

THE CULTURAL CHANGES OF THE BODOS AS REFLECTED IN THE THREE SHORT STORIES OF JANIL KR. BRAHMA

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ABSTRACT

Culture is a unique possession of human society. Culture distinguishes one society from the other. Thus, each society is different from the other. Culture includes whole range of our society. It includes our walks of life, our modes of behaviour, our attitudes, judgements, morals, values, beliefs, ideas, ideologies, political, legal, economic, sciences, philosophies and other types of activities. As culture is dynamic and adaptive, the Bodo culture is also changing in the course of time. The mindset, living style, production, consumption, exchange, employment etc. are changing slowly in due course of time. Thus, it is observed that Bodo culture is growing slowly with the passing of time. Today, there are certain cultural similarities with other Indian societies as well as societies found throughout the world. The factors responsible for social and cultural changes are may be modern education, Christianity, emergence of semi- town and town in Bodo concentrated areas, emergence of job opportunities in semi- town and town, the tribal community development schemes of the government agency, the emergence of science and technology and communication and so on.

The study attempts to investigate the cultural context of the Bodos, chiefly based on writing literary text; and the study seeks to bring into light the causes of the cultural changes of the Bodo society.

KEYWORDS: *Society, Culture, Cultural Change, Modernity*

INTRODUCTION

The Bodos are sociologically one of the most important tribes of the North-Eastern India, particularly of Assam. Bodos are one of the indigenous tribes of India, mainly of Assam. They are mostly found in Assam. Besides Assam, there are some Bodo pocket areas in the neighboring states like Meghalaya, Nagaland and West Bengal. Moreover, the Bodo people are found in some pocket areas of neighboring countries like Nepal, Bangladesh etc. Historians and anthropologists observed that the Bodo- Kacharis are the earliest inhabitants of the Brahmaputra valley. In olden times, they were known as Kiratas, Asuras and Danavas etc. G.A. Grierson mentions that the generic name 'Bodo' was first given to them by B.H. Hodgson. He observes, "*The generic name 'Bodo' was first given to them by B.H. Hodgson.*" [¹] Further, he mentions that Bodo or Boro is the name by which the Mech or Mes and the Kacharies call themselves. Racially the Bodos are Mongolian. Hence, the Bodo culture is a part of the great Mongolian culture.

¹Grierson, G.A. *Linguistic Survey of India, vol-3(part-2)*. Delhi: Lowprice Publications, 2005. Reprinted. p.1

In course of time, the Bodo literature has recognized as one of the Indian literatures. Consequently, the Bodo literature has gained a status in the context of literary discipline. Therefore, literary text may be taken into account for critical discussion from multifarious aspects. Many short story writers of Bodo literature have mirrored the cultural changes through their storytelling and characterization. They have visualized many more things of the society and culture in their short stories. Therefore, this paper aims to highlight the cultural changes of the Bodo society.

Objectives

Following are the objectives of the study-

- To study the cultural changes of the Bodo society
- To study the cause and effects of cultural changes, chiefly based on three short stories of Janil Kr. Brahma

Hypothesis

Culture is dynamic and adaptive. Thus, change is inevitable for every culture. As culture is responsive to the changing condition of the physical world, it seems that the walks of life, modes of behaviour, attitudes, judgements, morals, values, beliefs, ideas, ideologies, political, economic, philosophies and other types of activities of the Bodos are changing slowly in course of time. Assume that many new things are added to the traditional Bodo culture with the passing of time. As a result, the Bodo society and culture is transforming slowly. Today, outlook and living style of the Bodo society is becoming modern as well as global. It is assumed that the cultural changes of the Bodos, is reflected in the short stories of Jonil Kr. Brahma. The writer has attempted to depict the cultural changes of the Bodo society through the storytelling and characterization of short stories. Thus, it is assumed that the cultural changes of the Bodos may be observed, if the texts of the short stories are analyzed from sociological point of view.

METHODOLOGY

The topic has been analyzed critically based on literary text collected as secondary data. Based on three short stories of Jonil Kr. Brahma, a renowned storyteller in Bodo, the topic has been analyzed inclusively from sociological point of view. In addition, necessary secondary data are collected from review articles and books, which are directly related to the study. Besides, an observation method has been used for the study. The collected data have been analyzed extensively from sociological point of view, though the data are purely literary text.

