

Cultural Influence and Impact on Bodo Wedding Ceremony: A Brief Study

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Marriage is a universal institution of human society, that unite two male and female to form a new generation. In every culture, rites of marriage serve as a reflection of a community's values, history, and belief system. Marriage is called "*Haba*" in Bodo, it is a main socio-religious organization traditionally rooted in *Bathou* religion and manifested by different rites, customs, and community participation. Traditionally, they conduct the marriage through *Hathasuni* or *Hata Khurnai Haba*. They are monogamous, the polyandry form of marriage system is not followed by them. In present time, influence of other's cultures there can be seen among various aspects of Bodo traditional Marriage system. Due to the influence of other culture and impact of religious adoption, there is a large shifted has been seen in process of marriage system of the Bodos such; proper and post wedding rituals, used of dress and ornaments, cuisines, drinks etc. In this paper trying to highlight the marriage ceremony of Bodos and influence and impact with other culture.

Key Words: Bodo Marriage, Types, Stage, Religion adoption, Influence, Food, Dress

1.0 Introduction

Marriage is the legally relational knot of a community that union of two people as partner. The meaning of the marriage is very profound. The Oxford Dictionary defines marriage as "the state of being husband and wife" (p. 415) The marriage, that is called "*Haba*" in Bodo. There is a deeper meaning in the Bodo word "*Haba*". In Bodo '*ba*' means soil or earth and '*ha*' means to bear the 'soil' or the responsibility of the earth on the back." (Brahma D. K., A Study in Cultural Heritage of the Boros, 2009) Marriage is the custom of a man and woman marrying and

leading a life in the society. (Muchahary, 2011), The union of opposite-gender or agreement of two-person, male and female is the marriage. (Baro, 2017-18) Generally, marriage is a social institution thought which a man and woman establish a perpetual bond, integrating their lives and gaining social recognition.

The Assam is one of the second largest state in the Northeast India where there is found most of divers and vibrant culture. The society of Assam is noted for its multireligious and multicultural individualities. The state is famous by the cohabitation of various tribes and non-tribes from thousand years. The Bodo tribe also one of

them. The Bodos have some unique characteristics in several areas such as social customs, religious beliefs, ritual practices, marriage system, cultural identity and so on. However, in present time they are not so different from their Hindu neighbours. There is seen cultural influences in the traditional Bodo culture of the other neighbouring culture. The study specifically discusses the influence of other cultures on the Bodo marriage system and how it has been shaped by the Bodos over time as a result.

2.0 Objective:

The objectives of the present study

To study the Bodo marriage system and its stages.

To examine the key influences of other cultures on the Bodo marriage system.

3.0 Scope of the Study:

The study tried to explore the Bodo wedding ceremony and the changes under the influence of other culture. It is attempting to examine the traditional types of marriage, its stages, and rituals, focusing on changes in process of marriage, dress, food, and modern practices, while also acknowledging initiatives to restore traditional practices.

4.0 Area of the Study:

This study focuses on the wedding ceremony of the Bodo tribe of Assam, Northeast India. In this study the traditional marriage system of the Bodos and the external cultural influence, impact of religious adoption in the traditional marriage processes, use of dress, food, and its changes over time are taken as area of the study.

5.0 Methodology:

A descriptive method has been applied to fulfil the paper. Data have been collected from two main sources primary and secondary. Primary data have been collected from different age group, genders in the Bodo community through interviews. Secondary data have been collected from published book, journal, published and

unpublished theses, article, and online sources etc.

6.0 Discussion:

The Bodo marriage system is traditionally rooted in *Bathou* religion or Bathouism and community-based rituals, which it has undergone significant transformations due to the influence of Hindu, Christian, and the Western cultures. While maintaining the core tribal identity, Bodo marriage system has shifted from simple, communal events to more complex, ritualistic, and often expensive ceremonies, heavily influenced by mainstream cultures of India and western culture.

