SOCIAL CHANGE AMONG THE BORO SOCIETY: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF DHIRA VILLAGE OF ASSAM

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ABSTRACT

Every sphere of social life is affected by new innovations, progress and development. The progress in the new areas and the development of science and technology has touched every nook and corner of the world. It has brought tremendous change in socio-economic and political life of human beings. The Boro society also could not remain unaffected from these modern waves. Boro community is one such society experiencing transition and transmission in education, health, economy, literature, science, technology, philosophy, religion and many others etc. The Boros of Dihira village also keep pace with the new circumstances and have learnt to live with the coming situation. The present study intends to deal with the social change relating to the institutions of economy, education health, socio-cultural and religion. This investigation attempts to find out social change among the Boros and more particularly Boros of Dihira village.

KEYWORDS: Boros, Economy, Education, Health, Religion, Social Change

INTRODUCTION

The ‘Boros’, also known as ‘Bodo’, is one of the major communities of Assam belonging to the Indo-Mongoloid ethnic group of the Tibeto-Barman language family. According to Rev. Sidney Endle, “The origin of the Kachari or the Boro race is still very largely a matter of conjecture and inference in the absence of anything entitled to be regarded as authentic history” (Rev. Sidney Endle, The Kacharis, 1975:3). However, on the basis of Mongolian affinities of the Kacharis, he pointed out that Tibet and China as the original home of the race. The generic name of ‘Bodo’ was first given by Hodgson to this group of language. The ‘Mech’ or the ‘Kacharis’ call themselves as Bodo or Boro. The neighbouring Assamese speakers call these people and their speech as Kachari or kochari. Boros, who lived in Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal, are known to their neighbours as ‘Mech’. The Boros have their own language and literature which are known as Boro language and literature. They have their own culture, tradition, beliefs and customs. They were originally worshipper of ‘Bathou’ the indigenous religion and supreme God of the Boros. The ‘Sijou’, plant
(euphorbia splenden) stands as an emblem of the supreme God at the altar. But gradually, a great section of people come into the fold of mainstream Hinduism and with the advent of Christian Missionaries a considerable section of people converted to Christianity. The mobility of Bodo society, without losing their basic value and identity has been taking place as a result of the appearance of different religions in their society. The Boros consider themselves as Hindu except those who follow Christianity.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Rawat H.K (2010) his book ‘Sociology – Basic Concepts” reveals that everything changes, all the time. No society can remain indefinitely static. Any change in the environmental circumstances changes the character of the society. Even the most stable society undergoes changes. Some elements are added or replaced and others become modifies or are lost. Contact with other cultures, invention or discovery brings new elements into the culture of a society. The book highlights several factors of social change such as physical environment, demographic factor, cultural factor, economic factor, political factor and the role of elites in the society.

Sekhar Brahma (2011) “Religion of Boros and their Socio-cultural Transition” speaks on the changes in the traditional Boro Society. It states that traditional society began with Brahma dharma movement in the first decade of 20th century. Gurudev kalicharan Brahma, the first preacher of Brahma dharma among the Boro Kacharis, initiated reforms in their society. At that point in time, the society had been demoralised by social evils like animal sacrifice and use of liquor in the name of religion, force marriage of young girls, acceptance of bride price, illiteracy, pig-breeding and superstitions. He elaborates that the factors stated above as the main reason of backwardness among the Boro society. It also reveals that there are several factors which have played a dominant role in changing their social pattern and status, economy, mode of living etc.

