

CHAPTER 3

SOCIAL FOLK-CUSTOMS AS REFLECTED IN BODO FOLK SONGS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Customs are generally created and upheld by the society. To run a society, some social norms are adopted and those social norms are called the social customs or customary laws of a particular society. The Bodo people, behind the ages, have been practicing many types of social customs. Because to run a society smoothly with proper discipline and purity, customary laws are necessary, then only a society can progress in a right direction. Thus, in book “Society, An Introductory Analysis”, Machllver & Page said about social customs- “Customs are the most spontaneous of all social rules and often, the most compelling. But they are sanctioned not like a law by organised coercive authority, but by a wide variety of informal social pressure. Customs are so intimate that until we reflect on it, we do not realize how they attend nearly every occasion of our lives, how our actions from morning till night, from youth to age, are custom regulated. In all sorts of ways, through chance trial and error, experience. Particular modes of procedure are devised, are followed and initiated and unobtrusively are accepted in the social mores. And often just as unobtrusively customs fade and disappear, again without formal abolition and without recognition by any but those who recall the “good (or bad) old ways”.¹ Thus to run a society properly, social customs are adopted and accepted by a particular society and anyone going against the particular social customs are sometimes punished as per the social customs and customary laws. These social customs and customary laws keep the society and the people bind within the social boundary of a particular society. That is why Bhaben Narzi said that the social customs of Bodos can be called as laws of Bodos. He said, “The Boro society has a well and disciplined ruling system. If somebody violet this ruling system they have to be punished according to their social system. This ruling system is called Ayen (law)”.² In the same way B.N.Bordolai said about the social customs- “This local laws are known as pandulipis as they are in manuscripts and hardly printed.”³

¹ Quoted from, Narzaree., Indramalati & Birlang. (2008). Laisini Bikhayao Indramalati. Kokrajhar: Mahamaya Printing Works. p-9

² Ibid. p-9

³ Bordolai, B.N. (1987). Tribes of Assam (Part-I). Guwahati: Bohniman Printers. p-6

In the course of time, later these social customs gradually found its place in the folk songs. In the same way the folk tradition and practices are reflected vividly in the Bodo Folk Songs.

3.2 CUSTOMARY LAWS AS REFLECTED IN BODO FOLK SONGS

The human society, down the ages, has observed various kinds of customary laws. And the society existed in accordance to the existing social customs and customary laws. In the Bodo society too there are customary laws are observed in every occasion of a person's life starting from birth to death. And the human society too is observing these social customary laws down the ages. That is why the human society in order to run the society smoothly these social customs and the customary laws are expressed in the folk songs to some extent. Thus during the *Bwisagu* celebration while singing, during Bodo social marriage ceremony these customary laws get expressed. For example-

Betel leave and betel nut plays an important role in the Bodo social marriage. Along with it "*Bwirathi*" and the "*Barlampha*" too play an important role in the Bodo social marriage. In the same way the bridegroom's family while going to get the bride carries, betel nut and betel leaves along with them which is called in Bodo "*bibanlangnai*". There is another customary law, of taking two (a pair) *Bwirathi* along with them while going to marriage in bride's house. That is why during '*Bwisagu*' celebration girl sings addressing her beloved where the social customary laws of Bodos are revealed. The song is as-

Rupsing jomidarni
Rupsing jomidarni
Moron sahebni saha bagan ada saha bagan
monjwng mon dongobwla
aie-aphani dorkhong mwkhagao
goi beda-beda, phathwi biha-biha lananwi
sithla gejerao thailir phangbrwi gainanwi
bwirathi jorase lananwi
abongni sakhiao
dwlwi-nwgwrwi
angkhon langphwi ada angkhon langphwi
*Dabri gamini Rwmwinat gws wmdai.*⁴

⁴ Brahma, Lakshwar. (2007). *Bwisagu arw Harimu*. Kokrajhar: Mahamaya Printing Works. pp- 33-34

In English,

Rupsing jomidar's
 Rupsing jomidar's
 Moron saheb's tea garden brother tea garden
 if your mind is willing
 at the threshold of parents
 bunch of betel-nut and bundle of betel leaves
 by planting four banana trees at the corridor
 by taking a pair of *bwirathi*
 in Gods witness
 with pomp and glory
 come and take me away
 of *Dabri* village's dear beloved *Rwmwinath*.

