

Vol 5 Issue 10 July 2016

ISSN No : 2249-894X

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*Monthly Multidisciplinary  
Research Journal*

*Review Of  
Research Journal*

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# Review Of Research



## A STUDY ON MARRIAGE SYSTEM OF THE BODOS

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### ABSTRACT:

**M**arriage is a social institution under which a man and a woman live as husband and wife by legal or religious commitments. Such as it is an important social ceremony of the Bodos. Marriage creates new social relationship and reciprocal rights between the spouses, between each and



the kin of the other, and establishes what will be the rights and status of the children when they are born. Marriage, in Bodo it is called 'Haba', 'ha' means 'soil' or 'earth' and 'ba' means 'to bear something on the back'. It means to bear a great responsibility in their conjugal life. Earlier in Bodo Society the 'Hathasuni Haba' was

performed. In spite of this kind of marriage there are six other system of the marriage in Bodo society. In earlier times, we heard about the Bodo marriage it was a festive one, but now-a-days such type of marriage is not available. In this paper, thoroughly discussed about the marriage system of the Bodos.

**KEY WORDS:** Bodo community, marriage, hathasuni.

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Marriage is an important social ceremony of the Bodos. The word marriage has been defined as a union between a man and a woman such that children born to the woman are recognized legitimate offspring of both parents. Marriage creates new social relationships and reciprocal rights between the

spouses, between each and the kin of the other, and establishes what will be the rights and status of the children when they are born. Every society has recognized procedures for creating such relationships and rights, and for making it known that they have been created<sup>1</sup>.

## 1.1 METHODOLOGY

Accomplish this study, the investigator used survey method. For the related materials investigator collected through the door to door field investigation work. So, in such context work, I have heavily depended on interview, questionnaire and observation method which are consider as my primary source. As secondary data, investigator has taken from all kinds of existing published materials available in the forms of books on language, literature, culture, history, journals and periodicals, newspapers, and documentation in the archives in any form etc.

## 1.2 DISCUSSION

The Bodo word for 'marriage' is '*Haba*'. The word 'ha' means 'soil' or 'earth' and 'ba' means 'to bear something on the back'. It is quite interesting to note that the Sanskrit word for marriage 'bivaha' also has a similar etymological meaning<sup>2</sup>. After marriage a person enters into a circle of great responsibility. With the marriage ceremony the Bodos give the newly married couple a new lesson on life which is full of duties and responsibilities.

The Bodos have a very high regard and dignified concept of chastity and they live by it. In the words of Sydney Endle,. The standard of chastity among the Kacharis, both men and women, is by no means a law one. As a rule the young people, in the villages at least, lead pure lives before marriage, and are faithful to their marriage vows<sup>3</sup>.

## TYPES OF MARRIAGE

Traditionally the Bodos have six different types of marriage. These are -

1. *Swngnanai Lainai Haba*
2. *Gwrjia Lakhinai Haba*
3. *Kharsonnai Haba*
4. *Bwnanwi Lainai Haba*
5. *Dwnkharlangnai Haba*
6. *Dongkha Habnai Haba*.

Such as there are eight forms of marriage in other Hindu Society. These are *Brahma, Daiva Projapatya, Arsha, Raksasa, Paisacha, Asura, and Gandharva*. Among them Brahma, Daiva, Prajapatya and Arsha are considered by the society and other remaining four types of marriages are not considered by the society<sup>4</sup>. In Bodo society also *Swngnanai Lainai Haba, Gwrjia Lakhinai Haba* and *Dongkha Habnai Haba* are considered by the society. Other remaining three forms of marriages are not acceptable by the society, yet these types of marriages takes place but it is very rare.

