

Prevailing Taboos and Superstitious Beliefs among the Dimasas: A Study in Howraghat Block, Karbi Anglong, Assam

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Abstract: Taboos and superstitious beliefs have always been deep rooted in the tribal communities of Assam and is also an integral part of everyday duties. It is something where social or religious custom prohibits a particular practice. Moreover, the people are tightly locked up in religious taboos and beliefs thus taking useless practice. The present study was conducted to find out the prevalence of taboos and superstitious beliefs among the inhabitant of Dimasa tribe in the Howraghat block, Karbi Anglong district of Assam.

Taboos and superstitious practices were found more common in uneducated and unemployed peoples. The females are more involved in superstitious practices. The main reason found for the practices are wide spread poverty, illiteracy and malnutrition, lack of personal hygiene, scarcity of drinking water, sanitary, living conditions and health education etc. Their settlement tends to be small and isolated and difficult to reach with facilities and services. The present study clearly shows that taboos and superstitious beliefs still prevail in the Dimasa tribe. This prevalence may block the wellbeing of the individuals and hinder their positive personal growth. Thus, steps should be taken to alleviate or at least reduces such taboos and superstitious beliefs, thus urging the people to thing rationally and logically.

Keywords: Taboos, Superstitious beliefs, Dimasa, Practice, Prevailing, Tribal.

Introduction:

The Dimasa people are recognized as one of the most important tribe of Brahmaputra Valley. They are mainly concentrated in the Dima-Hasao, Karbi Anglong and Nagaon districts in south-eastern Assam and in Dimapur of the state of Nagaland. Being Indo-Mongoloid tribe, Dimasa have a long history, rich cultural heritage, distinct languages and indigenous living style including food habits, weaving and handicrafts.

Taboos and superstitions were introduced to regulate the moral order of the society. Every society in the world cares for its traditions is the prevailing practices that were responsible for the survival of a given society before introduction of modern scientific inventions. The notion of taboos and superstitions has been a vital component of tribal people especially among Dimasas. Infact, certain norms and code of conduct such as taboos were entrenched which facilitate orderly maintenance of the society. Though they are not written in any revealed law. People learn them, practice them and teach others in the society.

Therefore, the study was undertaken among the Dimasas residing in Howraghat Block areas which is situated in Karbi Anglong district of Assam. The importance of taboos and superstitions in Dimasas society is also discussed.

Material and Method:

The methodology adopted to study the prevailing taboos and superstitious beliefs among Dimasas, necessitated the use of both primary and secondary data. The unit of observation has been confined within the limits of Howraghat Block area. Both qualitative and quantitative empirical data are collected by employing various methods and techniques like case studies, interviews, observations, life histories and house hold census method.

Discussion and Results:

The community based survey was carried out among the Dimasa people of Howraghat Block in the district of Karbi Anglong, Assam. The selection of the samples of the study was entirely based on the concentration of the tribal and a stratified strategy was adopted to choose the sample.

Sl. No.	Village	Population			Literacy Rate
		Male	Female	Total	
1	Pan Kumar Dimasa Goan	193	181	374	54.1%
2	Raja Pathar Silputa	99	84	183	68.2%
3	Sanpura Dimasa Gaon	99	87	186	57.9%
4	Pub Sikarighat Dimasa Gaon	87	81	163	52%
5	Matikota Gaon	116	102	218	71%
6	Hatipura Gaon	82	71	153	53%

Wide spread poverty, illiteracy, lack of personal hygiene, sanitary, living conditions and health education have been identified as conditions responsible for practicing and believing taboos and beliefs in this community. Their settlement tends to be small and isolated and difficult to reach with facilities and services.

i) Taboos in day to day life :

The study revealed that the people of Dimasas of Howraghat areas were already familiar with common taboos that they used to follow in their day to day life. Although there is not enough practical reason in supporting of these taboos, but these was very rigidly followed by the people of this community.

- a) Meat or fish were not exchange between neighbours or families at night. If in case, then food should be packed with chili, garlic, or wood-charcoal as it believes the evil spirit night attack.
- b) Good work should be start at any days of the week except Saturday and Tuesday as they believes it brings failure or misfortunes.
- c) A pregnant woman is not allowed to go to the cremation ground and the room where a dead body is kept.
- d) Never too cut nail and hair on the day of Saturday, Tuesday and on the day when he/she was born "Saisiri jang Marbani yaskur jang khanai sothouya".
- e) Among children and adults, when two foreheads or temple of the head strike each other by accident, they have to strongly repeat doing the action and utter "hagrani jibu dashu" the snake of jungle, do not bite.

ii) **Woman as impure “Gushu” :**

- a) A woman during their menstruation period is regarded as impure or “Gushu”. Dimasa people has a conservative society, in the sense, that many do’s and don’ts in the custom are traditionally prevalent. In this areas, it has been found that, a women during their menstruation period never cook or serve food to people. In case other family member opted to do it. She also can neither touch any of the object at the house. They shouldn’t also perform puja during those periods. After four or five days they clean themselves after having “di-gathar” (tulshi water for purification).
- b) One of the practices that are seen here among Dimasas of these areas that the women cannot take the life of hen, duck or goat to have meat unless and until it is cut by male member of the family. In case if male is not found, someone from other house are called on.
- c) Inheritance of Rights : It is found that women have no say over ancestral property, as it is the sons who share among themselves equally or otherwise, the youngest son inherits the parental property. But it has been now seen is some cases especially in small and literate working class family, parents are willing to give their property to their daughters as same as to their sons.

iii) **Birth related to Taboos :**

The people living here follows different taboos and beliefs related to birth of a child. They had their own rules and customs. According to them, when a child is born the whole family clan become impure. They are not allow to do pujas or any social ceremonies like marriages, engagement until purification was conducted. This is termed as “Tausa Ratheba”. Here, three or four aged women are invited to perform “Tausa Ratheba” with items of eggs, chickens, rice beers, banana flowers, dry fish etc. outside the house of the baby born family.

A new born child is then taken out in the sun, which is called the nana “dihonba ceremony”, a vital role in the blessing the baby.

iv) **Taboos related with Marriage :**

Marriage within the patri-clan, matri-clan is strictly prohibited in this community. Suppose, a boy of Langhasa is not allowed to marry a girl of Langhasa father (patri-clan) and again a girl of Miyongma is not allowed to marry a boy of miyongma mother (matri-clan). As they believes violating this leads to genetic defects in the baby during birth as well as ostracization by the society.

Here inter-caste marriage also strictly prohibited. If someone does purification has to been done called “Tharba Ceremony”.

v) **Taboos related with Death :**

In Dimasa community of Howraghat area, if death happens in a family, then all the family members including the close relatives are considered impure and shouldn’t perform any ritual till 13th day of the demise. Any form of meat or fish is forbidden. On the 14th day, the funeral ceremony is observed and the family of the deceased will invite their relatives, friends and local people for the feast.

Conclusion :

Various taboos and superstitious beliefs are still prevailing among the Dimasa people residing here in these areas. As during field survey it has been seen that majority of the populations are illiterate for which they still believes and follows taboos and superstitious beliefs in their day to day life. They basically practice these to prevent any misfortune from happening. Although the proper reason behind practicing these taboos cannot be proven practically. It can be said that the

villagers have great concern about society's unique values especially related to birth, marriage and death related to taboos and thus they still maintain their old traditions.

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