Again girl sings like as-

oua barini oua meoai
ada oua meoai
goi beda phathwi biha lananwi
aie-aphani dorkhong mwkhagao
*gosong phwiblanw nwni nwnghayanw jagoumn angni beoai.*⁵

In English,

bamboo garden's bamboo shoot
 oh brother (beloved) bamboo shoot
 carrying bunch of betel-nut and bundle of betel-leave
 at the threshold of my parents
 when you would come and stand
 your brother himself would be my brother-in-law.

Then the boys also sing in the same way targeting his beloved one-

injur kheblu-kheblu manw gabdwng
agwi manw gabdwng
Baswri phangdang
goi jora jora phathwi jora jora bwirathi jora
nainw thangbwla daphirai agwi
Baswri phangdang;
nwni nwnphayanw nwni nwmaya
lwrou (laothi) gongse phaga dwngse horphagwn
*wi agwi Gungkiparani Baswri phangdang.*⁶

In English,

why are you crying pinching the wall
 dear darling *Baswri* beauty why crying
 pair of betel-nut and betel-leave, pair of *Bwirathi*
 when to go to talk as regards for wedding

⁵ Ibid. p-38

⁶ Ibid. p-42

don't be send back dear *Baswri* beauty
 your father and your mother
 will send a stick and a rope
 oh' dears *Gungkhi* village's *Baswri* beauty.

Thus the Bodo wedding ceremony there is a customary law of taking “*gaojwn thakha*” (bride price) by the family of the bride from the family of the bridegroom. Besides this there is a custom of “*mamaimara khonnai*” (a custom of a honouring maternal uncle by presenting a pig after marriage by the bridegroom). In the ancient times, if the bride's family demands more price “*gaojwn thakha*” then during the *Bwisagu* celebration the son-in-law takes advantage of the situation and expresses satirical to father-in-law through songs. The song runs like this-

bilw budangni na bingchi agwi na bingchi
aio habab ma ese dam bichi
nwnghou langnwbwla naga-nanglaigwn bangase thakha
habab! gwrib gundraya
*jaya jalaigwn jalai jakhai.*⁷

In English,

bilw budang's bingchi fish (bingchi=a kind of coloured and flat-sized fish)
oh' dear bingchi fish
oh' what a costly, what a costly
to take, we'll have to pay a heavy price
oh' poor people becomes helpless.

In the same way, not only of money, jewellery of gold and silver, other wearing and ornaments, perfumes and luxurious things, and *dokhona thaosi* (bride's dress) are to be given to the bride. As it is the customary law of Bodos, bridal to be adorned with *dokhona thaosi* in wedding. So, a girl in love indicating to her beloved expresses her feeling through a song-

bilw budangni na bingchi ada na bingchi
*angkhon langnwbwla naga nanglaigwn dokhona thaosi.*⁸

In English,

bilw budang's bingchi fish o' dear darling bingchi fish
to get me, you will have to give dokhona thaosi.

Again songs like-

hajw khoroni hololokha

⁷ Ibid. p-48

⁸ Ibid. p-48

*angjwng rajiw jagwna nwnlokha
ada hathaisalini thao dingrilo nwn baikha
asan mutha, muga mala gwjwnglo dwnkha.*⁹

In English,

the top hill's *hololokha*
to live with me is you alone
oh' dear you just get the cane of oil from market
get ready to bunch of bangles the shining golden necklace.

In the same way in ancient days, when the groom's family goes to bring the new bride, the bride's parents use to demand gold necklace, bangles etc. Now-a-days this customs is gradually not practiced. Some Bodo songs reveal the existence of such practices. The song is as-

*jamphwi dariyani bisongali
naga nanglaigwn angkhou sanse langnwbla
sona hali.*¹⁰

In English,

the canal's of *bisongali* (a kind of shrub plant)
if you want take me
will have to give me a pair of gold earrings.

