

## Traditional Folk Media In The Marriage System Of The Bodos

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### Abstract:

Communication has become an inseparable part of human since the dawn of civilization. Generally, the traditional media is the non-electronic mediums which acted as traditional carriers of information and messages from one generation to another generation. These traditional folk media plays a vital role in the communication of the indigenous people which have their roots from their cultural traditions. These traditional media is an inbuilt character which is genuine in nature highlights the socio-cultural developments of the society. Environment has also its own importance in the society due to their relationship with the people in their habitation, adaptation, socio-economic development as there is a communication between the two. The Bodo community which is largest indigenous tribes of North-east India has its own distinct traditions, customs, beliefs, religion. The Bodo community has its own system of communication which provides wide range of sending and receiving of message. Traditional media basically include various art forms like folk theatre, folk dance, music, songs, folk tales, story-telling, lullaby, proverbs and idioms, games etc. Marriage is an important institution of the human life. The Bodo society follows systematic marriage system according to their societal norms and celebrated by social order as well. The Bodo community has been practicing various rites and rituals associated with the marriage system. This paper attempts to highlight the various forms of rites, rituals and customs followed by the Bodos and their signals or the media through which communication is made in the process of marriage.

**Keywords:** *Traditional media, Marriage, Society, Customs, folk song.*

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### Introduction:

In the present age of civilization it is strange to talk on traditional folk media where information, communication and technology have taken an important place around the world. The advent of modern media, have stalled the existence of traditional folk media since people has showed much attention towards the modern means of communication due to its familiarity. Communication holds an important aspect of culture. The society or the community is distinguished by culture from one another as it reflects the social structure of the community. The modes and channel are determined by the totality of the historical and economic experience gained by the people. Some of these include like festivals, colour of clothing, tales and proverbs, music and songs, dance, animals, birds, insects, fresh leaves, tribal marks, body language, gestures, legends,

myths etc which are created by human's interactions and consensus.

In the developing countries like India, people from the remote villages depict their daily events and cultural developments through stories, songs and dances.<sup>1</sup> Since ancient times, traditional media have been use in India to express their socio-cultural and emotional needs of the people in the society. Traditional media is use extensively as a medium of communication particularly in the rural villages where there is less penetration of modern media. Traditional folk media are the indigenous means of communication as it have their roots in the cultural tradition of the community. "Traditional folk media are a tool of a special nature. Their special nature is attributed to the fact that they have no grammar or literature, yet they are nurtured through oral and functional sources. Traditional or folk media provide

channels for expressing socio-ritual moral and emotional needs of a society or societies to which they especially belong".<sup>2</sup> Basically traditional

"These media having roots in native culture, embedded in the local identity and social values besides providing mass entertainment helped Indian society as indigenous tools of inter-personal, inter-group and inter-village communication for ages".<sup>3</sup> The traditional media is effective tool which connect the masses in all regions. It has variety of forms and themes as well as live and local that suits the communication It has become one of the indispensable medium for the indigenous community not only to express emotions but also give entertainment and information. The special characteristics of the traditional media is alive, oral which provides an effective channel to express the socio-cultural, religious, moral and emotional needs of the people to which society they belong.

According to Malhan,<sup>4</sup> the traditional folk media could be:

1. Action oriented folk arts and verbal musical forms like rural theatre and puppetry, discourses and kathas, folk songs, ballads, story-telling and poetic symposia;
2. Audience situations like festivals and fairs, social, ritual and ceremonial gatherings and meets;
3. Opinion leaders like Village heads, etc, and
4. Rural arts and crafts, traditional designs and miscellaneous motifs.

Traditional folk media are used as a medium to disseminate information to the masses. It is originated in the environment where all sections of people can participate to convey, to express and to deliver the message with more familiar and credible forms. It is very close to the hearts and minds of the people as it satisfies the innate need for expression and also provides for the preservation of the traditions and culture of the forefather. Thus through this the society can express its sorrow, happiness, celebrations, achievements etc.<sup>5</sup>

Assam is the land of multi-ethnic, multi-cultural having their own history and unique identity. The Bodo is the oldest settlers and largest indigenous ethnic group of Assam. The Bodo community has their own distinct culture,

media comprises various forms of performing arts drama, folk dance, folk songs, folk tales, puppetry, proverbs, riddles, story-telling etc.

religions, language etc. The Bodos belonged to the Tibeto-Burman language family of Mongoloid race mostly inhabiting in the foothills of Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh. And they are also found living in a scattered manner throughout the North-Eastern part of India. Some small Bodo pockets areas is also seen outside India i.e, in Burma, Nepal Bangladesh etc. Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, "The Bodos spread over all Brahmaputra valley and North Bengal forming a solid block in Eastern India and they formed one of the main bases of the present day population of this tract".<sup>6</sup> The main occupation of the Bodos is agriculture and mostly dwells in village.

