

Impact of Globalization on Kherai festival of the BODOS

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Abstract: Globalization on Kherai festival is an important topic in this globalized world, and as we notice that many indigenous tribes are facing some kind of identity crisis. The impact of Globalization is in every community around the globe. At the present days of science and technologies and with the help of mass media and communication we can collect the information of the socio-political, their economic and cultural pictures of different communities around the globe. The socio-cultural and religious practices of the various parts of the globe are mutually impacted due to the communication with each other around the globe. This mutual impact brings changes in many ways in cultural elements of the communities in various parts of the globe. When this cultural aspect changes and gets a fresh form can be called globalization. This globalization impacts their religion as well as the religious practices and festivals of a community. The Bodo culture of North-east India is also impacted by the process of globalization. The scientific and technological development of the 21st century has introduced the Bodo culture to the world. This leads the ways of Globalization to enter into the Bodo culture and their religious practices. Various factors help the globalization process to enter the Bodo culture. It will be studied particularly about the impact of globalization on the Kherai festival of the Bodos in this proposed topic. The 'Kherai' is one of the most important festivals of the Bodos. It is a religious festival performed by the Bodos since time immemorial.

Key word: Globalization, Culture, Bodo, Kherai, festival, Bathou religion, Deity.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Globalization speeds up the movements and exchanges (of human beings, goods, and services, capital, technologies and cultural practices etc.) all over the globe. The global phenomenon is inherent to human nature. Some thinkers say that globalization began about 60,000 years ago, at the beginning of human history. Throughout time, different civilizations have developed commercial trade routes and experienced cultural exchanges. It has continued throughout history, but particularly after the second half of the 20th-century world trades accelerated in such a dimension and that speeds the term 'globalization' started to be commonly used. Globalization began long before European explorers set sail across the vast Atlantic Ocean on journeys that would eventually reveal the existence of the Americans- indeed, long before the term 'globalization' was even coined.¹ According to Nayan Chanda Globalization is a process that has worked silently for millennia without having been given a name.² Oxford dictionary defined Globalization as develop or operate worldwide.

Globalization leads a community or a culture to adopt principles, beliefs, and costumes of other cultures, losing their uniqueness to a unique globalized supra-culture. The impact of Globalization had been seen in every community around the world and the Bodo community is one among them. Like the other communities of the world the Bodos also knowingly or unknowingly have joined the process of Globalization. In their culture, there are so many changes that had been happening since from early 19th century, and still today it is happening and in the future, the impact of Globalization will be there too. In this proposed topic it will be discussed in detail particularly about the impact of Globalization on their traditional Kherai festival. The Kherai is one of the biggest religious festivals of the Bodos. They are performing this festival since time immemorial.

II. BACKGROUND OF THE BODOS

The Bodos are racially Mongoloids who follows the religion known as Bathou religion. They spread over North-Eastern India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan etc. They are the largest ethnic group of Assam. It is believed that the Bodos were the inhabitants of the Himalayans and West of China, Tibet, the land that is known as 'Bod' and they had migrated to India and settled in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam. They are the earliest settlers of the North-Eastern region of India. S.K. Chatterjee asserts that places in the north of China in between the head-waters of the Huang-Ho and Yang-tzse Kiyang rivers were the original home of the Mongoloid people from where they moved and dispersed in different direction. According to Suniti Kumar Chatterji "The Bodos spread over the whole of the Brahmaputra valley and North Bengal as well as East Bengal, forming a solid block in North- eastern India, were the most important Indo- Mongoloid people in Eastern India."³ Many

historians agree that the Bodos invented the North- East India about 10,000 BC. It is also said that they came from Mongolia via China and Tibet to India. Linguistically, they are the speakers of Sino Tibetan language family. Their language is a subsection of the Bodo-Naga section under Assam-Burma, a group of Tibeto Burman branch of Sino - Tibetan language family. Their language is known as Bodo language.

III. ORIGIN OF KHERAI

The followers of the Bathou religion consider the Kherai festival as the biggest and the most important religious festival among all the other festivals of the Bodos. It is not certain how the word “Kherai” came from, and the exact meaning of the word Kherai. Some scholars tried to define the origin and the meaning of the word Kherai. According to Dr. Kameswar Brahma, the word Kherai comes from the word kharia or khuria borai (Bathou brai, the chief God). It has been believed that the Kherai puja is performed in his name, the words kharia borai might have got combined and got transformed into Kherai, (kharia borai> Khubrai> Khurai> Kherai).

