

# Traditional Beliefs on Magic of Bodo and Assamese: A Comparative Study

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**Abstract:** Magic is an integral part of beliefs and practices which is directly linked with social beliefs as well as folk religion. Generally, magic is not socially acceptable. It is a primitive one. Magic is the attempt to control the mysterious forces of nature by means of inadequate to that end. The untoward natural events, inadequate technical means, situations full of danger and uncertainty lead to beliefs in the magical practices. The Bodo and Assamese are inhabitant people of Assam. They have own culture, tradition and traditional beliefs and practices which are related to the rituals and natural land where they inhabit. The land and nature are the sources of their subsistence economy, culture, history and religious heritages. Without the land and nature these factors have no meaning and value in their lives. In general, family and individual are regulated by religion, which influence people's behaviour, action, faith for enforcing social norms and ethics. Magic is an integral part of traditional beliefs of the Bodo and Assamese society. They have great traditional beliefs on the magic.

**Key Words:** Traditional Beliefs, Magic, Bodo, Assamese and Comparative Study.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Magical beliefs and practices came into being along with human existence. Magic attempted to overpower the forces of nature and the supernatural powers which believed that these forces are capable of bringing fortune or misfortune to man. It is a belief system which involves certain rite, magical objects, a magic formula and a person officiating. Magic is white or black; it is white if the practices are performed are intended to bring about some good favourable results for human beings, even if they are achieved with the evil spirits; it is black, if it is intended to cause some evil result by incantation, spells and other actions.

The Bodos are one of the major ethnic and linguistics aboriginal communities belonging to the Indo-Mongoloid family of Tibeto-Burman stock of the Assam-Burmese group of the Brahmaputra valley in the northeast part of India. The Bodo people are recognized as a plains tribe in the 6<sup>th</sup> schedule of the Indian constitution. They are residing or living in many districts, both plains and hills areas in Assam. Generally, they are widely scattered, but mostly concentrated in districts of Baska, Bogaigaon, Kokrajhar, Barpeta, Chirang, Goalpara, Kamrup, Dhubri, Nagaon, Sonitpur, Dhemaji, Karbi Anglong and Lakhimpur. Besides Assam, Bodos are also found in Meghalaya, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, West Bengal and even Nepal. At present, the Bodo group of speech community is scattered all over Assam. On the other hand, the non-tribal Assamese people are belongs to the Indo-Aryan language family. Generally, the Assamese people are native or inhabitant of Assam in North-East India. The majority people inhabit in the maximum numbers districts of Assam. They are among the original inhabitants of the place, and typical culture of the place grew with them. Among the prominent caste, especially non-tribal Hindu Assamese includes Ahoms, Brahmins, Koch, Kalitas, Baishya, Yogis, and the Scheduled Caste etc. Particularly they have their own culture but they are known as Assamese in general.

Mentioned may made here, they have rich traditional beliefs and practices on magic which have been gradually transmitting among them since early times. We have found that the *Tantra-Mantra*, *Jadu-Vidya*, *Jara-phukha* and some materials have been prevalent in the village areas of Bodo and Assamese societies. It is also observed that the beliefs on the *Tantra-Mantra* and *Jadu-vidya* etc. practices of both white and black magic are popular among the Bodos than Assamese.

The traditional beliefs of the Bodos and Assamese do not have any founder or reformer as such. In other words their traditional beliefs and practices are not centred on a great historical person or persons like modern world religions. In the traditional beliefs and practice of Bodo and Assamese worldview one cannot clearly distinguish between the sacred and secular, between religious and non-religious, and between the spiritual and material areas of life. It is seen that all the cultural components are so neatly interrelated that if one element is disturbed the whole social set up is affected. They had been handed down their traditional beliefs and practices from the time immemorial.

Like other people of different society of different countries, the people of Bodo and Assamese are very prone to liking traditional beliefs and practices. Most of the rural people depends their livelihood on cultivation and they have different folk amusement, while chiefly depends on the folk and ritual culture of the society. Comparatively, the Assamese traditional beliefs and practices are much richer than the Bodos. So, a comparative study is necessary to know

the Bodo as well as Assamese traditional beliefs and practices and how they have maintaining their traditions in this globalization era. It is important to understand the impact of both the cultures in society. So, an attempt has been made in this research study about the traditional beliefs on the magic which have been prevalent among the Bodo and Assamese.

