CHAPTER-III

SOCIAL FOLK CUSTOM AND GIBI BITHAI

Custom plays very important role in society in controlling the behavior of an individual. However there is no such authority which can impose custom in anybody's life. These were established long time back among the mankind spontaneously and gradually. According to Davis customs are those “Practices that have been oft repeated by a multitude of generations, practices that tend to be followed simply because they have been followed in the past.”1 Bogardus says “Customs and traditions are group accepted techniques of control that have become well established, that are taken for granted and that are passed along from generation to generations.”2 Thus customs are traditional practices of human beings and are observed with a view to control and run the society smoothly.

Significance of customs:

Customs used to play a very important role among the Bodos in the past. Earlier the Bodo custom used to be very rigid and if anybody was found violating it, he was either subjected to physical torture or simply ejected from the village. But in the present day it seems to have lost its former importance (demand) or grip upon the Bodos people due to the impact of Western education among the Bodos. By the by the Bodos still follow the traditional customary laws in their day to day life. The Bodo tribe has its own, custom of rites. The rites on the birth, marriage and death are major part of the Bodo culture. These traditions make the Bodo culture a very rich culture. The significance of customs is also seen in the unity of Bodo people.
Bodo as a traditional society have also customary laws of their own. These habits and practices of the Bodos were very hard and fast in earlier period. Now-a-days these practices are reformed and innovated. So Bihuram Boro focused on the customs of Bodos in his narrative verse Gibi Bithai. These social customs are strictly observed by the Bodos even today.

Rites of Passage:

The birth of a baby is being taken as a holy matter. It is believed that a baby is the gift of God. So when a baby is born they accept it through their rites. Cutting of navel with a sharp bamboo blade and tying it with a thread is traditional custom of the Bodos. The purification of house after falling of navel of baby is performed by sprinkling holy water made from dubri grasses (carpet grass) and a branch of tulsi in a glass of water. After this the following lines are said to the baby:-

\begin{verbatim}
Haraibola bungnagou
gwdwba mamwn nwngnw,
dinwinifrai nathai
Jabai subunggodai
\end{verbatim}

(G.B. Ch – XXVI, St. 861)

English rendering:

What were you in your previous year; from today you became a man.

\begin{verbatim}
Wngkham dwonai (anna prasan) is another duty of the parents. This function is to be done after completion of five month of a baby.

Earlier six types of marriages were prevalent among the Bodos\textsuperscript{3}. According to the author, marriage is of three types, viz., mizing, musung and mithingga. Mizing haba is not for middle and lower class. Mithinga
haba is not a marriage system of people. Only musung haba is for the common people. As a human being, he must wed according to the rules of society. A person has no right to marry his relatives.

Among the Bodos nobody weds in the month of Magh and it is believed that Jet month is also not suitable. So, Phagun month is the best month for wedding purpose, Hahasuni (marriage feast) is held at the groom's house when the bride is brought to the groom's house the first time. Barlangfa and Bwirathi play vital role in performing the marriage.

In the Gibi Bithai death is known as bandwba (the fifth of the god). Nobody can get rid of it. So as a work of God we should respect the dead body. The singer has mentioned three ways of disposing of the dead i.e., (i) burial (ii) cremation and (iii) left openly. But now-a-days last one is not applied. Only first two are executed. After the burial is finished then ‘narzi argarnai’ i.e, the ritual of the break-up of relation with dead person is done among the Bodos. ‘Dahagarnai’ is another funeral rite which is performed after completion of ten days from the time of death. The Sradha ritual is held, according to the writer, within one month from dahagarnai. Nobody can have meat and fish until the Sradha is finished over.

Five customary rites and rituals:

The Chapters XXVI to XXX of the verse by Bihuram Boro has explained about the five customs or rites of Bodos. These rites are as follows:

Asarse – rites relating the birth of a child.
Asarnai – rites relating the marriage.
Asartham – rites relating the happiness.
Asarbrai – rites relating the sorrow.
Asarba – rites relating to the disposal of dead.

Asarse (rites – i):

Asarse is regularly practiced among the Bodo society since the ancient time. When a baby is born then, first of all navel will be cut by medicine woman and then it would be tied with awakhundung. The body of the child is too tender, taking this view into account at that time soft clothes are to be used after washing with warm water. Earlier navel was cut with split bamboo. Mother also becomes weak during that time so she must abstain from hard labour. After completion of seven days she will wash all the clothes used at the period of child birth. Douri will purify all the houses of the family along with the family member by sprinkling holy water and perform prayer near the Bathoubrai. At the same time naming of the child also takes place. Up to sixteen years he or she the baby must be taken care of and taught the ways of character building as well as to obey customs of the society.

Asarnai (rites – ii):

Marriage is the oldest socially recognized institution. In different societies there are different rites and rituals of marriage. These customs are explained through asarnai among the Bodos.

