



MARRIAGE SYSTEM OF THE BODOS

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ABSTRACT:

In human society marriage is a very important institution which permit man and women in family life i.e. husband and wife. The Bodo has well established institutions of the marriage. No doubt, they are monogamous not polygamous. Polyandry form of marriage is absolutely absent in Bodo society. Various rites and rituals have been associated in the marriage ceremonies of the Bodos which have been practiced since the time immemorial. In this paper a modest attempt is made to highlight and study the marriage system of the Bodos and associated rites and the rituals. In Bodo marriage is known as Haba which is a combination of two words i.e., Ha and Ba. Ha is identical to soil or Earth and Ba means to accept something on the back. So, Haba specifies to bear soil or responsibility of the earth on the back.

Keywords: Haba, Gothokdar, Barlangpha, Goi Khaonai, Nirik Bosonai.

OBJECTIVE:

The objective of the study is to highlight and study the marriage system of the Bodos. Marriage is occupied the most important place in Bodo society. The main purpose of marriage is to highlight the culture and identity of the Bodo community. With the sole objective of understanding the transition of traditional dresses has been developed in this paper.

METHODOLOGY:

The methodology of the study is obviously inter-disciplinary method with the combination of historical sources and field work. Both primary and secondary sources are consulted. Accordingly, the work is primarily based on field investigation for collecting first hand data as well as also based on all the literary texts. The technique of anthropological, data collection, participants,

observation, interview methods, both structure and non-structure, case study, genealogical methods are adopted. The collected data have been analysed both quantitatively and the qualitatively whenever necessary.

INTRODUCTION:

Marriage is known as Haba in Bodo. It is a combination of two words i.e. Ha and Ba. Ha is equal to soil or Earth and Ba means to bear something on the back. So Haba specifies to bear soil or responsibility of the earth on the back. (Brahma, 2008: p. 76.) Haba is one of the essential and unavoidable part in social life of the Bodos. It is also known as one of the most important institutions which permit man and woman to family life and to have children by involving the right of sexual relationship. Dr. Oinam Ranjit Singh says that in human society the establishment of the institution of marriage is a unique. In earlier period, human being survived more or less like any other animal and sex life was absolutely free. Therefore, only the maternity could be experimented alone and paternity could not be recognized. The only way to know the paternity of children would be exclusive union of man and woman. The only aim to understand the fatherhood of children lay in the seed of marriage institution. (Singh, Vol.-IV, Issue-2, Oct.-Dec., 2007: p. 38.) D. N. Majumdar and T. N. Madan reported that every kind of human grouping comes into being, and is maintained, through a process of conscription by which various persons become its members. In every human family, the majority of its members are recruited into it by being born into it. But before child is born, some women in patrilocal societies; man in matrilocal societies are employed into it. A family comes into being through such a communication of spouses. Marriage is the socially recognized form of such recruitment through communication. (Majumdar and Madan, 1986: p. 6.) From the view of L. H. Morgan we can also understand that in the beginning there was no marriage institution among the human beings. From promiscuity, human society grew into group marriages. At that stage, all the brothers of a family used to marry all sisters of another family so that every male family was equally the husband of every female and vice-versa. In the last stage of marriage man could marry more than one woman and the stage of monogamy preceded polygamy. (Roy and Chakraborty, 2007: p. 76.) The marriage institution evolved through various stages at different places of human civilization which came into materializes in different forms of marriage. (Bottomore, 1972 & 1986: p. 180.)

ANALYSIS:

About the polyandry practiced there is no evidence of practiced of polyandry among the Bodos. Even there are no available sources of oral and literary which can furnish the information of polyandry practice. The renowned scholars like Premalata Devi commented that the polyandry system was absolutely absent in the Bodo society. (Devi, 2007: p. 80.)

It may be concluded that the Bodos rarely practice the polygamy. The Bodo society does not encourage having of more than one wife. However, it is seen that some of the Bodos married more than one wife because of some reasons or condition but in general the Bodos are not polygamous. No doubt, a Bodo may marry more than one wife if his first wife has no son. The custom of the Bodos permits to marry more than one wife when there is absence of male child to the first wife. It is because the son will succeed to the property of the parents. It is also said that polygamy is found among the high class and wealthy people like Zamindars, Mandals, Mauzadars etc. (Endle, 1911: p. 30.)

In the words of B. N. Bordoloi, G. C. Sarma Thakur and M. C. Saikia monogamy is the highest and noblest among the three forms of marriage i.e. polyandry, polygamy and monogamy. Thus, monogamy is socially accepted and approved form of betrothal among the Bodos. (Bordoloi, Thakur, Sarma and Saikia, 1987: p. 13.)

Dongkha Habnai Haba and Gwrjia Haba are considered as matriarchal system of marriage and rest are patriarchal one. The Bodo society does not encourage Hinjao Bwnai Haba, Kharsonnai Haba and Dwankharnai Haba though these are also performed but not in regular. Dr. K. Brahma, Rev. Sidney Endle, Bhaben Narzi and Binoy Kumar Brahma are also stated that these marriages system are irregular or illegal in the Bodo society. (Brahma, 2009: p. 40.)