## 2. OBJECTIVES:

- To study about the traditional beliefs on magic of the Bodo and Assamese.
- To bring into light the culture of two different groups; Bodo and Assamese.
- The focus of my research work is comparative study of the traditional beliefs and practices between Bodo and Assamese.

## 3. METHODOLOGY:

The Analytical method is employed for collecting data. The data collected are analyzed and synthesized on this study. Necessary data and information are collected by consulting both primary and secondary sources. The information from different people Bodo and Assamese are the primary source. The secondary sources have been collected from archival data, text books, journals, and articles.

## 4. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS:

Magic is an integral part of traditional beliefs of Bodo and Assamese society. The untoward natural events, inadequate technical means, situations full of danger and uncertainty lead to beliefs in the magical practices. They have believed in magical potency as well as use magical power in many ways. They extensively believed in and practice both white magic and black magic. The person who practices magic called “*Oja*” and “*Bez*” (medicine man) particularly in the Bodo and Assamese society. The *Mantra* (the Chant) is the principal source of their magic which is known as “*Mwnthor*” among the Bodos. They believed in the existence of spirits, ghosts, witchcraft, etc. also they believed that these super-natural elements cause diseases and sufferings to the human beings. Traditionally, they have been believed that the *Oja and Bez* can prevent the evil activities of those supernatural elements. Magical practice is also performed to cure certain simple disease. The beliefs and practice of magic in Assamese society was quite prominent in the past. We have found magic plays an important role in the folk life of Bodo and Assamese peoples. Magic in the form of charms, incantations, spells, divination, ceremonialism, possession, shamanism, etc. are still prevalent. More or less, the magical beliefs and practices are still prevalent in both societies as other. They also have a considerable amount of common magical beliefs and practices.

### 4.1 White magic

Generally, white magic is not negligible, so white magic is considered the number of the *Oja* or *Bez*, especially who are expert. It is believed that like human beings the god and goddess, and evil spirits are roaming invisibly. It is also believed that sometimes they create troubles to the human beings. To protect the human beings from their troubles the importance of the medicine man is very high among the both societies even today. Among the different societies besides the tribal societies, the beliefs and practices are still prevalent. We have seen that for the welfare of the human societies the practice of the white magic is more popular among the both societies than the black magic.

So, they have been using white magic in different ways since earliest for the preventions such types of disease and evil spirit like – Magical water, Winnowing of mantra, Magical thread, Burning of mustard seeds and chillies etc. The white magic is supposedly utilized only for good or unselfish purposes only. The practices of sorcery are still prevalent among the both societies.

#### 4.1.1 Khuga Nangnai or Mukhloga

The belief in the danger resulting from the evil eye prevails widely in the Bodo society. Sometimes we have seen that the human beings are considered to be potential causes of disease. They are regarded to be the causes of misfortunes other than disease also. In the Bodo traditional beliefs, the phenomenon of the evil eye is more of an act of the mouth than the eye. It is known as “*Najar nangnai*” (Sight or vision) or “*Khuga Nangnai*” in Bodo. Generally, the word “*Khuga*” means the mouth as well as the face and “*Nangnai*” means to be affected in Bodo. The literal meaning of “*Khuga Nangnai*” is affected by the evil spirits. Specially, it is takes place as a result of being said as well as being seen. As for example, if somebody tells that his or her child is very healthy and the child falls ill thereafter, which is an act of evil eye. Again, there is a beliefs among the Bodo, if one eats out of doors and is seen eating by somebody and consequently has stomach troubles, then also it is an act of *Khuga Nangnai*. They may suffer a stomachache every time they eat in public place especially in the feasts. Traditionally, the Bodo society has believed that it works on human beings, animals as well as plants. As a result men fall ill, grow thinner, and lose appetite due to evil eye. If somebody leads a disease free life, he may be infected by disease as a result of evil eye.

On the other hand, In the Assamese traditional beliefs, the phenomenon of the evil eye is more of an act of the mouth than the eye. Generally, the word “*Mukh*” means the mouth as well as the face in Assamese. The literal meaning of “*Mukhloga*” is touched by the mouth or the face. Specially, *mukhloga* takes place as a result of being said as well as being seen. As for example, if somebody tells that his or her child is very healthy and the child falls ill thereafter, which is an act of *mukhloga*. Again, there is a beliefs among the Assamese, if one eats out of doors and is seen eating by somebody and consequently has stomach troubles, then also it is an act of *mukhloga*. They may suffer a stomachache every time they eat in public especially in the feasts. They believed that there are some people who have an evil mouth as well as an evil eye which causes of diseases as well as other misfortunes. Traditionally, the Assamese society has believed that it works on human beings, animals as well as plants. As a result men fall ill, grow thinner, and lose appetite due to *mukhloga*. If somebody leads a disease free life, he may be infected by disease as a result of *mukhloga*. Apart from these some people are identified as possessing an evil mouth or an evil eye.