DISCUSSIONS

The Bodos did not have written literature until the second decade of the twentieth century though their language is rich and ancient. The Christian missionaries started publishing books on grammar, dictionary, religion, tales, rhymes and songs. The proper Bodo literature was started from 1920 when Satish Chandra Basumatary brought out the 'Bibar' magazine editing in the manuscript form. The 'Bibar' magazine as its first printed form appeared in 1924 in the editorship of Satish Chandra Basumatary. 'Abari' written by IshanMushahari is the first short story of Bodo literature. It was published in 1930 in the magazine 'HathorkhiHala' edited by Pramod Chandra Brahma. IshanMushahari is considered to be the first creator of the Bodo short story.

Janil Kr. Brahma is a renowned short story writer of contemporary Bodo literature. Anil Kumar Brahma writes, "Brahma is a talented story teller among the contemporary Bodo short story writers. The stories of Brahma are woven round

the theme of social protest against inequality and injustice. Many of his stories are replete with wit and humor.”^[2] Janil Kr. Brahma’s first short story book called *Dumphaoni Phita* was published in 2005. Fifteen stories are included in this book. Janil Kr. Brahma’s second short story book called *Mwider Muhuni* was published in 2007. The writer included twenty-six stories in this book. Janil Kr. Brahma’s third short story book called *Japan Ni Swimaw* was published in 2009. Twenty stories are included in this book.

For present study, the short stories namely *Dumphaoni Phita* (Dumphao’s Cake), *Anwi Onaishiniusunda* (Half-burnt firewood of ant Onaishi) and *Manshigidir* (High Officer) are taken as data for analysis, from the short story book called *Dumphaoni Phita* (Dumphao’s Cake). In the short story called *Dumphaoni Phita* (Dumphao’s Cake), the writer has nicely mirrored the changes of Bodo culture and society. In the story, characters are Dumphao, Somen, Gaodang, Sorola, Bahadur Mephal, Sonam and Hongle. Dumphao and Somen are two important characters of the story. From an extensive analysis of the story, it is observed that Dumphao and Somen are modern. Previously Bodo people reared domestic animals like- pig, goat, hen etc. only for domestic consumption. However, observe that Dumphao rears hen not only for domestic consumption but also for commercial purposes also. Thus, Dumphao sells domestic hen at Samthaibari market and buys some essential domestic items from the market. The idea of Dumphao for rearing hen to earn money as well as the idea for buying some essential family items with the income of domestic hens is progressive and modern. Further, it is observed that Dumphao, wife of Somen Basumatary is a businessperson. She has accepted business as main basis of income as well as means of livelihood instead of traditional livelihood.

When Somen, husband of Dumphao becomes incapable to supply essential family items, Dumphao decides to start business to meet up the financial crisis of their family as well as to help her husband in running family. Accordingly, Dumphao sells her other domestic hens to start business near national highway at Samthaibari marketplace. Traditionally Phita (traditional breakfast made from rice powder) is prepared only for domestic consumption. But, it is visible that Dumphao prepares Phita not only for family consumption but also for commercial purposes too. She sells Phita to earn cash money for running their family. Besides Phita, she also sells Chithao (traditional breakfast of the Bodos made from rice powder) for earning money; then expanding her business, she also starts selling tea along with Phita and Chithao. Consequently, she earns more money. Apart from that, Dumphao establishes tailoring center called ‘Dumphao Tailoring’ at Samthaibari market engaging some educated local youths. Doing business economic position of Dumphao improves remarkably. Accordingly, their way of living improves. They construct three bungalows as well as buy agricultural land. Nevertheless, they also buy essential domestic items. Moreover, Dumphao’s physical beauty improves. Even Dumphao donates five thousand rupees to build up martyrs’ tomb for those people, who have given up their lives during Roman scrip movement. The thoughts of Dumphao to start business at Samthaibari market place to assist her husband to run their family and accordingly acceptance of business as main basis of income as well as livelihood is progressive and modern. This is the clear example of cultural change. Nowadays, it is observed that some of the Bodos have learned to run business in town and semi-town and some of the present generations have adopted trade and commerce as means of livelihood instead of traditional livelihood.

