

## Women Representation in Concerning the Rites of Child Birth in Social Folk Customs of the Bodos

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**Abstract:** *This paper attempts to explore women's participation and representation on symptoms of pregnancy, carefulness and restrictions, child birth and umbilical cord cutting, placenta burial, adulterate cloth washing, purification, name giving to the new born baby, puberty etc. in the Bodo society. They follow the rites of traditional customs of the society and co-operate with each other during the time of child birth. Basically, the senior old women of the village or neighbours those who have husband take part actively in this ceremony whereas widow women are restricted to participate in the same.*

Keywords: Bodo, women, rites, tradition, folk, customs

### Introduction

The Bodo speakers racially belong to the Indo-Mongoloids. The terminology i.e. Indo-Mongoloids defines at once their Indian connection and their place within the cultural milieu in which they found themselves 'as well as' their racially affinity. The area of characterisation for the primitive Sino-Tibetan speech appears to have been North-Western China between the head –waters of the Huang Ho and the Yang –tsze kiang rivers (Chatterji, 1974). According to the classification given in the Linguistic Survey of India, the Boro or Boro kachari, which is described in this analysis, belongs to the Boro(Bodo) sub-section of Bodo-Naga section under the Assam-Burma group of the Tibeto-Burman branch of Sino-Tibetan or Tibeto-Chinese speech family (Grierson, 1903). The Boro social structure is primarily patriarchal with a few elements of matriarchal characteristics (Bhattacharya, 2007).

At present, majority of the Bodos are found in the state of Assam situated in the north eastern region of India. They live mainly in villages and agriculture is the main source of their livelihood. The Bodo women engage in various activities and perform their duties accordingly. Over and above their household activities, they also engage equally with their counterpart in the paddy fields. The Bodo women participate and represent in concerning the rites of child birth which reflect in their social folk customs.

### Symptoms of pregnancy (*Gwrbwao Thanai*)

In Bodo society, women are representing during the time of pregnancy. When menstruation is discontinued then it is detected as a pregnancy. Menstruation starts at the age of 12 or 13 years of girls. It is observed that every mother-in-law of a marriage woman is anxious about the information of the first pregnancy of her daughter-in-law. The

mother-in-law naturally becomes happy while she comes to learn about the first pregnancy of her daughter-in-law (Brahma, 2008). In Bodo society, there are special rites connected with pregnancy. If a woman does not become pregnant after marriage then her mother-in-law and other family members see her with evil eye which is also seen in other Hindu and non Hindu society.

### Carefulness and restriction (*Jwthwnwi Lakhinai*)

After pregnant, a woman has to remain careful for the whole periods till the child birth. During this period she is not allowed to do any hard work by her mother-in-law or other family members. In Bodo society, there are some restrictions on her food items. She is not given to eat all the food items like *Gwkwi Phithai*(sour fruits), *Banlu* (Chilly) etc (Nashi Islary, informer). She is not allowed to go to the forest, rivers, cremation grounds, to visit or touch any dead body and advice her not to talk bad words. She is restricted from the movement which may cause any danger of accident or to protect her from evil spirit (Brahma, 2008). This faith is continuing from the early age among the Bodos. It is also seen in non Bodo society. Thus, the women represent and participate during the time of pregnancy period.

### Umbilical cord cutting ceremony (*Uthumai Hanai*)

At the time of child birth, the Bodo women follow some traditional customs. Since time immemorial, the Bodo women have been co-operated with each other at the time of child birth. The elderly women of the village perform the duties of midwife (Brahma, 2008). After the child is born, the umbilical cord is cut with a sharp edged slip of green bamboo skin (*Owa Kathemal in Bodo*) and the elderly woman tied the umbilical cord with cotton silk thread and keep it on a piece of wood

or bamboo or *Makhu* (one kind of instrument of weaving). If the child is female then it is tied five or seven times and if male, it is tied six times around the cord. But this traditional cord tied system is not practiced equally with regard to newly born baby in some Bodo dominated areas and villages. They tie the umbilical cord as they like. In performing this system, males are restricted to co-operate except husband or *Dwuri* (priest) or *Oja* (medicine man).

After the child is born, mother is given to have bath with tepid water and sprinkle with holy water and dressing her new '*Dokhona*' (a traditional dress of Bodos). She is not allowed to sit on the chair or '*Khamplai*' (a low wooden seat with or without legs). She is asked to sit looking towards northern side on the '*Phestha*' (a ring shape made with thatch) (Bilaishri Boro, informer). During the time of child born, if the child is senseless then a woman beat a dish (*Thwrsi in Bodo*) with her hand moving around the house and enter the child's room and beat the dish near the baby's ear and utters:

*"Onnanwi phwido phwido  
amwkha phwrla  
sikardw sikardw."*

(Bilaishri Boro)

English Rendering: Please come come  
amwka phwrla  
awake awake.

After completion of this performance, the senseless baby gets sense.

