



Agriculture Related Beliefs In Social Life Of Assam.

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Abstract: Folklore of a tribe is formed with the various social beliefs they accumulate throughout the ages. Although these beliefs are not scientifically proven truths, still all these have deep impact upon the cultural life of a tribe. Assam is an agriculture based state where various tribes live harmoniously. They live with some social beliefs most of which are agriculture centered. Those God fearing people do their agricultural activities using their traditional tools and for agriculture they are fully dependent on nature. Thus they form many social beliefs and perform various rituals for the well being of their paddy fields and crops. This research paper puts forward a study of those agriculture related beliefs in the social life of Assam.

Key Words: Folklore, agriculture, beliefs, festivals.

- I. **Introduction:** Through the folk literatures and beliefs the folklore of a tribe is exposed. Years of experience of a tribe enable them to get beliefs, customs, rituals, music, dance etc, and thus folklore is formed. However, these folk literatures or social beliefs are not a science related to people, rather traditionally evolved folk-science. The researches of folklore and folk culture have been divided in to three categories by the scholars. Among them Morris Bloomfield is a major exponent. Followers of the methodology of Morris Bloomfield studied the Sanskrit language and other language of this group and from the linguistic perspective they started this in Indian and European folklores. The second category covers the Anthropologists and social scientists. Franz Boas is one of them. They had studied mainly the folklore of original inhabitants of America. Like the Indian school they also studied the language and dialects. Arne and Thomson are the leaders of the third school. They studied the European Tales to create a new school. They were influenced by the traditions of oral literature. Assam is a unique land of various tribes and so folklore of Assam gives the message of harmony. Today also various social customs, beliefs, worships and other religious activities are practiced in Assam. Being an agricultural state many agriculture centered festivals and rituals are common in the state. This paper discusses some agriculture associated social beliefs prevalent in Assam.
- II. **Fertility beliefs in Folklore of Assam:** Fertility beliefs occupies a major part in Folklore of Assam. When primitive men lived in forest their prime objective was just the population growth and that was why social beliefs relating to birth, death and marriage were evolved. Fertility concept influenced upon the marriage also. Women are mates of agricultural activities and so birth of a girl is the coming of Lakshmi (The goddess of Wealth), Tolani Biya of a girl (first menstruation of a girl) is called 'puspostav' as first menstruation is compared to the flowering of trees. So, we can affirm that Tolani Biya is originated from fertility beliefs. In the same manner, marriage function has an association with fertility beliefs as rituals done during marriage relates to reproductive energy e.g. giving of fish during Joran (function at the eve of marriage), planting of two banana trees along with eggs at the entrance of the marriage hall, Akhoi tola (A ritual in hindu marriage in which the bride's brother hands over parched paddy to the bride who gives these to the groom who in turn offers these to fire), sprinkling of rice etc.
- III. **Agriculture and festivals :** Bihu is the major festival among the various tribes of Assam. There are so many agriculture related beliefs centred on Bihu. During Kati bihu farmers lighten earthen lamps in the paddy field wishing prosperity of crops and worship goddess Lakshmi. On the other hand, Magh Bihu starts during harvesting time. On the day of Uruka of Magh Bihu people tie hay at the fruits giving trees (betel nut, coconut etc.) and sings- "Magh noaboloi najabi", thopathopi lagibi (Don't go away to bath Magh, give fruits abundantly). In the night of Uruka, villagers arrange feast with fish and fish is the image of reproduction. Likewise, Rati Bihu starts before a month of Bohag bihu, people believes that when Bao paddy becomes luxuriant in the field and then performance of lewd songs and dance make earth excited and increases productivity.

Various tribes of Assam observe many agriculture based festivals e.g. tribes like *Deuri, Sonowal kachari, Tiwa, Bodo, Rabha, Mising*, observe *Bihu, Bisu, Baishagu*, etc. *Bodo's kherai* dance and *kherai Utshav, Adi or Abar's Dorung Puja, Aran Puja Solong* (Only Women take part), *Galong* community's *Mopin festival*, *Mising's Ali Ai Lrigang* are also the examples of these kind of festivals. In *Ambubasi* mother earth is supposed to menstruate and thus earth is believed to become productive. In some place during *Ambubasi* soil and water is put in a pot and seed is kept there to grow. At the end of the festival the pot with grown seeds is flown to the river water. Among the crops related festival *Lakhmi xabah* observed during the Ahin Month is also an important one. In Ahin month, as the paddy crops form clusters women gather to sing *Lakhimi Naam* and bring first rice sheaf to granary. *Garos* celebrate sowing of paddy seedlings with dances. They offer the first harvest to *Ja Mogala*, (God of agriculture). *Lakhers* (a tribe) sacrifice animals in the field for well being of their crops and after harvest of their Joom cultivation they perform *Pokhupila* dance. *Kukis* observe two harvesting festival i.e. *Lalogong* and *Anol*

with dance and songs. It can be assumed that *Nonkrem* of Khasis is associated with agriculture. During this festivals priest also takes part and they perform *Nonkrem* dance for well being of crops.

