

Phusli Haba: A Festival Of Bodos

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Abstract:

Assam is a state of various culture and communities. The Bodo tribe is also among them. They belong to the great Mongolian race. They have their own language, religion, culture, belief, customs, rituals, festivals etc. They celebrate different kinds of festivals throughout the year. As Bodo is an agriculturally based community, most of their festivals are related directly and indirectly to agriculture. The main religion of Bodo is Bathou and their chief of God is Bathou bwrai. They worship other deities along with Bathou Bwrai. They celebrate many religious festivals, such as Kherai, Garja, Newan hwnai etc. Phusli haba is one of them. The word Phusli means doll and haba means marriage. In this festival, villagers make dolls of Raona Raoni with thatch and worship them. They believe that if they perform this festival then they can get rid from thunder and lightning and also get sufficient rainfall for good crops. Even though it is a religious festival, the old traditional marriage of the Bodo is reflected through the performing of this festival. There is a folk narrative of this festival. They dance and sing various folk songs along with traditional musical instruments during the festival. One of the religious festivals of Bodos i.e. Phusli haba has been discussed here. It's a thorough analysis based on the data collected from field studies to make the study of success.

Keywords: Religion, belief, tradition, festival, tribes and culture.

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I. Introduction:

The Bodo is an indigenous tribe of Assam. The Bodo is an indigenous tribe of Assam. They belong to the Mongoloid race and linguistically a branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family. Assam is a state of various cultures and communities. Bodo community is one of them. The Bodo has the largest population among the other tribes of Assam. At present, Bodo people inhabit all the districts of Assam, such as Baksa, Kokrajhar, Udalguri, Chirang, Dhemaji, Nalbari, Goalpara, Nagaon etc. and also neighboring states of Assam, namely Meghalaya, Bhutan, Arunachal Pradesh and West Bengal. Every community has its own culture, language, religion, rites and rituals, customs etc. The Bodo community also has their own language, culture, folk belief, dress, tradition, religion, rites and rituals, festivals etc. They celebrate many festivals throughout their whole lives around the year. Festivals are an important part of human beings. In the busy schedule of life, people enjoy and celebrate many festivals. These festivals highlight and make alive the cultural identity of a community. A religious festival is a festival which is celebrated by the follower of a religion with faith, to get blessed and offer something with rituals and activities to impress the deity.

II. Objective of the study:

The Bodos are an agriculturally based community. Most of the families laid their life by depending on the paddy cultivation. So, most of their festivals are directly or indirectly related to agriculture. Observing the celebrations of their festivals, it may be classified into three types-

- (1) Agricultural Festival
- (2) Seasonal Festival and
- (3) Religious Festival

III. Methodology

The discussion bellows have been based on data from the collection of the field work. For the secondary source various book, article, journal, magazine are used. Observation and interview methods are applied during the field work. The following discussion is made on the *Phusli haba* festival, especially Bhogpur village of Baksa district.

IV. Discussion of the study

The Religious Festivals of Bodos are mainly *Kherai*, *Garza*, *Neowan Hwnai*, *Phusli Haba*, *Salami*, *Barmani* etc. Among these, discussions have been made on the topic of Phusli Haba.

Phusli Haba

Phusli Haba is a religious festival of Bodos. In this festival, the first creation of humankind i.e. *Deva Bwrai* and *Deva Buri* or *Raona* and *Raoni* are given marriage by making their dolls. The word *Phusli* refers to doll. According to their belief, if they are worshiped once in a year by making doll and giving marriage of these dolls then deities bless them by getting pleased. And impressing them also brings enough rainfall for good crops, even protecting them from lightning and thunder strikes. Phusli haba (marriage) festival is celebrated in the Bodo village of Baksa, Nalbari, Kamrup districts of Assam. There is no fixed day and date for observing this festival. It is celebrated on any day of the Assamese calendar, Bohag and Jeth (April-June) month. The day of the puja is fixed with discussion by villagers. In some village after the fixing date of this festival consuming of some vegetables are prohibited till the end of puja.

