

Marriage System Among The Boro-Kacharis

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Abstract:

Marriage creates new social relationships and reciprocal rights between the two new people, between each and the kin of the other, and establishes the status of the offspring's when they are born. The Boro word for marriage is 'Haba'. The Boros have a very high regard and dignified concept of chastity and they live by it. The Boro-Kachari society is patriarchal with a few features of matriarchal society. As a rule, endogamy is absent in Boro-Society. One cannot marry a girl from a cognate family. Although they are exogamous marriage with a girl from non-tribal communities is not encouraged by the society. It is considered to be a luxury. One can marry a girl from the same clan, Likewise, a boy from a Bosumatary clan is free to marry a girl from any clan. Marriage between Hindu Boros and Christians is not strictly prohibited. Usually, the married girl is bound to accept the religion of her husband. Cross-cousin marriage is strictly prohibited. In this paper an attempt will be made to discuss the different marriage forms among the Boro-Kacharis and to analyze the factors influencing the Boro-marriage system on the Assamese Society.

(*Keywords : Marriage, Society, Culture, Assamese*)

Introduction:

The Boros or the Boro-Kacharis are the most distinctive section of the different ethnic groups settling in the North Eastern part of India particularly in the Brahmaputra valley. Sidney Endle first used the terminology '*kachari*' in his ethnographic account on the Boros. Scholars like Grierson used the term '*Bodo*' and '*kachari*' to refer to this ethnic group in Assam. Grierson in 1903 identified the origin of the Boros from the Indo-Mongoloid stock belonging to the Tibeto-Burman Language family. Racially they belong to the Mongoloid stock of the Indo-Mongoloids or Indo-Tibetans. A section of the Boros migrated towards the east and crossed the river Brahmaputra, got settled in the North Cachar Hills district. Gradually, with the passage of time many changes crept in their language and culture and they acquired a new identity called the Dimasas. Some of them moved further and in course of time got crystallized into distinct communities such as Morans, Borahis, Chutias, Thengal Kacharis, Sonowal Kacharis, etc., inhabiting the eastern part of Assam.(S.K. Brahma,1992:

4-5) In order to understand the social processes functioning in a society, it is important to know the socio-cultural milieu of the society in which they are rooted. Thus, to get the necessary insights of the Boro distinctiveness, it is essential to have some acquaintance with the marriage system of the Boro society.

Objectives:

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- i. to study the different marriage forms among the Boro-Kacharis;
- ii. to analyze the factors influencing the Boro-marriage system on the Assamese Society

Methodology:

There are two types of sources for preparing this paper, which are primary sources and secondary sources. The data are collected from various published books on marriage system among the Boro-Kacharis, periodical evidence of important journals, research paper and newspaper.

Marriage system among the Boro-Kacharis:

Marriage creates new social relationships and reciprocal rights between the two new people, between each and the kin of the other, and establishes the status of the offspring's when they are born. The Boro word for marriage is 'Haba'. The Boros have a very high regard and dignified concept of chastity and they live by it. The Boro-Kachari society is patriarchal with a few features of matriarchal society. As a rule, endogamy is absent in Boro-Society. One cannot marry a girl from a cognate family. Although they are exogamous marriage with a girl from non-tribal communities is not encouraged by the society. It is considered to be a luxury. One can marry a girl from the same clan, Likewise, a boy from a Bosumatary clan is free to marry a girl from any clan. Marriage between Hindu Boros and Christians is not strictly prohibited. Usually, the married girl is bound to accept the religion of her husband. Cross-cousin marriage is strictly prohibited. Of course, parallel cousin marriage is permitted by the society, while polygamy is rare, polyandry is totally absent. (M.M. Brahma, 1986: 16)

There are six types of marriage among the Boro-community and the last two are not regarded as legal in the community

- (1) Marriage in accordance with the social system of the community (Songnay Haba).
- (2) The system of marriage where the second husband comes to live, with a widow in her first husband's family (Dongkha Haba)
- (3) The system of keeping a boy in the house of the girl's father (Gorgia)

- (4) The system of marriage wherein girls willingly enter the house of a boy (Kharsonnay)
- (5) The system of marriage where in girls are forcibly taken to the bride-groom's house (Raikhas - Haba)
- (6) The system of marriage where in girls elopes and get married. (Donkharnay)

The last two systems of marriage are not legal and accepted in the society, with the advent of education, the Boros have become enlightened and they have discarded the above mentioned systems of marriage. Marriage by kidnapping a girl prevalent in the past now has been strictly prohibited. But the system of marriage where in girls willingly enter the house of their beloved ones and surrender themselves for marriage (Kharsonray) is still in the society.

Some interesting systems of marriage existed in Darrang district. When a Boro-boy attained marriageable stage, the bride chosen by the boy was forcibly taken to the Boy's house. Similarly, when a girl attained nubility, a boy chosen by the girl was forcibly taken to the girl's house. Now a days, these systems have become absolute.

There is no system among the Boros to show horoscope to the astrologers. They fix the day according to the custom of the society to search out a bride. The parents of the bride-groom go in search of the bride. Seeing a dead body on the road side, digging land with a spade and cutting bamboo with a hatchet are regarded as ominous signs while going to see a girl. (B. Narzi, 1985: 66)

In the Boro-society, there is the problem of choice also. Generally a slim-figured girl with long nose and long and dark hair is chosen by the groom. Similarly, a tall boy with a slim waist is chosen by the girl. Moreover, the choice of a Boro-bride is beautifully reflected through the following Boro-folk song.