6.1 Types of Marriage:

There are six types of marriage system in Bodo society. These are follows-

- i. *Haba Gwlao* or *Swngnannwi Lainai Haba* (arrange marriage),
- ii. *Kharsonnai Haba* (girl initiated),
- iii. *Gwjjia Lakhinai* (groom service or matrilocal),
- iv. *Dongkha Haba* (widow or widower remarriage),
- v. *Bwnannwi Haba Khamannai* (marriage by capturing) and
- vi. *Dwnkhar Langnai Haba* (elopement) (Brahma D. K., 2015)

The last two of these six types of marriages have been unacceptable by the society, but sometimes it should be acceptable based on situation. Bhaben Narji a renowned cultural activist of the Assam, in his book "*Boro Kacharini Somas Arw Harimu*" also discusses about these six types of marriage system of the Bodos. Similarly, another scholars Mr. Meghnath Mwchahary, and Dr. Adaram Basumatary, has also mentioned the same. Among these six types of marriages, the *Haba Gwlao* or *Swngnannwi Lainai Haba* (arrange marriage) is accepted as most respectfully by the society.

6.2 Process of marriage:

Hathasuni Khurnai is the main traditional marriage process of the Bodo marriage system. (Narzi, 2014) This process is very simple and easy. Earlier the Bodos were conducted their six types of

marriage through *Hatha Khurnai* or *Hathasuni Haba*. In this system bride have purified with holly water after arriving groom's resident then allow to enter *Ishing* or kitchen of the *Noma No* and kneel down in front of *Mainao Bindw* (a place where goddess of wealth is worshiped) then salute to *Mainao Buri* or goddess Laxmi. At the same time the Oza or priest recite *Mantras* introducing the bride to God and goddess and an egg is turnaround five to seven times above the bride's head, which is known as *Daodwi Neusinai* in Bodo. After that bride cooks plain rice and chicken curry with rice flour without applying any ingredients like turmeric, oil, chilly and other spices. The rice and curry are kept in two *Hatha* (a kind of wooden bowl) separately and serve it to groom and villagers. Then the *Hathasuni Khurnai* celebration is come to end.

6.3 Stages of Bodo Marriage:

The marriage of the Bodos generally occur in three main stages. These stages construction the customary practices, especially in the arranged marriage or *Swngnamni Lainai Haba* which are held in high regards by the Bodo community. Dr. Mangal Singh Hazowary divided Bodo marriage into three stages. These are-

The first is the pre-marriage preparations centring round the selection of the bride,

The second is the marriage proper and

The third one is the post-marriage rites. (Hazowary, 2021)

Pre-Marriage:

This primary stage focuses on bride selection and formal agreements, mainly for arranged marriage. In this phase, there is some key rituals include "*Gongkhan Thebnai* or *Ashan Thenai*" leaving silver bangles at the bride's house as a proposal sign at the day selection of bride and settlement of the marriage, "*Goi Khaona*" or cutting areca nuts and betel leaves after the proposal has accepted, and "*Biban Langnai*" or delivering goods in the painted earthen pitchers by the "*Barlangpha*" to bride's house. Several traditional beliefs and superstitions are also important, including good signs and bad signs.

i) good signs: The bride selection party when reached to the bride's resident if the bride working some works like- drying or husking paddy, then it is believed that bride would be a fortunate, if cleaning or sweeping the courtyard or combing won hair, it would be a long life.

ii) bad signs: If the bride selection party come across caring death body and crossing of a mongoose (*Neolai* or *Neol* in Assamese) from right to left side or see the someone's digging soil with hoe then it is believed that either husband or wife may expire untimely or there may be separation between them. When it is consulting about the selection of bride, at that time if the selection party hear the thundering sound, then believed that the bride should be quick to anger and there is most possibility of quarrel between the husband and wife.

