

Socio-Cultural Transition of the Bodos As Reflected In a Short Story of Nilkamal Brahma

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ABSTRACT

The Bodos are one of the indigenous tribes of India. They have their own language, religion, housing pattern, livelihoods, social customs, beliefs, dress, ornaments, food habits, festivals, music and dance etc. However, the Bodo culture is changing slowly with the emergence of 19th century. Changes have been visualized both in material and in non-material culture. The mindset, beliefs, values, living style etc. are changing slowly in due course of time. Besides, changes are observed on house planning and construction, on cultivation, on religion, on hygiene, on livelihood, on diet, on dress, on festivals and so on. Apart from that, changes are observed on production, on consumption, on exchange and on livelihood. At present, the new generations, particularly educated section like modern occupations instead of cultivation. Thus, among the Bodos a middle class society emerged. They are teachers, doctors, engineer, professors, nurse, lawyers, police and army officers, bureaucrats etc. It is also observed that a section of the Bodos have converted into different religions. Consequently, the Bodo society has become a plural society, a multi-religious society. Now, there are people of multi religion in Bodo society. The outlook and living style of the Bodo society is becoming modern as well as global. Emergence of modern education, Christianity, town and semi- town, difference Bodo social organization, science and technology, communication, the new world view etc. are the factors for social and cultural changes of the Bodos. Thus, the study attempts to investigate the socio-cultural transition of the Bodos as well as the factors responsible for socio-cultural transition, chiefly based on a chosen short story.

KEYWORDS: Culture, Livelihood, Modernity, Society and Transition

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I. INTRODUCTION

Nilkamal Brahma: Nilkamal Brahma is one of the most famous short story writers of Bodo literature. He has contributed many short story books in the granary of Bodo literature. Graphic portrayal of the reality of life is an important salient feature of his stories. The characters of his short stories are representative of new thought and ideas. Traditional Bodo society has changed with the emergence of modernity. In his stories, he has nicely depicted the contemporary Bodo society. He has focused the urban living people, corruption of modern people and complex life of modern society. Anil Kumar Boro writes, “*The broad canvas of Nilkamal Brahma’s short stories brings together a whole range of characters that represent the transition from tradition to modernity, from the rural to the urban life.*”^[1] On the other hand, about Nilkamal Brahma’s stories, Phukan Ch. Basumatary and Swarna Prabha Chainary write, “*From a simple village woman to an educated up to date Boro woman; from flesh trader to a super ego woman, he tried to reflect every women characters of society. So, his characters are multi-dimensional.*”^[2]

Brahma’s first individual collection of short story, ‘*Hagra Guduni Mwi*’ (Stag in the deep jungle) was published in 1972. According to critics, ‘*Hagra Guduni Mwi*’ is considered Nilkamal Brahma’s masterpiece. There are ten short stories in the book. Brahma’s other collections of short stories are- ‘*Silingkhar*’ (1984), ‘*Sirinay Mander Bibar*’ (1985), ‘*Sakhondra*’ (1987). Apart from that, he edited and compiled collection of selected short stories, ‘*Soloni phungkha*’ (1984) and ‘*Phungkha*’ (1978). Critics are of the opinion that Nilkamal Brahma occupies top position among the Bodo short story writers. Nilkamal Brahma’s story book, *Silingkhar* (Tragic life) is very famous among the readers. There are fifteen short stories in this book. From the book, the story ‘*Udrainai*’ (Purification) is taken as data for present topic.

¹ Boro, Anil Kumar. *A History of Bodo Literature*. Kolkata: Sahitya Akademi, 2012. Second Printing. p.57

² Basumatary, Phukan Ch. & Chainary, Swarna Prabha. *Monograph of the Boros*. New Delhi: Lakshi Publishers & Distributors, 2017. First Edition. p.39

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

For scientific research review of literature is an important part. S. Endle described about Bodo society and culture in his book, *'The Kacharis'*. In a book, *'Social Mobility'*, Binoy Kumar Brahma has discussed about the transition of Bodo society and culture. Anil Kumar Boro has highlighted about the social and cultural changes of the Bodos in a book, *'A History of Bodo Literature'*. Phukan Ch. Basumatary and Swarna Prabha Chainary have discussed about the transition of Bodo society in a book, *'Monograph of the Boros'*. K. Brahma has elaborately discussed about the Bodo society and culture in his book, *'Aspects of social customs of the Bodos'*. Sekhar Brahma has discussed about elaborately about the transition of Bodo society and culture in a book, *'Religion of the Boros and their Socio-Cultural Transition'*.