Marriage is one of the important ceremonies performed around the world. It is a part of the human life cycle. Marriage is a social institution which bonds man and woman and accelerates in the procreation to expand the family members. Marriage is an approved social pattern whereby man and woman are permitted to form a family with respect to the customs and laws.

The objective of the study is to highlight the various traditional media that are associated with the traditional marriage system of the Bodos and their role of traditional media to convene the marriage of the Bodo.

#### **Traditional marriage system of Bodos:**

Generally, Bodo society is a patriarchal society however also can be called an egalitarian by its characteristics. The marriage in Bodo is a religious sacrament and belief that it is made in heaven and celebrated on earth. The bodo word '*Haba*'<sup>7</sup> is the combination two words '*Ha*' and '*Ba*' meaning '*soil*' and '*to carry*', so meaning '*to take the soil on back*'. The opposite sex having attained the marriageable age were married off through traditional rites and rituals and proclaiming them to be husband and wife. Monogamy and polygamy except polyandry are accepted socially in the Bodo society. According to Sekhar Brahma, the traditional Bodo marriage is of six types.<sup>8</sup> They are:

- (i) *Samajni nem-khanti baidiywi Haba* (Arrange Marriage)
- (ii) *Gwrjiya lakinai Haba* (Obtaining girl by service)
- (iii) *Kharsonnai Haba* (Girl flee away)

- (iv) *Dhongkha habnai* (Widow remarriage)
- (v) *Bhwnanwi Haba lanai* (Marriage by capture), and;
- (vi) *Dwnkharnai Haba* (Elopment)

### Reflection of traditional media:

The Bodo traditional marriage system though religious by its outlook rather is social function or get together of the relatives. The marriage has become the meeting place of the people coming from various corner of the region. The event has become a pool of communication between the people coming into one place giving information to various subjects. As the Bodo villages are not well connected, transfer of message from one village to another village was difficult. Lack of transport and communication has distant their dear and near ones to get in touch which marriage is such an event that provides enough time and space to express their emotions to each other.

In the early period, searching of bride of marriageable age was not an easy task. The changing of dressing style on the part of the females indicates the growth of the female. *Jerbha yao Dokhona gannai* (wrapping of Dokhona from the Breast) indicates the female growth from teenage to adolescence.<sup>9</sup> Direct and indirect inquiring of bride for the marriage is difficult for the family in need however; the traditional folk arts have made it easy. In the Bodo society, folk media is extensively used before the settlement of the marriage ceremony. Such traditions are considered to be the channel of communication between the groups.

According to Dr. K. Brahma, the entire proceedings of a Bodo marriage are divided into three stages: the first is the pre-marriage preparation centering round the selection of the bride; the second is the marriage proper and the third one is the post-marriage rites.<sup>10</sup>

### Pre- Marriage:

Before the marriage is fixed certain events are conducted to finalize the ceremony. Bodo society uses some traditional media like; *Asan tebnai* (keeping bracelets inside the main roof of the main house of the bride), *Goi kaonai* (cutting of areca nuts) and *thandwi gaslongnai* (inspection

of Bride's house) before the marriage ceremony. These events conducted are to see the preparation of the marriage and to report it to their respective families.

### *Asan tebnai:*

This event is the first step of inquiring bride. The Bridegroom's party use to take some materials along with them while visiting the house of maiden. The materials such as; a pair of bracelets (*Asanshuri Jorase*), one rupee coin, pair of betel nuts, pair of betel leaves and a pair of full rice bear bottles are essential items of visiting the house of the maiden.<sup>11</sup> They explain the purpose of their visit to the bride's parents. A Bodo proverb runs on the lines of the said event as...

*"Turi nuba Bhati garw*

*Jerao Jwn nuyw beyaonw goi kitwo garw"*<sup>12</sup>

English translation: "Where thatch grass is seen, the carrying bamboo pole is thrown in there. Where marriage worthy girls is seen, the betel nuts cover is thrown in there".

On condition, the Bridegroom's family selects the bride than a pair of silver bracelet is kept in the roof of bride's house. In addition, all the materials are left to the said house as well. If the bride's family does not return back the bracelet and a rupee coin within a week then it is assumed that they have accepted the proposal. Further process of the marriage is discussed in the next seating along with the village headman and elders of the village. In case, the bride's family returns the bracelet, it means rejection or withdrawal message for the bridegroom's party.

