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A Study on the Transition in Housing System of the Bodos' of Assam

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Abstract:

The Bodos (/bɔdɔs/) belong to the Mongolian group of people who are described to be the inhabitants of a country north of the Himalayas and West China. They speak language of Tibeto-Burman language family. They had rich in culture, traditions, belief and practices and are changing in modern time. Their housing system is changing in modern time due to factors and these factors have led to change in housing system. The ising(/isɪŋ/), okhong(/ɔkʰɔŋ/), and khophra(/kʰɔpʰra/) system is not available and the rituals related to housing are abolished. At present, it is obvious some RCC, building, and houses of different designed.

Keywords: *Housing, Nomano(/nɔmanɔ/), ising(/isɪŋ/), okhong(/ɔkʰɔŋ/), and khophra(/kʰɔpʰra/) and Oja(/ɔza/).*

1. Introduction

The Bodos belong to the Mongolian group of people who are described to be the inhabitants of a country north of the Himalayas and West China. They speak language of Tibeto-Burman language family. The history of Assam evinces the fact that the Bodo-Kacharis are the indigenous people of Assam since the time immemorial.

Nowadays, they are one of the most important aboriginal groups and widely scattering in the districts of Bodoland Territorial Council consisting of the four districts – Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baska and Udalguri. Besides these districts a number of inhabitants have been scattered in the district of Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, North-Lakhimpur, Demaji, Sonitpur, Darrang, Kamrup, Nalbari, Barpeta, Bongaigaon, Dhubri, Goalpara, Nagaon, Morigaon, Golaghat and Karbi Anglong of Assam which under India.

However, culture is just like a backbone of a particular society. It helps in identifying a particular society/ people. The Bodos are rich in their culture and tradition. Further, the transition is found in the Bodo culture. The trend of **Bodo** cultures are changing in modern time due to the influences of other communities, education, globalization and modernization. For example, in housing, they had certain rituals as well as processes of construction. In traditional way they build their houses as one-storied and the walls are made of **engkhwr** (/eŋkʰur/reed) or split bamboo and the roof of **thuri** (/tʰuri/thatch) fastened by cane or **theuol** (/tʰeuol/ a rope of bamboo split) and only main house (**noma no**) is different from all those types. The main house is made, to the north side of the yard and this house is divided into three rooms. These rooms are named, like **ising** (first room from east) **okhong** (middle) and **khophra** (last from east). The **ising** is used for keeping **mainao burwi** (/mainɔ/ /burwi/ cereas) as well as for cooking, middle room is used for eating and the last one as bedroom for head of the family. Such uses and process of construction is completely abolished.

It needs to be mentioned here that many anthropologists have studied about the Bodo culture in their articles, journal, books and newspapers. Reverend Sidney Endle (1990) gave a detail account of culture, tradition, rituals, moral etc. of their traditions along with folk tales and grammar. Bhaben Narzee (1971) wrote a book “Boro-Kacharir Samaj Aru Sanskriti ” in Assamese. The book can be considered as a document of the Bodo identity, customs, traditions, folk literature, laws, morals, festivals, performing art and many more. Many writers also studied about some parts of the Bodo culture both in materials and non-materials. However, the study has not been done in respect of the transitions of their culture. So it has been made to study about the transitions in housing system of the Bodos.

It is also obvious that the **Bodos** culture is being studied by various scholars based on different aspects, but the transition in housing has not been studied yet. So, the work will focus about transition in the **Bodos** housing system. It will help the people to know past and present of the Bodo housing system. This will have educative and socio cultural value in present time and will help to know the research scholars as well as people who want to know it.

2. Objectives

- i. To understand traditional housing systems of the Bodos
- ii. To highlight the traditional rites and rituals related to their housing system
- iii. Transition in Bodo Housing system.
- iv. To examine the causes of transition in culture
- v. To give a few dynamic views on transition in housing system

3. Hypothesis

The transition in housing system of the Bodos provides a wider scope to make comprehensive and all embracing study which covers everything concerning the life, belief, world view practices and activities of the folklore.

