

# THE TRANSITION OF ASSAMESE SOMATIC CULTURE IN THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF MODERNISATION

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## ABSTRACT:

Time is constant. The fluid movement of time is bringing the change to the human society of the world too. The Assamese society of Assam is not an exceptional too. The era that we are living is called modern age. The reason of it is that the different changes come to the prevalent society. According to 'Yandaboo Treaty' of 1826, the ruling power of Assam goes to the hands of the British. From that time when the British started to rule in Assam the industrialization and the townified process had brought an unimaginable change to the town and city and also of the village life of Assam. Including this transition, the changes come to the folk-culture is a notable one. By the term of folk culture it implies to the form of composition of different task behaviour that has been going on in ancestral way traditionally among the rural and economically educated person. In this composition, from food, clothing and shelter to songs, tales, dance and drama are all included. Folklorists had divided the Assamese folk culture into four different parts. They are-

- 1) Oral folk study or folk literature: In folk story, folk poem, folk epic, folk speech and folk language are included in here.
- 2) Social folk custom or folk principle: festivals, functions, recreational programmes and sports, traditional medicines, folk religion etc. are included here.
- 3) Somatic culture: Folk art, folk crafts, folk architecture, folk dress, traditional cooking methods are included here.
- 4) Folk performance art: Folk dance, folk songs and folk drama are included here.

From the above mentioned four divisions, somatic culture is one of the exceptional elements. In relating to the somatic culture, many changes have come to it from different perspective. In our research paper, under the influence of modernism what kinds of changes have arrived to the inclusive facets of somatic culture of Assamese traditional social life, is particularly attempted to make an analysis through this paper in a descriptive methods.

**Key Words**– Modernisation, Somatic Culture, Assamese Somatic Culture, Transition and Transition.

## **Introduction:**

### **Modern, Somatic Culture and Tradition:**

The dictionary meaning of 'Modern' is –contemporary or in the now, prevailing at the present time. Likewise the concept of so-called 'modern' is for the time being. In other words, Modern refers to those thoughts, feelings and philosophical musings which can be fit into the system of transitional society. The era we are living in, is also rendered as the modern era. With this era many subjects are involved such as the expansion of education, an inadequate triumphant, victorious journey of science, industrialization, process of building towns etc. From the 17<sup>th</sup> century, science starts to develop in a rapid growth and the discovery of different things of science in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century brings a drastic change to the journey of life along with, it heavily impacts on the style of thinking, feelings and emotions of people i.e. even to the extent of changing the life style of people.

On the other hand, somatic culture is one of the notable components of folk-culture. Apparently, according to the prevailing idea, by folk-culture, it means an assimilated form of different behaviour of activity that has been going on among the rural folk as a tradition. But this idea is supposed to be negated by a particular group of experts in present day outlook. According to them,- There is no such kind of things, that folk-culture could exist only in villages, not in some extravagant cities. Whether it is in towns or cities, it is not peculiar to share the same attention

towards folk-culture. Whatsoever , to highlight that the debates over this matter is not our objectives; so by saying, folk-culture we mean that several different behaviour of activities which have been coming down from the ancestral times, as tradition such as starting from food, clothing, shelter to subjects like songs, tales, dance and drama etc. falls in the perimeter of folk-culture. On the other hand, subjects created by the human which is visible such as materials, utensils, houses, jewelleryes, cloths, architecture, culinary methods, fine arts etc. are included in the somatic culture. These things have to be passed down from one generation to another in the ancestral process. In this way, these things have to be traditionally harboured.

Tradition is not stable. It's a law to proceed towards the future from the past through the present. With passage of time, the living methods of human have been changed for a little more than before. For which the volatile hobbies of men lead to the various form of culture. Due to unable to disregard appealing the sense of time, every society of man is influenced by the modernisation more or little. It is not an astonishing fact that a more or little change is to be found in the tradition of somatic culture; which is the vital component of folk-culture in such circumstances.