Now we are going to discuss about the Bodo marriage systems in details-

**1.2.1 Swngnanwi Lainai Haba:** It is an arranged marriage. It is the common socially accepted marriage custom of the Bodos. Therefore normally this system of marriage is celebrated with great solemnity and honour. According to this system the bride is selected by the parents of the bridegroom and then the marriage is settled after negotiation. In earlier days this sort of marriage was solemnised at the

house of the bridegroom only. Now a days, the marriage is solemnised at the house of the bride also. It is regarded as regular marriage by the society. Brideprice was common in earlier days. In the present Bodo society it is not compulsory<sup>5</sup>. After discussing the matter for a fairly long time, the bride price is decided.

**1.2.2 Gwrjia Lakhinai Haba:** It is solemnised at the house of the bride. It may be called a marriage by service, because the bridegroom has to give service at the house of the bride before the marriage. This form of marriage was prevalent almost tribal societies. For which in the novel 'Miri Jiori' (1894) by Rajani Kanta Bordoloi' the system is reflected. It was invogue among the non-Bodos. In Assamese it is called Ghorjia<sup>6</sup>. This type of marriage is celebrated when in a family there are only daughters and there are no sons or male members to inherit the family property.

The period of service is a matter of arrangement between the parents of the parties concerned, and seems to vary greatly, i.e. from three or four to upwards of twelve to fifteen years<sup>7</sup>. Cohabitation, however, is allowed after about twelve or eighteen months of service, and at the conclusion of the full period, the young people are free to depart wheresover they will, though they usually return to the house of the bridegroom's parents. In this case to the marriage is solemnly celebrated and it is known as *Gwrjia Lakhinai Haba*. This form of marriage is regarded as an irregular marriage. This type of marriage is rare in the present day Bodo Society.

**1.2.3 Kharsonnai Haba:** In this type of marriage the bride enters into the house of the bridegroom before the settlement of the marriage. It is takes place when there is a delay in the arrangement of the marriage or the parents are not happy with the bride. It is possible if there is mutual understanding between the bridegroom and the bride. The consent of the parents are not taken into consideration. Society frowns upon such marriages but they are tolerated. This kind of marriage is reflected in the short story namely 'Abari' which is first short story of the Bodo Literature written by Romantic poet Ishan Mushahary. This is also an irregular marriage.

**1.2.4 Bwanwi Lainai Haba:** In this system of marriage the bride is forcefully carried into the house of the bridegroom by his party and then the marriage is solemnised. It is called marriage by capture. This system of marriage was prevalent in the earlier days. It is not a socially approved system of marriage in the present Bodo society. It is almost similar to the *paisacha* marriage system of the Aryans, In the words of A.S. Altekar, the *Paisacha* form of marriage, which is the most condemned one, is undoubtedly of the greatest antiquity. In this marriage the bride is either duped, very often by making her overdrunk, or physically overpowered by the bridegroom in order to make her yeild to his passion. To mesmerise a woman by talisman or magical practices and carry her away was also regarded as a *Paisacha* form of marriage in medieval times<sup>8</sup>. He also mentioned that they have included Paisacha system of marriage in their list, firstly because old tradition knew of it, and secondly because it was sometimes resorted to by backward tribes<sup>9</sup>. 'Bwanwi Lainai Haba' is also regarded as an irregular marriage.

**1.2.5 Dwnkharlangnai Haba:** This system of marriage is not socially approved and yet it takes place in the Bodo Society. This marriage is by elopment of both bride and bridegroom. The mutual understanding between the bride and bridegroom is enough for this type of marriage. When there are objection from both the house of bride and bridegroom then the bride and bridegroom go to other place and manage their marriage. This type of marriage is a kin to the 'Gandharva' system of marriage by the Aryans. It is also regarded as an irregular marriage.

**1.2.6 Dongkha Habnai Haba:** This system of marriage is approved by the Bodo society. In this marriage the bride is a widow. If a man comes and lives with a widow and the society recognises this cohabitation, then the man and woman should regularise the marriage according to the social custom called *Dongkha*<sup>10</sup> *Habnai Haba*. This system of marriage is very rare.

