

An Aspect on the Transition in the Rites and Traditions Related to the Lifecycles of the Bodo

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Abstract: Life cycle is a course or a series of changes in the life of an organism including reproduction that take place in the life of an organism. In an organism, the lifecycle commences from its independent life form to its established state where offspring are produced. The life cycle includes – birth, marriage and death. The Bodos observe some customs and traditions, which constitute their identity and culture. They adopted different rites and traditions regarding related to the birth are pregnancy recognition, alertness, jaginai nenai (attending delivery / issue), woman charge (hinjao sebnai), pressurize (bwlw hwhwnai), naval cut (utumwi hanai), bathing (thukhwinai), spade beating, child welcome (boraina lanai), offer at water (dwiao baonai), feast providing (dwisarnai), naming (mung dwnnai), rice feeding (wngkham dwonai), ear perforation: food for mother, hair cutting (khanai sinnai), puberty, offer for sale and birthday. . Out of these rites and traditions transitions are occurring and some are abolished.

Keywords: Bodo, life cycle, recognition, alertness, jaginai nenai, hinjao sebnai, bwlw hwhwnai, spade beating, boraina lana and transition.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Bodos are a race of Indo-Mongoloid family and second largest scheduled tribes of North East India. Life cycle is a course or a series of changes in the life of an organism including reproduction that take place in the life of an organism. It includes – birth, marriage and death. The Bodos observe some customs and traditions, which constitute their identity and culture. This part of life cycle will be studied in the paper.

2. OBJECTIVE OF PAPER

- 2.1. To know the rituals celebrated by the Bodos regarding the life cycle.
- 2.2. To know the transition of rituals related to life cycles.
- 2.3. To know the new rituals related to lifecycles.

3. PROBLEM OF STUDY

The Bodos are a tribal community in North East India. They had rich culture and heritage. But these culture and heritage are taking modern shape or new form due to the development of education, science and technology, globalization and for other factors. The transition in the part of life cycle and to study the extent of transition is the basic problem.

4. METHODOLOGY OF STUDY

The methodology of study is descriptive. The data available in the hands are processed in descriptive manner. Both the primary and secondary data are used. The field study is also made in the Bodo populated areas of the Assam state of India.

5. THE TRANSITION IN THE RITES AND TRADITIONS RELATED TO THE LIFECYCLES

5.1. Pregnancy recognition:

They were very meticulous about it, when menstruation discontinues, they detected that she is pregnant. The married women disclosed it to her mother-in-law or any other female member of family. The mother-in-law or husband is always anxious about the pregnancy of her daughter-in-law or wife. They detected pregnancy on the basis of discontinuous of menstruation.

Such system of pregnancy detection is changing among them. Only a few residing in rural areas those are economically poor following it. The Bodos who are economically good, residing both in rural and urban areas are adopting medical consultation with doctor, nurse or using modern method of pregnancy detection instruments.

5.2. Alertness:

The pregnant women were not taken care in earlier time. They are allowed to work as usual. In spite of pregnant, they used to plant paddy, pounding rice, domestic work as well as other field work as usual women.¹ But they followed some restrictions for women. They are not allowed to go to forest, cremation ground or visit or touch any death body. Her movements are restricted as a precaution against any accident or for the protection from evil spirit and go out in mid-day of scorching sun shine.² The pregnant women were allowed to put on 'tabis or red/black yarn silk to protect from evil spirit as well as evil comment (khuga nangnai) of the people and also offer pujas in the name of pregnant women.³

But in modern time they take care for pregnant women, hard work is not allowed, bed rest is given, frequent medical checkup is done, pregnant is predicted by pregnancy test devices, use of 'tabis' or red/black yarn silk is relegating and only found a few for example.

5.3. Jaginai nenai (attending delivery / issue):

The *jaginai nenai* or attending the child delivery / issue is their customary tradition. The frequent medical checkup to the pregnant woman was not their tradition. They are not taken care about on which date or when the child will issue. Even, a pregnant woman is allowed to deliver at home. While a woman gets severed pain to issue a child either husband or a family member calls aged women to attend delivery. At bathou and ising a pair of betel nut & leaf, an earthen lamp is set fire and offered in the name of God and Goddesses, so that they help issue of child.

As soon as women get the information they come to attend. The women smeared mustard oil, to the body of a pregnant woman and even at vagina too.