Rev Sidney Endle (1911) in his book ‘The Kacharis’ highlights the characteristics both physical and moral, origin, distribution and historic summary, social and domestic life, laws and customs, religion, folk-lore, traditions and superstitions, outline grammar and specimens of the Bodo language. On the religion of the Bodos, he describes “the religion of the Kachari race as distinctly known as animistic and its underlying principle is characteristically of fear or dead. His writings reflect that the Bodos had two types of deities, like- household deities and village deities.
B.N. Bordoloi, G.C. Sharma Thakur, M.C. Saikia-(1987), “Tribes of Assam, Part-I,” reveals the social life and institutions, religious outlook, festivals, marriage birth ceremonies, language, literature and trends of change. During the early part of this century the social culture of the Bodo tribe was blessed by such virtues like honesty, truthfullness, straight forwardness and a general trustworthiness. But with the passage of time, things have somewhat changed bringing new complexities unknown or unheard before. The improvement of communication, general mobility and intercourse with the people all around has brought some psychological and attitudinal change of all sections of people. Overall analysis of the reviewed literature reveals one or the other factors of change. But none of authors have brought out changes in social institutions among the Bodos in general and Dhira village in particular.

AREA OF STUDY

The investigation in the research work is mainly based on the social change among the Boros in Dihira village. It was basically designed to understand the changes in the social institution of the Boros. The Dihira village is located in the northern Baksa district. It is just 10 km away from the international boundary between Bhutan and India. The geographical area of the village covers only 50 acres comprising of both residential and cultivatable land. The village is not very big in size and consists of only 27 households. The shape of the village is normally long, elongated and narrow. Houses are constructed on both sides of a common street. The village land for cultivation is kept on one side i.e. in the eastern side of the village. The soil of the village is alluvial and fertile having a mixture of red and black soil. The western part is fully covered by Manas National Park. According to the 2011 census, the population of the village was 170. Of this the total male population is 82 and the numbers of females stands at 88. The main occupation of the people in Dihira village is agriculture and almost all the families of the village depend on agriculture.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study primarily deals with the social institutions of the Boros. The basic objectives of the research are drawn as follows:

1. To find out the changes in institutions of economy
2. To evaluate the present status and changes in education
To critically assess the issues and awareness on health
To examine the socio-cultural and religious change.

METHODOLOGY
The present study has been undertaken by conducting intensive field work on household using Interview Schedule. The study is based on both primary and secondary data. The secondary data were collected from books, Journals, newspaper etc. In order to collect the primary data, following research methods were being used-

1. Interview Schedule
2. Personal Interview and observation

Research Tool
An Interview Schedule with 23 questions was developed for the collection of data. Questions were in structured form and were printed in English. The questions were open and close-ended. As a part of data collection, discussion, observation and hearing of the conversation were also used. Supporting equipments such as camera, notebooks etc. were also used during the personal interview.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION
The analysis and interpretation of data collected through Interview Schedule and Observations may be drawn as under:

It was found that the ‘Boro’ society is primarily patriarchal with few elements of matriarchal characteristics. In the earlier time, most of families of Dihira Village were joint family but at present most of the families are nuclear. Majority head of the household expresses that economy is the main factor for disintegration of the joint family in the village. It is found that 70 % of the total households are nuclear family. Father is the head of the family, who is obeyed by other members of the family. In absence of father or after his death the eldest son or mother (if son is not matured) because the head of the family. A typically Boro family builds several houses within the compound according to their necessity. The main house (noma no) stands in the north of the compound or homestead and the granary in the east. The main house is divided into three rooms. The first room, known as ‘khopra’, is used for dinning and third room, ‘ishing’ is used for cooking and the altars of the Bathou Brai (chief deity) and Mainao (goddess of wealth) are placed there for worship. The guest house,
known as ‘choura no’ is built in front of the homestead and it is also used as dwelling house for young boys. Nowadays, such typical Boro family is very rare in their society, except in some interior villages. With the coming of Brahma religion among the Boros, the use of main house (noma no) and its importance has been changed. They neither set altar nor cook foods in the main house. They do not built main house like traditional ‘noma no’ which posses, only one door and a corridor running into the interior room without any window. Rather they build houses for their conveniences like other Indians, as there was no rigid rule for constructing houses among the Boros followers of Brahma religion but among the followers of traditional Bathou dharma they have extra kitchen house. They do not prepare food in the main house. With the advent of new architecture, the construction of typical ‘noma no’ is gradually disappearing among the Boros. In the traditional custom, only sons are entitled to inherit the paternal property, as daughters have to leave parents house after getting married. Every sons get equal share of land from their paternal property and one who looks after the parents till death may get an additional share of land. The parents can decide with whom they are going to live in their old age. In absence of son, daughters inherit the property. If the person is childless the property goes to the nearest relatives after death of both husband and wife. An adopted child is also entitled to inherit the property. It was also found that sometimes a rich father can give a portion of land to his daughter even in the presence of sons.

**ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES**

**Income:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Monthly Family Income</th>
<th>Total No. of families</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>500-1000</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>29.63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1000-2000</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2000-3000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3000-4000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4000-5000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>5000-10,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table-1 *Monthly family income of the Boros of Dihira village (Source: Field Survey)*
From the Table and Diagram –I, it was found that most of the families of Dihira village are earning less than Rs. 1000 per month. 29.63% of the total families are earning less than 1000 income per month. It has been found that 25.93% of the total families are having more than Rs. 1000 monthly income but less than Rs. 2000 per month. Only 3.70% of the total families were earning more than Rs. 10,000 as monthly income.

From the analysis, it was found that the economic condition of the Boros in Dihira village is pathetic. To improve their economic condition they have to use modern tools and techniques in the agricultural sector. They need to enhance their educational status so that they can avail good jobs and other employment opportunities.

**Agriculture and allied activities**

Till recent past, agriculture was the only occupation of the Boros of Dihira village. More than 96% of the villagers are engaged in agriculture either in cultivation or as agricultural labourers. The other tertiary activities are land based and depend on the availability of locale resources. The agricultural lands were handed down from generation to generation as the only source of economic activity. Fertility of land and monsoon rain made this region suitable for easy cultivation of various crops and vegetation. Basically the villagers depend upon the paddy cultivation. But they also cultivate cash crops such as- mustard seed, tobacco, jute, varieties of pulses and vegetables like- potato, tomato, cabbage, cauliflower, radish, carrot, cucumber etc. These are cultivated partly for consumption and partly for selling in the market. They also cultivate varieties of spices, chilly, onion, garlic, coriander, ginger etc. For cultivation of paddy, the villagers mainly depend upon monsoon
rain. There was artificial irrigation system in the village to supply water in the paddy field by damming the stream and by digging canal but this facility was not working properly. The water comes through the canals during the rainy season only. Most of the households in the village have areca nut trees and plants of betel leaves. Sometimes these two items fetch a good amount of money in the family income from market.

**Spinning and Weaving**

The rearing of ‘eri’ and ‘muga’ is another traditional economic activity of the Boros. The Boros produced ‘muga’ and ‘eri’ cloths for their own use as well as for business purpose. But nowadays they have almost given up rearing ‘muga’ or silk worms, as it is more laborious than the market price. At present, they are only producing eri cloths, which can be reared indoor. Most of the families in the village have given up the rearing of muga or silk worm because of competitive global market.

Among the Boros, spinning and weaving are found to be the activities of the women only. Due to the initiation of various government schemes, few of the women could avail free grants and loans in cash or kinds to open weaving centre or industry. The Tribal Development Corporation, District Rural Development Agency, Bank etc. are providing such assistance to Boro women to opened weaving industry in some places of the district and supply their products to the markets. As such, quite a few women have become economically independent in the present Boro society.

**Trade and Commerce**

The traditional Boro society did not encourage carrying out any trade and business. They are very simple and truthful in nature. They believe that in business people have to resort in lying, to make profit. Telling a lie is considered to be a great sin by them. So the villagers did not accustom to any trade and business till the recent past. But this theory does not hold good at present. Due to division and fragmentation of land holding, the agricultural products are not enough for livelihood in many families, as such many of them have to take subsidiary occupation like- small business, shop keeper, carpentry, manual – labourers, drivers etc. There has been a striking change in the economy of Boro people in Dihira village from the ancient time to modern times. The change in the economic system has also contributed towards the development of the villagers and it has also helped to change the outlook of the Boro people.
EDUCATION AS COMPONENT OF CHANCE:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Qualification</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary School</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ME School</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>3.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hr. Secondary</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>2.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>1.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Graduate</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>1.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>43.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropout</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>29.73%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table-02 Educational qualification of the villagers (Source: Field Survey)