Assam is one of the north eastern states of India and the components of ethnic, socio-cultural and linguistic structure here, forms a 'consolidated graded life' of which the descendents claim as an Assamese. Apparently, somatic culture refers to the outfits, food, architecture that has been passing down in

the form of tradition among the Assamese people. In the Assamese life style, these subjects have been discussed from the ancestral times. However, with the passage of time, tradition is also changed. So, the source of the Assamese somatic culture is also not left out from here. The modern era is the era of globalization at present. In this era, everything is examined and analysed thoroughly in a new way. In the era of the British, modernism is emerged in the life style of Assamese people. It can be said that the modern era is begun in Assam after handing over the ruling power of Assam into the hands of the British in accordance to 'Yandaboo Treaty' of 1826. Expansion of education, establishment of oil industry in Assam by the British, the constructions of railways, making of roads and ports, and through importing industrial commodities of England, as soon as the wave of modernisation flow in Assam. Flowing of this modernisation, bringing change the sources of traditional Assamese somatic culture, is also a remarkable approach. So, in this seminar paper, it is trying to analyse about the changes come towards Assamese somatic culture in respective of modernisation. The 'introduction' of the subject included in the part, the objectives and importance of study, the ranges and methods and the sources of attaining data is cited below-

### **Importance and Objectives of Study:**

#### **OBJECTIVES:**

a) Food, Clothing, and shelter along with these basic needs of human around one or two relevant subjects the source of somatic culture started to build on with the passage

of time for which factors and in what way it is changed and what way it can impacts on the Assamese folk-culture and its heritage is attempted to analyze briefly in here.

b) To look into the matter by using of different sources of traditional somatic culture after the change in which way it has been sustained on as a separate identity of Assamese socio-culture.

c) Though the tradition changes with the time by keeping the sense of original root of tradition, another intention is to look into the matter regarding how it can be admitted in accordance of changing era.

### **IMPORTANCE OF STUDY:**

a) Though it is discussed in a limited range about the transition of somatic culture along with the various sources of folk-culture, but it is not to be seen to discuss separately including all of its approaches. However, culture is also changed in the flow of time. Therefore, it is needed to discuss this approach newly on time to time. So, on the basis of limitations of early study, though the discussion of changing direction till now, there is a probability that some of the unexplored facts might come into the light. The importance of the studying subjects can be realized from this approach.

b) The Assamese somatic culture has been bearing witness flowing from the past through present to the future of Assamese socio-culture in a particular time of the different approaches. Particularly, as the ancient heritage of the society, as an example is to be needed to analyse the hidden specialities in the sources of

inclusive somatic culture. Because, the specialities of this approach will be come into the light based on different perspectives of Assamese traditional socio-culture.

c) In this contemporary time, the uses of different sources related to somatic culture of Assamese society, has been decreasing parallelly with the lack of proper usage due to the influence of modernism where there is a possibility of losing it forever. In the case of proper use and conservation of the sources of Assamese somatic culture with such a study can create a little awareness to draw out the proper usage also in the future.

### **Scope and Method:**

In the scope of selected topic along with the basic elements of Assamese somatic culture- food, clothing, shelter; it is attempted to analyse briefly on the topic within the range of its related perspectives. For the sublime topic-‘THE TRANSITION OF ASSAMESE SOMATIC CULTURE IN THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF MODERNISATION’ an explanatory and analytical process is used in the presentation as per in the need of different stages.

### **Source of Data Collection:**

For the collection of the selected topic primary and secondary kinds of sources were taken as a help to carry out this task. Regarding the topic, the presented book on ‘Daak’s Phrases’ as a primary source or other relevant books, magazines, journals are supposed to be the secondary sources

is accounted to be main component in here.

## **Discussion of the Main Subject**

### **THE TRANSITION OF ASSAMESE SOMATIC CULTURE IN THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF MODERNISATION:**

Generally, by somatic culture we can refer to natural life style of people. The stream of tradition age after age and immersive arts with tactics of protective heritage, performance, process can also be referred to as somatic culture. The original objectives of the somatic culture is- to discuss how the traditionally harboured men and women of the society build a house, how do the produce cloths, or make food items, how do they engage in farming process, or even domesticate and make pisciculture and all, how do they prepare the water system for the soil in cultivation, making machinery and how do they make staff of utensils etc. Briefly to say, the basic elements of human food, clothing and shelter and centering around related to its one or two topics the somatic perception of folk culture is seemed to be built on. The changing of these elements in the passage of time, some impacts also falls on the Assamese folk culture parallelly. For the convenient of discussion different components of somatic culture can be mentioned as follows –

- a) Folk Art
- b) Folk Craft
- c) Folk Architecture
- d) Folk Dress, and

- e) Folk Culinary Methods. (Sarma, Nabin Ch. (2013).Page-20)

About the change that has come to the mentioned components of somatic culture is analytically discussed and attempted to offer as follows.