5.4. Charging both couple (hwoa-hinjao sebnai):

They follow strict virginity among them. The hwoa-hinjao sebnai (charging both husband and wife) is their traditional rite. They believe that if both husband and wife are sacred by religion and do not have religious profane; normally the issue or delivery of child takes place. On the other hand, if, both or any one has profaned by religion un-married time, the woman get difficulty in issue of child. Under such circumstance, issue of child may be dumb, deaf or physically handicapped. Both the wife and husband are separately taken to ising khona (near ceres or mainao) and charged by an aged woman whether they had illicit sexual relation during un-married time with both or with some other else. The aged woman asks as-

To the husband_

Nwi abou nwngha gwdwphwr swrjwngba

Mabaphwr swmwndw dongmwn nama,

Nwi abwi amukhia hagoa hagoa jatharbai,

Phab nangwn abou dongobla khinthadw'⁴

If yes husband replies-

Ou lwi abwi umukhjwng,

If more than one girls-

Amwkhijwng, phwrlajwng----

If not—

Gwithralwi abwi raojwngbw...

Then ask to pregnant woman-

Nwi abwi nwngha gwdwphwr swrjwngba

Mabaphwr swmwndw dongmwn nama,

Phab nangwn abwi dongobla khinhadw

The pregnant woman replies same as husband to the woman and if both husband and wife thought profane by religion an udrainai is offered, giving a chicken and a pigeon in the name of god. If not nothing puja is offered. There is a faith, if both or any one of them lie(s), wife may die.

Such howa-hinjao sebnai tradition is relegating from their culture. They adopt scientific treatments in this regard. If child is not issued at stipulated time, as per due sussestion of doctor, scissoring is made. The developments of education, philosophy of people, govt. facilities, and development in health infrastructure are caused to change in this aspect.

5.5. Pressurize for issue (bwlw hwhwnai):

They believe that if bwlw (pressure) comes child is issued normally. For that pressure should be utilized in proper way. To put pressure, an uwal (big mortar) is better they think and is utilized during child issue. A jute sack is unfurled at ground and uwal is placed on it. The pregnant woman is allowed to kneel down on the sack and take support from uwal, touching on it. In spite of giving pressure, if child is not issued, they believe something religious profane is needed.⁵

The use of uwal and thoila (a jute sack) is not available in the Bodo society in present time. The jaginai nenai system is also found more or less. In spite of nenai, if child is not issued within 1 to 3 hours, they immediately shift to the hospital. In this regard use of both tradition and modern are found.

5.6. Naval cut (utumwi hanai):

As soon as child is issued, they cut naval of child with bamboo split (owa theul). They did not use scissor, blade and all. The naval is not allowed to cut widow or widower. If such people are allowed to cut, un-natural dead of child may be taken place. They believe having of bitter hand, sweet hand and sour hand of woman. So, the woman, whom they think 'bitter hand', is allowed to cut naval. If such woman is allowed, the naval of child dries quickly. The naval of new born baby is cut by a theul keeping on a shuttle (makhu) and remaining part of naval is buried in front of main house. Some people use to burry corner of their bari. At the time of placing naval at ditch it should be kept gently. But if it is dropped, child becomes "bagdaola baigra (coward) in future. The naval of child is tied by a cotton or muga thread. If child is male, the cord is tied for five times round and if female six times round.⁶

Nothing medicine is used at naval cut. The naval is cut keeping a three fingers' long. If naval is not dry within four to five days, dried earth or ash or dried spider (bema rungonai or vermilion) is put.

At present, they use scissors, blade, cutter knife and other instruments. The use of owa theul is abolished. The tradition rite is not followed among them. They used scientific technique and medicine. This is due to the development of economic condition, medical science, and education and govt. facilities available before them.

5.7. Bathing (thukhwinai):

The mother bathes newly born baby by with tepid / lukewarm water. If mother is unable, she does only formal and an elder woman or expert to bath does the bathing. The child is sprinkled with dwi gwthar (holy water) mixed with some dubri hagra, tulsi and a golden ring.⁷ During the time of bathing she recites the following words-

Nwi gotho, nwngha gwdw mamwn

Harsa na, bangal na jungalmwn

Da nwngh boro nokhor, Boro bimani gwrbwao

Jwnwm mwnbai.

Dinwiniphrai nwnng sase Boro subung janangsigwn.⁸

But earlier it was recited as

Nwi gotho nwnngba gwdw mamwn? Banggal na gangarmwn na nepalimwn, dinainiphrai nwnng bodo jabay!

After bathing child, a dry cloth is wrapped up and lay on a songrai. Such tradition is changed and irrespective of rich and poor they take frequent medical checkup and child is not placed at songrai, but on a suitable bed.

