

The Bodo Folksongs: Articulating Their Rice-Culture

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ABSTRACT:

The Bodos, one of the largest tribal groups of Assam, have a population of nearly 2 million (Census – 2011). They constitute 5.5% of the total population of Assam. The Bodo or the ‘Bodosa’ people are belonged to the Bodo-Kachari community and their language belonged to the Tibate-Burman language family. The Bodo language is a Sino-Tibetan language using Devanagari scripts for writing. The Bodos of Assam are culturally rich having their own language and culture, traditions and customs, unique life style, festivals, rites and rituals, songs and dances, cuisines, dress codes etc.

The Folksongs of the Bodo people in relation to their agricultural practices, especially paddy cultivation, are one of the original assets of this region. These folk songs usually narrate some features of nature in general and agriculture in particular, and help in understanding the comprehensive life experience of the people. The Bodos of Assam as one of the Bhumiputras, assumes their role as being one integral part of greater Assamese society and culture. The unique Bodo folksongs loudly utters how close the lives of the people to the phenomenon of nature and how rich the cultural heritage of this region conserved and expressed through these songs. The Bodo Loka Geet of Assam is unique in their folk flavor. They are integral part of their Folk-literature expressing their life experience amidst nature and their agricultural surroundings.

This paper tries to understand how the folk-life of the Bodos of Assam helps in formulate their Folk-music and to highlight some aspects Bodo folk songs inspired by their livelihood behavior which also narrates as pacts of their nice culture. The study is basically a discussion on the Bodo Folk-songs relating to their agricultural behavior.

Key Words : Folksongs, Bodo, Culture, Dance, Assam.

INTRODUCTION :

The Bodos of Assam is the largest tribal group having a population of nearly 2 million (Census – 2011) they constitute 5.5 % of the total population of Assam they are also considered as one of the

original inhabitants of the soil mostly resided in the locuer Assam region, and having their own unique cultural identity in spite of being an integral part of the greater Assamese society and culture. They are a plain tribe in the sixth schedule of the Indian constitution. The Bodos of Assam resided largely in the Kaksajhas, Chisang, Udalguri, Goalpara, Sonitpur, Dhemaji, Lakhimpur and Baksa districts of Assam but in smaller number and au scattered. They are an important ethnic and linguist aboriginal group resided in the Brahmaputra valley of the state. West Bengal and Nepal are other residents of the Bodo community. The bodo or the 'Bodosa' people belonged to the tibeto-Burman language group. The Bodo language is the Sino-Tibetan family of language using Divangari script for writing.

From religious point of view the Bodos are mostly the followers of Hinduism, bathauism and Christianity. Though a good majority of the bodo tribes still follow some form of the animistic Bathauism, yet they classified themselves as the Hindus. As per the available data 90.31% of the Boddo living in Assam are now the followers of Hinduism. Buthauism is actually a form of forefathers worship called dobonglaoru. The Shejou plant is believed as the symbol of Bathou and bathauwari or Sibani (Siba) is worshipped as the supreme god. In Bodo language Ba means five and Thau means deep philosophy or elements. According to bathauism this world is composed of five basic elements like Ether or sky, Fire, Waters, Air and Earth. Bathauism is all about realizing the Philosophy of the five elements. Most importantly the Bodo people, consider Bathaubwrai as the 'protector of the rice fields'.

The Bodos of Assam are actually very rich having their own language and culture, traditions and customs unique life style, festivals, rites and rituals, songs and dances, dress codes etc. All these greatly contribute to the greater and colausful Assamese culture. The Bodo language has got the recognition as one of the 22 Indian languages in the ligesth Schedule of the Indian Constitution in the year 1963 and there are 14,16,125 (campus-2011) Bodo speakers in Assam, i.e. 4.53 percent of total population of Assam (census-2011). The Bodo folk traditions and customs are unique in their identity and their language is proud to be healthy in expressing is to the world. The Bodo population of the Assam with their own unique cultural components gives the state a unique identity of its own. This uniqueness is owing to the traditions and customs and the age old and multifaceted cultural assets consesued by the Bodo people from their ancestors mainly through their tradition.