Proper Marriage:

The main ceremony, commonly known as "*Hathasuni Khurnai*" is take place at the bridegroom's residence through some rituals performed before the *Bathou* altar by lighting two lamp or *Gasha Jora*. The bride cooks plain rice and chicken curry with rice flour, then serves to the groom and villagers. A priest or *Douri*, recites mantras praying deities to bless the couple. The celebrations end with a feast of rice beer (*Zou* or *Zumai*) and pork (*Oma Bedor*) on the final day, highlighting community joy and togetherness.

Post-Marriage:

Following the marriage, "*Athmangla* or *Athimongol*" rites on the eighth day the couple return to the bride's natal home for a small ceremony with gifts like livestock (a pair of chicken), and sufficient quantity of tea, milk, sugar, puffed rice and two bottles of wine (*Zou Gisi* and *Gwran*) were given, though this rite is rarely practice now in the society. Other rites address situations such as early widowhood, known as "*Kbolar Gothaimy*" or inheritance issues to unpaid bride price.

7.0 Adoption of Other Religions and their Impact:

Religious worship is a part of the culture. Religion plays a major role in the disciplined

leadership of a society. It is through religion that certain customs arise within a society or community, and these principles are followed by the people of that society. Many customs, including births, marriages, and death, agriculture, festivals, etc., are associated with religion. The influence of other religions has played a profound role in the Bodo marriage system. In addition to the basic *Bathou* religion worship in the Bodo society, various religions like Brahma, Christian, Satsang, Hindu, etc. have been worshipped. Due to adoption such different religion, the practice of Bodo traditions has been seen shifting more along the religious aspect than the social aspect.

The Bodo marriage has been deeply accomplished through a long process. Many traditional rituals are performed quietly, from the time of the bride selecting to the proper marriage and the post marriage. Over time, the adoption and influence of other cultures there is can be seen more or less changes in some aspect of the Bodos wedding ceremony and as a result the change in the traditional marriage system cannot be ruled out. The effects of different aspects can be obtained by noting the changes in the Bodo marriage system. These effects are discussed in the following.

7.1 Brahma Dharma:

In the Bodo society, some people follow Brahma Dharma, a reformist tradition influenced by Hinduism. The tradition Bodo marriage rituals in the Brahma Dharma are some different from traditional *Bathou* Bodo marriage. Of course, they have not given up all the traditional customs of the pre-marriage ceremonies. In fact, many of the traditional customs associated with the pre-marriage ceremonies are being followed by them. (Brahma P. , 2017) The difference is emphasized only on religious distinctions. *Bathou* followers perform the marriage in front of the *Bathou* altar however; Brahma followers in front of *Puja Mandap*. Rather than Bodo traditional marriage rites *Hatasuni Khurnai Haba*, Brahma Dharma followers carry out the marriage through the Hindu spiritual practice of

Jagyahuti. A temporary *Puja Mandap* or wedding hall is arranged, and the bride and groom are married as the *Purabit* or priest chants mantras and offers oblations to the sacred fire. Interestingly, the hymn used during the wedding is actually a translation from the Sanskrit shlokas. They have replaced the Bodo traditional elements such as tea, puffed rice instate of *Zou* or rice beer and *Oma Bedor* or pork during ceremony.

7.2 Christianity:

Following the arrival of Christian Missionaries in the 19th century in Northeast India as well as Assam, a significant number of Bodos converted to Christianity. Bodo Christians give more priority to religion than any other social customs. Marriage is always held in high reverence as it is believed to be instituted by Christ. (Basumatary P. , 2021) The marriage is conducted according to church rules, even in their society, the Bodo traditional marriage cannot be seen. Instead of *Hatasuni Khurnai*, they appear to have married through the Christian religious system. The bride and groom are taken to the church and solemnized by a father or pastor, which is completely deferent from the traditional Bodo marriage system.