III. OBJECTIVES

Culture is a unique possession of human society. Culture distinguishes one society from the other. As the culture is changeable, the Bodos culture is changing slowly due to impact of modernity in course of time. According to many critics of the language, **Nilkamal Brahma** has mirrored the socio-cultural transition of the Bodos in his short stories. He has eloquently portrayed the socio-cultural changes through the storytelling and characterization of his stories. Therefore, this paper aims -

- a) To study the culture of the Bodos,
- b) To study the socio-cultural transition of the Bodos, chiefly based on the story, *'Udrainai'* (Purification) written by Nilkamal Brahma and
- c) To study the agents of socio-cultural transition as well as to highlight the contemporary culture.

IV. HYPOTHESIS

Culture is dynamic. Change is inevitable for every culture. Thus, it is assumed that the traditional society and culture of the Bodos is changing slowly due to impact of modernity. It is also assumed that the writer of the selected short story has mirrored the socio-cultural transition in his story. Further, it is assumed that he has mirrored the socio-cultural changes through the storytelling and characterization of his story. Thus, it is assumed that the socio-cultural transition may be observed if the story and characters of chosen text is analyzed extensively from sociological point of view.

V. METHODOLOGY

The study is based on literary text. The short story, *Udrainai* (Purification), written by Nilkamal Brahma is the primary data of the chosen topic. The data is collected from the anthology of short stories. Thus, the topic has been analyzed critically based on the chosen text, *Udrainai* (Purification). For analyzing the proposed topic, the secondary data which are directly related to the study are used. Thus, help is taken from some books and articles which are directly related to the study. In addition, observation method has been used for analyzing the study. The data has been analyzed extensively from sociological point of view, though it is a purely literary text.

VI. THE STORY

Udrainai (Purification): In the short story *Udrainai* (Purification), the writer has eloquently reflected the socio-cultural transition of the Bodos. In the story, the characters are Maniram Baglary, Mayarani Baglary, Son of Maniram and Mayarani Baglary (Who is an engineer), Daughter of Maniram and Mayarani Baglary (Bonshri), Daughter-in-law of Maniram and Mayarani Baglary (Wife of engineer), the Doctor (With whom Bonshri's marriage tie was fixed) and the Secretary of Weaving Department. In the story, all the characters are modern. Maniram and Bonshri are the two important characters of the story. However, Maniram is the central character of the story. As reveal in the text, Maniram is a Superintendent of Weaving Department. He is a greedy and corrupted man. Mayarani Baglary, the wife of Maniram Baglary is a self-centred woman. She is ambitious as well as fashionable woman. She likes town life. Thus, Maniram constructs a reinforced cement concrete (R.C.C) building in Guwahati to full fill her desires. Nevertheless, he buys an ambassador car to satisfy Mayarani. Maniram Baglary teaches his children in a famous educational institution. Thus, his son becomes an engineer and his daughter completes Master of Arts. Maniram's son is an employee of Central Public Work Department. Along with his wife, Maniram's son lives in Simla for doing his job. Maniram Baglary earns lot of money in his life. However, his greediness for money does not decline till his retirement. Before his retirement Maniram Baglary diverts eighty thousands government money to his own account for his daughter's marriage. He diverts the government money to give gift in daughter's marriage. Maniram Baglary ties Bonshri's marriage tie with a doctor. However, he is a poor. Thus, to give gift and to make her happy, Maniram brings many new things at home like furniture, ornaments of gold, ornaments of diamond, radio, gramophone etc. However, Maniram Baglary is terminated from the job and sent to jail for his corruption. And he is compelled to refund the diverted amount. Thus, problems arise in Maniram Baglary's family. Bonshri, the daughter of Maniram tries to save her

father as well as family from the crisis. So, Bonshri meets the secretary of weaving department and requests him to save her father's job, but the secretary refuses to save her father. Again, Bonshri requests her elder brother (an engineer) to save her father, but he also declines to save his own father. Bonshri search a job to overcome the crisis, but she does not find a job anywhere due to bad reputation of her father. No one comes forward to help Bonshri. Even, the doctor weds another girl, though Bonshri appeals the doctor to wait her for two years. Thus, after selling the paternal house and the furniture which are brought for her marriage, she refunds eighty thousand rupees to Government fund. However, she cannot succeed to save her father from imprisonment. Maniram Baglary suffers in jail for his guilty. He suffers mentally thinking about daughter's future. After five months he dies in jail due to heart fail. From Simla his son arrives at home to perform funeral ceremony of father. They perform father's funeral ceremony at their uncle's home. After the end of funeral ceremony, Bonshri sends her mother with her brother to Simla. She gives away the ambassador car to her mother. After four months she also goes to South India and there she becomes a Nun in a Catholic Church.