In the Bodo society re-marriage is socially recognised as regular marriage. A widow can re-marry any person who is not related to her. However, she loses the authority on the property of her deceased husband. The male child is always entitled to get the property of his father. Sometimes, it is seen that the widow is allowed to take the female child of her deceased husband along with her new husband<sup>11</sup>. Satyendra Nath Sarma also says, the widow remarriage, though rare, did exist among castes other than the Brahmins and the Kayasthas<sup>12</sup>. In the marriage of widows no such ceremonies are performed.

As we know, marriage is very important in the social life of the Bodos. Therefore, it is taken very seriously consequently, when a marriage is contemplated for a boy or a girl all the marriage norms are followed up meticulously.

**1.3 Pre-marriage preparation:** traditionally when a boy comes of age for marriage, i.e. from 15/18 to 20/25, the parents have consultation with their neighbours, close relatives and friends and set to find out a suitable bride for him. The most important part of the pre-marriage preparation is the selection of the bride; the Bodo parents are very particular about making the right choice. For this reason a parties of at least five members are formed to make preliminary enquiry about bride and her family. The members of the bridegroom's party carry a pair of silver bracelets (*asan suri jorase*), a pair of silver one rupee coins, a pair of areca nuts, betel leaves and a pair of rice-beer bottles (*thakha gwthang jorase, goi-jora, phathoi-jora, jorase jou dingri*) to the house of the bride at the time of settlement. The members of the bridegroom's party leave these at the house of the bride. The parents of the bridegroom explain the purpose of the visit indirectly as-

*Jerao jwn nuw beo goi*  
*Khithou garw*  
*Jerao thuri nuw beonw*  
*bathi garw*

(Meaning-The top portion of areca nuts are dropped where there is the female organ, just like a piece of stick is dropped where there is thatch.)

The central idea of the above expression is that by describing the things of nature the parent of the bride groom expresses the purpose of their visit to the house of the bride. The thatches are necessary for building a house. So, the person who searches for the thatch drops a bamboo pole or stick at the field where there are thatches. It is the custom of the Bodos to express their purpose of visit to the house. Within a week from the date of the first approach of the bridegroom party the parents of the bride return the silver bracelets to the house of the bridegroom. Then it is understood by the parents of the bridegroom that the parents of the bride have no consent for this marriage. This is called 'ashan phinnai' or returning of bracelets. Then again the parents of the bridegroom approach the parents of the bride for the second time and sometimes the third and fourth times also.

After obtaining the final consent of the parents of the bride the parents of the bridegroom alter the previous relationship with the family of the bridegroom and assume the new relationship. It is called '*swmwndw phirainai*' or changing relationship. A feast is arrange for this purpose with pork (*oma*

*bedor*), chicken (*dao bedar*) *jou* (*rice-beer*) and rice and entertain the members of the bride's family along with related persons.

**1.3.1 Goi Khaonai (cutting of areca nuts):**—after the final settlement the members of the bridegroom party go to the house of the bride with the bundles of areca nuts and betel leaves. This ceremony is known as '*Goi khaonai*'.

**1.3.2 Biban Langnai (carrying the bundle of commodities) :**—This ceremony is performed compulsorily by the bridegroom party. Areca nuts and betel leaves are essentials for this ceremony. Two earthen pitches (*Hani thingkhli gongnwi*) are carried to the house of the bride. On the body of the two pitchers the sign of the Sun and the Moon are painted. If the sign is detected to the wrong then the bride party charges a fine from the parents of the bride groom. The person who carries the two earthen pitchers is called '*Barlangpha*' and four girls or ladies (not widows) who are essential during the marriage ceremony. The girls or ladies are called '*Bairathi*' (*Bairathi Jora*). One pair bairathi is called '*ishing bairathi*' and another pair is called '*okhong bairathi*'<sup>13</sup>. '*ishing bairathi*'s functions are within the campus of marriage and '*okhong bairathi*'s function for outside as well as at the time of bringing the bride from her own house. No widow or widower is allowed to perform any auspicious work during the marriage ceremony<sup>14</sup>.