7.3 Bibar Bathou (A Reform Bathou Riligion):

Among the Bodos, a newly reformed *Bathou* religion is followed, which is called *Bibar Bathou* or *Gwthar Mwikhun Bathou*. This religion is something different from traditional *Bwli Bathou*. In the *Bwli Bathou*, people sacrifice eggs, birds and animals during the *Bathou* worship, and on the other hand in *Bibar Bathou*, instead of sacrificing birds and animals it is worshiped by offering flowers, mixed corn (prasad) etc. However, the wedding ceremony of *Bibar Bathou*, known as *Bathou Aroz Haba* is similar to the traditional Bodo marriage system. The rites of pre-marriage are same as the traditional but there is seen only difference the prayer song is sung during the proper marriage ceremony with the Bodo traditional musical instruments like- *Kham*, *Shiphung*, *Serza*, *Jotha* and *Jabkebring*. At the end of

proper marriage bride walking around the *Bathou* altar into anti clock direction five times carrying a small bucket of rice on her head with the groom to the *Isbing* of *Nomano*, which is called *Mainao Dikhangnai* or *Mainao Thisonnai*.

Instead of six types, five types of marriage systems are celebrated by the *Bibar Bathou* follower. These five types of marriages are a) *Haba Gwlao*, b) *Dauthu Haba*, c) *Gwrjia Haba*, d) *Dongkha Haba* and e) *Bihari haba*. (Mahasabha, 2020) Through these five types of marriage system, they are carry out the marriage ceremony. This follows the Bodo hymn-

Bathouni Bandw Bandwba

Sijou Siri Siriba

Shipbung Gudung Gudungba

Thaigir Khonga Khongba

Boroni Asharabw Asharba

English rendering: The Bathou altar has five bamboo rings, the Sijou (*Euphorbia nerifolin*) has five edges, elephant apple has five carpels, same as that the customs or rituals of Bodos is five (pregnancy, birth, puberty, marriage, and death).

In harmony with these five basic philosophies of the *Bathou* ritual, the *Bathou* worshippers perform five different rituals and marriage system. Instead of traditional marriage *Hathasuni Khurnai*, they conduct the marriage according to Hindu or Brahma religious customs. At present time the *Bathou Aroz Haba* is becoming popular among the *Bathou* religious Bodo community. It's a distortion of the traditional marriage system *Hathasuni Khurnai*. However, the *Hatha* (a kind of wooden bowl) is not used in this wedding, this kind of marriage has more similar to the marriage process of Brahma Dharma. (Basumatary D. A., 2013) This marriage pattern also resembles the marriage ethos of Assam's Vaishnavite-based Assamese.

8.0 Influence of Other Cultures on Bodo Marriage:

Over time, the adoption and influence of other cultures have caused changes in Bodo wedding ceremonies. The effects are visible in dress, food, cosmology, and modern practices.

8.1 Dress and Ornaments:

Like language, Dress plays an important role in identifying a community. The Bodo women's dresses *Dokhona*, *Phasra*, *Rege Regang* and the men's *Gamsa*, *Arnai*, *Gosla* etc. are identified the Bodo culture as well as community. Wearing of new attire is an integral part of the Bodo wedding customs. At Bodo weddings, the bride and groom wear traditional attire. The bride and two *Bwirathi* attendants are dressed in traditional garments known as *Dokhona Thaosi* in Bodo, which is often red, while the groom wears *Gamsa* and *Goshla*. In the Bodo society rumors can be heard saying that "the wedding would not be complete if there was no *Dokhona Thaosi*, and that the bride would not be given to the groom." (Informant: Sridhar Kachari, age 55 years, Bogoribari, Khoirabari, Udalguri) The influence of other cultures is evident in the wedding attire of the Bodos. Nowadays, instead of the traditional *Dokhona Thaosi*, and *Gamsa* there is used various design and colours *Dokhona* and *Gamsa* in the Bodo weddings.

In the Brahma marriage, the bride and her mate dose not wear the traditional red *Dokhona Thaosi*. Instead, they wear a white *Dokhona*, *Phasra* and blouse. The groom and the priest or *Purabit* also wear a white *Gamsa* or Dhoti with a kurta. This shift to white attire reflects influences from Sanskritization, mainstream Indian Hindu culture, and modernism.