The agents of socio-cultural transition:

The traditional society and culture of the Bodos is changing slowly with the passing of time. The outlook and living style of the Bodo society is becoming modern as well as global gradually. Modernity has broadened the world of the Bodos and has brought basic changes in their social and cultural life. Several agents are usually considered as responsible for the socio-cultural transition of the Bodos. Some of this are-

1. **Modern education:** Modern education is one of the most influential agents of social and cultural change. The introduction of modern education enables the Bodo people to take advantage of new opportunities that came in course of time. Modern education imparted the required skill and knowledge to them which are needed for doing the modern jobs of different government agencies or business corporations emerged in town and semi-town.
2. **Brahma religion:** Brahma religion is one of the major factors for social and cultural transition of the Bodos. The emergence of Brahma religion in Bodo society brought changes in culture. Changes in Bodo society and culture began with the preaching of Guru Kalicharan Brahma. Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma initiated reforms in all fields- social, religious, political, economic and educational.
3. **Bodo social organizations:** Time to time various Bodo social organizations emerged in Bodo society with reformation mission to uplift the Bodo society. The social organizations strongly participated in mobilization with reformation mission to uplift the socio-cultural, socio-economic, socio-religious and socio-political condition of the Bodo society. Certain changes have come in Bodo society and culture through the mobilization of various Bodo social organizations.
4. **Christianity:** Christianity is one of the major factors for social and cultural change of the Bodos. The traditional Bodo society, which met Christianity in the twentieth century, underwent a great change. Through the works of various Christian missionaries, namely *Australian Baptist Missionary society, Anglican Church, Lutheran Missionaries* etc. certain changes came in traditional Bodo society and culture.
5. **Towns and semi-towns:** The towns or semi-towns of Bodo concentrated area are one of the major factors for socio-cultural transition of the Bodos. The emergence of town and semi-town brought new employment opportunities in society. And the emergence of employment opportunities in various towns or semi-towns has brought a change in the mindset, in livelihood, in economic position and living style of the Bodos.
6. **Modern communication:** Emergence of modern communication is one of the major factors for cultural changes of the Bodos. Development of modern means of transport and communication brought certain changes in their mindset as well as living style.
7. **Science and technology:** Science and technology is one of the major factors for socio-cultural transition of the Bodos. Emergence of science and technology has been playing an important role in changing the traditional culture in many aspects. Emergence of science and technology has brought changes on house type, furniture, utensils, musical instruments, costumes etc.

VII. ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Change on place of living:

Traditionally the Bodo society is an agrarian society. They are an inhabitant of village. However, from an extensive analysis of the chosen text, it is observed that Maniram Baglary and his family members live in town. Maniram Baglary is a Superintendent of Weaving Department. On the other hand, the son of Maniram, is an employee of Central Public Work Department. He is an engineer. The son and daughter- in- low of Maniram Baglary, live in Simla.

Change on family structure:

The family is the basic unit of social structure of every society. The Bodo society is primarily patriarchal. In Bodo family is called *Nokhor*. In a *Nokhor* (family) of traditional society, grandfather, grandmother, father, mother, sons, daughter, uncle, aunts and their children etc. live together. Thus, a '*Nokhor*' consists of grandfather, grandmother, father, mother, sons, daughter, uncle, aunts and their children etc. In traditional society, father is the sole guardian of a family. Father is the head of the family, who is obeyed by other members of the *Nokhor*. However, from the analysis of the text, it is seen that the family of Maniram Baglary is a nuclear family. His family consists of only father, mother, sons and daughter. Moreover, the son of Maniram and Mayarani, who is an engineer and an employee of Central Public Work Department, lives in Simla with his wife. It is also a nuclear family.

Change on livelihood:

The primary basis of Bodo economy is land and the natural environment they live. Agriculture was the primary and common occupation to all the families. Earlier, all the members of a family could not think other than participating in this process. Besides, economy of the Bodos was dependent on hunting, fishing, collecting of forest product and basket and mat making etc. Apart from that, the rearing of Eri and Muga was another traditional economic activity of the Bodos. In traditional society, Bodo women used to go to forest for collecting seasonal vegetables, mushrooms, roots, fruits, firewood etc. However, from an inclusive analysis of the text, it is observed that Maniram Baglary is a salaried middle class man. In place of traditional occupation like-cultivation, rearing eri, spinning, weaving etc. he has accepted government job to earn money. He is a superintendent of weaving department. He lives in town. On the other hand, the son of Maniram Baglary is an employee of Central Public Work Department, who is a self-centred and egoistic man. The job of Central Public Work Department is his main basis of income as well as livelihood. Acceptance of job brings progress in their economic condition as well as living style remarkably.