The Folksongs of the Bodo people in relation to their agricultural practices, especially paddy cultivation are one of the original assets of this region. These folk songs usually narrate some features of nature in general and agricultural in particular and help in understanding the comprehensive life experience of the people. The Bodo of Assam, as one of the Bhumiputras (son of the soil), assumes their role as being one integral part of greatest Assamese society and cultural. The unique Bodo folksongs loudly utters low close the lives of the people to the phenomena of nature and low rich the cultural heritage of this region conserved an expressed through these songs.

The Bodo loka geet (Folksong) of Assam is unique in their folksong flavour. They are integral part of their folk literature expressing their life experiences amidst nature and their agricultural surroundings. The Bodo folk-literature is divided mainly into prose and lyrical poetry. The Bodo folksongs are mostly the musical presentation of Bodo lyrical poetries. These lyrical poetries include various songs, prayers, hero-worships (veer-gatha), tantra-mantras (enchantments) and various others prbachan mulak kabita. One way important aspects of Bodo folksongs is its aptness for singing in the accompaniments of musical instruments and dance forms.

The main categories of bodo folksongs : Some notable scholars namely mohini Mohan Brahma, Madhuam Bodo etc. Their two categories into the following groups- (a) Hero-Worship songs or Valour songs (b) Patriotic songs (c) Songs of soil and rustic life (d) Love songs (e) Festivals songs (f) Cowherd songs (g) Hymeneal Avenue song (Marriage songs) (h) Religious songs (i) Bihu or Bwisagu songs (j) Humans songs (k) Sports songs (l) Ritual prayers and philosophy.

All these Bodo folk songs are usually song and performed accompanied by some unique traditional Bodo musical instruments and with their traditional and undiluted compositions which are sung and performed in relations to particular occasions they are meant for. The Bodo folksongs are usually accompanied by instruments like Kham (long and big drum) which is called Medal in Assamese language, Siphung (long size Bodo flute) which is similar to Assamese Bahi and Indian Bansure but longer in size, Jotha which is called 'Tai' in Assamese language, serja also called serenda (kind of violin), Jopkhring which is called Jap-tal in Assamese language, Gongana which is called Gogona in Assamese language, Thonkha which is called Toka in Assamese language and Binju like the Bina used in Indian music and khawang which is a pair of small symbols. One unique feature of Bodo songs is that it is always accompanied by music and dance.

Folk Songs Relating to Rice culture:

Among the many different categories of the Bodo Folksongs representing their folk-life there are many such songs which have unwavering relation to their agricultural activities specially rice forming and their livelihood behaviors. The Bodo Folksongs on the rustic-life narrates the life-story of the rustic people with their happiness and sorrows and hopes and fears. The folk-life of these people living with their land and paddy fields, rivers and maintains, cattle and livestock is narrated in these songs.

The forming community while cleaning the paddy fields of the stubble plains and removing the weeds and at the time of preparing the land for farming prays the 'God of Air or Ether' to help them in their mission and in the accompaniments of a traditional flute (siphung) sings

“Riu Riu Riu
Aao he batha rajaya derhabai
Barma rajaya Jennangbai
Zfedou he bao buli maharaja
Sahai Houfedou gaja goumja” (Boro, page- 11)

(The mild wind is blowing, dear king of air, you are victorious, Brahmaraj lost Dean king of air, help us with your fervor and zeal)

There are many huellabeis in Bodo language that tells many interesting stories about rice farming which recounts how intimate the Bodo folk-life is to their farming activities. A portion of a lullaby consisting of light lines which relates the famous Bodo story of the birth of Ahu paddy is quoted here-

“Aasu loi aasu naung manou rajowaa ?
Aanglai rajoyee mauchooaoung gogleeyong

Asnglai gagluyoang laokharanou
Guma. . . . “ (Boro, page- 26)

There are various other folk-songs reflecting the folk life of the Bodos amidst their agricultural life. These are like hal-Bowa Geet (ploughing songs), Dhan-Kota Geet (reaping songs), Kapor Dhowa Geet (songs relating to washing of clothes), Hati aru Mah chorowa Geet (Elephant and Bull rearing songs), Hos-Kota Geet (songs relating to the cutting of fire wood) etc. These songs are usually sung at the time of performing the related livelihood activities.