### **Local Food and The Change Come Towards Culinary Method:**

Local food and culinary method is a remarkable component of Assamese somatic culture. The change comes to this component in the flow of time. Traditionally, the women had only a particular position in the kitchen in the lifestyle of Assamese people, and also, another people were not allowed to enter into the kitchen except the cook. It was kept a distance between kitchen and dining room and if it is needed both the system in a same house then it was covered with a wall or making a wall of soil in the fire place. At the time of cooking rice the cook entered into the kitchen by arranging all the necessary things. At the time of cooking, the cook wore a special dress keeping aside and packing up again after finishing of culinary activities. Now-a-days, such kinds of disciplines are not to be observed relating to enter into the kitchen. Because, like the earlier Assamese women, they do not keep themselves within the four walls of home and they come to take part a major position in the external world and so spending much time in the kitchen for a woman is not possible now. In this situation, men also men start helping women in the kitchen equally to run the family systematically. In the same manner, in case of food habit, inclusion of new food items and in the case of changing

equipments is also emerged fast as the food habits and culinary activities. In the Assamese traditional lifestyle along with rice, fish-meat, vegetables and other similar stuff, stuff of sour and bitterness, 'Pura-Pittika', 'Kahudi-Kharoli' etc. are though favourite items in here but many times some foreign food items have also enlisted in the storage of Assamese food items. In the present moment in Assamese society the popular food items like 'Pulao', 'Kofta', 'Korma', 'Biryani' etc. were basically food items of Moghuls. In that way, some of the restaurants started to build up in every corner through them some other food items like 'Chow Mein', 'Momo' which are of Chinese food items; 'Fried Rice', 'Pizza', 'Roll', 'Burger', 'Toast' etc. are of western food items which has been in as food habits of Assamese people. In the case of cooking style food items, a great change has come to the culture. There is a saying in 'Daak's Phrase' –

“Baah Chit Soliya Kati,

AkhaPaniKoribaJuti.

PaniDibaAkhaPati,

LuwaRandhoniKhorirJuti.

EgunChaulDugunPani,

TinigunJaalDibaTani.

DigholKoriyaDibahaPhuk,

TeweDekhibaJuirMukh.” (Sarma, Nabin Ch. Ed. (2012).Page-23)

In the contemporary time, 'Daak's Phrase' has become an irrelevant, which is why except the towns and cities, in the house of



economically backward people in rural areas it can be seen that 'cooking gas' (L.P.G.) too used in there. With the case of cooking apparatus too beside the traditional cooking apparatus like 'Soru', 'Kerahi', 'Deksi' the other convenient apparatus like cooker, fry pan are used as well. Moreover, beside Microwave Oven with different kinds of electrical apparatus, the cooking methods have become so much easy. With the case of food intake customs related to the prohibition too has turned out to be a little lenient which can be observed from a further distance. In the life style of Assamese people, some vegetables are prohibited to eat according to 'Tithi'. For example, Kumura in pratipad, Kharuwa Bengena in dbititya, Poto in trititya, Mula in chartuthi, Bel in panchami, and Tal in saptami etc. It is also prohibited to eat fish and meat in Purnima, Amabashya and in Sankranti. It has in the collection of essay namely 'Darangog' -

"Bat  
pittokofslesmajennalankhoy.

Bhujanardrabyasehimotemiloboi.

Jitithitjibyanjankhaitenisedhan.

Sobakejanoyupokarsudhajon."

(RabhaHakasam, Upen (Ed). (2009) Page-14-15)

It is mentioned that in the ancient Assamese society, such kinds of prohibition was seemed to be abide by strictly. But now-a-days, such kinds of prohibition could not seem to be abided by fully.