²Boro, Anil Kumar. *A History of Bodo Literature*. Kolkata: Sahitya Akademi, 2012. Second Edition. p.57

Land is the main source of livelihood for the Bodos earlier. Bodo society is agro-based society. However, it is evident that some of new generations prefer doing job in government agencies in place of traditional cultivation. From the analysis of the text, it is noticeable that in place of traditional cultivation SomenBasumatary prefers job for earning money. SomenBasumatary is a service holder. SomenBasumatary is a L.P. teacher. Job is his main source of income as well as livelihood. Apart from them, husband of Gaodang and Sorola is jobholder. Gaodang's husband is an employee of F.C.I. Office of Guwahati. Job is his main source of income as well as livelihood, which signifies cultural changes. Modern education and new worldview encourages them to accept job as main basis of income in place of agriculture.

Traditionally Bodos are inhabitant of village. But, the story reveals that Gaodang likes better to live in town for various facilities instead of living in village. Gaodang is H.S L.C passed; she lives in Guwahati with her husband. Nevertheless, Gaodang is fashionable and fond of money, jewelry and dress. On the other hand Sorola's husband is also an employee of Air Force, thus, he lives in Kashmir. Sorola also likes to live in town instead of living in village. Thus, she lives in Kashmir with her husband. Sorola is also fond of jewelry, dress and money. It is visible that doing job in government agencies financial position of Gaodang and Sorola's husband improves. Accordingly Gaodang and Sorola becomes materialistic and consumerist. It is observed that the traditional thinking and lifestyle of the Bodos changes slowly. Thus, it is clear that the traditional Bodo culture is changing slowly due to impact of modern education and new worldview.

In the short story called *AnwiOnaishiniUsunda*(Half-burnt firewood of ant Onaishi), the writer has nicely depicted the cultural changes of the Bodos. In the story, the characters are Onaishi, Merga, Dorle, Clerk, Bugob and Village head. Onaishi is the main character of the story. Cultural change is fairly painted through her. From an inclusive analysis of the story, it is obvious that Onaishi, wife of Merga is a modern woman. Traditionally Bodos are agriculturist. Thus, agriculture is their main source of livelihood. Besides weaving, rearing of eri, hunting, fishing, basket and mat-making etc. are traditional livelihood of the Bodos. However, modernity brings new profession in Bodo society instead of traditional livelihood. In the story, it is visible that thinking of Onaishi is progressive; she adopts business as her main source of livelihood after her husband's demise instead of traditional livelihood. Onaishi produces Phita and wine for commercial purposes, which are produced for mainly domestic or community use earlier. She sells Phita, tea and wine at Rongiya town to lead her family. Onaishi is a village woman. Onaishi's village is almost two kilometers distance from Rongiya town. Thus, every morning she goes to Rongiya town to sell Phita, tea and wine. Dorle, daughter of Onaishi helps her in running business. Both Onaishi and Dorle return to village by evening after selling Phita, tea and wine. Both Onaishi and Dorle are progressive women. The thinking of Onaishi to sell Phita and wine to earn money as well as acceptance of business as main source of livelihood is modern. Nevertheless, Onaishi is conscious mother. Hence, she desires to give Dorle in marriage with a good youth and accordingly she requests the clerk of C.I.D Office to help her in finding a good youth. It is evident that some of the present generations run their family selling Phita, tea and wine in town. For many Bodo family stall of Phita, tea and wine is the main source of cash income as well as livelihood nowadays. Thus, it may be said that the traditional Bodo culture is changing slowly with the passing of time.

Further, the story reveals that Merga, husband of Onaishi became wage labor to earn money when he lost his own land due to gambling and drinking. Due to lack of modern education and skill Merga, lead his family being a wage labor losing all his land and properties before his demise. Nevertheless, it is noticeable that the person who always comes to Onaishi's stall to drink tea is also a service holder. He is a clerk of C.I.D Office. Acceptance of wage labor, business and

job to earn money as well as livelihood is modern, which means social and cultural change.