Materials required for the festival

The materials required for this festival are- thatch, banana tree, cotton tread of three colours- red, white and black, a pot to keep holy water, vermilion, rice beer, rice powder, chick, rice grain, basil leaves and its tips, tips of *justicia gendarussa*, barmunda grass, turkey berry, banana leaf, betel nut and betel leaf, Indian timber bamboo, bamboosa, white new cloths, insane incense, *dhuna*, a pair of *hatha* (wooden container used in Bodo traditional marriage), pinwheel flower, milkweeds, musical instruments i.e. a pair of *kham* (drum), a pair of long *siphung* (flute), a pair of *jotha* (manjeera), a pair of *jabkhring* (wooden manjeera) etc.

Holy rice beer

After the fixing of the puja date, women villagers collect rice grain and give it to the wife of *Douri*. And three days before puja the wife of *Douri* at first purify herself by taking a bath to brew holy rice beer.

On Gwthar (Holy rice powder)

The person who grinds rice powder first purifies herself by bathing and then takes a place and cleans it with water and grinds the rice powder by facing towards the east side. The rice grinder woman only needs to grind with her single hand and to be continued with it. Because she is not allowed to change it to her other side hand. During the grinding time a person is to be aware of not touching the legs with the wooden rice mortar.

Role of Douri and Barlampha

All the offerings of this puja from beginning to ending are performed by *Douri*. In the olden days, *Barlampha* took the main role in the traditional marriage. He also takes the main role of *Phuslihaba* (doll's marriage).

Making of Holly water

By taking a brimful of water pot, five pieces of unbroken rice grain is kept inside the pot. *Justicia gendarussa*, tip of Bermuda grass and basil leaf, are binded together with cotton thread and kept in the water pot. And in that way, holy water is made.

Phutula Banainai

As soon as afternoon begins, the aged women of the village gather at the selected place of puja. They bring thatch from the roof of their *noma no* (main house) especially from three sides i.e. north, east and west corner. But at present, roof houses are rarely found. So they collect thatch at its peak season and store it for later use. Along with thatch, they also bring cotton threads of three colours specially white, red and black. They keep all threads and thatch on *dala* (winnowing). Then they choose a priest from them. The selected woman priest sprinkle holly water and collect all the thatch brought by the women of the village. Later, the priest separated it into two parts as by making a two piece of bundle one is make longer and another is make shorter. Two bundles of thatch are wrapped with thread to give the shape of human. Both the dolls are shaped into the form of a male and a female. Dolls are decorated with the leaves, flowers and fruits of trees and plants. During the time of dolls making, the women take enjoyment with each other by singing various kinds of folk songs. Seeking the opportunity, they use some slang words in their songs. Men are not allowed to participate in the making of dolls. Many ornaments are made with the leaves, flowers of jungle trees and plants. With the help of turkey berry fruit they make the male and female organs and decorated both the dolls into the shape of male and female. On the other hand, men make a boat of banana tree having a hut on it. Hut is decorated with flowers and they paint many paintings on the hut with the vermilion.

Performing of Pushli Haba festival

By making an altar at the worshipping place, they decorated with rice powder and placed banana boat on it. Then doll of Raona Raoni are placed inside the hut and worshipped by everyone. As soon as, the doll of Raona Raoni is placed at banana boat they immediately sing the song. All age group of villagers celebrate this festival and also enjoy it. The priest (*Douri*) keep *fathali* in front of dolls in an orderly and offer rice grain, basil leaf, small pieces of betel nut and betel leaf and even flowers also given in the name of offerings.