Swngnanwi Lainai Haba:

Swngnanwi Lainai Haba is the Bodo word which denotes arrange marriage. This type of marriage is the most approved form of marriage among the Bodos right from the ancient days. In this form of the marriage, the mutual agreement of both the parents of boy and girl are required in which the consent of the boy and girl is not taken into account as an important. However, opinion of girl's parents is considered the most essential than the consent of parents of the boy because request comes first from the side of boy's parents. (Brahma, 1998: p. 65.)

Asan Suri Thebnai or Asan Suri Langnai is the first step of Swngnanwi Lainai Haba. For the proposal of the marriage, a party of boy's parent's numbering three or five along with Gothokdhar will proceed to the house of the bride without giving any information to the bride's family member. The party used to carry a pair of Asan Suri Jorase (a pair of silver bracelets), Goi (areca nuts), Phathwi (betel leaves), Jwo Bidwi Gongnwi (two bottle of rice beer) and Rang Jora (a pair of silver one rupees coins) in order to make a proposal for marriage where they make a request the hand of the expected bride. They also further observed whether the bride house is under normal condition or not. (Kapadia, 1972: p. 117.)

After listening the proverb cited by the Gothokdhar, girl's parents asked the boy's party to enter the house to discuss the matter. Before leaving the house of the girl, the party of boy's side used to keep Assan Suri Jora (a pair of bracelets) under the roof of Verandah of Noma No (main house) to understand the consent of girl's parents. When the Asan Suri Jora is not return within a week from the date of approach of the boy's party, it is assumed that the parent of the girl agreed the marriage proposal. (Mushahary, 2004: p. 107.) A pre-marriage ceremony called Gongkhon Hwnai is organized before final settlement of marriage in which parents of the bridegroom go to the house of the bride along with a pair of silver bracelets and two bottle of rice beer. Carried items are left to the house of bride.

After Goi Khaonai, Biban Langnai ceremony is performed by the bridegroom's party. In this ceremony, two earthen pitchers are carried by a person known as Barlangpha who should not be widower. In one of the earthen pitcher sun's picture is painted and in another one the picture of moon is painted. The pot with the sun picture is filled the tea leaves and another pot with the moon picture is filled sugar. In Biban Langnai ceremony, rice beer, areca nuts, betel leaves and pork are also brought to the house of the bride by the bridegroom's party. The items carried by them are collectively known as Biban. (Devi, 2007: p. 97.) The Biban (two earthen pitchers) is carried by Barlangpha. Areca nuts and betel-leaves are carried by two female members known as

Bwirathi. The Bwirathies should not be widows. After reaching bride's house, Barlangpha placed all the items carried for the purpose in front of the door of Noma No. Two Bwirathi started cutting areca-nuts, betel-leafs and distributed among the member presented in the bride's house. This ceremony is conducted along with articles brought by boy's parents. In the marriage system of Bodos, the roles of Barlangpha and two Bwirathi are very essential and not ignorable. Attended persons are assumed by Barlangpha and Bwirathi in the ceremony. In early days, on the occasion of Biban Langnai, a pig was equally cut into two parts. One part was given to the parents of bride and another part was kept for bridegroom family. The cutting of pork into equal parts is known as Omakhopthang. (Brahma, 1998: p. 17.) But nowadays this practice is rarely seen in the society.

The Biban Langnai is followed by Khobira Langnai. (Informant: Jyotish Chandra Narzary, Age- 59, Occupation- Teacher, Vill- Kunguri, P.O.- Serfanguri, Dist- Kokrajhar, BTC, Assam on 16/03/2016) In the Khobira Langnai ceremony, date of the marriage, the items required in the marriage and conditions relating to the marriage have been fixed. Areca nuts, betel leaves and rice beer will bring by the parent's party to the house of the bride. They never solemnize the marriage ceremony in the month of Chaitra. There is a folk song about the selection of the time for the marriage ceremony. (Hazowary, 1997: p. 24)

Hinjao Bwnai Haba:

Hinjao Bwnai Haba is marriage by capture. In this form of marriage, a man captures a girl without the consent of the girl or her family and get marry. This kind of marriage is equivalent with the Raksasa form of Hindu marriage. In earlier days, this type of marriage was very common in every community. Rev. Sidney Endle says that such form of marriage was prevalent among the Bodos in ancient time. (Endle, 1911: p. 43.) But with the social advancement in the Bodo society, it has now almost become unseen.