## THE CHANGES COME TOWARDS FOLK DRESS OF PEOPLE:

The dresses bring up a heritage like penchant of a society and its own introduction. Like today, the dresses of Assamese woman were 'Riha-Mekhela-Chadar' in the past. Here, the different is that the women in the past did not use blouse, petticoat, chemij, bodice etc. like the women in the present. They only wore two dresses- 'Odhubostra' and 'Udhrabostra'. It is remarkable that the most of the Assamese women meagrely wear ChadarMekhela in day to day life except in case of the festivals at present. The tradition of wearing ChadarMekhela is also changed in very late. It emerges from some lassies of the present new generation who take step on the ramp. Besides wearing ChadarMekhela, Assamese maidens and women wear sari, churidar, and also pants-shirt, frock, skirt-top, wrapper, jeans, leggings, t-shirt, gown, nighty, etc. accepting the changes of time. Though, these kinds of dresses are not the traditional dress of Assamese society, it must be said one thing that these kinds of dresses are more convenient than MekhelaChadar in present day context in busy life. Though MekhelaChadar looks beautiful, it is not so convenient to wear for taking much time or for consciousness in the way of busy life. On the other hand, Chula-Churiya, Gamocha, ChallengChadar are the traditional dress of Assamese male person, as after the arrival of the British, they began to wear pants, shirts, t-shirts, jeans etc. The inconveniences having in case of wearing Chadar-Mekhela is also applicable for wearing Churiya-Chula.

Therefore, though these are immigrant culture there cannot be any objections in case of wearing above cited dresses. Only it should be paid attention according to its place, time and penchant. But it is a matter of remorse that the new generation hardly seems to be abandoned the penchants, gentility etc. It is totally not a good symptom for social life.

## CHANGES COMING TO THE FOLK ARCHITECTURE:

The influence of geographical environment is clear in folk-architecture. In the former time, the raw materials obtain from the nature directly such as- bamboo-wood (pillars of house), reed (walls of house), thatch or palm leaves (roofs of house), rattan (to bind the house) etc. with these materials a particular house was made – ‘Katharful soli di, hengul, haitalsani’. There were many different houses like- Batsora (a house that is built up in front of the house of noble people), Soraghar (a house that is supposed to be found after crossing the gateway, where the guests are felicitated), Marolghar (in front of Borghar, where women sit and gossips with same aged women), Borghar, Suwanighar, Randhanighar, or Akholghar, Bharalghar, Guhalighar, etc. But these are wearing equally off with the modern age. The real model Assamese house attached with ‘Tup’ is almost scarce. Moreover, in this case the production of the sources of building house are also decreasing or to be found scarce. Bungalow of tin, house of bricks and a number of apartments are increasing day by day. On the other hand, many people instead of buying manor state to enter into difficulties or building house,

it seems that they live in buying a part of flat. In case of building house, the people of ancient Assamese society, mostly built up houses according to ‘Daak’s phrase’. There is a saying in Daak’s phrase-

“Grihopotir hate  
koriporiman,

Dirghaprasthosthirjukhiyaa  
an.

Sorusorukoibandhibaghar,

Eta nalagedohutakor.

Aathiyakothalmajotaam,

Tebejanibabarirkam.

Pubebhanupochimechaya,

Uttoreguadokhinedhuwa,

Tebejanibakoriba kaya.

Dokhinebhuiuttorebari,

Kolkoriba sari sari.” (Sarma, Nabin Ch. (2012).Page-64)

Again, towards upper Assam, house must be built by “PrasthenaDirgheTrayu a BanabaGhar”- it means the parable is still prevailed that the house should be built by keeping length of nine forearms and width of thirteen forearms.

But, at present time house is not built, either by keeping the phrase of Daak or parable accordingly. It is only needed a piece of land to build a house of having more than 7.5 billion of population in the present world. The phrase of customs and principles do not come much here. Now, the methods of building Assamese houses are changed. Such kinds of changes can be

rendered as positive nature in case of folk-architecture. According to Assamese architectural principles, brick houses are permanent and convenient than to the houses built of wood, bamboo and thatch etc. After building such kind of house for one time, you need not to repair again and again and cost nothing unnecessarily.