**1.3.3. Goi Khaonai:** This is an important and popular pre-marriage ceremony according to the traditional custom of the Bodos. After the final settlement for the bride, the members of the bridegroom come to the house of the bride with lots of areca nuts and betel leaves. This ceremony is called '*Goi Khaonai*'. The parents, relatives and villagers of the bride are entertained with areca nuts and rice-beer in abundance.

For the marriage the Assamese month '*phagun*' is preferred. Even the day of the marriage is selected normally for a Sunday; for on Saturday and Tuesday marriage ceremonies are never held<sup>15</sup>. After fixation of the date between the two parties of the bride and bridegroom the proper marriage takes place.

**1.3.4 Hathasuni Haba (the traditional marriage system of the Bodos):** The earliest and traditional form of marriage is called '*Hathasuni Haba*' or '*Hathasuni Khurnai*'. This form of marriage is very simple. At this ceremony the bride kneels and prays to God (*Bathou Bwrai*) and offers meals to the bridegroom. When the bride prays in front of *Bathou* the *deuri* or *oja* chants the '*mantra*' introducing the bride and the bridegroom to God. The meal consists of rice and curry prepared with rice powder and chicken without applying oil, spices and colour. This is called '*ondla khari*' in Boro. After taking a little portion of the meal the bridegroom rises from the seat and prays to *Bathou* to grant them a peaceful conjugal life. The bridegroom wears '*gamsa*' and shirt; on the other bride wear '*dokhona thaosi*' (a special dress for bride and colour is red). According to S.N. Sarma, it is another feature of the tribal marriage is the worship of the respective tribal deity according to the traditional custom. Thus the Karbis worship Hemphu, the Bodos *Bathou* and the Rabhas their deity *Risidevata*<sup>16</sup>. Liquor (rice beer), meat, areca nut, betel leaves, *jatra-gaan* play an important part in this marriage festival. The marriage festival is certainly a very joyful event for every member of the family and the village as well.

**1.3.5 After-Marriage ceremony:** The Bodos also have some important post marriage customs. These customs are still observed among the Bodos and they are still considered as essential components of

the marriage.

**1.3.6 Kholar gothainai:** In Bodo marriage custom, if the husband expires suddenly after the marriage, the bride returns to her parents and the amount of *Malsa* (bride price) is given back to the parents of the deceased husband by the parents of the bride. This act of returning of the bride and 'Malsa' is known as '*Kholar gothainai*'.

**1.3.7 Mamai-mara:** Sometimes the bridegroom or the parents of the bridegroom are not able to pay the '*phon thaka*' (bride price) at the time of marriage and if the bride expires leaving female child behind, then the '*phon thaka*' or the bride price of the female child would go to her uncle at the time of her marriage. This system is known as '*Mamai-mara*'.

**1.3.8 Athmangal:** It is performed on the eight day of the marriage ceremony at the house of the bride's parents. It is a very brief ceremony and no big feast is arranged on the occasion. At that moment the bridegroom must bring one cock and one hen with them to the bride's house. It is a custom of the Bodos. And also the bride or her family must be paid small money for the custom of '*bisina-sara*' in the name of bride to her friends.

**1.3.9 Divorce:** In Bodo society divorce is also take place. After the marriage if the couple decides between them to separate, the village community is called and tearing of betel-leaf (*fathwi lai bisinai*) ceremony is performed. The betel leaf is kept in the presence of the village elders in the house of '*gamibwrai*' (*village headman*) and then betel leaf is torn into two pieces by the husband and wife. By this act the relation of husband and wife is come to an end.

## 1.4 CONCLUSION

Marriage is certainly a very important in the life cycle of the Bodo society. It is a great responsibility an individual to a conjugal life. The marriage life is called in Bodo as '*songsarao habnai*' or '*bala gudungao ganai*'. It is a way of disciplinary life of the society. The institution of marriage has greatly contributed towards the unity and structure of the Bodo society. It is a social system of the human being. A man becomes social after the marriage. So, it is an important institution of the Bodo society, not only Bodos but also the entire society of the world.

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