- a. Transition in material culture is obvious
- b. Modern folklore is growing on.
- c. Transition in rituals related to housing.
- d. Folk beliefs regarding housing system are eliminated
- e. Transition has led to the growth of another modern structure.
- f. Transition has changed the way of housing among them.

4. Methodology

The work tries to focus the Bodos traditional housing system and its transitions. Most of the information is gathered by observing housing system in the Bodo villages and formal discussion with knowledgeable persons. The field study was conducted for the year of 2013- 14.

The various books of the Bodos social systems and customary laws, Bathou religious books have been collected from the Bodo villagers from the actual life situation. So the method of field source collection is based on actual field situation by observation and interview. Audio-visual equipment was used for collecting material of traditional practices and rituals. However in the study both the primary and secondary sources were used.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. The Bodos' Housing System

The Bodos called the house, *no* (/nɔ/). Their traditional housing is strictly abided by some traditional rituals and laws. Their traditional houses are made in *hadab* (/hadab/) and some are *bwisang* (/buisan/), made by mud and thatched by thatch. These include three steps, namely, plot selection, site selection and construction.

5.1.1. Plot Selection



Figure 1: Traditional Bodo Housing System

First, plot is selected by knowing the sooth, suitable and unsuitable for future. Suitable or unsuitable is known by their traditional belief. The place where the houses will be constructed is selected during winter. In the evening of winter a male person will stand at plot. While he feels hot at the time of standing, plot is not suitable for constructing houses and if not feels hot then it is suitable and select plot using traditional method.

Another method is, the centre place of land is un-earth grasses, clean and plaster with the mud. In evening, a glass of water is taken in a brass glass, a small branch of leafy *tulsi* (/t^hulsi/) is taken, pair of betel nut and leaves, flowers, rice, sugar etc is kept on top part of banana leaf and covered it with *don* (/dɔn/ a kind of basket, made of cane/bamboo). This is done on the day of Saturday or Tuesday. Next morning whole items are observed, if everything, remains as it is, then, they believe the plot is suitable. The things are remained scattering here and there, the plot is not suitable, if people build houses at such plot, and their whole life will go on troubles. There may be suffering from diseases, quarrel between/among the husband and wife, family members.

Another process, where houses are going to construct, centre part of the land is dig out up to two feet or more and soil of is tasted. If land is tasted bitter and sour, they believe land is not suitable for construction and tasted sweet, they think it is suitable. In such a way, select suitable and un-suitable for construction.

But, such tradition is changed in modern time due to the development of education, science and technology, change in attitudes of the people. The people of the district are not following this tradition. Only a few people offer a puja (/p^huza/) in the name of god, not to create any disturbances in their family and well-being in future.

5.1.2. Site Selection

The selection of site is done by an *oja* (chant man). They believe there are some *mwdai lama* (/mudaj lama/ unseen God’s ways) along which god and goddesses travel. If the *mwdai lama* (of god and goddesses) is blocked by construction of houses, the god and goddesses create un-happy among the family members. Under such situation they may create sudden stomach pain, chest pain, sudden death of family members etc.

So in selection of site, carefulness is taken and an *oja* is called and taken to the site of selected plot of land. He selects the plot and demarcates pointing by *khunthia* (/k^hunt^hia/ small bamboo fence). He demarcates, where the different houses to be built. He says not to change the *khunthias* fenced by him and suggests not making the houses in other site and built within this area. The site is distributed, *nomano* (main house) to the north, *bakhri* (/bak^hri/granary) to the east, *soura* (/suora/ house for guest and servant) to the south. The most traditional site of *soura* is distance from the yard.