## **CHANGES COME TOWARDS FOLK CRAFT:**

From the ancient time, Assamese men and women are particularly using ornaments of gold and silver. Assamese women used to wear engraved with precious stones and pigmented ornament. In the neck, there were 'Golpota', 'Dholbiri', 'Xilikhabari', 'Maduli', 'Dugdugi', 'Junbiri', 'DighorJingiri', of silver (chain); in the hand there were 'Gamkharu', 'MuthiKharu', 'Keru', 'Kongkon' moreover wearing of it; the married bride wore 'Xithipoti' on head, 'Gojmotihar', 'Baju' on hand, 'Chandrarhar' on waist, 'Kundal' and 'Thuria' on ear, rings on fingers and 'Nupur' on feet. These jewellerys were made on different plans. For example – 'Japi', 'Dhol', 'JethipotiaXilikha' etc. except these things, images of animals, birds (peacock) were also observed. Men too used to wear some ornaments similar to the woman. Except, their using of 'Gamkharu' and 'MuthiKharu', in the times of Ahom dynasty the noble people were used to wear 'MaduliwaDhol', long piece of garland etc. But in the present Assamese society, with the expansion of western culture it is observed that the foreign vogue of these jewellerys has gone down. With the starting of proclivity towards the

scope of economic, social and penchant some new stream of thought has come out in resulting the wearing of different foreign jewellerys by Assamese people; but eventually the Assamese jewellerys could bring the old reputation of its own position again at present. Not only the jewellerys became popular but also it succeeded in maintaining a special position in the national ground.

## **Changes coming to the Folk Art:**

Formerly, the Assamese maiden searches out the commodities of practising beauty straight from the nature. 'Maah-Haladhi', 'Manisaal', 'Haitha', seeds of trees, seeds of elephant fruits, 'Kalakhaar', 'Barhamthuri', 'Jetuka' and different kinds of aromatic flowers were their beauty products. But the discovery of different things related to science kept aside the woman from old sense of beauty. Everyone started to seek the readymade things. On the head, it took place chemical shampoo instead of using 'Manisaal', seeds of elephant fruits, leaves of hibiscus flower, 'Kalakhaar'; on nails there are soap, face wash instead of using 'Maah-Haladhi'; on lips there is lipstick instead of using Betel- nuts or 'Barhamthuri'; on the body there are eau-de-cologne, deodorant instead of using aromatic flower or deer musk ('Kasturi' of Deer). There is an absence of adoring the earliest style of braids such as 'Koldiliya', 'Negheriya', 'Devmoohan' etc. Moreover, combs made of buffalo's horn, ivory, wood and bamboo and combing hair with these combs such process or custom had been long gone at present moment. Now-a-days, different haircuts like 'step-cut', 'laser-cut', 'U-cut', 'straight' etc. are on top of the trending



chart. But the harm caused by the chemical products to skin and hair pushes the people back to take shelter again at the bosom of nature and starts to use beauty products made of natural elements. In the matter of beauty a noticeable change is the advent of beauty parlour. Now-a-days, maidens and youngsters instead of practising the beauty at home, they spend lots of moneys in the parlour only to make them look artificially stunning.

## CONCLUSION:

From the study or presentation of the topic 'The Transition Of Assamese Somatic Culture in the Circumstances of Modernisation', it could be possible to establish different facets from different perspective. Though the study and research of the topic some decisions can be summed up. They are as follows-

- 1) Somatic culture is an important element of folk culture. Food, clothing, shelter- these basic needs of human being and the elements of somatic culture was built up and on centering around one or two relevant matters are traditionally harboured. After the arrival of the British in the passage of time, a little effect of modernism falls rapidly on this particular element.
- 2) A radical reason that brings a change towards Assamese somatic culture is- ability to follow someone, along with it, the expansion of education, development of science and

technology and busy life process of people.

- 3) Though there is no notable solution to be found in order to prevent the changes coming towards the different elements of somatic culture in the midst of it, a speculation was found from different perspectives where different views of Assamese socio-culture of at present time such as- garments, food habits, construction of house, process of ornaments etc. was found its identity.
- 4) It is expected of changes coming to the somatic culture to fit in the changing of time. Although, because of the changes in its all ranges it does not seem that it cannot be separated from the main or head branch. On the basis of its facets the Assamese somatic culture will still be able to hold its own identity even in the future.

From the above discourse, it could be observed that the Assamese somatic culture is a relentless flow that has been traditionally streaming from the past through the present towards the future. The basic foundation of it is tradition. Above of it, while the tradition is an approach, it is common to enter some new modification in the approach. So, in the tradition of Assamese somatic culture it is not uncommon entering some new modification. But under the pressure of the modernity, transition, emergence and modification the tradition should not be

gone extinct, it is mandatory we should be aware of it. Because, in their own land, by the heartily encouragement of the mind of people, it is possible to bring out the inartificial renaissance of the culture of own society.

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