5.8. Spade beating (khodal damnai):

As soon as newly born baby falls at ground from mother's womb, child is observed whether sense is having or not. If child's movement of body is not found, to awaken him/ her or to have sense a woman whose husband or child is alive or not died of anybody, which they called 'khorogojongai' pickup a spade and beat it by a stick and mentions names of parents like, Merga, Gali etc.⁹ If child is male, she moves anticlockwise for five times and if female, seven times. During the beating of spade she says-

Nwi amwkha- amwkhini gwdansa

Sikhardw gwdanphisa

Sirimwndw angw phisa

Naidw gwdan songsar

Nwma-nwmpahaya boraibai.¹⁰

In spite of spade beating if child is not awaken they believe child is death and if comes sense, believe alive and named the child like khodal or khodali. Such tradition is abolished; they use scientific instruments to test the sense of child.

5.9. Child welcome (boraina lanai):

After bathing child, mother-in-law or if not, an elder woman, who attended in child issue offer a small puja in front of main house. A pair of betel nut and leaf, a top banana leaf, a glass of water, either tulsi or dubri hagra are required for this puja. If child is female a female chicken and if child is male a male chicken is required to offer in the name of god "duwari bwrai or duwari buri." A top banana leaf is placed in front of door of main house and everything as mentioned are placed on it. Then the woman says---

"Nwi duwari bwrai-duwari buri

Door kheonaini thakhai nwnngswrnw

Daosa mase hwnai jabai."¹¹

They believe, if this puja is not offered child cries off and on or some diseases like mwkhra kaia nangnai, stomach ache etc may infect to child.

But, this tradition is come to marginalize among them. A few examples are still found such doing in interior areas.

5.10. Offer at water (dwiao baonai):

They wash clothes and other items use in delivery at stream or river. They believe, if these dirty items are washed at stream or river or water, a puja should be offered in the name of khwina santhi, goddess of river/water. To back pardon and propitiate goddess khwina santhi, an offering is made, at gathwn to the bank of stream or water. A thuri (thatch plant) is planted, a pair of betel nut and leaf and a garland made of cotton and flower is hung at thuri. The woman who is going to wash cloth and other material says---

"Nwi bima khalai dwiphwn,

Gajri muwa sunai janwswi

Gajri damwn."¹²

And then, they wash materials used at child issue. Such washing and doing, offering puja to the bank of water is abolished. Now they wash at family well, hand pump motor. But such offering is found more or less in rural areas, in town it is completely vanished from them.

5.11. Consecration (tharnai):

In traditional or old bathou, newly born baby was believed profane by religion. Hence religious consecration was made, sacrificing animals at bathou altar with the help of an oja bwrai. But due to transition in religion the religious consecration is not made animal sacrifice. It is made praying and singing hymns, like-

Stayi- Nwi..... anangosai
Nwi.....swrjigiri Paligiri
Bwrai bathouni bandwnwini bandwjwng
Jwnwmlanai borobimani gwrwbikhayao
Gwdan gotho iyun jwlwini
Jabaybiyw borophisa boronokhorni I

Sethi ontora – Sijou gudiao bathousaliao
Boraibai najaobai nwnghisakhou jwng II
Mansi mohorai gwthar thangkhijwng I
Bathouni mung asarjwng
Dinwi gwthar khalarao
Apha gwthar sanao II

Nwithi ontora- Bwr bidwng apha aroj gabdwng
Jwng boybw khousewi nwngni serao
Dinwi gwthar khalar aphajwnwm sanao
Bwr hordwng bwr sarsridw
Iyun jiuni undwi gothoni
Thangnathanaini songsarao apha mulug songsaraoII³⁹

Etc and other hymns are sung in the name of religious consecration. But this system of praying and singing is a development in the last decade of 20th century, while old bathou was transform to new bathou.

5.12. Feast arrangement (dwisarnai):

There is no change in this system. In earlier time a grand offering was done and found same both in rural and urban areas. Generally after 7 days of child issue a grand feast is offered to the women who are attended. The pork, chicken, rice bear and other edible items are provided to them and they are honoured by giving a pair of betel nut-leaf and a *phali* (medium size *bodo* handkerchief) to each. At last both the parents bow down to the women and people, attended in *dwi Sarnnai* and everybody bless the couple (parents of child) and child (and give little amount of money to child in present time).

However, unfortunately, if child dies, after issue, a grand feast is offered to the people who helped the couple.

5.13. Naming (mung dwnnai):

The right of naming child was in the hands of grandfather or grandmother in earlier time and they named as they like. The name was not given up to 6 to 7 months or may be more than it. But at present, such system is no more. The father or mother selects or both select a name and keep(s) it. In ancient time, they took a letter only, looking a *panjika*. If parents are not educated, a person able to read and write is requested to see. Now a few educated people go to the *jyotishi* (astrologer) and select letter and names.