Un-known people, whom they think profane by religion, are not allowed to enter at yard and for the purpose of staying of such people it was constructed far from yard. But this system is abolished due to the development of education and site of construction is placed to south attached to yard. *Sikhla thagra no* (/sik^hla t^hagra nɔ/ house for family members, like daughter, maid etc) to west, at centre an open place is kept which is called *sithla* (/sit^hla/ yard). At yard of north-east corner of an alter is prepared by making place high with soil, planting a euphorbia-splendens (sizuo), *tulsi*(t^hulsi), placing small rock in middle, fenced by five round of bamboo split and using eighteen bamboo split post this is known as *bathou*, the only one traditional religion of the *Bodos*. *Dao gogra*(dao gɔgra/, *bwrma*(bwrma/) *gogra*, *oma*(ɔma gɔndra/) *ɔgondra*, *mwswo goli* (musuo gɔli/ cow shed), *bon jabgra*(bɔn jabgra/), *bwrma gogra*(bwrma gɔgra/), are constructed near to human residence. Cow shed / buffalo shed are made far from human residence. *Bwrman gogra* (goat shed) / *dao gogra* (a hut for chicken) is constructed to the north-west corner of yard.



Figure 2: Semi modern Bodo Housing

The transition in site selection is not found in modern time. They do not faith in *mwdai lama*, site are selected based on the size of the plot of land. The changes in the structure of education, religion, attitude of the people, and reason for unacceptable, philosophy of people, modernization and globalization have created transition in this aspect to the people.

5.1.3. Construction

The traditional style of Bodo house is one-storied and the walls are being made of *engkhwr* (reed) or split bamboo and roof of thatch fastened by cane or *theuol* (a rope of bamboo split) and only main house (*nomano*) is different from all those types. Each hut commonly contains two rooms, one for eating and other for sleeping. The houses are generally being constructed by the Bodos, very close to each house keeping a yard in the centre. The main house is made, to the north site of the yard having and not having veranda and this house is divided into three rooms. These rooms are named like; *ising* (1st room from east) *okhong* (middle) and *khophra* (last from east). *Ising* is used for keeping *mainao burwi* (ceres) as well as for cooking, middle room is used for eating and the last one for sleeping head of the family. Out of these three rooms in *ising* except the family members, other persons are not allowed to enter. However, flexible that, bachelors are allowed to enter who are in same faith, have not illicit sexual relation, and ever have not food in the house of Christian, Muslim and other than the Bodo.

Sl. No.	Informant	Age (in year)	Place
1	Rameswar Boro	65	Dangdupur, Udalguri
2	Ananda Goyary	55	Purani gorairi, Udalguri
3	Mebro Borgoyary	65	Maithabari, Patgaon, Kokrajhar
4	Amarendra Basumatary	65	Northmaoriagaon, Kakormari, Kokrajhar
5	Sameswar Narzary	80	Northmaoriagaon, Kakormari, Kokrajhar
6	Thaneswar Basumatary	53	Northmaoriagao, Kakormari, Kokrajhar
	Many more . . .		

Table 1: List of Respondents



Figure 3: Modern Housing System.

Another type of house constructed by the Bodo is *bakhri* (granary). This is constructed to the east; a few of them construct a little north-east parallel to north-south. The *bakhri* (granary) is made in the form of *sambangla* (*/sambangla/in their word*) having only one entrance without any windows. The wall of the *bakhri* is made of bamboo split or reed by plastering of mud and floor is made 3 to 4 feet high by laying bamboo poles and *seren* (bamboo plank). The sides of the floors are extended by bamboo poles and *seren*. This extended site is known as *nagan* (*bakhri /nagan/*).

They cultivate mainly *maisali* and *asu* paddies in two seasons. Whatever the *maisali* and *asu* paddies reap are kept in upper part of the granary for the use of whole year and lower part of the granary is used for keeping fire wood, agricultural items like plough, yoke, spade, *hasini*, *beda*, *mwi*, and others. The next house is constructed to the west of yard. This house is called *swabni no* by them and this is divided into two rooms. One room is known as *soura*, which is used for sitting and resting for guest and another is used for sleeping of young members of family.