In the *Bathou Aroz Haba* the bride and her mate and the *Bwirathi* wears yellow *Agor Gubwi Dokhona* and the groom and his mate wear green *Gamsa* and a white shirt. The rituals such as the groom applying vermilion on the forehead on the bride's forehead and showering blessings bridegroom as a witness to the sun and moon during the *Bathou Aroz Haba* and *Brahma* marriages reflect Hindu influence. In the Christian Bodo society, the groom wears

Western dress like pants, white shirt and overcoat. The bride often wears white gown. The marriage has been heavily influenced by Western or Christian culture.

Another notable aspect is the tying of the *mangalsutra* around the bride's neck during the wedding. The traditional Bodo wedding system did not have such a *mangalsutra*, as it originated from Hindu culture. Through the passage of time, however, the practice has been adopted in both *Bathou Aroz Haba* and *Brahma* marriage. Even today, many Bodo people do not consider a marriage proper unless the *mangalsutra* is tied during the wedding.

In contemporary Bodo marriage, a *mehendi* ceremony is now commonly held the day before the wedding. Similarly, the bride wearing a *Maang Tikka* on her forehead during the marriage ceremony has also become common. These customs reflect the influence of mainstream Indian cultures on the Bodo wedding traditions.

8.2 Foods:

The Bodos are usually a community that loves to eat meat and used alcohol. The practice of eating meats and drinking alcohol in social functions, festivals, picnics, etc., has been present in the Bodo society since ancient times. So, there is a famous Bodo folklore related to uses of meat and alcohol among them, viz-

Wngkhamni Ali, Bedorni Akhai

Zouni Fokerhi, Ma Jalu Ambu Khuga

English rendering: Dump of rice and meat, pond of wine, how much wish could eat.

It is clear from the above folklore that the Bodos used large quantities of meat, including wine, during the wedding or any other occasions. An example of this can be clearly found through the ritual of giving or feeding of the "*Oma Khobthang*" during the Bodo marriage. In the course of time, the Bodos began to abandon the use of meat and alcohol by converting in different religions. The use of meat and alcohol is not seen during marriage between the Bodos

of *Brahma* and *Satsang* traditions. It is seen vegetables and cheese or *Paneer* being given in lieu of fish and meat. The Christian society Bodos did not use alcohol but they used fish and meat during wedding ceremony or other occasions.

There is in the Bodo wedding ceremony it can be seen the replaced of the buffet system. Traditionally, the Bodos used plate made of banana leaf sheath, which is known as "*Dona*" in Bodo (*Khol* in Assamese) to take meal and they were eat by sitting on the floor. Now they used disposal paper plates in lieu of "*Dona*". The communal way of sitting on the floor and eating from banana leaf sheaths is being replaced by the Western style of used dining table and standing buffet.

Nowadays, in the Bodos wedding there have seen the use of a variety of extracurricular dishes such as green salad, *Papad*, *Rasgulla* or sweet desserts, *Dahi* or milk curd, etc., along with fish and meat. This kind of sweetness, sweetening of milk at weddings is a culture of the Indian Bengali community. It is noteworthy that under the influence of Bengali culture, the Bodos also started using these additional foods in the diet of the wedding.

After taking a meal, chewing of betel nut is a habit of the Bodos. After the wedding meal, it is customary to have a betel nut from bride's hand. There is a folk song among them of the marriage ceremony related to taking betel nut-

Goi Dedere Phathwi Sinari

Daobokhi Baidi Sunwi

Daothu Khoro Baidi Daba

Khaoregang Khaobai, Jaregang Jabai

Sona Mukhi Khuga, Mwina Mukhi Rao.

