
Customary Belief and Faiths of the Boros in Bwisagu Festival

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ABSTRACT

The Boros are the largest tribal people of Assam. They are known in different names in different places. They have some define festivals that identify themselves as a rich community. All the races and communities of the world have some belief and faiths relating with the festivals. The Boro people have also some customary belief and faiths. Some of their belief and faiths has become diminishing or become futile in present scientific age. Though their belief and faiths have no scientific proof yet it has tremendous significance in their society in ancient as well as modern age. Attempt has been made to focus on those faiths, better understanding and its significance in the Boro society in conveyance to Bwisagu festival for their neighbours.

Keywords: Boros, Festival, Belief and Faiths, its significances.

INTRODUCTION

The habit of belief and faith linger in every race and community of people. In olden times, from beginning of the social life; the people depended on the mighty nature. They learn various lessons from nature in their life. Thus they acquired various experiences living in the nature. As such certain belief and faiths have come into existences with the experiences gathers from living and those are use as advice for the generation to generations. Those belief and faiths were handed down generation to generations and get influential places in today's written literature. In folk literature belief and faiths is called folk belief or folk faith. It is one of the branches of folk literature. These kinds of belief and faiths are prevalent in all racial groups of people living in the society even in the present scientific age. It only differs according to place and racial groups of people but get equal importance even in the today's age of science and technology. As it exist in human mind it breads in every walk of human life. The Boro people are also not away from certain belief and faiths. The belief and faiths of the Boro reflects about their religions, custom, rites and rituals, festivals, etc. very meaningfully.

Background: The Boros are largest tribal people with about 13 Lakhs (Census, 2001) of present Assam. They belong to Indo-Mongoloids and Kirata people. Their forefathers were known as Kiratas, Indo-Mongloid in the puranas and epic age and also called as Asura, Danava, etc. in free-historic age by their neighbours. Till today they are known as different names in various parts of India like—Tipras or kok-Borok in Tripura, Meches in West Bengal, Boro Kocharies or Boros or Bodos in Assam, Dimacha or Dimacha Kocharies in North Kachar district of Assam, etc. But it is certain that whatever name they may called by their neighbours and wherever they may live they are the same people and everywhere they speak the Boro or Bodo language with few local variations and the people are very seldom call themselves by any name other than Boro or Bodo. The Boros or Bodos writes as Boro-Kochari in their written documents for community identification in Assam.

The Bwisagu festival which is celebrated from the last day of the Chaitra till 6th day of the new year Bwisakh is the greatest seasonal, agricultural, religious, marry-making festival of the Boros of entire Bodoland Territorial Council areas and others parts of the Assam, India and abroad. The Boros has some special customary belief and faiths relating to Bwisagu festival. This belief and faith is not a taboo. On the other hand, those belief and faiths is the path bearer of the illiterate, innocent, poor stricken, cultivation dependent economies of ancient Boros. The remarkable parts of this faith are that it is the customary, traditional one and not the sophisticated modern- proof oriented scientific one. But those have special significance among the Boro people from the time immemorial. The following are some of them:

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- (1) The Boro people are agriculturist. They use bullock for ploughing of soil. The last day of the month chaitra of the Assamese month is called by the Boro people as Bwisagu for the cattle. In this day cattle are respected and can't be bitten by the sticks. The cow is Lakhi, Mainao (Goddess of wealth) for Boros. So, it is not use for the purpose of ploughing. The Boros belief that if the cow is use in the works of plough in place of bullock, then the family will be poorer than the poor by the curse of cow. Cow-dung is use by the Boro people by some secret purposes like purifying the house, courtyard, places of worship, etc. The Boro women use cow-dung to plaster the wall of the house mixing with mud. It is also use as manure in agricultural field. New ropes are use on the day of Mwsouni Bwisagu (Bwsagu means for cattle) or the 1st day of the Bwisagu. The cattle rites are the beginning of the Bwisagu festival.
- (2) There is a traditional belief among the Bodos that during the Bwisagu no quarrel should take place. They believe that those who indulge in quarrels during these days would take birth as cows or dogs in the next life. So, they try to avoid any sort of quarrel during the time of the Bwisagu festival.
- (3) The Boros who lives in the villages of nearby forest areas use to go to deep forest for community hunting on the sankhranthi day, the last day of the Chaitra month of the Assamese. In the evening they use to take bitter tastes vegetables collected from the forest. A special curry is prepared with the porks or meats and collected vegetables of different tastes, from the forest which is known as 'Gwkha- Gwkhwi Zanai' (eating of bitter and sour taste). Sometimes the young boys and girls also go to climb hills.
- (4) To render unproductive the eggs of the snakes they produce a particular tune on the flute (siphung); the tune is calling 'Satravali'. The snake community is belief by the Boros to be the foe of the human being and all other creatures and annihilation of snakes is considered an act of general welfare. It is done on the first day of the Bwisakh or the 2nd day of Bwisagu or the 1st day of the Bwisagu i.e. Mwsouni Bwisagu.²
- (5) In the 2nd day of the Bwisagu the members of the family offer prayer to the Bathou at the altar of the Bathou after cleaning the house and purifying by bathing, etc. They worship the God, Bwrai Bathou Maharaza with hope of more and more production and growth of cultivation. They pray to God for their wellbeing in the New Year bid farewell to the old.
- (6) In the second day of the Bwisagu just after prayer to the Bathou they worship to their ancestors in the altar prepared for the purpose towards the south-west corner of the courtyard. They also offers various food and drinkable items like meats, fishes, wine, cakes, fruits, battle-nut, tobacco, etc. to their beloved ancestors and recently dead relatives in a special altar designed for the purpose as stated.
- (7) The Boros don't sit on the four-legged-tool, Khamphlai or pira during the Bwisagu festival, as they belief that to sit on the four-legged tool means to sit on the head of the parents³. Dr. K. Brahma added that the traditional belief of the Bodos signifies that the Bodos have real respect to the parents or elderly persons.⁴
- (8) The Boros exchanges their mutual love, dance, song, feasting, merry-making, etc. during the Bwisagu festival. Here we get the age old relation like love, faith, unity, integrity and such kind of understanding passes from the age of unknown period.
- (9) The Boros never use granary during Bwisagu festival. All kinds of selling and even husking of rice are not allowed during Bwisagu.
- (10) The women folks of the Boro family go to the house of the Oza or the medicine man with Zou (rice beer) and cocks as the presentation on the first day of the New Year. Now-a-days money replaces some of this traditional presentation. The oza replaces the Thabiz or Khoboz (amulet) of the users for the New Year. The married girls also pay respect to their father-in-laws and take the blessings and they also visit to their own parents to get blessing for the new year.
- (11) From the second day of the Bwisagu till the seven day every family becomes the centre of merry-making and all the members of the society forget themselves out of enjoyment. The young boys play on Flutes (siphung), four string Serza (a kind of violin), Thorkha (Bamboo clapper), Kham (a big drum), etc. while the young girls and old women folks play on the Gongona or Gogana (Jews harp), Batha Bibung (a kind of instrument made of straw or thatch), Zotha or