### *Goi Kaonai* (cutting of areca nut):

Areca nut and betel leave holds an important place in the marriage system of the Bodos. It serves as a source to start the conversation between the people. This event is organized for the final settlement of the marriage ceremony. In this ceremony, the bridegroom's parent along with some elder members of the village goes to the bride's house. They carry two bottles of wine, a bunch of areca nuts and betel leaves to the maiden house. The *bwirathi* (female attendant) serves the betel nut to the villagers coming in the ceremony which the bridegroom's

party has brought. Thus, the ceremony indicates the final settlement of the marriage.

Other important events like *no-nainai* (inspection of the house), *swmwndw phirainai* (changing of relationship), *howa-gwdan nainia* (interview of bride-groom) take place before the marriage ceremony. There is also a system prevalent among the Bodos of the Kamrup and Nowgong district of presenting *Aronai* (scarf) by bride to the bride-groom while visiting the latter's house. However, if the girl happens to abstain from giving then it is assumed her unwillingness in the marriage.<sup>13</sup>

### Proper Marriage:

The earliest traditional marriage of the Bodos is called *Hatasuni Kurnai*. The *Oja* with the help of *Deuri* performs the marriage ceremony. *OndlaKhari* (curry prepared from dust rice) is cooked with chicken without applying spices and colour which has to be offered to god and goddess and then served to the bridegroom.

The marriage ceremony of the Bodos is very festive one. The splendor, abundance of the marriage and the sadness about earlier days is thus reflected in the popular folk songs.

Godoni dina bojong thango?

Angkhamni Ali, bedorni Akhai,

Jauni Phakria goilialoi bajoi

Gailia Gailia.....<sup>14</sup>

English rendering: Where those days have gone, when there were ridges of cooked rice, abundant meat, just like the fried paddy, abundant rice-beer, just like tank full water, all these things are no more, elder sister-in-law, no more to-day.

### Post- Marriage:

After the marriage remaining customs are performed by the bridegroom's family to take bride to their house. A system offering *phontakha* (bride price) is practice by the Bodos. In this ceremony the bridegroom's parent have to offer a pair of areca nuts and betel leaves and two coins of rupee one to bride's parents. Another ceremony called *Malsa* is also collected from the bridegroom.

*Bisina Nagarnai* (Leaving of friend's Bed):

This ceremony is performed by the bridegroom and bride after the marriage ceremony in their respective village. It is a farewell party organized by the bridegroom to his friends of village and starts a new life. Likewise, the bride also gives the same party when she goes back to her former village i.e., *Asto -Mongol*, to her friends. The ceremony is attended by their friends to give farewell to the newly wedded couple and congratulate them for their new journey. This event plays a kind of media through which the couple are acknowledge by their friends for their conjugal life.

### Traditional beliefs and indicators of the marriage:

Every signs and symbols are genuine tools of communication which may be natural calamities or other untoward incidents which indicates or passes a message to the society. The Bodo society has various beliefs regarding the marriage right from the approach of bride to the finalization and marriage. This belief has come down from generations to generation and is still followed by them. While going to see a bride by the bridegroom's party, every action, activities, events, climate, characters are noted. Any incident occurred is taken into consideration and due advantage is not taken.<sup>15</sup> Some signs and symbols which are believed by the Bodos are:

- i) While going to see bride and come across thunderstorm indicates that the day is not good and not suitable to discuss the proposal. It also shows that behavior of the bride will be ferocious.
- ii) Stumbling down on the left leg side while on the way to see bride shows the sign that the marriage between the two will get problem.
- iii) If the mongoose cut across the road from right to left than the marriage between the two will not last long further will get divorce.
- iv) If the snake cut across the road from left to right than the marriage between the two will not last long further will get divorce.
- v) If dead body is seen then it is a bad sign. One among the two will die.
- vi) As soon as the party reaches the maiden house and see working with spade or cutting of bamboo then either

- bride or bridegroom will die after marriage.
- vii) Right from the approach and sending of proposal and marriage, widow or widower are not allowed to take part in the process.
  - viii) As soon as the party reaches the maiden house and sees maiden working like, drying of paddy, dusking paddy on the courtyard then it is assumed that the new bride is a 'Laxmi' (goddess of wealth) to the bridegroom.
  - ix) After reaching the house of the maiden and happens to see the bride coming out from the kitchen with the first step taken by left leg then the bride will be caring and loving towards her husband to be.
  - x) Sweeping courtyard of the house, combing hair shows good sign among the society indicating that they will have long life.

This sign or manifestation while going to see the bride indicates whether to proceed. Basically the Bodo people use to believe this manifestation with utmost sincerity. However, the validity of this believe is up to reaching the house of maiden.

