

rites of passage of the Bodo with reference to death and associated rites and rituals

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ABSTRACT

Rites of the passage includes the three important rite of passage- birth, marriage and death. Death ritual is a very important in human society which the Bodos have been following since the time immemorial. Various rites and rituals have been associated in the death ceremonies of the Bodos. In this paper a modest attempt is made to highlight and study the rites and rituals that associated with death of the Bodo.

Key Words: Death, Rites, Bodos, Cremation, Rituals

INTRODUCTION

North-East India has been diverse multi ethnic tribal groups with their unique tradition and culture which are very rich and varied and socially mingling into the mainstream of the India. It is the only region to see the unity and diversity of India where natural beauty, calm atmosphere, crowd and splendid strife of different tribes has originated. Though their culture may be different with each other but originally the charms and beauties are reflecting deeply through their dances, music, dresses of hills and plains areas in the heart of the tribal people of North-East India. Both Orient and Western researchers contributed for the development of North-Eastern region in regard to focused with the other civilized cultures. Therefore, tribal cultures also no marginalized from the other developed cultures hold close to them and seeks unity in diversity.

Assam is symbolized of multi-ethnic groups with multi cultural. Of various ethnic tribal groups, the Bodo is one of the prominent and the oldest inhabitants of North-east particularly in Assam. Racially they belonged to the Mongoloid stock of the indo-Mongoloid or Indo-Tibetans. Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee says that, “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" (S.K. Chatterjee, 2007: 45-46). Majority of the Bodos are found on the Northern Bank of the Brahmaputra valley but now they spread all over Assam, North Bengal and in some parts of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, etc.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of the study is to highlight on the rites and rituals of death of the Bodo. Many rites and rituals have been associated in the last journey of the Bodo. With the sole objective of understanding the rites and rituals of the Bodo relating to the death ceremony, this paper has been developed.

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 on the rites and rituals of death of the Bodo have been consulted and information also has been gathered from published work and journals.

When a person die, the society leaves no stone unturned to bid a peaceful farewell to deceased. For that, when a person dies, the society performs few social rites which express regard for the deceased. When a person dies, the whole neighbours and villagers gather to pay respectful homage to the deceased. They bring out the deceased from house and lay him on a cradle made of bamboo with head forward southward. Almost every family of the Bodo have certain bamboo grove from which one is to be cut as and when family members die for using the disposal of death.

In the meantime, the family members prepare food for the deceased, which consist of chicken and boil curry without oil, turmeric and salt, handful of rice and the favourite food items which were like by the decease during his lifetime. If he used to take wine during his lifetime, it is also offered. The family members kept all the prepared food on the banana leaf and made feed to the deceased by their left hands one by one. At last, water is given to the deceased to help quell the thirst for water with the banayan leaf. Only the family members and near relatives offer the food to decease, not the villagers but the villagers are allowed to offer water to the decease with the help of banayan leaf. (Mwshahary, 2010:87)

When the feeding ceremony is over, the body of the deceased is washed with holy water. Perfumery sticks (insane stick) are lifted and placed around the deceased so as to dispel bad smell. Oil is applied on whole of the body and on head. The hairs are tiles with the comb, and then a clutch of red thread is placed on the mouth of the

deceased. Then all members present touch the deceased feet as a mark of respect and farewell. Afterward, the body is covered by a white cloth and tied to the cradle.

Four persons preferably sons and near relatives lift the cradle on the shoulder. They make three rounds and carry the dead body towards the funeral place in procession. A man with a glass in hand goes on spraying water all the way. Another man starts to torn white thread from a ball and continue to do so still they arrive at the funeral site. Other carries deceased belongings during lifetime so as to give there along with him so that he can lead comfortable life in the other world.

Before the funeral, some traditional customs are followed relating to the dead body. All the person presents at the funeral place offer the dead body a little water with the help of leaves of fig tree (*pakribilai*) and utter the word: “*No lwngdw amwka, dinwiniprai nwng ba nwng, jwng ba jwngswi.*” (Narzee, 2006:99)

Free translation: “O, you take this water, from today you will remain yourself, we shall remain ourselves.” (Dr. Kameswar Brahma, 2015: 72)

When they arrive at funeral site, they lay the dead body upon the fire prepared by dumping log one upon another with the head southward. Then the white cloth is uncovered and makes naked the dead body. When dumping of logs is over, the eldest son takes an earthen jar full of water on the shoulder and makes it fall on ground as he makes three or seven round around the pyre. Then he lit the pyre with ‘*Pathw Serena*’ (jute stick) in flame when others accompany him shouting “*nwi saobai, nwi jwng saobai*” (Mwshahary, 2010: 87) till the pyre gets its flame.