" O my Godly father,
Do not send me to a house,
Where a crow enters and a kite enters,
Please give me in marriage to a family
Where you find a Store-house full of grain
And a cow-shed full of cows." (P.C. Bhattacharjya, 2007: 13)

At present, marriage among the Boros is performed according to two systems viz;

1. according to Brahma rules.
2. according to traditional system.

The Brahmas perform their marriage ceremony reciting mantras in Sanskrit but now a days, the Boros appoint Purohits (Priests) from among themselves. They have translated the mantras into the Boro language.

On the very day of the marriage of the Brahmas the girls only sing their songs. They simply take tea and sweets. The Brahmas do not solemnize the marriage ceremony with pomp and grandeur. On the other hand, those who perform the marriage ceremony according to the traditional system spend a lot of money by arranging great feast varieties - chicken and rice beer. It is said that a Boro-marriage continued for seven days and seven nights. Hence, most of the Boro-families ruined themselves financially by the time marriage ceremony ended. The Brahmas have discarded most of the tribal customs and have adopted Brahmanical rites including performance of Jajna, abstinence from non-vegetarian food, drinks and from dance and merry-making. Even the marriage is performed in the house of the bride as in the case of other Hindus. (M. Choudhury, 1988: 27)

A few post-marriage customs are also prevalent in the Boro communities today

'Khalari-Gathai' is the act of returning the bride and the bride price (malsa). In Darrang and Kamrup districts, there was a system of taking money from Rs. 100/- to Rs. 1000/- for every bride from the boy's house. Now a days, these practices have changed from place to place. The educated Boros do not demand the amounts of money for bride's. (B. Narzi, 1985:66) A Boro-widow may claim her 'Malsa' (bride-money) if she prefers to go to her father's house. Unlike in other communities, it is the bride not the groom who has a price in the Boro-Kachari society. Everything is guided in their society by a strong patriarchal element with the male dominating everywhere. The groom does not go to the bride's house for wedding it is the bride who is brought to his. The payment of bocy price for the bride and the gifts given and respect, paid by the groom to the eiders of the bride's family with pigs, meat and wine reflect the domination of the male by the female in the Boro-society.

'Mamai Mara' Tihe uncle of the deceased niece has to receive the bride -price of her female child in case it has not been payed during her marriage.

'Athmangal' is performed on the eight day of the girl's marriage. Only a few selected relatives are invited for a feast on the occasion. The couple leaves for the bridegroom's place after receiving gifts by the bride's relatives

Divorce takes place in a Bodo society by tearing a betel-leaf into two pieces. This is known as *fathwi bisinai leng* .The betel -leaf is kept in the presence of the village elders in the house of the Gaon bura. However, if the reasons for divorce are not very serious from husband's side, he has to pay for her livelihood. If the woman is been divorced for her unfaithfulness, the entire money spent on her by her husband's side is to be returned. Once the amount is paid she is free to live with her new husband. (M. Choudhury, 1988: 26-27)

Influence of the Boro-marriage system:

The influence of the Boro-marriage system in the Assamese Society is also noticeable in respect of widow marriage. In the Assamese Society, widow marriage was prevalent among the non-Brahmin classes particularly in rural areas. Sometimes, some of the non-Brahmins married the widows of the Brahmin community. They were known as 'Borias'. They were looked down upon by the society. They were regarded as low-caste people in the society. At present, although widow marriage is permitted by law, remarriage of widow is not looked upon with favour by high caste Hindus viz; Brahmins and Kayasthas. Hindu widow remarriage is gaining ground with the change in the conservative outlook and spread of education. (Darrang District Gazetteer, 1978:126-127)

Although the marriage ceremony among the Hindus is performed according to *Jajurveda* citing mantras, some customs are observed in different parts of Assam, of the light types of marriage mentioned in the *Smritis*, the Brahma form of marriage is accepted in the Hindu society. Besides, the local customs observed in different parts of Assam, a few other practices such as *Dara-Agacha* i.e. putting up a barricade against the bride groom's party by the men of the bride's party, *Angathi-khela* i.e., the playing of a ring in the presence of young boys and girls concealing the ring in the heap of rice are taken from the tribal society.

The Assamese marriage system is a composite one of Sastric and local elements. In the system of *ghar-jamai* or *Chapaniya* or *Dhoka* instead of the girl, the young man stays in his father's in-law house either for a certain period or for the entire life. This custom is not favoured, rather looked with disdain in former days. This is also one of the instances of the influence of Boro-marriage ceremony upon the Assamese marriage ceremony. (S.N. Sarma, 1989: 226-228)

Similarly, the *Jorandiya* or *Tekeli -diya* ceremony i.e., leaving a party from the bride groom's house with clothes, ornaments, food stuff and a sacramental jar of water, 'Nowani,' the nuptial festivities of taking ceremonial bath by the bride and the bridegroom, the 'Gathian-khunda' ceremony in which a sweet scented aromatic root is powdered and put on the head of bride, offering eggs to the bride and the bridegroom etc. have been accepted by the Assamese from the local people belonging to the Mongoloid stock. (Bilal. Gogoi, 1986:45)

Conclusion:

At present the Boro society has undergone many changes. There are only a few marriages that are performed in the traditional manner. Due to the various factors that led to

mass movements in this part of the state. People have mixed reactions to deliver when it come to asserting their own stand on the issue of orientation, involvement and apathy to the situation prevailing around. Most of the people who have been converted to some other religious faith at the core of their hearts do still follow the traditional religious philosophy. The Boro-Christians wear the same traditional *dakhana* but put a veil on their heads as a part of European culture. The customs followed in the premarriage rituals are strictly traditional. In some places it is the standard Assamese way of celebrating marriage except for a few interludes in the marriage that are strictly Boro in nature.

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