

Inside Society, Culture and Public Health Readings in Anthropology



Edited by
Milonjyoti Borgohain
Dhritiman Sharma

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Social Folk Customs Associated with Birth, Puberty and Death Rites of the Sonowal Kacharis of Assam

—*Sarati Gohain Dewarath*

The word "Social Folk Customs" is an important area of Folklore and Folk life. According to Dr. B.M. Denson, "It is very close to material culture and lies in between oral literature and material culture. Here the emphasis is on group interaction rather than on individual skills and performance" (Denson, 1972, 3). The Oxford English Dictionary gives the meaning of the term "custom" as "a traditional and generally accepted way of behaving or doing things." Thus customs are an important part of the life of each and every community or group of people living in this world. The social folk customs are based on traditional beliefs and practices. Each one of us living in the society has our own customs, beliefs, rites and rituals. The ritualistic observances differ from society to society.

Assam is a land where people from different community and tribe live together. These groups of people have their own distinctive culture, traditions and customs. Each tribe live their life carrying with them the traditional beliefs and practices. Among these the Sonowal Kachari tribe is one of the largest plain tribe of Assam. They are the offshoot of the Jhoo-Burman or Bodo group of people. At present they are distributed in the different districts of the Bokakpura valley. The Sonowal Kacharis have their own social folk customs which is being practised till date. The topic of discussion in this paper is the Social Folk customs associated with birth, puberty and death rites of the Sonowal Kachari Tribe of Assam.

Customs associated with birth rites

The Sonowal Kacharis practice certain customs when a woman expects a baby. There are also certain folk beliefs which are usually seen in the

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Mahashweta Devi's “Draupadi” as a tool against Gender Violence

Suravi Gohain Duwarah

Mahashweta Devi was a writer and an activist. Her work incorporated the plights of women and tribals. Her short story “Draupadi” is the tale of a Santhali woman named Dopdi Mehjen, who fights against the system and the systematic gender violence and emerges victorious. Mahashweta Devi tells the story of this tribal woman who is caught during a Naxal uprising, for fighting for her rights and is brutally gang raped by the police officers who catch her. The story shows how a patriarchal society sees abusing a woman as the only way to break her soul and spirit and leave her helpless. They rape her and leave her covered in blood. But Dopdi refuses to be victimized. She gets up, gets rid of the clothes put on her and marches naked to the Senanayak. Every man standing there feels terrified of her bravery and nobody dares to touch her as she fumes in anger. She says that they could only rip her clothes off, but they cannot make her put them back on. Mahashweta Devi's Dopdi serves as the epitome of a woman's strength who refuses to stick to the boundaries and the limitations

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FOLKLORE OF THE THENGAL KACHARIS : CHANGES AND ITS PRESERVATION (WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE FESTIVALS)

Dr. Suravi Gohain Duwarah*

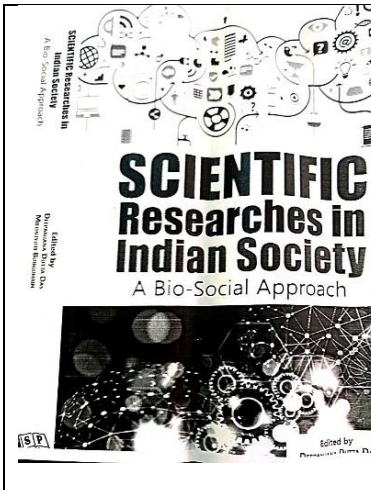
Abstract

The term Folklore means a group of people and their life and culture. Here the term life means the traditional way and pattern of life of a particular group of people i.e. folk. The major divisions of folklore are oral literature, social folk customs, performing art and material culture. In this paper an attempt has been made to study the folklore of the Thengal Kachari tribe of Assam with special reference to the festivals celebrated by this ethnic group. Festivals and Celebrations are included in the social folk custom category of Folklore. In this paper an attempt has been made to study the customs related to the celebration of the festivals of this tribe and the changes in their customs. Discussion is also made regarding the factors responsible for the changes and has suggested some measures for the preservation and protection of these.

