and beer also distributed among family members. The man also carries the symbol is known as "BIBAN". The bridegroom's side needs to offer four betel and four nut to all the married woman of the bride's family side. After pre wedding ceremony offered betels are cut and their cover are thrown to the roof of house. After two days of pre wedding ceremony, the bridegroom's side need to offer wine to the girl's family. This ritual is called as. "TIKAPELUA BHAR" in Bodo.

After the pre wedding ceremony, with a gap of one year, marriage is conducted. Those Bodos believing in ARYAN religion use fire torch in the marriage ceremony and instead of offering meat in reception, they offer tea and snacks. If the girl's family is financially not sound, then

mutually both families share the expenditure. When the bridegroom approaches for marriage. They bring two silver decorated with banana leafs having two signs of vermillion, two leafs of holy basil (tulsi), two pair of betel nut, one pair of five crops, five coins and one lamp. With the two sieves, they covered the upper side with cloth and cover with BISONI. They fill rice with two bowls. They need to bring betel nut extensively for feast purpose. On the marriage day also, bridegroom family must bring symbol. Another symbol filled with tea, betel milk etc also brought for marriage that symbol (bhar) is called "LONKHAR BIBAN" or "THENGBANGRA" "in Bodo language. The bride's side offers the symbol to the Herdsman seeking Blessings from lord KRISHNA. The bridegroom and his family need to be brought to the wedding place by the family members of the bride.. The girl's family welcomes the bridegroom by Sieve and washes his feet on a stool. After that, they are offered snacks at the place. In this type of marriage, there is a ritual of "GA DHAN" in Bodo culture. In this ritual before marriage the boy offers 100 -120 rupees to the girl's family. Another ritual is that the boy seek blessings of his in laws by offering them two silver coin on sieve covered with banana leaf and filled with rice. The elder member of the family blesses the couple for their married life.

The traditional Bodos followed the custom of "HATHASUNI" "for their marriage. They perform the HATHASUNI ritual at bridegroom's house and then proceed towards bride's house for marriage. The modern Bodos do not observe marriage ceremony at bride's residence rather they observe it on the bridegroom's residence. Then bridegroom's family visit for pre wedding ceremony. They also have a feast on their house. They observe HATHASUNI on the wedding day .according to HATHASUNI ritual the bridegroom side arrange a feast for their guest. The newly wedded bride cook food for her in laws and that food is mixed with food prepared for the feast. Before that activity, the food is offered to the deities of kitchen and priest introduces the newly wedded couple to the deity and they seek blessings. Thus, HATHASUNI feast ritual is observed. After eight days of marriage, both bride and bridegroom visit the bride's house for feast. It is called "ATHMANGLA" when they visit for feast; they need to bring fifty one pairs of betel nut, six Bihar betel, one pig one pair of pot wine. Thus the feast ceremony is celebrated in this type of marriage.

2. Son-in-law marriage:

In this type of marriage the bridegroom stays with his wife and her family after marriage. In Bodo tradition, if the boy does not have parents or they died before, one individual of the same tribe must take responsibility of the boy during marriage. The individual must assure the bride's family about the boy's character. The boy needs to stay in girl's house for a period of one year before marriage to prove his credentials. He must engage in agriculture and maintain his health assuring the family of the bride that he is eligible for their daughter. Then after satisfying the criteria, the boy must stay in laws house for a specific period of time is 3 to 5 years. After the

completion of the period, couple can stay independently in other place for that purpose, father of bride provide financial help to them.

3. Dhoka Thaki marriage system:

This type of marriage is a distinct feature of Bodo culture. If a widow has movable or immovable property of her husband or has a minor child, then the widow can remarry. If a man wishes to marry a widow then he must prove his loyalty by providing silver coins and take pledge to stay with her. This tradition is called “GONKHON HINAI “in Bodo language. That man needs to live his patriarchal family in order to marry a widow. Generally a widow and aged bachelor get married in this type of marriage. According to Ratneswar Basumatary - *Dhoke Thakib Khuja manuhjane bondobosta huar pisat nijar pitribonkha tyag karibp lage. Sadharnote sampatti thoka bidhaba tiruta aru nirupayat pora borola manuh ubhazor bhitarthe Dhoka prathare bibah howa dekha jai.*¹

4. Girls consent marriage:

If a mature girl wants to marry a mature boy willingly, then the family of the boy needs to address the family of the girl. This type of marriage is usually not whole heartedly accepted by the society. But if the families of both the side agree the marriage ceremony is held and later society accepts their marriage.

5. Forced marriage:

In this type of marriage, the boy forcefully tries to get the consent of the girl for marriage. But if she resists him, then the boy forcefully conspires with some people and at some place grabs the girl and pressurizes her to marry him. Earlier this type marriage was much more common in Bodo society. But as more people are getting across to education, these types of forceful rituals are diminishing.

6. Elope Marriage:

If a boy and a girl are in a relationship and their parents refuse about their marriage, then the couple elopes and marries each other. But this type of marriage is not accepted by the society. The couple can also get punished for eloping and getting married without the consent of their parents.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion “Marriage system of Bodo:A study”, we get the following conclusion-

- The marriage system of Bodos is diverse and is prevalent till date.
- There are many small-big rituals associated with marriage system of Bodos like “Gonkhon” etc.
- There is no provision of child marriage among Bodos society.

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