#### **Bathing ceremony (*Gothokwu Thukwinai*)**

After the child is born, the mother of the baby gives bath to the child with tepid water and two or three basil leaves (*Dung brud brud Dwi arw tulusi Bilai gangnwai, gangtham hwnanai*). If the mother of the child is not able to give bath to the baby then one of the women performs this duty. After giving bath to the baby, the mother clean the body of the baby with a thin cloth and then the baby is sprinkled with holy water (*Dwi gwthar*), mixed with some dub grass (*dubri hagra in Bodo*), a few holy basil leaves and a ring of Gold (Brahma, 2008). Then the baby is offered three times to test the holy water to the baby's tongue and utters:

*"Oi gotho?  
nwngha gwdw mamwn,  
garo na mero  
gongar na harsamwn?  
dinwiniphrai nwngh Boro Jabai."*

(Nashi Islary)

English Rendering: Oh Baby! Whoever you were, whether you were a Garo or Mero, a Gangar or non Bodo, but you have become a Bodo from today.

The bathing ceremony is performed either by the mother of the child or other women present at that time. Thus, this ceremony is solely performed by women only.

#### **Placenta Burial ceremony (*Phul Phobnai in Bodo*)**

After cutting the umbilical cord placenta, it is usually buried at in front of the main house (*Nomano in Bodo*) in which mother of the newly born baby lives. But today this system is slowly disappearing from Bodo society.

#### **Adulterate cloth washing ceremony (*Gwthar Si sunai*)**

The Mother's adulterate clothes are washed in the river or pond. Near the river or pond a *Laijwo* (a tip of Banana leaf) is kept and on this *Laijwo* a pair of betel nut (*goi jora*), a pair of betel leaves (*phathwi jora*), some flowers are kept and also few cotton on a planted stick and pray to goddess of river and utters:

*"Ai gonga bimani  
gwthar dwiao  
sua suthi si phwrkwo  
suswmnai jabai.  
beni thakai ai bimanao  
aros gabnai Jabai."*

(Nashi Islary)

English Rendering: I pray to the mother Goddess of River because all the adulterate clothes have washed with you.

#### **Purification ceremony (*Dwi Sarnai in Bodo*)**

The purification ceremony is celebrated after the cure of child's cord cutting. Next day, after the cure of child's cord cutting all the clothes and houses are washed and cleaned with water. As per the customs of the Bodos, a *Dwuri or Oja* of the village is called upon and makes houses holy and feed rice, rice bear, meat and fish etc to all the women who were co-operated at the time of child birth. The child's parent respect and also honour them and offer on a tip of banana leaf- a pair of betel leaves, betel nut and a *Dokhona* or *Sadhri* (*sumi*) or blouse to the woman who had cut the child's umbilical cord and take blessing from them (Nashi Islary, informer).

#### **Name giving ceremony**

Like other society, there is no specific name giving ceremony in Bodo society. The names are chosen by the parents or family members with the physical appearance of the baby viz.-if a female child possesses a big nose, she is called by the name *Hongle* or *Topsi* and if white and rudely (*gupurjarwu rwu*) complexion is called *Jarwu* or *Gaodang*. Female children are given enduringly such names like *Rani* (Queen) *Sona* (Gold), *Rupa* (Silver), *Baleng* (Thin girl) etc (Brahma, 2008). If a male child's nose is big he is named as *Hongla* or *Topsa*, if flat nose then *Nabla*, if short then *Haitha*, etc. It is observed when cord cutting ceremony is over. Now a days, some educated parents or families of the Bodo society organise the name giving ceremony that prevail in other societies.

### **Ear perforation to the Girl:**

Like other girls, the Bodo Girls are also fond of ornaments. Ornaments are the main part for them. A girl starts using ornaments from the early age. The ornament is called 'Enti', a small ring made of bronze or gold which is generally used at a tender age. The house wife or the elderly woman of the Bodo society use ornaments regularly. In the Bodo society, an elderly woman performs ear perforation of the female child. A young girl also possesses the requisite courage and may also be allowed to perforate the ears of a girl. It is seen that the mother of the girl also perforates the ear (Brahma, 2008).

### **Puberty in the Bodo society:**

In Bodo society, there is no social observance of puberty of the girls. It is generally observed that the mother of a girl is the only member of the family who has the information of attaining puberty by her daughter. It is also peculiar that the girls who attain puberty maintain secrecy about rite of passage. There is no restriction from her parents' side and

thus she can perform all the usual works at home. The girl who attains puberty is somehow restricted from mixing with the boys freely in Bodo society. She also changes her dress and put on a garment meant for a grown as female known as 'Dokhona' in Bodo, which cover her body from chest to ankle (Brahma, 2008).

### **Conclusion**

Thus, in Bodo society women perform a great job through participation and co-operation during the child birth which is reflected in their social folk customs. They perform the duty of midwife and help to complete all ceremonial programmes related to child birth and these rite have been continuing since early age among the Bodos.

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