#### 4.1.2 Dwi Jarinai or Panijora

The Bodo and Assamese people believed that if some persons sometimes voluntarily or involuntarily injure others especially children by looking at him. Mild spitting on the face of the child guards such evil eyeing. Moreover, for the cure of this type of disease some seeds and chillies are rooted over the head of the patient and afterwards thrown it to fire which is known as “*Khuga dannai*” and “*Mukh Kota*” in Bodo and Assamese society. In case of such type of disease, the medicine men are called who cure the illness through spells of magical water, which is known as “*Dwi Jarinai*” and “*Panijora*” in Bodo and Assamese. Especially, this water is given to ailing person to drink, who is not allowed to take the common water. A few leaves of the “*Tulansi*” (basil leaf) and Salt are also kept in water. The water spells are used to remove snake venom and spirit possession also. We have also seen that brushing the body of the patient with twigs of certain plants such as “*Bihlangani*” (Skt. Visalanhini) and “*Dingkhia*” or “*Dhekia*” (Fern) during recitation of spell is a common feature of this practice.

#### 4.1.3 Khasni or Maduli

Sometimes they believed on magical thread as white magic for the disease and evil eye suffering person. Eventually, a small piece of thread full of incantation is bound around the wrist or the neck of a sufferer. The small piece thread is called “*Khasini*” and “*Mukhloga rosi*” or “*Dul*” or “*Maduli*” particularly in Bodos and Assamese and this rite is known as “*Khasini ganhwnai*” and “*rosi pindhuwa*” among them. Generally, it can be applied on Tuesday or Saturday only. One must use the thread for a period of one week. If the patient recovers before the completion of one week even then thread must be retained on the body for a week. They believed that through this thread the sufferer patient may recovers.

#### 4.1.4 Jarinai or Jora-phuka

There is a traditional belief among the Bodos and Assamese that some diseases can be removed by applying formula of mantra only. It is seen that for the remedies of diseases, the people of both societies has believed to occur out of natural cause empirical medicine and mantras, which are extensively used among them. The “*Jarinai*” and “*Jora-phuka*” is the common term in Bodo and Assamese for incantation of the mantra. In Assamese “*Jara*” means winnowing and “*phuka*” means blowing air from the mouth. The performance of the *oja* or *bej* while treating a patient with mantras has something to do with lashing and blowing air. The medicine man applies the formula *mwnthor* or *mantra* on the body or any affected parts of the body of the patient with the leaves of seven times or five times. He takes a few polygonal plants which is known as “*Saldaokhumoi*” and “*Bihlongoni*” in Bodo and Assamese, and lashes the patients while chanting the mantra over the patient. In some cases blowing of air is done thrice at the end of the mantra. This act is called “*Phuka*” in Assamese. The word “*Jara*” also implies both the acts and is more commonly used where method is applied in uttering a mantra over the patient. The act is used in a wider sense to mean to charm also, in case of uttering a mantra over medicines and other objects only air is blown. In treating an upset stomach ginger, water, etc. are charm with mantra.

We have found that the beliefs of black magic are also spread in the area among the Bodo and Assamese. Especially, the “*Bej*” or “*Oja*” are believed to employ a variety of techniques which evil spirits achieve their ends by the malevolent use of food. They believed that the *Bej* or *Oja* make introduced some charmed objects; such as human hair, a bit of animal sinew in the victim by mining it with his food. It is believed that this multiples and fills the entire stomach of the victim. Generally, in the marriage parties, particularly the bride, bridegroom and their relatives are supposed to be open to the danger of the evil spells and charms of ban.

#### 4.1.5 Suthi dannai or Suthi bhonga

Sometimes the babies cry without rest and avoid to takes the milk of the mother. Then they believed that the baby is suffering from “*Suthi nangnai*” and “*Suthi loga*” (attack by evil spirit). The *Oja* or *Bez* removes the evil spirit

with the help of Mantra or the formula which is called “*Suthi dannai*” in Bodo and “*Suthi bhonga*” in Assamese, which means the removals of the evil spirits.