There is another explanation about the origin of the term Kherai. The sacrifice of animals and birds are essential for the Kherai puja. The sound Khe is produced when a goat or a pig is sacrificed before Bathou, by cutting the neck of the sacrificial animals with a dao at a stroke. Some worshippers of the Bathou believes that the word Kherai originates from the sound Khe and which added the Rai which means puja or the Chanting formula before the chief God Bathou(kharia borai). So, it is also believed that the word Kherai is derived from a combination like Khe+ Rai>Kherai. However, such explanations seem to be the products of folk etymology.⁴ There is no proper evidence of how the Kherai puja had started. But the Bodos are indeed worshipping and celebrating the Kherai festival from the very early period.

The legend says that there was an old man in a village. He had five sons. As a matter of time, he arranged their marriage ceremony at a time. The wife of the youngest son was the youngest among all others. Her name was Mongle. She was the most beautiful among other daughters-in-law. That is why they did not allow her to do the homely works. But she was very smart and knows everything and does any work quickly. Because of that, the old man cared for her more than others, and he asked her whether she is good or not etc. etc.

The marriage ceremony was arranged grandly. Because of that their storage of food for the year was shortened. Then the old man and his sons decided to go to a Famu (a farm far from home) to work and collect food for the coming days. The five sons went to the Famu but the old man stayed at home to look after his daughters-in-law. Time passed, Mongle was so young that she didn't understand the love of the old man; she thought that the old man has bad intentions for her. Then one day she runs away from home before Sun rises, while other members of the family were in deep sleep. Knowing that, the old man was so sad and went on the search for his daughter-in-law, Mongle. He searched her every day and night but there was no sign of her. The old man was so into searching for his lost in-law that he didn't care for anything. Whenever someone saws him they used to call him Jara pagla (mad man). One day he was sleeping inside of a tree, there he saw a dream that an old man told him to do puja rituals along with Bodo's instrument then only, the lost daughter in-law will come back. After that, he went home and called all his sons and arranged for the puja. When the puja was started along with the biting of Kham, Sifing and Jota (Bodo's musical instruments) suddenly, a Doudini (holy woman) came and participated at the puja. The Doudini was Mongle. It is said that the puja was the Kherai puja and the old man was Mansing sing bwrai (the first man) and the old man of the dream was the Bathou bwrai.

IV. TRADITIONAL KHERAI PERFORMANCE

4.1 Preparation of Kheraisali (altar place of Kherai): The followers of the Bathou religion observes Kherai with their traditional beliefs, rites and rituals which are transmitted from their ancestors from the time immemorial. To observe the Kherai festival the villagers select a place in the village area which has to be wide area, a field or a place comfortable for the Kherai festival, because there is no such permanent temple or altar place to observe the Kherai festival. The selected place for the performance of the Kherai festival has to be a wide area or a field or a paddy field where all the villagers can gather. The selected place is known as Kheraisali, a place where all the rites and rituals were performed in that particular area. The villagers gathered the day before of Kherai in the Kheraisali and cleaned that area. And on the next day, they do the works necessary for the Kherai festival.

An altar place is made for the deities of Kherai to offer foods and perform the Kherai rites and rituals. The Kherai altar is generally long in shape; it starts from the south and ends in the North. In the southern end, the main and the most important Bathou (almighty God of the Bodos) altar is made. On the left side of the Bathou altar till the Northern end of the Kherai altar, other deities of the Kherai were placed to worship them and to offer them the necessary things to the deities. There are some rites and beliefs are related to the making of the Bathou and Kherai altar.

The area of the Bathou altar is surrounded by a fence of splitting bamboos in a circular shape. The maker of the bamboo fence has to obey some rules which were obeyed by the Bodos since the early period. The

Bathou fence is folded with five split bamboo strips and in five layers, symbolising the five religious and spiritual principles. A Sijou tree (*Euphorbia splendens*) and a Jatrasai (a sacred plant) are planted in the middle of the Bathou altar as a symbol of the Bathou bray (almighty God). An earthen lamp is lighted under the Sijou tree; areca nuts and betel leaves, green bananas were put on the Layout (banana leaflets) were placed under the Sijou tree or in the middle of the Bathou altar. Holy water is kept in a pot along with a top branch of Jatrasai or tulusi in front of the Bathou altar for sprinkling. An Egg and a stone are kept in front of the Bathou altar as a symbol of creation and a symbol of truth. Eighteen pairs of Khangkhla (a kind of sacred plant) were planted from the Northern part of the Kherai altar till the southern end or to the Bathou altar.