From the beginning to the end of marriage some important figure are very necessary. Their presence can only let the marriage happen in the Bodo society. The three important figures in the traditional marriage system of the Bodos are *Hinjao dewani*<sup>16</sup> (middleman), *Barlangpha*<sup>17</sup> (male principle) and *Bwirathi* (female attendant). Their importance cannot be neglected in the marriage system of the Bodos. *Hinjao dewani's* (middleman) role is important before the marriage. He is the person who connects both the families and bring into terms. In the early period, family in need use to give the job to the middleman to search for bride according to the demand and matching. After finding the suitable match, then with due permission proceed accordingly for the tying the knot. The next is the *bwirathi* without whom the marriage in the Bodo society is impossible. *Bwirathis* consist of two young girls and the other two married women. The later do not have much responsibility except guiding the bride and other customary formalities but the former have to escort the bridegroom and bride in their marriage ceremonies as well as they are also used

for amusement. Too many jokes are cracked on them in the marriage. The joking songs sang for the *bwirathis* are:

*"Wi bwirathi loliya*

*Nwngni babangsin*

*Goi khaonaikao*

*Jwnglai jaliya, jaliya"*<sup>18</sup>

English translation: "Oh! Dear *Bwirathi*, we are not going to eat betel as you have lazily cut while cutting the items."

The *Bwirathis* sing the following song and dance:

*"Goi-dedere patwi sinari*

*Daobo ki sunwi*

*Motham lanjai badi thangkhu;*

*Khao regang khaodw*

*Ja regang jadw*

*Sona muki kuga Mwina muki rao*

*Apathni bwrai-bento*

*Sikla jwhwlao"*<sup>19</sup>

English translation: "Round small betel, beautiful nut leaves, lime like heron stool, tobacco like mongoose tail, cut on betel gladly, eats with gay, golden mouth yours, speech like maina, elders in the audience, bravo the heroine!"

*Barlangpha* as *bwirathi* is very important in the traditional marriage system of the Bodos. the word *Barlangpha* is combination of two words *Bar* + *Langpa*, meaning *bar* as air and *Langpa* as dancing like the wave. *Barlangpha* happens to be the carrier of *Biban* (responsibility) in the two pitcher in which the sign of the sun and the moon is painted. This responsibilities of *Barlangpa* and *Bwirathi* is not given to widow and widower since, it fetches a bad sign for the marriage in the Bodo society.

### Folk Songs:

Folk songs are the natural representations of the emotions of the society. The folk song depicts the contemporary event and is also

associated with every events of life as well. The society has abundance of folk songs associated with every event of life like, marriage, new season, festivals, adoring nature or love ones. In the traditional marriage various songs are sung by different groups of people.

In the then Goalpara district a popular folk song is sung by the boys about the girls' physique, behavior whom they are going to marry.

*"Mwkhangao naywbla tharai lai agwi,*

*Gonthongao naywbla nareng su.*

*Khanaiyao naywbla don khaorai*

*Hathaiyao naywbla akhai miji*

*Agwi jarwo, agwi pangdhang."*<sup>20</sup>

English translation: "Your face is looking like Tharai vegetable Oh! Dear, your nose is like thorn of orange, your hair is full and long, your teeth is like slim hand, oh! Dear your beautiful".

*"dagabswi aywi dagabswi, dagabswi*

*oma gedera baro khurmani,*

*phica hinzaoa malayni,*

*dagabswi aywi dagabswi,*

*gabbla khublabw nwma-nwmpakwo mwnlia.*

*mephal gongarnw horakhwi*

*boroni acar boroni bicarzwng*

*Boro harinw hordwng, hordwng"*<sup>21</sup>

English translation: "Do not weep, dear, do not weep, The fatted pig is for kith and kin, A grown up girl likewise is for others, No weeping or solicitation can keep you in your parent's home. You have not been given over to a Nephali or a Bhutiya, According to Bodos rite and rituals; You are given to Bodo man".

*Daokha habnay noawlai*

*Sila habnai noawlai*

*Ankhou dabilai apha gosai*

*Mai bakhri nunaiiao,*

*Mwsou goli nunaiiao.*

*Ankhou bilaihor apha gosai,*

*Ankhou bilaihor apha gosai"*<sup>22</sup>

English translation: Do not give me marriage to a house where the cows and the kites have easy access, my father *gosai* (God); Give me marriage to a house where the granary and cowshed are easily visible; O! My father God. This folk song reflects the socio-economic condition of the Bodos. The Bodo parents prefer of giving their daughter to the family having cowshed and granary.

Conclusion:

Traditional folk media are effectively used as indigenous form of communication within the Bodo society. The role of traditional media was very important in those days for it can reach the targeted audience without hindrance through various art forms. The traditional media plays an important role in the process of traditional marriage system of the Bodos. Despite poor connectivity and lack in communication the process of marriage has become possible in the Bodo society due to their intimate relation with the traditional media. However, a change in the tradition is seen with the influence of Hindu religion. Traditions which are followed from the ancient times are on the verge of extinction from the society.

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