English rendering: Areca nuts of the small in size, betel leaves of the best quality, lime as white as ordure of the white heron, with the knife of the size of a dove's head, *Bwiratis* have cut the areca nuts in abundance and all have eaten, after eaten areca nut and betel leaves mouth like golden

colour and talking in sweet voice like Maina bird (*Gracula Indica*).

Nowadays, the distribution of areca nut and betel leaves is reducing during the traditional Bodo wedding. In lieu of *Bhuna Jeera* or roasted cumin seeds are being used, an influenced from different elite cultures.

8.3 Zodiac signs and Horoscopes:

The Bodos did not have a marriage system based on the zodiac sign and the ascendant in earlier. With the passage of time, under the influence of other popular cultures and religion, the Bodos have also begun to decide marriage based on the zodiac signs of the bride and groom, and to choose the wedding date and exact time according to the *lagna*. This system is a relatively new addition to the Bodo marriage tradition, adopted under the influence of other Indian culture.

8.4 Influence of Globalization and Western Culture:

In the present day, globalization has brought together different corners of the world and the communities who does not have any kind of influenced of modernity in the past days. Now, they are coming together and living as same region by the help of electronics and social media viz. Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, TV, Radio etc. The influences of globalization and digital media have reshaped the aesthetic and social structure of the Bodo culture and weddings ceremonies. While the main rituals might remain, the wrapping of the event has shifted significantly toward Western and pan-Indian standards.

Traditionally the Bodos invited the villager and relatives by physical visit with offered *Goi-Phathwi Zora* (areca nut and betel leaf) to the ceremony. In present day, the traditional invitation method of them replaced by digital cards and WhatsApp invitations.

Traditional Bodo weddings were held in the courtyard with the decor of simple bamboo and banana structures which is known as "*Sainasali*" in Bodo. Influenced by the Western event management, weddings now feature colour

themes, floral arches, and elaborate stage backdrops that similar to the Western and urban Indian weddings.

The increase of social media has introduced other elite culture as well as Western style professional documentation that was never a part of traditional Bodo culture. Historically, Bodo couples did not have a public romantic courtship phase and there was no tradition of taking photographs at the Bodo weddings. Now, couples go to scenic locations, often wearing Western formal wear of fusion outfits, to create cinematic films and photo albums.

9.0 Conclusion:

The topic: "**The Influence of Other Culture in the Wedding Ceremony of the Bodos: A Study**" It can be made clear in the end that Bodo marriage is a social institution, by which the marriage of two people, male and female, is tied to by a hierarchical system. That's what the Bodos call Haba. The word Haba has deep meanings embedded in it and is mainly composed of two basic words, *Ha* and *Ba*. The meaning of the *Ha* is the land or the world, and the meaning of the *Ba* is to bear the 'soil' or the responsibility of the earth on the back. That is, to carry the world on its back, or to step into the new world. The Bodos, like other festive celebrations, also conduct the wedding with great pomp and vigour through social rituals. There are usually six types of marriage system seen among them. Among these, interrogation marriage system, the .- i. *Haba Gwlao* or *Swngnanwi Lainai Haba* (arrange marriage), ii. *Kharsonnai Haba*, iii. *Gnrjia Haba*, iv. *Dongkha Haba*, these four types of marriage that are accepted, while i. *Bwnanwi Haba Khamnai* and ii. *Dwnkhar Langnai Haba* these two types of marriage are not accepted by the society. The Bodos administer the marriage through the traditional *Hatakurnai Haba* or *Hathasuni Haba*. There are a number of customs that are followed between the Bodos, from the time choosing bride, goes to see the bride and bring to the groom's house and wed. These policies implemented in the Bodo marriage have seen the influence of other

communities over time. The influence of other cultures can be seen in the Bodo marriage rituals, dress, food, drink, uses of cosmetics, and the use of various materials during marriages, etc. Due to these other cultural

influences, some of the Boro marriage traditions have seen major shifts. Meanwhile, the educated Bodo youths are seeing an attempt to revive traditional systems.

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