#### 4.1.6 Gothoi Mahkhananai

There is a belief among the Bodos, sometimes the dead person enters into the body of a living person and speaks by the mouth of the latter. Also, it is believed that if a person dies with unfulfilled desires, his soul cannot be freed from the bondage of the earth. His soul roams here and there on the earth without reaching the heaven; the abode of the god. Again we have found another belief that if the “*Saradu*” or “*Shradha*” (funeral ceremony) is not properly solemnised after the death of a person then his soul cannot get salvation. The person on whose body the soul of a dead man enters either he or she remains unconscious. It is believed that the body of a person must be kept sacred and untouched while the soul of a dead man enters into it. The person regains consciousness while the *Oja* (the medicine man) sprinkle sacred or holy water on his body as soon as the soul of the dead man leaves him. This is called “*Gothoi mankhangai*” among the Bodos which means entering of a dead person soul into the body of living person. This type of white magic is not found in Assamese society.

## 4.2 Black Magic

The Black magic is a supernatural power of magic for evil and selfish purposes. It is a type of magic that believed to use evil spirit to innocent people to do harmful. They have beliefs of supernatural power also. The Bodo and Assamese people beliefs that many diseases are due to the influence of the black magic, i.e - *Ban Hogarnai* or *Ban Mara*, *Ar Ban* or *Barma Ban*, *Job Phobnai* or *Job Puta*, *Muhini* or *Muhini mantra*, *Bhelki Vidya*, *Khetra Hamnai* or *Khetra Dhora* and *Daina* or *Daini*. Mentioned may be made here, in Bodo society the beliefs on black magic are much more than Assamese.

### 4.2.1 Ban Hogarnai or Ban Mara

The “*Ban Hogarnai* or *Ban Mara*” is a black magic practiced by the *Oja* or *Bez* among the Bodo and Assamese, which is a part of their traditional belief system. They believed that the *Oja* or *Bez* performs powerful magic against their enemies by this black magic. The hunters take help of the black magic while hunting in the forest. Mention may be made, with the help of such types of *Ban*; the *Oja* or *Bez* can apply magical power against their enemies. They believed that *Oja* or *Bez* require only the names of their enemies while they apply their black magic and from a distant place and can kill the enemies with the help of black magic.

Another believed is that the black magic is used in safeguarding the life from the attack of a ferocious animal like the tiger or the bear which is called “*Bewaini manthor*” in Bodo. The *Bewai* means the wife of the younger brother or the husband of a younger sister of a lady in relation. It is seen that a strict sanctity is maintained between the two persons related with this relation, *Bewai*, in the Bodo society. Generally, a married lady is ashamed of talking freely with her *Bewai*. As per their beliefs a ferocious animal like the bear also feels ashamed of appearing before a person if the *bewai manthor* is applied. In this way, a person can be saved from an imminent danger created by ferocious wild animals.

### 4.2.2 Ar Ban or Barma Ban

The *Ar ban* or *Barma ban* is another black magic which is known as magic of fire in Bodo. They believed that this black magic also applied against an enemy. As a result of this black magic fire originates at any place of the house against a person whom the *Ar ban* or the *Barma ban* is applied which can be removed by another stronger *Oja* only.

### 4.2.3 Thepa Ban

The “*Thepa*” or “*Amboo thepa*” is a kind of frog. It expands its belly if it is touched by anybody. Just like the belly of a *Thepa* or the *Amboo thepa* the *Oja*, who is expert in *Thepa ban* can expand the belly of a person. This type of black magic is not found among the Assamese.

### 4.2.4 Job Phobnai or Job Puta

The Bodo and Assamese people beliefs that if a family is suffering from such black magic, the members of such a family lose lives without proper treatment. It is also believed that no medicine can remove such a disease unless or until the magic is removed by an *Oja* or *Bez*. This type of black magic is applied by the *Oja* or *Bez* with the help of powerful mantra which is applied on some “*Jabs*” (corns) and which put under the ground, especially under the courtyard or back side of the house. They believed that the members of the family suffer from certain unknown disease due to the action of the magic. The strong and powerful *Oja* or *Bez* can removed the applied magic and save the lives of the victims. Some men or women are expert in the black magic and they are called “*Daina*” (Men witch) “*Dainis*” (women witch) in Bodo and Assamese. Naturally, they are neglected by the society. And it is observed that sometimes such black magic follower persons are outcaste by the society.