Keywords : Folklore, Festivals, Preservation, Protection.

Folklore and Folklife means the knowledge of a particular group of people and their life. Here the term life means the way of their life, their culture, tradition, customs, beliefs and practices. Folklore is somewhat which is handed over from one

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CHAPTER EIGHT RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES OF THE THENGAL KACHARIS OF ASSAM

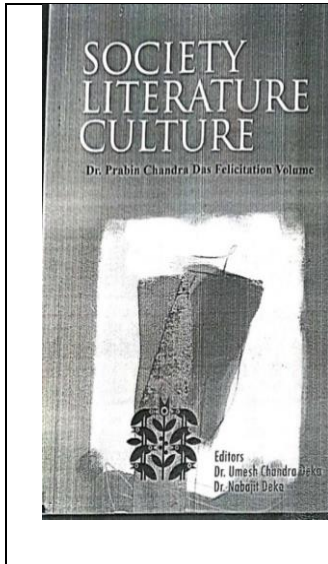
Suzani Gohain Umrahah

INTRODUCTION

Assam is a land where people with heterogeneous culture and tradition live together. It comprises of different caste, community and races, and among all these the Thengal Kachari is a small ethnic group. The Thengal Kacharis belong to the great Bodo group of the Mongoloid family. As Dr. B.N. Das states, "The Bodos may be divided into the western group and the eastern group. The Rabha, Meeh, Garo are some of the members of the western group, while the Sonowal, Thengal, Jharia etc. belong to the eastern group. (Das 2016:107)

Regarding the origin of the Thengal Kacharis there is very little mention of this ethnic group. There are myths, tales and legends which speak about the origin of the 'Kacharis'. But if we look into the historical writings there is very little information regarding the 'Thengal Kacharis', their earliest settlement and their migration. The history is also silent about this. Some of the scholars and anthropologists have studied the matter and has stated their opinions regarding this.

Dr. Jogeswar Borah writes, "There is a saying that in the war of 1526 A.D. when the Kachari King Khunhura won the war against the Ahom King Suhungmung Dihingia, two Kachari youth who were brave and expert in magic and bow, namely Jangbahadur and Chakradhwaj decided to establish two separate kingdoms. They came with some Kachari family and established a Kachari kingdom with its capital at Kachamar field. Jangbahadur became the first king and then Chakradhwaj. Their soldiers used to wear a trouser called 'thenga' while they fought. They wore thenga even in the time of peace. This was the reason that the king Jangbahadur and his subjects were called as 'Thengal Kacharis'. (Borah, 2013: 169). Presently the Thengal Kacharis are inhabitants of



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FESTIVALS AND CELEBRATION OF THE THENGAL KACHARIS IN LAKHIMPUR DISTRICT OF ASSAM : A FOLKLORISTIC STUDY

Suravi Gobain Duwarah*

The Thengal Kachari tribe of Assam is a small plain tribe having their rich culture and tradition. They belong to the great Bodo group of Indo-Mongoloid, Tibeto-Burman stock. Dr. B.M. Das, the renowned anthropologist stated, "The Bodos may be divided into the western group and the eastern group. The Rabha, Mech, Garo are some of the members of the western group, while the Sonowal, Thengal, Jharua, etc. belong to the eastern group" (Das, 2010, p.184).

This tribe is very close to the Sonowal Kachari tribe of Assam. Both the Thengal and Sonowal Kacharis are offshoot of the great Kachari race. Both these tribes are given the status of Scheduled Tribe, but till now there is no mention of this small tribe in the Scheduled Tribe list of Assam. This tribe is mainly scattered in the districts of Jorhat, Golaghat, Dibrugarh, Dhemaji and North Lakhimpur of Assam.

This small ethnic group inhabiting in several districts of Assam have adopted the Assamese culture and tradition to a great extent. As a result of the process of acculturation and assimilation with the greater Assamese society they are in a process of transformation. The major factor behind this is the impact of Neo-Vaishnavism and the influence of