A pair of betel nut and betel leaves, basil leaves, rice grains and banana is also offered on the tip of banana leaf. They keep a brimful of *don* (basket) containing rice grain in front of banana boat. A pair of betel nut and betel leaf, an egg, and a coin are kept on *don* (basket). *Douri* lights earthen lamp at Bathou altar and also at the hut of Raona Raoni. Priest chant the mantra and pray for the entire villager. Villager also pray and offer flowers and garland of *angwn atha* (milkweed). In ancient days, Bodo people are unaware of the month as they don't know about it and only able to measure the month with the help of season. And in the same way, Bodo people guessed the time of festival by depending on the season of nature. *Angwn atha* (milkweed) flower is very important for this puja. According to their belief deity love *angwn atha* (milkweed) flower and if deity is worshipped by giving this flower then deity will be get impressed and fulfill the wish of devotee. And for that reason, Bodos celebrate Pushli marriage festival in the blooming season of *agwn atha* (milkweed) flowers especially in the Assamese month of Bohag and Jeth. All the age group of villagers including from child to old man and woman enjoy this festival by taking part in it and many folk songs are sung during this festival. Their songs vividly reflected marriage song, prayer song, songs of works etc. Along with song, married and aged villagers began to dance by circling the hut. In that way, they enjoyed for full day. In some village, this festival is celebrated for one day one night. The entire villagers make a garland individually and offer it to the deity with offerings and ask blessing from the deity. According to their belief, if childless couples worship Raona Raoni with heart and soul then they are able to get the blessing from Raona Raoni. Childless couples who are seeking for childbirth tell about their matters in front of *Douri* and villagers. *Douri* recite out their matters with mantras in front of deities and advised couples to make circle with dancers around the deities hut. The elder women of village asked one of them to carry pot or *khamphlai* (wooden tool) on the back and asked to walk or dance around the hut of Raona Raoni. The holy water pot is fed to the childless woman. After making round of five times they worshiped dolls of Raona Raoni. *Douri* having chanted of mantra give them a pair of betel nut and betel leaf and asked husband and wife to eat this after dinner or in the sleeping time. After the end, there is a tradition of *mainao borainai* (welcoming of goddess of wealth). A girl about 9 to ten years old of the village carry a *don* (basket) of grains on her head by covering her head with white cloth and whereas villagers welcome *Mainao* by dancing through the rhythm of *kham* (drum), flute, *jotha*.

In some village married woman also carry this basket. *Mainao* is brought from the place of *Phuslihaba* (doll marriage) to the house of *Douri*. Later, they make circle of *Bathousali* and then rice grains of *Don* are placed in the *MainaoBindw* (dwelling place of *Mainao* deity) of kitchen. And this process is called *mainaoborainai* (welcome of *mainao*). In the end of puja, they gather at the celebration place of *Phuslihaba* and enjoyed by dancing for the accomplishment of *Mainao borainai* and *phuslihaba*. All of them tease *Barlampha* and take enjoyment. At last, *Barlampha* is examined through such process as firstly oil is applied on the pair tips of banana leaf and later kept it between the knees of *Barlampha*. He is asked to make five rounds of Raona and Raoni through dance by jumping and keeping this pair of banana leaf between knees and if he failed to do then fine is raised on him. *Barlampha* come out from the puja after the completion of test. He throws out the tips of banana leaf outside of puja place. In that festival, there is a tradition of feeding *ophri* (rice leftover after making rice beer/ husk). In the end of puja, they floated Raona Raoni's boat in the river. This festival is ended with the floating of Raona Raoni boat.

In that day, at the time of evening there is a tradition of *Lama gathenai* (road blocking). During this festival, the male members of village enter to each house and beat with the help of sticks on fencing, gate, grass etc

During this festival, the male members of village enter to every house and drive away the evil deity by beating on fencing, gate, grass etc with stick to the boundary of village. Then they block the road with the help of bamboo branches and also keep an idol made of straw. They also burn the bundle of hay at the side of village entry road. The villagers offer flowers, burns incense, sacrifice chick and with that puja also ended. The main reason behind the blocking of road is to protect the village from bad deities.

V. Conclusion:

From the above discussion, of *Phuslihaba* festival it can be say that Bodo Community's people worship both the domestic and gods of jungle. Among of the Bodo people, there is a folk belief that if they perform this festival once in a year then they can get rid from disease and from the lightning and thunder strike. They also believe that if deities impress with their performance then sufficient rain will fall down to the earth and crops will give more production. Basically, they are an agriculturally based community and they are the

nature lover. They love to live close with nature. After the Assamese month of *Bohag* and *Jeth* in the season of monsoon farmers keep themselves busy with cultivation. So, they observe this festival in the hope of good crops and in order to protect themselves from thundering and lightning while they busy with cultivation. There is one more rituals on that same day which is known as *LamaGathenai*. Through the *lamagathenai* they drive away the evil deities and disease from the village and close the road to prohibit from entering evils spirit to the village. They belief if they done it then the villagers will be safe from some harmful cause. With the celebration of this festival, the Bodo traditional marriage is also reflected. In olden days, they perform it by the sacrifice but in present day it is performed by offering flowers and fruits. There is also a folk narrative which is found among the Bodo people which is related with these festivals. Worshipers are belief that, if childless couple worship Raona Raoni's doll then they might be able to get a child.

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