Bihuram Boro has explained about the rites of marriage in the chapter – XXVII briefly. When both the families of the bride and groom is agreed then a date is fixed for marriage. A Bathou altar is established temporarily at the house of bridegroom. The guardian of the bride will bring his daughter near altar and she will sit near the groom along with the gathering public. A Douri will start his function gradually. The groom will take promise along with Bathoubrai as witness to maintain happy
union. At the bride’s house a Hathasuni is performed. The male and female will take blessing from the public to cross the river of life.

**Asartham (rites – iii):**

According to asartham Bihuram Boro is concerned with a man’s happiness in life. When a man becomes rich then he becomes very proudly. This type of person wants more and more and one after another. He regards the other people as ordinary beings. He doesn’t have any feeling for his relatives. He doesn’t value the customs of the society. He wants to own everything in the world. Rites and rituals seem to be obstacle for him. He wants to have many wives. He doesn’t feel any shame. For the purpose of worship he has no money but for the rubbish purpose he spends extravagantly. According to the author such type of men fall into sorrow. Because life is full of happiness and sorrow. The happiness of a person is not for ever. It is like night and day. So at that time of happiness also we should not forget to pray our Lord Bathou and should not hate others. This is the main theme of *asartham*.

**Asarbrai (rites – iv):**

In the *Gibi Bithai* through the asarbrai author has described relating the sorrow of life. Bathou is the savior of every soul. He is the owner of happiness and sorrow. At the time of sorrow we should pray the name of Bathou. He is the only deity who can help us get over the tragedies of life.

The author has mentioned asarbrai rites in the chapter – XXIV of *Gibi Bithai* according to the author God is everywhere. At the time of sorrow we need to worship the Bathou. He will lessen the intensity of our sorrow and help us reach the path of happiness. We do not need to go anywhere in search of Him. He is within in us. Bathou doesn’t take any
sacrifice like chicken, goat, fowl, and pig. These animals are god’s son. To pray the Bathou flowers, holy water, holy earth, rice powder, khankla (a kind of plant), alaribathi (an earthen lamp), incense basil, dubri (a kind of grass) are used. There is one kind of people who sacrifice poultries in the name of gods but these are only vague. Actually these are not right way of worship, says the singer poet.

**Asarba (rites – v):**

Through *asarba* author wants to say about the last period of life and the rites of disposal. At the last moment of life, no body would like to die, due to his desire of various substances. But it is not rites of old man. At that time he has to pray Bathou avoiding desires of earning money from the heart. According to the author the cause of death may be two types: natural death and martyr dom. Natural death occurs if a person becomes old, feeble, and if he is infected with any incurable disease. There is a kind of death which is not the cause of above mention. If a person dies for the shake of motherland for the welfare of society, this type of death is known as *ru sarijanai* (martyrs). For the death of this two types the guardian has to follow the rites of society in the disposal.

**Five sayings of MwnsingsingGuru:**

*Mwnsingsing* Guru was believed to be creator of *bad* (principle of offence) among the Bodos. He was sent from the heaven to decide the problem of *Chandwbaodia*, a legendary hero of Bodos. K. Brahma said that he was oldest and wisest person⁴. That is why he is also known as Mwnsingsingbrai. ‘Brai’ means old man. Bihu Ram Boro has mentioned about the creation of Mwnsingsing Guru in the chapter – xxv. He was born from an egg, in the bank of river Mwnasw. According to the verse *Aham* Guru taught the five sayings to *Mwnsingsing* later on. *Mwnsingsing*
preached all this teachings to general people. In the Chapter – XXV of Gibi Bithai the poet has elaborated upon discussed the five sayings of Mwnsingsing Guru. It is believed that to be a good person everybody must follow these saying in day to day life. At the same time the door of heaven is always open for him. But people who don't follow these sayings He becomes like an animal.

According to the first saying, Mwnsingsing Guru advised the people to receive the new born baby, beggars and guests with kindness, because they are considered as incarnations of God.

According to the second saying, Mwnsingsing advised to get married according to the customs of the society and to take responsibility of the house, because it is believed that if a person doesn't do this act he will not be accepted by God. In the third saying Mwnsingsing Guru has advised to keep balance even at the time of happiness. A person must not be naughty at the time of happiness. Because when a person becomes rich then he tends to forget all the rites of the society. But at last such type of person will have to suffer again by doing mistakes in life. By the fourth saying Mwnsingsing advised to pray the Bathou at the time of sorrow and not to give way to despair because happiness and sorrow come and go in one's life. So, at that time one must stay steady to overcome the sorrow. The fifth teaching voice of Mwnsingsing is to cremate the dead body according to the customs of the society.

References:
2. E.S. Bogardus, Sociology. P-475.