

TRADITIONAL RICE CULTIVATION OF THE BODOS

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ABSTRACT:

The Bodos have their own traditional custom of cultivation which are indeed very rich and varied. The Bodos are mainly agriculturist. Agriculture is the main occupation of the Bodo people. For the diverting of water, they make irrigation canals near the river bank into their rice fields which shows the skill or techniques of the rice cultivation. The Bodos cultivates crops like Bawa, Ashu, Sali etc. during the time of summer season.

Keywords: Custom, Agriculture, Bawa, Ashu, Sali.

OBJECTIVE:

The objective of the study is to highlight and study the traditional cultivation of rice of the Bodos associated with agriculture. As we have seen that now a days the Bodos are also used different kind of agricultural equipment. The Bodo male and female used to go in the paddy field for the cultivation. With the sole objective of understanding the cultivation system of rice has been developed in this paper.

METHODOLOGY:

The methodology adopted in this paper is inter-disciplinary approach which included consulting number of written sources as well as interview method. The people who have knowledge of agriculture and cultivation of the Bodos and various associated with information. The technique of anthropological data collection, participants, interview method are adopted. The collection of data has been analysed both quantitatively and the qualitatively wherever necessary.

INTRODUCTION:

The Bodos are agriculturist. They cultivate different kinds of crops like *Bawa, Ashu, Sali* etc. during the time of summer season. (Brahma 2017: p. 53.) No doubt, the Bodos are good cultivator and they are self-dependent. In this regard Rev. Sydney Endle says that the Bodos are especially skilful in the construction of irrigation canals and earth-work embankments for diverting water from river banks into their rice fields and their efforts in this direction are very largely aided by their closely ethnic organization. (Endle, 1911: p. 13.) It is stated that when they proceeded and settled in the valley of Assam and some parts of North East India, they had crossed their earlier stages of life and became nomadic farmer. (Moshahary, 1986: p. 116.) In earlier time, when they practiced Jhum or shifting cultivation they always tried to find out virgin land which could provide more productivity.

With the passage of time, they gave up Jhum or shifting cultivation and started settled agriculture with ploughshare and other allied agricultural implements. However, concrete evidence has not been found so far when the practice of pre-agricultural activities and Jhum cultivation had been abandoned by the Bodos and when they have started agriculture with ploughshare and other agricultural implements. Even today majorities of the Bodos are cultivators and live in the village. Whenever the rainfall threatens to be below the average, the cultivators with their elders go to the field to bring the water to the paddy field from the nearest river. (Ibid. p. 76.)

ANALYSIS:

Selection of land: For the cultivation of rice, the Bodos used to select *Hama Ha* (Informant: Wangchu Basumatary, Age- 56, Occupation- Supervisor Soil Conservation, Vill- Baganshali, W/N- 7, P.O.- Kokrajhar, Dist- Kokrajhar, BTC, Assam on 18/07/2015.) which is alluvial land. This type of land requires sufficient water from the rain or irrigation or any other sources. For the storage of rain water or water from any other source, embankments are made by the Bodos in their paddy field. They consider only the plain or table-land is fit for the purpose of agriculture. The land where the plant called *Dingdinga* grows abundantly is called the *Khandina Ha* (Informant: Bipen Chandra Boro, Age- 68, Occupation- Ex. Village Headman, Vill- Pub Rehabari, P.O.- Pub Rehabari, Dist- Barpeta, Assam on 06/09/2016.) (Unstable land) which is regarded as the unfertile. *Khandina Ha* land is generally not selected by the Bodos for cultivation. The land which is situated near the bank of a river or stream is called *Hashrao Ha* (Informant: Satiram Wary, Age- 55, Occupation, Oja, Vill- Jalpaiguri, P.O.- Salakati, Dist- Kokrajhar, BTC, Assam on 14/03/2015.) (a loose soil). *Hashrao Ha* land is also regarded as not suitable for the paddy cultivation because it is unable to retain water for a long time as the water flows down to the river or the stream.

Sharab Daria Ha (Informant: Sombaru Narzary, Age- 68, Occupation- Farmer, Vill- Nasraibil, P.O.- Soraibil, Dist- Kokrajhar, BTC, Assam on 25/02/2015.) is another type of land in which paddy is cultivated with the help of water. There are certain lands in which cultivation is done by means of rain or irrigation facilities. This type of the land is known as *Jamphai Daria Ha* (Informant: Sajen Basumatary, Age- 58, Occupation- Farmer, Vill- 16 No. Mazabari Amguri, P.O.- Haltugaon, Dist- Kokrajhar, BTC, Assam on 16/07/2016.) (a kind of land where the paddy cultivation is done with the help of irrigation). *Jamphai Daria Ha* land is suitable for the paddy cultivation if there is proper irrigation facility from the canals which is called *Jamphai* by the Bodos. They construct canals or embankment to preserve water for the cultivation and divert the water to the plots of land where they plant the paddy.

Pre-Agricultural Ritual: Before starting the actual ploughing, the Bodos used to go to their own paddy field and select a suitable site for the performance of the certain pre-agricultural rites and rituals. The selected site is plastered with water and placed a banana leaf on it with the following items towards the north-south direction for the purpose of the offering to *Mainao* (goddess of wealth):

In this ritual both man and woman are allowed to take part and the propitiation of other gods and goddesses are also made. This ritual is performed not to harm to the crops to bring more productivity. As and when the offering is over, the farmer or any

male member of the family used to start ploughing. In the early days, ploughing was done with a pair of oxen or bullocks by many communities including the Bodos. However, nowadays the Bodos began to employ modern equipment such as tractors, power tillers etc. and modern techniques of the cultivation are also adopted which lead to produce more crops. Verities of rice are cultivated by the Bodos in a year which can be discussed under the following heads. (Narzi, 2006: p. 51.)