The last one is *mwswo goli* (cow shed) which is constructed to the south of yard. This house is generally constructed without wall. Except these above houses some other house is also made for servant within the campus looking for suitable site and some small huts are made for keeping domestic animals like, *dao gogra*, *bwrma gogra*, *oma gondra*, *bon jabgra*, etc. These houses are made in small size, making *bwisang* (chang in Assamese) and small entrance is given to each house for coming out and into of the animals, no windows are made. These houses are thatched by *thuri* (a kind of jungle use for roofing). A *sosma* (a spectacle of bamboo) is made and tied to the *khami* (bamboo split). A folk believe is seen for the purpose of tight a bamboo spectacle and is to save their house from storm and tempest.

6. Policy Implications

The Bodos are Mongoloid people and they had their distinct culture and identity which made them different from other Aryan people. But in present time such systems are changing and acculturation is found to some extent. In case of housing their style, type and method of constructions were different. The ising, okhong, khopra system was mandatory and some rites and rituals, religious aspect were involved in it.

Due to the development of architecture, construction technology, economics and other factors as well as transition in religion, the old methods and rituals are changed. They do not construct the houses in traditional way and traditional type is abolished in modern time. So it can be preserved by creating a visual dictionary of it. The materials required for the construction of traditional Bodo houses are mainly based on items available from nature and less expensive. So the people who are economically backward can be encouraged and suggested to follow the traditional system.

The young generation should be aware of the knowledge, rites and rituals of construction of bodo traditional housing system. If they would have such knowledge among them, and the knowledge would be handed down from one generation to another, the gap of knowledge would not be appeared; the traditional housing would not be eliminated among them.

The traditional housing systems should be preserved in museum or somewhere, where it is possible, time to time discussion and cultural exhibition should be made. The departmental govt. should try to bear such responsibilities and then the traditional housing system of the Bodos' would be remained among them along with modern one.

While the preservation and revitalization of the traditional Bodo housing systems would be made this would be helpful in future for the research scholars and which would be educative value.

7. Conclusion

Their housing system is changing in course of time. The mixing up of traditional and modern is available. The strict traditional system like selection of plot, selection of site and style of construction is not followed by them as tradition. Selection of plot of land, knowing suitable and unsuitable is not followed in the society. They choose the plot of land according to the choice of their mind and look for suitable, communication, better facilities, society surrounded in the areas.

The traditional method of selection of site of land is not followed and such folk belief is eliminated from them. The selection of site is made as they like and their mind accepts suited for it. The traditional Bodo house, generally being constructed by them is *nomano* or main house containing *ising*, *okhong* and *khophra*, *bakhri* (granary), *swnabni no*, *soura*, *mwswo goli* (cow shed), *dao gogra*, *bwrma gogra*, *oma gondra*, *bon jabgra no*, *wngkham songgra* are changing.

Even in village too the most traditional one is not build by them. But most tradition one is completely vanished from them, like *ising*, *okhong* and *khophra* system. Some people even do not make main house, some are making in two rooms only. In towns and cities they are constructing RCC houses, buildings and in different forms adopting high architect.

The reason for changes in traditional system is because of, abolished of natural items (like thatch, wood, jungle, forest product), development of education, development of architecture, influences of others, economic development, mind set, feelings of unsuitable, traditional systems are not fit for modern time, available of goods and materials for modern one and globalization.

Semi- traditional houses are available in village areas and they follow it to some extent, like made the wall either by engkhwr or bamboo split, install the post either by wood logs or cemented posts, make either bang low or not, thatched either by thatched or thin sheet.

The Bodos those who are educated and rich they are following modern method of construction, like building, half wall, RCC. The most traditional housing is completely abolished. The construction of *soura* far from yard is abolished and houses are not constructed as earlier. Somebody makes in L size or some are U size. The one storey construction is also given up by them.

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