4.2 Deities of Kherai: The Bodos have many Gods and deities. But, in the Kherai festival, only eighteen Gods and goddesses or deities, considered as the main deities and worshipped by the Bodos. The names of the deities are somewhat different from place to place, because of their dialectical characters. But, the main Gods and deities who are most commonly known by all the Bodos have taken place in the Kherai festival is namely- Ailwng, Agrang, from Khwila, Kaji, Abla Khungur, Rajputhur, Rajkhandra, Ali Bwirai, Sanja Bwrali, Aai Dibaoli, Mwnasw, Bagraja, Bwrlu Buri, Bhandari, Jwmwn Burwi, Choudri, Bwiswmuhi, Rwnswndri.

4.3 Role of the Oja: The man who is known as the Oja is a priest of the Kherai festival. Without him the Kherai is unthinkable. Generally Oja is an aged person who knows how to call the gods, deities and spirits. He also knows how to convince them for the welfare of Human beings. In the Bodo society, the Oja took a very important role in every religious function and performance whether it's communal or individual. In the Kherai festival he is like a leader, he instructs all the necessary work that needs to be done for the performance of the festival. And he also chants all the mantras throughout the Kherai festival.

4.4 Role of the Deori: The deori is a man who is selected by the villagers for a year. He is responsible for all the communal or village's religious pujas and festivals. He is also considered a holy person in the pujas. Without him, the Kherai festival can not be completed as he is the one who has to offer all the necessary things during the puja ritual to the deities.

4.5 Role of the Doudini: The doudini is a woman who has the power to talk to the Gods and deities whenever needed to solve the problems of the people. She gets the power to see the past and the future whenever the deities came to her body. She is considered a holy person by the Bodo people. The doudini takes a very important role in the performance of the Kherai festival. As soon as the deities came into her body, by the chanting of the Oja, the Kherai rituals starts and she dances whole night at the Kherai with the beat of the Kham, Sifung and Jota, along with ritual activities of the festival.

V. IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION ON KHERAI FESTIVAL

Globalization is a process of interchange in every aspect of the nature of human beings or cultural exchanges of communities in the world. In a society of a community if they are not accepting the process of the updating nature of today's world that society would be in really tough situations or challenges which would be very difficult for them to face. There are so many impacts on the traditional Kherai festival of the Bodos due to Globalization. Some of them were discussed below:

1. There is no permanent place or shrine to observe the Kherai festival. If the villagers have to observe the Kherai festival at that time only they select a comfortable place within the village area and they observed the Kherai festival in that selected place for that year. But, at present in some places, a permanent Kheraisali (the place where the Kherai festival is observed) is there that the villagers can perform the Kherai festival every year. This is an impact of Globalization.
2. Kherai festival was observed for three days and nights in the early period. But over time it has been changed. Nowadays the Kherai festival is observed only for one day and a night. One of the reasons behind this reducing nature of festivals is a shortened time among the people of today's world.
3. The round fence of the Bathou is made of bamboo poles since early times. The bamboo is used by the Bodos in their livelihood in many different ways since time immemorial. But nowadays, because of the impact of Globalization, the Bodos are also using some other metals, like iron and steel. Because of this impact Bodos in some places instead of bamboo they are using an iron to make the Bathou fence. In present days the bamboos are hard to find and the iron or steel stays for a longer period than the bamboo, which they do not have to change the round fence of the Bathou every year.
4. The impact of Globalization can be seen on the structure of the Kherai altar in some places. The traditional Kherai altar is starting from the south and ends in the North. Bathou is placed in the southern end. But nowadays in some places, a small altar is also made on the right side in the South part of the Bathou altar. It is to worship the ancestors or for the departed souls.
5. Offering of animals (chicken, goat, pig, pigeon etc.) was an unavoidable part or ritual of the Traditional Kherai festival. But now a day, some Bodos in some places perform Kherai festival without offering any kind of

animal. They observe the Kherai festival by offering flowers and fruits. They are now trying to worship their religion by offering flowers and fruits and some other things like the other communities of the world instead of offering some animals to their God and goddesses. It is also an impact of Globalization.