And besides this in a Bodo traditional wedding ceremony 'zouor zumai' (rice bear) is a must. The bridegroom's family, along with the betel nut and betel leaves have to carry according to the custom, "zou thinkhl?" (pitcher of rice-bear). If the bridegroom's rice bear is sour, and tasteless, then the older women from bride's party sings teasing the bridegroom like this-

*ukhum besani silimala
wi houa gwdan, nwngni zoualai melema melema
injur mukhani gwmwthing
wi houa gwdan, nwngni zoualai khwithing thing
maru dubsangni olodor
wi houa gwdan, nwngni habani oma burwini bedor.*¹¹

In English,

centipede insect of the top of roof's
oh' bridegroom your rice-bear is tasteless
cricket insect of wall's edge
oh' bridegroom your rice-bear is sour
the high land's *olodor* (a kind of esculent arum)

⁹ Brahma, M.M. (2011). Boroni Khuga Methai. Kokrajhar: Mahamaya Printing Works. p-18

¹⁰ Ibid. p-18

¹¹ Ibid. p-34

oh' bridegroom your wedding pork is of aged pig.

Again, in the same way have found other songs of when a couple cannot live a happy conjugal life and goes for divorce. In Bodo it is called “*phathwi-lai-bisinai khanthi*” (betel leaf to pull apart) custom of Bodos. Emotions of such unhappy conjugal life gets reflected in the Bwisagu songs thus-

angkhoul swiabwla
nwma-nwmpahaya manw laiya ada
angkhoul swiabwla
phathwilai bisi ada
angkhoul swiabwla
angkhoul nainw manw thaga?
*haire suni khaphal!*¹²

In English,

if you don't like me
 why did your parent get me
 if you don't like me
 then divorce me dear
 if you don't like me
 then why did you come to see me?
 oh! evil luck.

3.3 FOLK BELIEF AND TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Folk belief is also another important sub-genre of folk literature. All over the world among the community and the human races the belief system would be there. And these belief systems are varied in different places and communities. Thus, in literature this belief system is called as folk belief. Folk beliefs are the inseparable elements of the culture of a tradition bound society. They reflect the socio-cultural norms of the society and much of the history of the society is unfurled through them. These give the stamp of distinctiveness to a community. In fact, these folk beliefs along with customs and traditions may be considered as unwritten social laws, which keep the society intact.¹³ Therefore, folk beliefs are truly identifying the culture of one community. It is the correlation with the livelihood and the human society. It is very difficult to say that folk beliefs are at what time or where from coming into the human society. It is handed down in the society by traditionally since ago. Hence, Prafulla Dutta Goswami said about this, “It is difficult to explain the whys and where forces of popular beliefs. Beliefs are traditionally handed down and in a society

¹² Brahma, Laksheswar. Op.cit. p-50

¹³ Ahmed, Kasim Ali. (2012). Folklore of Assam. Guwahati: EBH Publishers. p-96

which does not appreciate the sceptical and critical attitude of mind, how they started or why they started is hardly remembered.”¹⁴ Most of the beliefs prevalent among the people of Assam are associated with the conduct of their social life, and many of them can be traced back to injunctions having a religious bearing. Some of them are also associated with superstition and fear of the unknown forces. For instance, many food taboos and eating restrictions, and various rites relating to birth and death are based on ignorance and also falsehoods, they are regarded as unassailable. However, beliefs covering family, kinship, the community, physical activity, the supernatural standard of decency etc. constitute a code which lubricates the social life to run smoothly.¹⁵

Accordingly, in Bodo society has too lots of folk beliefs. The Bodo people are smoothly maintaining the livelihood with relating the nature since ago. The important of livelihood like knowledge, suggestion and advices are given instruction to future generation through folk beliefs. These folk beliefs are be going on slightly in Bodo society too these days. Folk beliefs are reflecting very well the social folk customs and traditions, religion and culture. For which Bodo societies are carrying on honesty and prestige.

Following discuss about the Bodo folk belief and which reflecting the traditional knowledge is as below-

1. *Sithla gejerjwng khodal-rua phaphliao bannanwi thanglai phwilai khalamnwmwna. Bibdi khalamwbla iunao nokhorni swrba thwigwnkhou phwrmainai jayw.*¹⁶

(There is no allowed to carry spade or axe on shoulders through the middle of threshold. If it is doing so in future it explain that someone would die)

Sometimes the threshold may cover with moss and it becomes slid. So, if a person walk through the middle of threshold by carrying spade or axe on shoulders he may slip down. At this time the spade or axe may cut or may make injured on the body of that person. So, through this folk belief it is reflected that the people should stay away from that work. Through this folk belief the traditional knowledge should get.