#### 4.2.5 Muhini or Muhini mantra

The *Muhini or Muhini mantra* is a part of black magic. A person can bring somebody else under his control with the help of magic called *Muhini mantra* or *Manthar*. The people Bodo and Assamese believed that if someone love but could not get his or her, whether he or she is married or unmarried, younger or elder, from any caste or religion, or even angry with the person will become close to his or her through the healing of *Muhini mantra*. This magic is generally applied to the married couple, lovers and enemies.

#### 4.2.6 Bhelki Vidya

In earlier days, the Bodo and Assamese people were believed to be expert in the *bhelki vidya*. It is also a part of black magic. With the help of this black magic or sorcery they detected the thieves. If the thieves stole away the ducks, cooks, etc. from a house, the *Oja or Bez*, who was expert in sorcery, caused the stolen cock or the duck cry inside the belly of the thief. The sorcerers could transform the flower of the plantains into a cock, influenced magic over the chilies. When the chili walked towards the guest from the house of the host in rows, transformed the plateful rice into a bundle of salts when the guest sat on the seat for the lunch. Besides, they also performed much other sorcery. In fact, every people are more or less superstitious, but the Bodo people are more so, and it is natural that these black arts formed the ground work of their religious life.

#### 4.2.7 Khetra Hamnai or Khetra Dhora

The Bodo and Assamese believed that sometimes the malevolent spirits attack any person, either male or female. As a result, the patient meets different ferocious animals like elephant, bear, tiger, etc. in dream and he is chased by these animals. He loses the health day by day and becomes bloodless which this sort of suffering is called "*Khetra hamnai*" or "*Khetra Dhora*". It is also believed that the pregnant women or the babies become victims of this suffering. Generally, the children of one or two years of age suffer from this *khetra*. It is very dangerous and the patient dies within twenty four hours, if proper treatment is not done.

They believed that the *khetra* can be removed if the gods are propitiated with the articles like knife, a pair of candle, a pair of incense sticks, a pair of bats, a little portion of vermilion, a piece of charcoal, a pair of areca nuts and betel leaves a small branch of the bamboo, rayon of red, white and black colours, a piece and a toad along with the *Oja* or *Bez* enchants the mantra or formula.

#### 4.2.8 Daina or Daini

The *Daina or Daini* (Witchcraft) is a part of black magic beliefs and practices. The witchcraft was born for killing innocent persons for the reason of jealousy, hatred, conflict, competition etc. this black magic is found much more among the Bodos than Assamese. Generally, the Witch practice and hunting are permeated all aspects of old renaissance culture. However, much incident owing to witch related issue particularly among the Bodo society has been endorsed by socio-economic backwardness as well as illiterate.

### 5. FINDINGS:

- The Bodo and Assamese have their own organized religion and place of worship where most of the rituals are performed.
- In comparison of Bodo and Assamese traditional beliefs and practices on magic, there are lots of similarities regarding the practices of white magic.
- Different types of white magic still believes by Bodo and Assamese society like – *Khuga Nangnai or Mukhloga, Doi Jarinai or Panijora, Khasni or Maduli, Jarinai or Jora-phuka and Suthi dannai or Suthi bhonga* etc. But process of practice and customs are different from each other.
- Besides this, more or less the beliefs of black magic are popular among the Bodos, like – *Gothoi Mahkhananai, Ban Hogarnai, Ar Ban or Barma Ban, Thepa Ban, Job Phobnai, Muhini or, Muhini mantra, Shaw hwnai, Bhelki Vidya and Khetra Hamnai*.
- The belief on black magic is merely not found in Assamese society. Actually, they are not believed in black magic as well as regarded as sin or taboo.

### 6. CONCLUSION:

The traditional beliefs on magic are key issues of Bodo and Assamese society. We have found that the field of traditional beliefs and practices of Bodos on magic is broader than Assamese. The human beings are social animals which socially have the nature of love, hatred, domination, jealous, enmity, revenge etc. These factors guide the internal human minds to seek evil power, thus it gives birth of black magic among the people. The educationally and socio-economic backwardness are the main reason of blind belief and practice. The traditional beliefs and practice on black magic is lead to violation of human rights in the society. In context of Science, traditional beliefs are superstitious. Each

and every persons of the society are under controlled with the scientific mechanism. Even though, the traditional beliefs are still prevailing among the Bodo and Assamese. So, people of both societies should follow the scientific behaviour along with modern ideology without any hesitation because society never statistic it is dynamic.

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