Na khowa festival of Assamese is also an agriculture based festival. As the new harvest comes home, people arrange feast with new rice where all the villagers participate. *Sarania kachari* also enthusiastically observe this festival.

- IV. **Beliefs associated with paddy cultivation:** Paddy is the main crop of monsoon region. Rice cultivation is the part and parcel of the entire cultural life of all the countries of monsoon region. All tribal people have many beliefs relating to rice cultivation. On the day of sowing of paddy seedlings many farmers of various locations of Assam serve home made liquor, fish, meat to the villagers. Before sowing of the seeds they keep three pieces of betel nut with leaves and also some small bolder in a sheet of banana leaf and in a corner of the plot they plant a sapling of Tara (a kind of water plant of which leaves are like those of turmeric, *Alpinia alughas*) and a branch of Heleshi with seeds (a kind of aquatic plant, bitter in taste, but having medicinal properties; *Enhydra fluctuans*) and also a branch of 'Tita Fool' (a kind of bitter flower having medicinal value; *Phlogacanthus curviflorus*). On the other hand, on the starting day of harvesting, reapers come home carrying three sheaf of paddy on their heads. They remain mum as they come home. On the last day of harvesting some leave three bushes of paddy separately and collect the sheaf. They leave betel nut and betel leaves in a banana leaf. Some offer Coconut and children of the locality join the rituals. When the first sheaf is brought home the reapers neither can talk nor can see backward. On that day the host cleans well their houses up to the threshold. Storing rice in the granary also relates some customs and rules. Granary is regarded as a holy place and not used on Tuesday and Saturday. Women are not allowed to enter in to it during menstruation period.
- V. **Beliefs related to cow:** Agriculture in Assam runs on cows. Farmers always think of the well being of his ox on which he is fully dependent. Women during menstruation never touches a cow. 'Galirnaam' is a ritual held in a cow shed, Maah Praxad with Kesa-bhog (mixture of milk, banana and rice etc.) are offered to the invitee. During Rangali Bihu also the first day is celebrated as 'Garu Bihu' (Bihu of Cows) when cow is bathed affectionately.

Besides all these, rice is extensively used in various functions of Assamese marriage system. A bride is welcomed with the sprinkling of rice at the threshold by mother of the groom. There is also customs of throwing of rice at the groom by people of bride's side just to remove the influence of evil gods from him.

- VI. **Bhekulir Biya or Beng Biya:** Without proper irrigation system cultivators used to suffer a lot without rain even during monsoon season. So, God fearing people of Assam took shelter of their religious beliefs to invoke rain from the heaven. They believed that arranging Bhekulir Biya will cause rain enabling them to grow paddy in the drought hit field. They thought that rain comes when toad cries. Indra is the god of rain and attends the marriage of a frog. So, marriage of frog is arranged. People of an areas arrange a 'Bhekulir Biya'. A family of the village plays the role of groom's family and in the same manner another family of the village plays the role of the bride's family. A frog supposed to be a male is well adorned like a groom. All the rituals relating to an Assamese marriage ceremony is performed. The women sing Biya geet (songs of marriage). A couplet of biya geet sung on the occasion- Bhekulir Biyaloi ahe Indra Dev, Batah baraxunat titi (Indra Dev attends the marriage of a frog in spite of the rain).

Another song is- Bhekulir murare Jalanga paguri.

Bhekulir hatore kharu
 Bhekulik bisari Indra Ahile
 Dekhuai nidibi kewe.
 (A frog puts on a head gear
 And also bangles in hands
 No one should show him
 When Indra searches for him.)

A section of villagers take the side of grooms and they come with a procession to the bride's family. It always remains uncertain whether a frog is a male or a female as in past people had no any scientific means to know the facts. The bride frog is also well adorned. All the performances are usually marked by a sense of humours and rituals are done as a mockery. Rejoicing men and women enthusiastically join the function and a community feast is arranged. After the marriage is over the frogs in pair are freed in water.

- 7) **Conclusion:** We can conclude the paper with this finding that being an agriculture based society the peasants of Assam take refuge to some beliefs for well being of their crops field. All these beliefs form the folklore as well as culture and literatures of Assam. All these precious social beliefs have been passing throughout the ages from generations to generations as like the flowing water of the mighty Brahmaputra. Thus, the rich culture and literature of Assam reflect the unity and fraternity of the various tribes living harmoniously there since the past.

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