Earlier time there was a traditional belief about naming. If new born baby or child mortality frequently takes place to a person, then child's name should be named in bad name like- Swimakhi, Omakhi, Daokhi, Khakhreb, Rankhw or others.¹³ The god and goddess do not taken back, vice-versa. Such system is vanished from them.

5.14. Rice feeding (wngkham dwonai):

The wngkham dwonai rite is a recent origin of them. The child is not allowed to eat rice up to 6 to 12 months. A puja is offered and a grand offering is taken place. The child is first time feed rice and people attended in ceremony is also given. This first time feeding rice to child is known as "wngkham dwonai phwrbw".¹⁴ They offer a puja at bathou with the help of douri on this day.

In this ceremony, forecasting fortune of child is also done. Different items like flowers, earth, money, pen & pencil etc. are placed. The child is brought here and they see which one child touch first. If touches flower, they believe the child will be ritualistic, if touches the earth, the child will become a rich man, if touches the money, will love money, if touches book or pen or pencil, will become educated in future etc.

Such celebration of wngkham dwonai is found in town areas. This is also growing among the people, who are economically good in rural areas.

5.15. Ear Perforation:

Nothing celebration is done for ear perforation and it takes place during infant. While child grows it is perforated on nose. The ear or nose perforation is made only by an expert woman. The perforation is made only for female. But a male child is also perforated while he suffers from gonorrhea.

The tradition of perforation is not found in modern times. The male or female doctors are allowed to perforate and some are taken to beauty parlor.¹⁵

5.16. Food for mother:

The usual food is not allowed to mother after child is issued. For a month boiled foods are allowed. They believe some creepers are useful for increasing mothers' milk. So some creepers like dudhnala (gaikher goblong), khiphi bendwng etc are cooked with dry fish and given to mother.

But at present such traditional restricts are not available. They take suggestion from doctor, nurse and others and take some fruits and all.

5.17. Hair cutting (khanai sinnai):

The hair cutting (khanai sinnai) ceremony is performed for male child by them. Child's hair is not cut for a period of one or two years. Within this period a day is fixed and maternal uncle is invited for ceremonial cut. Maternal uncle cuts hair in presence of a few villagers and invited guests. A grand feast is provided to the attended people, where rice beer (jou rws), pork (oma bedor), chicken (dao bedor) and rice are important.

Now a days, they are giving up and a few economically sound are following it and is done in case of female child too. They believe, if hair is cut for two or three times it grows healthy. On the other hand, they also believe, if maternal touches or takes on arms he should pay a nominal money (1 rupee or as he likes). Otherwise his hands shiver in future for whole life. So tradition of maternal uncle pay system is still prevalent among them.

5.18. Puberty:

Regarding puberty they do not observe any special function. Generally mother takes special care for it and while puberty attains, girl uses to put dresses from waist to chest. In a few part of district they observe like Brahmins (Assamese people).

5.19. Offer for sale:

The tradition of nominal offer to sale and taking here and there was available among them. This rite is followed while frequent infant mortality is taken place to a particular couple. They believed, if nominal offer to sale is done, infant mortality does not happened to a particular couple and family gets rid from it.¹⁶ Either mother or father keeps a child on a

basket and carries on head and moves one village to another village. They bring back child to family and a puja is propitiated in family sacrificing chicken and taken back.

Such offering of puja in the name of infant mortality is completely vanished from their society. In such cases they take medical precautionary, adopt modern scientific techniques and medical treatment.

5.20. Birthday:

The tradition of birthday celebration was not prevalent among them. A few people who are educated, service holder and good economic conditions use to celebrate this ceremony in modern time and is converting to the tradition among them. On this day they offer puja as per the rite of their respective religion. The celebration behind, this day is due to the influences of other communities, economic development of family and conversion to other religion.

6. CONCLUSION

From the above it is to be noted that there is transition in respect of lifecycle related to birth. The pregnancy detection was taken on the basis of menstruation stop of a woman and mother-in-law or other family members were taken care of it. But in present time most of the women basically educated and residing in developed places use pregnancy test instrument. The pregnant women were not taken care in earlier time. At present, they are taken utmost care; frequent medical checkup and bed rest is given.

The jaginai nenai system is still found in some areas. The educated people directly take medical treatment facilities. The sebnai and bwlwhwhwnai systems are abolished. The utumwi hanai system is done using modern method and instrument. Thukhwinai is done in scientific way. Offer to sale, boraina lanai, dwiao baonai, are abolished.

The tradition of mung dwnnai, wngkham dwnai, and ear perforation, food for mother, khanai sinnai and puberty are changing to the trend of modern direction and old traditions are replacing by modern.

The wngkham dwnai and birthday celebration are not their tradition. These are influences of some other castes / tribes. These two systems are mostly developing them.

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