Diagram- 02: Pie-Chart showing the Educational Qualification

From the field survey it has been found that the illiteracy rate is very high in Dihira village. The Pie-Chart and Table 2, depicts less inclination of people towards education. It was found that the category of illiterate people recorded the highest with a percentage of 43.24 % among the others. This may be due to poor economic condition of the household and inadequate support from the government in the field of education. The percentage of drop out amongst the students in the village is 29.73% which recorded the second highest in the mentioned categories of educational qualifications. It was also found that 1.62 % of the total population are graduate and only 1.08% of the population were post graduates. If we compare the earlier educational status against the present, it reveals that there was a little progress of education in the village. In the recent years most families have begun to send their wards’ to schools. Education provides necessary knowledge and skills which enables an individual to operate ideally in the society and also contribute to its efficient functioning. In order to remove problem of illiteracy, help and guidance should be provided from various circles.
HEALTH ISSUES AND AWARENESS

A society cannot survive without proper health services. So, it was important to study the issues on health and related problems of a particular area or society. Such issue of health have a direct link and affects the society at large. In Dhira village, there were no any government or private health care facilities. There were traditional practices of medication for any illness. Medicines for any kind are given through traditional practices by medicine man of the village to cure the diseases, as a result most of the villagers died at early age of their life. There was neither drinking water facility nor family welfare centre in the village. Thus it was found that almost all the families of the village faces major problem of malaria, Jaundice and diarrhoea. Of course, there is a sub-centre nearby the village but it is not functioning properly. According to the villagers it remains open only two days in a week.

From the field survey it was also found that there was high incidence of maternal mortality rate among the Boros of Dihira village. But in the recent past almost all the pregnant women availed facilities provided by Accredit Social Health Activist (ASHA) in the village. They are aware and as such, there are low rate of maternal mortality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Awareness</th>
<th>Total No. Respondent</th>
<th>Families</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aware</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Aware</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td>66.67%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table-3: Showing the level of awareness*

From the above Table it can be said that only 33.33% families are aware about HIV/AIDS virus but 66.67% families were unaware of this virus and it spreads. The total numbers of unaware families are more than the total number of aware families. The people are unaware because it was found that most of the villagers are uneducated persons. Lack of awareness on health and related problems may be due to inaccessibility to information technology such as internet, and electronics media like Television.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The economic condition of the Boros in Dihira village was found to be feeble. There are several reasons for such weakness. Some of the important factors are – practice of the
primitive method of cultivation, insufficient access to markets, lack of transportation and inadequate education and social services. To improve their economic condition they have to use modern techniques and tools in the agricultural sector. Proper assistance must be availed from the government as in the case of some Boro women have opened weaving industries which have made them economic independence. They need to enhance their educational status so that they can avail good jobs and other employment opportunities.

Education provides necessary knowledge and skills which enables an individual to operate ideally in the society. In the education front, in order to remove problem of illiteracy, help and guidance should be provided to the people of the village. The illiteracy rate of 43.24% and dropout rate of 29.73% in the village is quite alarming. This may be due to poverty and inadequate government hold in the field of education. The government needs intervention in this regard.

Facilities for drinking water was neither available in the village. Health facilities and health centres are not proper. Of course, there is a sub-centre nearby the village but it was not functioning properly. Awareness among the people on health and related issues such as HIV/AIDS found to be worrisome. There was incidence of high maternal mortality rate among the Boros of Dihira village but it has decreased in recent years due to ASHAs’ intervention.

Socio-cultural and religion also played an important role in changing pattern of the Boro society. It was observed that religion of the Boros were classified into two categories- i) the traditional religion of Boros - Bathou and ii) the Brahma religion. The religion finds to be the potent source which lead resulted into positional change of the Boros. The people of Dihira village too converted from the indigenous religion of Bathou to Brahma religion. It was the course of social mobility and the process of Hinduization among the Boros.

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