

## BORO MARRIAGE: CHANGES AND CONTINUITY

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Marriage is the most important social institution in all the societies of the world. Marriage is considered as sacred. A marriage is performed after receiving, social and religious, sanction hence the couple are to shoulder both the social and religious responsibilities. "Marriage is the institutionalized and legitimate form of man and woman relationship based on sex. It is related with the procreation of children, their up-bringing descent and inheritance" (Dubey, 1980:15). Marriage is the social means to widen and strengthen the network of social relation in the society.*

**Keyword:** *Hinjao Songnai Haba, Gorjia Lakhinai Haba, Kharsonnai Haba, Donkharnai Haba, Dongkha Habnai Haba.*

The chief form of marriage, in the Boro society, is monogamy with some exceptional cases of polygamy. Polyandry is absent in the Boro society. Marriage is held by both sexes after they have arrived at full maturity as a result of inclination of the families. Adultery is considered as sin and serious offence and inflicted severe punishment according to social rules.

Manu, the ancient Hindu lawgiver, describes different modes of marriage. The forms of marriage are eight and they are- 1. *Brahma* i.e. based on Vedic rites, 2. *Daiba* i.e. offering a girl to the priest, 3. *Arsha* i.e. marriage by purchase in which bridegroom offers a fair of oxen to the bride's father, 4. *Prajapatya*, i.e. marriage by a proposal made by bridegroom, 5. *Asura* i.e. marriage by purchase, 6. *Gandharva* i.e. a secret union, 7. *Rakshasa* i.e. marriage by force or capture, 8. *Paisacha*, i.e. elopement (Garrett,385).

With slight variations, there are six forms marriage among the Boros, though some of them have already been discarded by the society.

1. *Hinjao Songnai Haba*: (Arranged Marriage):- This is regular form of marriage in the Boro society. This type of marriage is held with the mutual consent and agreement of both the parties and it is arranged by the social norms and customs. Till the recent past, decision of the parents or guardians was given priority than the choice of the boy or the girl, who were dependent on their parents.
2. *Gorjia Lakhinai Haba*: (Obtaining girl by service):- In this type of marriage the bridegroom has to work at the house of bride before marriage. But this type of marriage can rarely be seen in the present society.
3. *Kharsonnai Haba*: (Girls flee away to boy's house):- On the refusal of her parents the girl comes to her lover's house, by fleeing, before the marriage. The formal marriage takes place after the bride price is settled. This is an irregular form of marriage.
4. *Hinjao Bonai Haba*: (Marriage by capture): In former days, a woman was forcefully taken away from her parent's house and marriage took place. This type of marriage was recognized form of marriage in the earlier days. But present Boro society has discarded this system of marriage. It is almost similar to the Rakshasa marriage of Aryans.
5. *Donkharnai Haba*: (Elopement): This type of marriage is alike to Paisacha marriage of Aryan. Both boy and girl run away to distant place and live conjugal lives. The Bodo society does not approved this system of marriage. It seldom takes place.
6. *Dongkha Habnai Haba*: (Widow remarriage): *Dongkha Habnai Haba* is socially approved system of marriage where a widow can bring a new groom to her house and re-enter into conjugal life. The man who wants to marry a widow comes to an agreement and as a token he gives a silver coin to her. It is known as *gongkhon honai*. Such man has to leave his home and parents and prior to that a religious function is performed, where he provides a feast to villagers. In this marriage the man is deprived of his paternal property to enjoy his wife's property (Narji,1996:177&124). But, this type of marriage is getting rare in the Boro society.

In the early times Boros were said to be strictly endogamous and inter caste marriage was forbidden even with cognate tribes. But such restriction might have been discarded long back. Nowadays the Boro society approves inter tribe or inter caste marriage on condition that they would accept the Boro social norms and customs. Though monogamy is socially recognized practice in Bodo society, there are cases of man having more than one wife. But such man is considered as a man of weak moral character. The Boro society, of course, recognizes polygamy in certain cases like, (i) when a man has no children by his first wife, (ii) if the first wife is suffering persistent incurable disease and there is none to look after the house hold work.