Bawa Mai: *Bawa Mai* (*Bawa* rice) is cultivated in the Chaitra month of Bangla Calendar. For the cultivation of *Bawa* rice, first the land is to be tilled to make the land soft. The growing grasses in that agricultural field have to be uprooted properly. After the completion of the tilling the land and uprooting the grasses, the seeds are sown and covered with the help of harrow. Generally, it grows up to four (4) or five (5) feet high over the water level. (Ibid, p. 51.) Therefore, the cultivation *Bawa* rice is convenient and suitable in the lower land where water remains constantly deep or surplus. It is also stated that in case of the *Bawa* rice, no proper care is required if once seedling is completed. (Informant: Arjun Brahma, Age- 55, Occupation- Cultivator, Vill- Kagrabari, P.O.- Banargaon, Dist- Kokrajhar, BTC, Assam on 03/06/2016.) Before sowing seeds, the head of the family or concern cultivator offer a pair of areca nuts, betel leaves, incense stick etc. for the buffer harvest of rice to goddess Mainao. Nowadays, many of the Bodo cultivators are rarely cultivate *Bawa* rice as it gives lesser crops to compare to that of other rice. So, many of the Bodos have diverted from this cultivation of rice as they turned to the other rice which yield more crops.

Ashu Mai: The cultivation of *Ashu Mai* (*Ashu* rice) is done in the month of *Pagun* and Chaitra of Bangla Calendar with the following methods of cultivation: (Informant: Dwiba Prasad Brahma, Age- 58, Occupation- Teacher, Vill- Boragari, P.O.- Dotma, Dist- Kokrajhar, BTC, Assam on 21/04/2015.) (a) *Hadriao Phwnai* (sowing seeds in dusty soil) (b) *Habruao Phwnai* (sowing seeds in muddy) and (c) *Habruao Gainai* (plantation in muddy) (a). *Hadriao Phwnai*: In this method the land is tilled to make it soft and dusty. All the grasses present in the fields are uprooted and make it clean. After properly tilled and the uprooting the grasses the seeds are sown. A harrow is used to cover the seeds with the loose soil. When the height of rice is reaching upto six or seven inches, cleaning of the grasses and loosing of the soil in the paddy field is done with the help of *Beda* (a tool made of wood for removing weeds and loosing soil used by the Bodos). This cleaning and loosing is called as *Ashu Beda Hwnai*. The purpose for conducting *Ashu Beda Hwnai* is to remove unwanted grasses which disturb to the growth of the rice and to slack or to make loose the soil of the field for the health of the rice. (Informant: Hadang Basumatary, Age- 70, Occupation- Farmer, Vill- Batabari, P.O.- Simbwrgaon, Dist- Kokrajhar, BTC, Assam on 27/09/2015.)

Habruao Pwnai: In the method of *Habruao Phwnai* the land is tilled to make muddy or grimy one. The seeds are put into an air tied bag and put into water about two days till the seeds are sprouted. The germinated seeds are sown in the tilling muddy field. As and when *Beda Hwnai* is necessary, it required to be done in the field to produce more crops.

Habruao Gainai: In this method the agricultural land is made muddy by tilling and properly levelled it. Firstly, the required rice seeds are put into bag and tied it. After that the bag is put into water till the seeds are sprouted. When seeds are perfectly

sprouted, they are sown in the field. When saplings are enough mature for final transplantation, they are pulled out and transplanted in the paddy field.

Harvesting of the Ashu rice is normally done after two and half or three months from the date of sowing the seeds or plantation. (Brahma, 2017: p. 53.) However, at present day, cultivation of *Ashu Mai* is almost discarded by the Bodos as it produces less crops. So, the Bodos of today started cultivations varieties of the rice which are high yielding crops.

Maisali Mai: The Bodos grow mainly *Maisali Mai* (*Maisali* rice) rather than that of *Bawa Mai* and *Ashu Mai*. The cultivation of these varieties of rice is done in between the *Bwisag* and *Badra* months of Bangla Calendar. During this period the required rain used to get for the cultivation of *Maisali* rice. To plant *Maisali* rice, the Bodos plough the land four times to destroy the grasses and make the soil soft i.e. *Karainai*, *Samwr hwnai*, *Boro Hwnai* and *Pwmwnnai*. (Ibid. pp. 53-54.) The following two methods are adopted for the cultivations of the *Maisali* rice.

Leosia: Under *Leosia* method land is tilled and made muddy as well as properly levelled it. For the purpose of the germinating seeds, it is put into the air tied bag for two or three days in the water. When the seeds are properly sprouted, they are sown in the field for final transplantation. This is called *Khwthia Phwnai* (sowing seeds of paddy) by the Bodos.

CONCLUSION:

Agriculture is the main economy of the Bodos. Varieties of rice are cultivated. Besides rice, several crops are also grown by them. The major crops are mustard, jute, cotton, tobacco etc. and vegetables like potato, cabbage, cauliflower, radish, cucumber, gourd, green leaves, pulse, beans, small-beans, sweet potato, turmeric, pumpkin, melon, brinjal etc. including varieties of spices like chili, onion, garlic, coriander, ginger etc. Another important fruit tree which brings more economy to them is the *Goi Biphang* (areca tree). The areca nuts are most essential for them in day to day life including the religious functions.

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