In the short story called *Manshi Gidir* (High Officer), the writer has fairly mirrored the cultural changes of the Bodo society. In the story, the characters are Khordey, Subashi, Megonram, police of office and house guard of Megonram Bodo. The important characters of the story are Khordey and Megonram. Through their character, cultural changes are painted fairly. From an extensive analysis of the text, it is evident that Khordey Daimary and Megonram Bodo are educated people. Both Khordey Daimary and Megonram Bodo have accepted job as main source of income as well as livelihood instead of cultivation, weaving, rearing of eri, hunting, fishing, basket and mat-making etc. Khordey Daimary is a M.E. teacher. Modern education provides essential knowledge and skill to him for doing job in government agencies. Khordey Daimary lives at village. Khordey Daimary, a village dweller, is a simple, straight and honest man. It is visible that Khordey Daimary, husband of Subashi Daimary reads newspaper for getting various information of present world. When bisuge (formally contracted friend according to Bodo social custom) Megonram Bodo becomes a magistrate in Dhubri court, he gets the news reading newspaper. Reading newspaper for getting necessary information is new habit for the Bodos. Modern education enables him to read newspaper. Earlier Bodo people go near Oja (medicine man) to treat illness instead of going to hospital to take help from doctor. It is also visible that Khordey Daimary does not follow the old tradition and believe like going to Oja to treat sickness. Khordey Daimary aspires to check-up Subashi's health with renowned doctor of Dhubri town. Accordingly, Khordey Daimary goes to Dhubri town to treat wife staying at bisuge Megonram Bodo's house. The thinking of Khordey Daimary to treat wife Subashi with a doctor is modern. Development of medical science and technology influences as well as encourages Khordey to go near doctors for treatment.

It is observed that Megonram Bodo a magistrate in Dhubri court. Bodos are dweller of village. However, magistrate Megonram Bodo lives in Dhubri town. Megonram Bodo's family lives at official quarter of Dhubri town. Megonram Bodo uses modern transport for journey in place of traditional transport, the bullock-carts. Megonram Bodo goes to bisuge Khordey Daimary's house from Dhubri town with his own vehicle. Availing of modern transport to move from place to place indicates Megonram's progressive attitude. Megonram Bodo is a complex and self-centered man. With his family members, he lives in Dhubri town. Earlier there is some traditional values like- sharing, cooperation etc. in Bodo society. Moreover, there are certain loyalties to family and community in Bodo society and accordingly character and saintliness are regarded as important assets. It is observe that Megonram Bodo does not have sentiment of kindness, cooperation and loyalties to his friend Khordey Daimary. Rather, he thinks only about his comfort and benefit. He does not bother for others. Thus, when Khordey Daimary goes to Dhubri town to check-up Subashi's health, Megonram Bodo does not co-operate bisuge (friend) Khordey Daimary. Khordey Daimary cannot meet bisuge Megonram Bodo at office. Nevertheless, while Khordey and Subashi arrive at Megonram Bodo's official quarter to stay one day, Megonram Bodo does come out from inside the house to meet Khordey Daimary. Nevertheless, Khordey and Subashi are not allowed to stay in the house of Megonram Bodo. Thus, Khordey and Shubashi return to village from the house of officer disappointedly.

It is observed that in due course of time modern livelihood arise in Bodo society. Acceptance of job as main source of income, livelihood and living in town for doing job is modern; it is cultural change. Now, in Bodo society there are teacher, magistrate etc. Consequently, Bodoculture is growing slowly. Besides, the habit of using modern means of transport and communication is also modern. Thus, from the extensive analysis of the story, from sociological point of

view, it is observed that the writer has fairly reflected the changes of Bodo culture.

CONCLUSIONS

From the analysis of the selected literary text, from a renowned storyteller called Janil Kr. Brahma, it is observed that the traditional Bodo culture is changing slowly. The writer has attempted to visualize various aspects of culture as well as cultural changes. Due to impact of modernity, today, there is a change on traditional Bodo society and culture. Nowadays, some of the Bodos have taken up cultivation as means of earning money. It is also observed that Bodos of present generation, mainly educated persons prefer to do job for earning money instead of cultivation. Nevertheless, some of the present generation has accepted business as main source of income as well as livelihood in place of traditional occupation. Thus, in the course of time, a middle class society came up from traditional Bodo society. It is also observed that due to impact of modernity, some of the Bodos has become consumerist. Thus, necessity of middle class society has increased. Bodos of present generation has adopted western attire besides their traditional dress. In addition, nowadays, Bodo people take different types of modern food instead of their traditional diet. New economic system emerged against the static cast based economy system. Emergence of semi-town and town led the Bodos to abandon their old value systems and traditional forms of behaviour. Modern education has rid them from fear, superstitions believe, and it has introduced the Bodos into a new world. Majority of the present generation, mainly the educated Bodo people has imbibed new ideology and higher standard of living. Such kinds of descriptions are vividly noticeable in the literary text written by the writer.

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