¹⁴ Quoted from, Sarma, Nabin Ch. (2011). Asamiaya Loka-Sanskritir Abhas. Guwahati: Arjya Printer. p-101

¹⁵ Ahmed, Kasim Ali. Op.cit. p-96

¹⁶ Narzi, Bhaben. (2014). Boro Kocharini Somaj arw Harimu. Chirang (BTAD). Oasis Offset Printers. p-30

2. *Wngkham jakhangrwn mwna emao unduglangnw mwna/hama, unduglagwbla phwtharni abadaa gelemw.*¹⁷

(After having meal no one should allowed to sleep at once or suddenly; if it is doing so the crops of the field would lying down.)

It is explain that if a person should sleep after having meal his/her body may get problem. So, through this folk belief the traditional knowledge were given.

3. *Khundung maidi hwnai wngkhamkhon jaywbla aoluri jayw.*¹⁸

(If you eat the rice gruel of the spin yarn; you will become careless.)

It is explain that it is necessary of boiling rice gruel with tread to make spin yarn. If it is doing so the dust of tread mixed with rice gruel. So, if someone tries to eat this kind of rice gruel he/she should not allowed eating by saying this folk belief.

4. *Khasi jwng goi khaona jaywbla hathai goyw.*¹⁹

(If you cut the betel nut with sickle; your teeth will lose out)

It is explained that through this folk belief the teeth of sickle is bent or zigzag. So, if someone cut the betel-nut with sickle, the bent or zigzag teeth of sickle may enter inside the betel-nut. By knowing that, the forefathers were given advice to avoid such kind of work.

5. *Mwsou dirungkhon gajwbna barnwnangou hwnna phwthayw.*²⁰

(If you cross the tending cow's rope you need to tread the rope)

¹⁷ Ibid. p-53

¹⁸ Brahma, Binoy kr. (2012). Assamni Somaj Harimuo Subung Fwthainai. Kokrajhar: Mahamaya Printing Works. p-31

¹⁹ Ibid. p-31

²⁰ Ibid. p-13

This folk belief explains that sometimes the tending cow's roap may stay in the up and about of position. During that time if you cross the rope you may fall down. So, here it is advice that if you cross the tending cow's rope you need treading the rope.

6. *Agkhi akhaijwng mua horwbla mainao kharw hwnna phwthayw.*²¹

(If you give things with your left hand to someone; the wealth will lost)

It is explain that the left hand mainly used in grubby work and it is used during offering of goods to the death person. So, here it is requested if you give some goods to someone not by left hand.

7. *Aaina bainayao naywbla borad gwiyi jayw hwnna sanw.*²²

(If you look your face in the broken mirror; you will become unsuccessful)

This folk belief explains that if you look or use the broken mirror sometimes it may cut your finger or may get injured. So, here it is requested not to use the broken mirror.

8. *Gannai somao jikhou suthenw naga.*²³

(It is not allowed to tie your cloth with needle while you are wearing)

It is explain that while you are wearing cloth you do not tie your cloth with needle. Because the needle may go into the body or it may hurt the body. So, it is say that not to use needle while you are wearing cloth.

9. *Orkhikhou akhaijwng swmaobla hasumuthra jayw.*²⁴

(If you remove the embers with your hand will become bed wetter)

²¹ Ibid. p-15

²² Ibid. p-15

²³ Ibid. p-15

²⁴ Ibid, p-16

It is explain that during the winter season people sit near by the fire-place to get heat. At that time the children were playing with embers. The elders said that if the children are doing so they may become bed wetter. To control the naughty children of playing with embers the elder use this kind of folk belief.

10. *Khanjong khou orwbla khugayao garai jayw hwnna phwthayw.*²⁵

(If you bite a comb by your teeth you will get wound)

It is explain that when you dress with a comb the dust of hair may stick at comb. So, if you bite a comb the stick dust of the comb may enter inside the stomach and it may harm the stomach. So, the advice was given through this folk belief.

3.4 SUMMARY

In this chapter discuss about the traditional Bodo folk customs and customary laws which reflecting in Bodo folk songs and folk beliefs which provide traditional knowledge. But at present those traditional folk customs and customary laws and folk beliefs are decreases in use and develop.

²⁵ Ibid, p-16