6. In the traditional Kherai festival without an Oja and a Doudini observation of the Kherai festival is impossible. But now a day, despite the traditionally observe Kherai festival, that is without a Doudini, with the Oja and Deori only the Kherai festival also been observed in some places by the Bodos.

7. In the early days the musical instruments, Kham, Sifung, Jotha were had to be beaten continuously from the time of cleaning of the Kheraisali has started and making and preparing of Kherai altar till the end of the Kherai puja or festival. But now a day the musical instruments are used only from the time when the ritual of the Kherai starts.

8. The impact of Globalization also been seen in the things (fruits and animals) offered at the Kherai festival. For example, in the early period, the Bodos offered pigs for some deities but nowadays they replaced them with goats and chickens etc. some groups of Bodo people who worship the Bathou religion without offering any animals but only by offering flowers and fruits to the deities, they use apples and grapes etc. to offer to the deities but these fruits were unknown to early Bodo people.

VI. CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of globalization has affected many Indigenous communities of the world. Also, the Bodo is an Indigenous community of the world affected by globalization. We have seen the process of globalization for a very long time in many political, economic and cultural and religious terms. This effect or impact is now also influential in Bodos. Therefore it is not possible to avoid globalization in any way or terms.

Because of globalization or as a result of the impact of globalization, many different types of changes had been happening in between many cultural communities of the world, for example, in their style of living, in their thought process, dressing, foods habit, religion, festivals, belief system, and many other parts of their culture. As a result, they are transforming to another cultural dimension losing their original cultural identities. It is mentionable that, many cultural communities of India including the Bodo community are knowingly or unknowingly accepting or following or influenced by the westernized culture and they are trying to go hand in hand or following the influential westernized thoughts, methods of thinking and trying to blend into their ideologies. It won't be wrong to say that they are blending their overall culture to other cultures and in their way to forming a new globalized culture, where the diversity between each other is reducing. In this situation somehow they are losing their pure cultural characteristics and uniqueness and originalities one by one. There are many cultural communities that loosed the traditional cultural parts of their society.

In the Bodo community, there are many changes has been seen in every part of their culture just because of the phenomenon of globalization. These changes or effects of globalization is mostly been seen since the 19th century and these impacts are affecting Bodo peoples thoughts, living style, their livelihood and all other activities of their life. This impacts leading their culture to a new culture. As a part of that, their religious practices such as festivals, rites and rituals etc, are also changing, leaving or losing their old traditional practices and rituals.

Globalization also impacted the festivals of the Bathou religion and transformed their practices of religious festivals such as sacrificing an animal before the deity as a part of the ritual. The religious practices of an offering of an animal such as pig, goat, chicken etc. was a very important and unavoidable part of their religious culture. They are changing these religious practices by offering some different kinds of flowers and fruits etc. to the deities, which are available around them. These kinds of changes happened especially because of the influence of the neighbouring Aryans and westernized cultural communities. The British Christian missionaries are also one among the many other factors of their cultural globalization. Along with the conversion in Christianity and the other reason of the Bodos transforming nature of their religious practices is the influencing nature of a few growing dominative world religions. Many organizations of the world are spreading awareness about animal love and for very living beings of the world to develop love and compassion towards them since past few decades, these initiatives are might also be another factor for the globalizing nature of their religious practices. The neighbouring brahminical cultural communities are also another reason for their transforming religious practices. In the past end of the 19th to early 20th century, the spreading of the Brahma Dharma by the Gurudev Kalicharana Brahma among the Bodos is also one of the reasons for their globalized religious practices. He was trying to introduce the Bodos to other communities as a civilized cultural community by transforming their lifestyle through spreading the Brahma Dharma and its ideologies among the Bodos. They are trying to follow the religious practices and believes and ideologies of other communities of the world which are known as the elite cultural community. It will be very difficult as well as challenging for the Bodos to hold onto their indigenous cultural identity and to protect them from this changing globalized world.

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