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Cymbal, etc. and come out from their houses and gather together to dance and sing at the open field or from house to house. The songs sung by the young boys and girls are mostly the song of love.

- (12) The Boros drink rice beer continuously from the first day to the end of the Bwisagu festival. In ancient time the rice beer mean for Bwisagu were prepared for 3/6 months in advance. The newly married girls who have to reside permanently in the new home of her husband should stay in the husband’s house and respect to the villager of her husband with whole heartedly in Bwisagu through which her new relations become meaningful.
- (13) The habit of ceremonial eating of fowl or meats cooked with bitter harp known as ‘Khungkha’ or other seven wild vegetables of different tastes is one of the beliefs of the Boros. They offer it to the visitors also.
- (14) The Boros were very rich in every way and very happy in family affairs in ancient days. Their mutual love, faith and unity were very strong. So, the Bwisagu festival was celebrated during night time. Such types of celebration are also found at present in some parts of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) areas of Assam. This signifies that the Boro people are very simple, civilized, faithful and peace loving people.
- (15) In the Bwisagu festival the Boros except cooking, eating, singing, dancing, merry-making, etc., no work is done. For this we can mention the following description given by Rev Sidney Endle in his book ‘The Kacharis’ (Bodo) about the Kacharis of the Darrang district: ...During which little or no work is done, the whole period being given up to marry-making, dancing, feasting &c.5
The ritual of taking blessing is another significant traditional belief and faith of the Boros. The habit of taking blessing from the celebrates of the Bwisagu by the childless couple or child un-bearable couple and the persons who wishes to be live long is an important believes of the Boros. Sometimes young boys and girls also take blessing for the success in their life. In the ancient times the Boro people take weather forecasting in the Bwisagu festival. In the Sankhranthi day of the chaitra the learned man or the oza bind 12th different packets giving 12th different names of the months of a year with the starch or Khathri (a sharp similar to the turmeric) leaves without tearing it from the main plants. Somewhere it is done in the starting of the Chaitra month. On the next day or the first day of the New Year all packets are open one by one and observation is made carefully. The quantity of water contains on the packets indicates the rainfall of that month. Today this process has almost diminished but it had significance during the ancient times. Somewhere this type of works is done in the Sangkhranthi of Phus month of the Assamese.
- (16) The Boro people beg alms from door to door during Bwisagu by singing, dancing and merry-making. It is belief that the begging should not be refused by any house holder. They arrange feasts at the end of the Bwisagu with the materials they received from the begging alms.
- (17) In the seventh day of the Bwisagu the Boro people clean the house ceremonially, take purifying bath and seek apology from the elders for any omissions and commissions that may have been committed during the period of Bwisagu festival.
- (18) The receiving relatives and visiting to the relatives is also one of the important rituals among the Boros during the Bwisagu festival.
- (19) It is believed by the Boros that since the vegetables like gourd and brinjal are use in the Mwsou Bihu, these vegetables should not eat during the whole month of Bwisakh. In ancient time Boro people totally destroyed these vegetables after the Mwsouni Bwisagu i.e. the Bwisagu means for cattle. They belief that eating of gourd and brinjal after the Bwisagu festival means to becoming cattle or animal. This type of belief is prevalent even today among them.

CONCLUSION

Those are the only few special belief and faiths among the Boro people during the Bwisagu festival. It is belief that lots of belief and faiths will be there. Those belief and faiths give us way to understand the traditions of Boro race or community- their way of living, rites-rituals, customs, culture, etc. of previous as well as present society. It is also the ample index to understand Boro society or community as a whole. s, souvenir, books, etc. in Boro language.

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