Change on house type:

There were definite regulations for house building and maintaining household in traditional Bodo society. Their house making materials were *straw or jungle thatch, grass, bamboo trellis, strips of bamboo, wood, mud* etc. Usually, the huts are made of straw or jungle grass supported by bamboo trellis or of strips of bamboo. The walls are mud-plastered. Earlier, before constructing any house, they build *Bakri* (Granary) in the east of the homestead. After that, they build another important house, the *Goli* (Cowshed) in the South-East corner. The main house *Noma No* (main house) is built on the north side, facing to the south. The main house is partitioned into three rooms. The first is known as *Khopra*, the middle is *Akhong* and the third is known as the *Ising*. The first room *Khopra* is used as sleeping room of the unmarried girls of the household, the second room *Akhong* is used as dining room and the third room *Ishing* is used as kitchen. The main house possesses only one door and a passage inside from one room to another room. The Bodos call the guesthouse as *Chourano* or *Nosuna*. The *Chourano* or *Nosuna* (guesthouse) is built in the front of the homestead. Generally, it is kept outside the inner compound of the homestead. The *Chaoura No* or *Nosuna* is used by the bachelors. However, from an inclusive analysis of the selected text, it is observed that Maniram Baglary, who is a salaried middle class man, does not make his house like the traditional house, which is made of jungle grass and supported by bamboo trellis or of strips of bamboo. But, Maniram constructs a reinforced cement concrete (R.C.C) building in Guwahati. The house of Maniram Baglary is modern.

Change on mindset and lifestyle:

The primary basis of Bodo economy was land and the natural environment they live. Usually, they were satisfied having possessed cultivable land and cultivation. However, from an extensive analysis of the selected text, it is observed that Maniram Baglary and the son of Maniram Baglary has accepted government job instead of cultivation which means change in mindset. Maniram is a Superintendent of Weaving Department. On the other hand, Maniram Baglary's son is an employee of Central Public Work Department. Thus, their mindset and living style is different from traditional mindset and living style. Acceptance of modern livelihood brings improvement in their socio-economic position. It is observed that Maniram Baglary diverts eighty thousand rupees from government fund to his own account with a view to give gift in daughter's marriage which also shows change of mindset. There was no dowry system in traditional Bodo society. Maniram Baglary's thinking and desire to give gift in daughter's marriage signifies his progressive attitude and change of mindset. The giving of some valuable properties like furniture, ornaments of gold, ornaments of diamond, radio, gramophone set etc. as gift in daughter's marriage is new practice in Bodo society, which is the impact of other Indian communities, particularly immediate neighbours. On the other hand, Maniram Baglary's involvement in financial corruption indicates his selfish and corrupted mindset. It is also observed that Maniram Baglary sends their children to modern educational institution to learn modern education instead of engaging in cultivation

work. This indicates his realization of modern education. This is the change of mindset. Maniram Baglary's fondness of modern education as well as teaching his children in a well-off educational institution signifies his progressive mindset. Modern education broadens their traditional mindset and enables them to adopt modern lifestyle.

Traditionally the Bodos are simple, honest and kind-hearted. They regard honesty as essential human quality. In traditional Bodo society, elderly peoples are respected. Father, the guardian of a family, is respected and obeyed by other members of the family. Husband is respected by wife. There were good relationship and faithfulness among the family members. Faithfulness is the source of inspiration of life. Moreover, every member has loyalties to family. However, from an inclusive analysis of the text, it is observed that the thinking and nature of both Mayarani Baglary and son of Maniram and Mayarani Baglary (who is an engineer) is contrary to traditional moral value. Both have no intimate human relationship with Maniram Baglary. Rather, both are selfish. Both think only about their own interest. They do not have loyalties to family, which is contrary to traditional moral value. They do not try to save Maniram, while he is terminated from the job and sent to jail for his corruption. However, for them money and luxury is more important than loyalties to family. They are fond of luxury, fashion and town life. Mayarani Baglary is fond of reinforced cement concrete (R.C.C) building, ambassador car, fashionable dress, cosmetics, etc. On the other hand, the son of Maniram and Mayarani, who is an employee of Central Public Work Department, is a selfish man. Thus, it is observed that human relationship and loyalty to family is declining in due course of time. With the coming of time, some of the new generations are becoming ambitious, fashionable and hypocrite.