The Bodo youths at the time of working together in their paddy fields sing some songs to make fun of each other. These gay-songs are means for encouraging each other for participating in the farming activities with lots of excitement and enthusiasm.

Gabharu (Female) : “Aada Janggila mine sula
Aalia khauphoidau
Aada aali khoupoidou

Deka (Male) : Aaio jaboshree minichiri
Goy khaonanai mabab jananoi
Mageyee gainagaou thangdine” (Boro, page- 33-34)

The Bohag Bihu festival of the Bodos of Assam is quite similar to the other indigenous Assamese. The Bohag Bihu is called Bwisagu or Baisagu by the Bodos. The festival, which is one of the three primary agri-festivals under the name of Bihu in Assam, is celebrated during the first week of the first month. At the advent of the Assamese New year the inevitable change in nature makes the people of all ages celebrate the Bihu with songs, dances and festivity. As Bihu is primarily an agrifestival, many Bihu songs have references to the emotions of people relating to rice farming activities and the seasons concerned. The beginning of a new agri-season is started with the changes in nature with its nature and colour and people encourage each other to be united with nature and enjoy the new beginning with fresh spirit :

“Baisagu aaoi bwisagu
Bouthaur goujama thanglaibai
Bauthour goudanni phoilaibai

Bourai buroi chengra chikhla
Gatho gathai rangjadini” (Boro, page- 44]

The domestic cattle are the main properties of the traditional farmer’s communities and the first day of the Bohag Bihu is devoted to them. The farming community never forgets to show respect and love to their domestic animals that help them a lot in their paddy-- cultivation activities. The first day of the Bwisagu is devoted to the cattle and is called Makhu or Mashau meant for cattle and villagers doing the rite of bathing their cows and sings :

“Dighalate laeethi mousouni meeli
Dudali yayouna gai khukhile
Dighalati lauthe khring khring ganthi
Jongni mousowa jagouna bolod jathi” (Boro, page- 48)

In some other songs sung by the youths during the Bihu festival has ample mention of their paddy graveling and the related activities reflecting on how rice is important to their cultural life. In one such song, one former youth is being taunted by one young girl like this:

“Hathathi rothau rothau
Thankhu thophola
Ali khourai houwai
Hunthu thophora” (Boro, page 64-66)

CONCLUSION :

The Bodo folksongs are one of the most precious cultural heritages of Assam contributing greatly to be colorful cultural identity of the region. It is encouraging to see that this cultural tradition, rolling on from one generation to the other, is still maintaining its basic identity and localized varieties. This traditional media is efficiently contributing to the whole of the traditional wealth of the region. Pice culture is a massive depot of the long established media. Pice being the main staple food and rice- cultivation being the primary source of livelihood of the people it has become an unavoidable part of their life and culture. Agri-fields are the sources of their hopes and fears sorrows and happiness and to a great extent control their emotions. It is quite evident that the Bodo folk culture has the true flavor of the soil they live in, and their songs, dances, festivals, rites and rituals, cautions and their narratives bear the testimony of the fact. They love to live peacefully amidst their paddy-fields depending on their seasonal paddy, singing and dancing in neighborhood and maintaining a fellow feeling.

The Bodo folksongs apart from reflecting many others phenomena of Bodo folk life, primarily highlighted the rice culture of the people. They sings for good health and prosperity of their paddy fields, they sings and prays their Gods for good harvesting seasons, organize festivals to offer their prayers and also to celebrate the success their hand labour. Many of their emotions arousing art of their agriculture activities especially rice-farming.

There are many Bodo Bihu-Songs which relate the life story of the Bodo youths amidst their agri-feils narrating their intimacy to ploughing of land, sawing of rice, reaping of mature rice, thrashing, husking etc. Some of Bodo folksongs are specially sung for the purpase of Kati Bihu festivals by lighting earthen lamps in the paddy field at evening to welcome Goddess Lakshmi Devi, the Indian Hindu Goddess of riches and prosperity. In this Bihu the formers by lightening earthen lamps in the field at the time of panicle initiation of the rice crop. Folksongs song by Assamese Hindu peasantry during the Bihu are like prayers for harmless and enhanced production of crops they have planted. They also pray for ample of physical and mental strength so that they can devote themselves to agricultural activities.

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