## THE TRADITIONAL SYSTEM OF MARRIAGE:

The traditional system of marriage of the Boros is known as *hatasuni khurnai*. In this system both the bride and the groom are seated in front of *Bathou*, the altar of Siva in the courtyard and a *Deuri* (priest) recites *mantra* invoking Siva and other deities and declares that the bride and bridegroom have been wedded to each other and from that day they are entitled to co-habit as husband and wife. As a ritual, the bride cooks rice and curry of ground rice and chicken without applying spice and turmeric, which is called *ondlakhari*. The bride offer a little portion of the meal to the house hold god and goddess of *ishing* (the innermost room of the main house) on banana leaves and the *Deuri* recites *mantras* introducing the bride to god and goddess. The bride promises to lead a happy conjugal life by touching rice kept in earthen container. Then the bride serves a little portion of rice and curry to the bridegroom and to the villagers present. Then the *Deuri* and village elders give advice to the new couple about the duties and responsibilities towards the family and society. The main function of marriage ends with these.

The marriage function is followed by a grand feast, which continued for several days in earlier days. Rice beer and pork are the most important items of the feast and they were supplied in abundance. The villagers irrespective of sex and age enjoyed by singing, dancing and playing traditional musical instruments in the marriage (Brahma,1992:89).

## THE BRAHMA MARRIAGE AND CHANGE IN THE TRADITIONAL SYSTEM:

In the Boro society, the *Brahma* marriage is performed with Vedic rites associated with some traditional customs and rituals. Since the first decade of 20th century thousands of Boros had been embracing *Brahma dharma* under the guidance of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, consequently the new system of marriage came into existence in their society. The new religion has not only brought a great change in the pre and post marriage ceremony but it has also refined the old customs to suit the new religion. The use of rice- beer and pork on the day of wedding have totally been discouraged and the use of liquor has been replaced by tea. Tea has become one of the most important items to entertain guests in the wedding ceremony, nowadays.

Unlike the *hatasuni haba* there is no prevalence of dancing or singing in the Brahma marriage. Modern Band party has taken the place of traditional music. Nowadays wedding takes place mostly at brides house like that of Assamese or Bengali, but if marriage is to be solemnized in between two different religion, it has to be held at bridegrooms house (Narji,1960:101).

On their arrival to bride's house, the bridegroom party is given a ceremonial welcome at the gate of the house along with the music of band party. The bridegroom stands on the *gambari khamphlai* (a low sitting tool made of wooden plank of gambari wood) and the younger sister or cousin of the bride washes his feet and puts perfumed oil and cosmetics on bridegroom's hair and face than she combs his hair. The bridegroom, in return, gives a small present to his new sister-in-law as a token of love. Then the bridegroom and his associates are taken into the *noma no* (main house) but the guardian of the bridegroom and other members sit in the *affat* (a meeting place) to negotiate the business.

The main function of the marriage is performed at night. In accordance with Hindu calendar a *shubha lagna* (sacred time) is fixed for the performance of *yajnahuti*. The bride and bridegroom are taken from the main house to the *mandop* (the place of *yajna*) by cheering and playing band. The main function of the wedding starts with the *Purohit* (priest) chanting *Gayatri mantra*, facing eastward, in front of the fire of *yajna*, which will be followed by the father of the bride then also by the bride and bridegroom. The *Brahma Gayatri mantra* goes like this-

*"Om aiahi barde devi trayakshare  
Brahma badini gayatri chandasun  
Matoh Brahmajani nomohastyute"*

Then they offer *prasad* (mixture of corn, rice, pulse, sugar etc), *ghee*, *dhuna*, and sprinkle holy water to the *yajna* fire by chanting mantra.