Previously majority of the Bodo women are expert weavers. Weaving is practiced in every Bodo family. Earlier, a girl, who is ignorant of spinning and weaving generally castigated by the society and do not get any position in society. Nevertheless, the maiden who is ignorant of spinning and weaving, not only incurs the social odium but also finds it difficult to get married. Thus, earlier Bodo women keep busy themselves with spinning and weaving. However, from an extensive analysis of the chosen text, it is observed that Bonshri is not interested with all these activities. Rather, she has a great interest in modern education. Thus, she completes M.A. degree. She is a highly educated and courageous woman. The attitude of Bonshri to save her father as well as family from crisis is it's evident. It is observed that though the secretary of sericulture and weaving department and her brother refuse to help her, still she tries to save her father, which signifies her optimism as well as progressive mindset. She sells the paternal house and the furniture which are brought for her marriage ceremony to refunds eighty thousand rupees of government fund, which also indicates her broad and progressive mindset. Bonshri seeks job while crisis come in their family. The thinking of Bonshri to lead her life as well as family doing modern job is progressive. This is the impact of modern education as well as new world view. Thus, it is seen the mindset and lifestyle of the Bodos are changing slowly. And the writer has eloquently reflected the changes of Bodo culture through storytelling and characterization of his story.

Change on religion:

The traditional religion of the Bodos is 'Bathou'. Bathou, the original religion beers strong influence on social customs and behaviour. However, from the analysis of the chosen text, it is observed that Bonshri, the daughter of Mayarani and Mayarani has accepted Christianity. She is a highly educated girl. It is seen that after the end of her father's funeral ceremony, Bonshri goes to South India and there she becomes a Nun in a Catholic Church. Thus, it is observed that a section of the Bodos has converted into different religions. Some of them have embraced various Hinduism sects. On the other hand, some of them have embraced Christianity. Thus, the Bodo society has become a multi-religious society. Now, in Bodo society there are people of multi religion. In Bodo society, there are people of *Bathou Dharma*, *Brahma Dharma*, *Christianity*, *Saivism*, *Vaisnavism*, *Satsang* and *Ek Saran Naam Dharma*.

VIII. FINDINGS

From an extensive analysis of the selected short story from sociological view point, the following observation can be made.

1. The writer of the selected short story has attempted to reflect the socio-cultural transition of the Bodos.
2. The traditional place of living, family, house type, livelihood, mindset, lifestyle, religion etc. are changing slowly in course of time due to impact of modernity.
3. Some of the new generation has accepted modern livelihood besides cultivation. Thus, the importance of towns or cities has increased highly in Bodo society.
4. The knowledge of modern education and the development of science and technology enable them to realize the modern lifestyle.
5. Realization of modern education brings changes in mindset as well as lifestyle.
6. Acceptance of modern livelihood brings improvement in their socio-economic position as well as lifestyle.

7. The Bodo society has become a plural society, a multi-religious society.
8. Nowadays, some of the present generations are becoming dishonest, complex and selfish day by day.

IX. CONCLUSION

From an inclusive analysis of the selected text, *Udrainai* (Purification) written by Nilkamal Brahma; it is observed that the traditional Bodo society and culture is changing slowly due to impact of modernity. Changes are observed both in material and in non-material culture. In the story, the writer has reflected the changes on mindset, in moral values, living style etc. Changes on mindset, in moral values and living style are reflected through the activities of Maniram Baglary, Mayarani Baglary, Son of Maniram and Mayarani Baglary (Who is an engineer) and Bonshri (The daughter of Maniram and Mayarani Baglary). Moreover, changes are observed on place of living, on house planning and construction, on livelihood, on religion etc. Moreover, among the Bodos, a middle class society emerged. Changes on livelihood and the emergence of a middle class society are reflected through the activities of Maniram and son of Maniram, who is an engineer. The writer has mirrored the changes on place of living, on house planning and construction through the activity of Maniram and son of Maniram. Some of the new generation have converted in to various Hinduism sects and some of them have embraced Christianity. Consequently, the Bodo society has become a plural society; a multi-religious society. Conversion to other religion is reflected through the activities of Bonshri. Thus, it is observed that the Bodo culture is growing slowly with the passing of time. The outlook and living style of the Bodo society is becoming modern as well as global. Modernity has broadened the world of the Bodos and has brought basic changes in their social and cultural life. Such kinds of descriptions are vividly visible in the selected short story. Thus, it is observed that the writer has eloquently mirrored the socio-cultural transition of the Bodos.

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