Kharsonai Haba:

Kharsonai Haba is also another form of marriage of the Bodos which is considered as irregular. When there is objection of the parents of a girl about her love affair with a boy, then she run away with her boyfriend for becoming husband and wife which falls under the category of Kharsonai Haba. In this form of marriage, the parents of the concerned boy inform to the girl's family about the action of their respective daughter and son within the three days counting from the day of the departure of the girl from her house. When there is no option except marriage, a formal marriage is performed for receiving social sanction to become husband and wife. (Boro Samajni Songbijid Arw Nemkhanti, Kokrajhar, 2004: p. 5.)

Dwnkharnai Haba:

Dwnkharnai Haba is the love marriage which is identical with the Gandharva marriage of Hindu in which the consent of both the party i.e. lovers is counted more important than the assent of the parents of the boys and girl. (Ray and Chakraborty, 2008: pp. 82-83.) This form of the marriage was not so common but practiced in the Bodo society. It is also fact that nowadays, many of the younger generation are more and more inclined towards the Dwnkarnai Haba but it does not mean that arranged marriage is totally discarded. Still Swngnanwi Lainai Haba i.e. arrange marriage occupied a very important place in Bodo society.

Gwrjia Haba:

Gwrjia Haba is the form of the marriage which is assumed to have originated from the practice of matrilocal residence. In this form of marriage, the bridegroom used to stay at the residence of the bride permanently or as long as with the view to look after the bride's parents. It is generally practiced among the parents who do not have male issue. In ancient days, if the parents of the bridegroom fail to pay the bride price, the groom used to stay at the residence of the bride and rendered his service to the bride family in lieu of the bride price. (Hodgson, 1847: p. 178.) The period of one year free service of the groom to the family of the bride is known as Samdang Jagarnai and during this period the couple i.e. the boy and girl who are undergoing Gwrjia Haba cannot have marriage relation. (Informant: Anil Basumatary, Age- 67, Occupation- Cultivator, Vill- Baganshali, P.O.- Kokrajhar, Dist- Kokrajhar BTC, Assam on 31/03/ 20016.) When the service of the groom is satisfied by the family of the bride, then marriage ceremony is executed. The male who married a girl under the Gwrjia Haba lived at the residence of his wife. He also enjoyed the property right of the family of his wife. But the Gwrjia Haba is seldom appearing in the Bodo society.

Dongkha Habnai Haba:

Widow re-marriage is known as Dongkha Habnai Haba in Bodo. This form of the marriage is approved by the society. In the social system of the Bodos re-marriage of the widow or widower is permitted. In the Dongkha Habnai Haba, a man who is either widower or bachelor presented a silver coin to a widow with the proposal of the marriage. If the widow accepts the silver coin, it is considered that the proposal for remarriage is accepted by her. The person who is undergoing Dongkha Habnai Haba abandoned his family members and used to adopt the surname of the widow's family. (Boro Samajni Songbijid Arw Nemkhanti, 2004: p. 7.)

Narzi Gwran Orgarnai is the ritual of chewing dried jute leaf. This is required to perform by the person who is undergoing Dongkha Habnai Haba in front of the Bathou altar in which he has to chew dried jute leaf declaring the desertion of his clan and the property of his parents. A grant feast also arranged where plenty of Jwo Gisi, (rice beer), Oma Bedor (pork), Wngkham (rice) etc. are offered to the villagers and relatives. The concern person offered the items like Daosa Jorase (a pair of chicken), Jwo Gisi Dabkha Jorase (a pair of earthen pot rice beer), Dhup (incense stick), Goi Jora (pair of betel nut and Phathwi Jora (a pair of betel leave) etc. (Narzi, 2006: p. 79.)

In this traditional form of the marriage, marriage ceremony is performed at the residence of the widow in presence of the guardians, relatives, villagers and friends. The time for the performance of the marriage is in the late afternoon i.e. transitional timing between the afternoon and evening. The bridegroom put an earthen pot on his head and moved around Noma No (main house) seven times with producing the sound of mew, mew (crying of cat). The bride stands at the entrance of Noma No as a guard by holding a bamboo spoon which is used for rice cooking. This bamboo spoon is called Khadhwo in Bodo. The bridegroom attempts to get entry into the Noma No in each round but unsuccessful because of obstruction given by the bride. (Informant: Gopinath Brahma, Age- 67, Occupation- Ex. Headmaster, Vill- Laodonga, P.O.- Hogmabil, Dist-Kokrajhar, BTC, Assam)

CONCLUSION:

A ceremony called Nirik Bosonai (handover of bride to the groom's family by bride's father) is performed before the departure of bride party from the house of groom in which bride's parents formally hand over the right of custodian of their daughter to the parents of bridegroom. Bride's mother is not allowed to present in marriage ceremony according to traditional custom. A grand feast is arranged on the next day of marriage ceremony in the house of groom which contains rice-beer, chicken, pork, fish, meal, areca nuts betel leaves etc. in abundance. (Informant: Dharani Kanta Narzary, Age- 67, Occupation- Priest, Vill- Laokriguri, P.O.- Serfanguri, Dist- Kokraj) So, marriage is regarded as very important social institution for which society do not permit human being as husband and wife quietly and start living.

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