*"Om varde devi paramjyotih Brahmane svaha"  
"Om purna par am Brahma jyoti svarupaya  
svaha .... .."*

The rest of the *mantras* are recited in Boro language. Keeping the *yajna* fire as witness, the father of the bride makes *sampradan* (offer) of his daughter to bridegroom. And they pray for the blessing of god for the new couple. Thus the follower of *Brahma dharma* introduced a new system of marriage in the Boro society, which is much akin to that of Aryan marriage. Nowadays, this system of marriage is not confined only to the followers of *Brahma dharma*, but even the followers of the traditional *Bathou dharma* and other Hindu cult of Boros perform *yajnahuti* in the matter of wedding. The traditional system of marriage or *hatasuni khurnai* is becoming obsolete in the Boro society except in some interior places (Brahma,2011:26).

## BRIDE PRICE AND DOWRY:

Demand of *phon thaka* (bride price) was compulsory and unlimited in the traditional Boro society. The demand of *phon thaka* sometimes exceeded to rupees one thousand in those days. Gradually it was brought down to rupees one hundred and five only. But in the present Boro society demand of bride price has almost disappeared except it is still practiced as a ritual. In the prevailing customs, the father of the bride offer a nominal price of a pair of areca nuts, betel leaves and a pair of one rupee coins on banana leaf to bride's father. The bride's father accepts the areca nuts and betel leaves and returns the coins (Brahma,1992:95). This change in the Boro society came as a result of reformative works of *Brahma* religion and it had great impact in the Boro society.

On the other hand, though the dowry system was not known in the Boro society till the recent past, now it has crept into the society in disguise. These days it is seen that the parents of the bride give some valuable properties to their daughters, like furniture, gold ornaments, T.V., Scooter, Refrigerator, a plot of land for construction of house etc. according to their capacity. But unlike the Aryan Hindu society, no demand is made by the bridegroom himself or his parents. The parents of the bride feel humiliated if they fail to send anything with their daughter after marriage, as it has become a usual practice in the present Boro society. However such practice is confined mostly among the well-to-do section of Boro people and its impact is slightly felt in the lower middle class too. This system has developed as a result of the cultural inter-action with the Assamese and the Bengalis who are immediate neighbours to them. The conscious Boro people are afraid of such practice as it may, in the long run, take an ugly turn like *dowry* demand, bride torturing etc. as they happen in other parts of India. They also feel that the social organization should come forward to interfere and check when it is still young, so that the poor section people do not become victim of this system.

## DRESS OF BRIDE AND BRIDEGROOM:

The bridegroom wears white *panjabi* shirt, white *dhoti* and wrap white towel on his neck and puts on *murari* (wedding crown) on his head. The bride wears traditional dress of red colour like, *dokhna*, blouse, shawl and she puts on gold ornaments and a small *murari* on her head. The bride is adorned with lustrous ornaments and cosmetics in a special manner for the day. Her face is covered with a veil of transparent synthetic cloth of red colour with floral design. Though not superb the bridegroom is also decorated with cosmetics, ascent etc. on wedding day.

**ATMONGAL:**

On the eighth day from the day of wedding, the bride and bridegroom come to bride's house for the post marriage ceremony known as *At mongal*. In the traditional society the bridegroom brings cocks, goat or pig in honour of his father-in-law's family and relatives. But the educated section of Boros has almost given up such practice. The bride's father arranges a feast, on the occasion of *At mongal*, which is attended by the relatives of the bride. After this ceremony bride takes away all her belonging remaining in her maternal house.

**WIDOW RE-MARRIAGE:**

Widow re-marriage is allowed and encouraged by the Boro society since earlier. When a widow, having minor children, remarries a man her children also go to the house of her new husband. The children become *fisha Bathul* (step son or daughter) to new father. And if the husband is also widower, having children from previous wife, the second mother becomes *bima bathul* (step mother) for these children. A widow can remarry the younger brother of her former husband but the Boro society does not permit a remarriage with the elder brother of her former husband (Narjinari,1985:68). But, there is no post marriage ceremony in the widow re-marriage.

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