Free translation: we lit it; we have lit it (Dr. Subungsha Mushahary, 2010: 87)

After the funeral is over, the attendances proceed to a nearby river and take bath. By this they considered themselves have regained holiness. Then they eat dry jute leaf thinking that they have forsaken all types of relation with the deceased. Then they proceed to their respective residence. There they stand in front of respective houses when the wife or mother or any female member comes out to the site with a glass of water in hand. She sprays holy water with *Tulusi* branch or leafs on him. Only then he is allowed to enter the house.

Baonai (offering):

Baonai is the important ceremony of the *Saradu* which performed on the day of *Saradu* or before one or two days of the *Saradu*. The relatives of the decease with the villagers and other guests are invited. The main

function is done by the sons of the deceased or any male member of the family in case the deceased left no offspring or unmarried by offering to the deceased and rest of the family members as well as relatives and elder persons of the village are also participated without offering. A Priest is required in the offering ceremony as he has to recite the mantras relating to the offering ceremony. In Bodo this offering ceremony is known as ‘*Dosa Garnai*’ which is performed in the morning time. *Dosa Garnai* is done early in the morning. In this ceremony the Oja (Priest) uttered the following rites:

“*Nwi amwka, dinwi nwnkwwo nwngninw angw pisajla, angwni bisi, pongbai eba bida gaswi bai-bahagi, jati-kurma gamini ai-apa raijw raja jo jananwi nwnkwwo bidai hwnw nagirdwng. Ma kalamnw? Iswrni maya gelehwnai, nwngba bobao dong, ma jadwng, ma kalamdwng; na daoka sila jananwi dong nab hut-peta jananwi dong jwng jebw mitiya. Da dinwi nwnkwwo bidai hwnai somao nwngnw nangwo janai gasibw gannai-jwmnai, tao-sabwn, aina-kanjong, na-bedor, wngkham-engkri, dwi-saha, gwdwi-gwbab gaswikwobw nwngnw baonai jabai. Nwi amwkha nwnw jeraoki taya jahate nwngni mungywi hwhai besadfwrkwo pwinanwi alw gwjwnwi jananwi tangyw. Dohai de, nwnw jahate nwngni nokorni bida-pongбай, bai-bahagi, jati-kurma, nwngni lwgw-digifwrkwo sigo-sogo kalampwiya.*” (Informant: Bena Brahma, age 60 years, Vill- Santinagar, Dotma)

With this mantra the offering are made to the departed soul not to make any harm to the living beings. The offering in this ceremony are included all the belongings of the deceased during his lifetime along with meat, fruit, water, tea, foods etc.

SARADHU ASAR (SRADHA CEREMONY):

One of the most important and main ceremony of the ritual of death is *Saradu* which is observed on the thirteenth or the eleventh day from the day of the death of a person. James Hastings asserted that it is a mere highly developed form of the primitive funeral feast and of the custom of feeding the dead. (James Hastings, 1908: 452) In the middle of the courtyard, a don (basket) is placed where all the present people’s pays homage and place some coins as mark of respect to the deceased with a belief that the deceased will be able to pay fare to boatman to cross this world. It is believed that a man after death has to cross the ‘*Songser Lwitw*’ (the worldly sea) so as to reach the other world. (Binoy Kumar Brahma, 2009: 48)

The followers of the traditional religion perform the *Saradu* ceremony with the prayer before the altar of the *Bathuo*, the supreme God of Bodo in which villagers and relatives of the dead person are entertained with *Jou* or rice-beer which is procured in abundance. In the ceremony the villagers and relatives are served with rice beer and pork for their co-operation during the burial and wishes are made for eternal peace of the departure soul.

After that uncooked rice mixed with some coins are thrown in front of the villagers who are present in the ceremony. This is called '*Don Sarnai*'. Sometimes a ceremony which is called '*Mwsou Sarwn Hogarnai*' is performed in which a bullock is set free in the name of the deceased person. (Brahma, 2015: 74) it is the duty of the eldest son of the deceased to carry unclean leaf plates left after the guests have consumed the foods in a basket on his hand to throw away in the field or the area which is deserved for. This is called '*Sua Garnai*' which indicates removing of impurity.

A ceremony called *Jajna Ahuti* is performed during the Saradu by the follower of Brahma Dharma. After the completion of *Ahuti* all the member presents are offered with meat, *jou* with a common meal. The meal is generally vegetarian. The practice of serving *jou* or rice-beer is sometimes observed among the followers of the *Brahma Dharma*, just after the main function, including *suagarnai* is over, although it is restricted. (K. Brahma, 2008: 13)

CONCLUSION

No doubt, the Bodo had traditional mode of disposal of death however in course of the time other religions influenced to the traditional system. Many of the Bodo are converted into different religions like Hinduism, Christianity, etc. In fact, the Bodo have rich rites and rituals ceremonies relating to the death. The associated rites and the rituals to the death are still in vogue to the traditional follower as well as Hindu converted.

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