



Social Rituals of Tintekia Koch Community of Assam : A Study

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(ABSTRACT)

Assam is a land where various communities, tribes, people speaking multiple languages, practising several religions live together. Along with people from Aryan descent, majority of people belongs to the non-Aryan tribes like Ahom, Kachari, Deuri, Chutia, Boro, Rabha, Karbi, Tiwa, Mech, Dimasa, Garo, Miching etc. One distinctive tribe having similarities with these tribes communities is the Koch tribe. The Koch community is far spread across Assam, Meghalaya, West Bengal, Nepal and Bangladesh. Many clans belonging to this tribe has kept their own linguistic, literary and cultural characteristics till date. Due to ethnological diversity and conservational attitude linguistic and literary elements of every tribe is separate from each other. As such, social rituals and customs are also varied. Social customs among the different clans of the Koch tribes are also distinct from each other. An important clan belonging to the Koch community - the Tintekia Koches have kept their distinctive social customs till date. Hence, to establish the necessity of saving and preserving the social customs of the Tintekia Koches which are under threats of extinction will be the objective of my research paper.

Key words :

Koch community, Tintekia clan, social customs and rituals.



0.1 Introduction

Assam is a land where various communities, tribes, people speaking multiple languages, practising several religions live together.

Apart from Aryan, Pravidian, Austric majority of people are Mangoloids who have together contributed to the formation and development of Assamese race, culture and language. These Mangoloid tribes are Aham, Bodo, Tiwa, Mech, Rabha, Dimasa, Karbi, Garo, Miching etc. One distinctive tribe having similarities with these tribal communities is the Koch tribe. People belonging to this tribe are spread across several South East Asian nations along with Assam and many other states of India.

This Koch tribe has several clans. These clans have some similarities in social customs but show many distinct traits as well when compared clanwise. To highlight the social customs and rituals of the Tintekia clan of the Koch tribe is the chief objective of this research paper.

0.2 Importance of the Study

Some of the major clans of the Koch community is Tintekia, Hargia, Wanang, Margan etc. Nowadays many of the clans have faced loss of distinctive linguistic, literary and cultural traits but a few clans like Tintekia have kept their own language, culture and folk literature. Hence, to establish the distinctive identity of the Koch community it has become imperative to study the language, culture, society, folk literature of the clans along with the study of the Koch community.

0.3 Objective of the study

- a) To narrate the social customs and rituals of the Tintekia Koches.
- b) To collect, preserve and evaluate the social customs of the Tinteken Koches.

0.4 Scope of the Study

In this study Tintekia Koches residing in Assam, particularly Tintekia Koches residing in Derapathar locality of Hojai district are encompassed.



0.5 Methodology

In this study descriptive method has been followed.

Both primary and secondary sources are used while collecting data. In the field study as a primary source data has been collected through indicators. As a secondary source writings, explanations, analysis on primary source have been used.

2.2 Social customs of the Tintekia Koches

Social customs of the Tintekia koches are reflected through the various uses, conducts and rituals prevalent in the koch society. Some of them are related with folklore and some are religious beliefs. Some of the customs are Kathuwari, Maitine, Heponi, Owai ,Utraine etc. Brief descriptions of them are provided below :

2.2.1 Kathuwari

Koch people refers to rituals of the dead as Kathuavari. It is observed accordingly with the social customs. There is no fixed or regular day for its observation. It is observed accordingly with the convenience of the family or the host. But the social rule is that the family has to offer rice, curry, water and alcoholic beverages for the deceased soul every day. When the ritual of the dead is observed the family has to offer the gathering wine, rice, meat of pork, chicken etc. is finally completed.

The Koch society observes the Kathuwary in three ways. These three types are Kathuwari, Nema or Nemma Kaam and Kam-maata. A brief description is to given below accordingly with societal rules :

2.2.2.2 Kathuwari :

This type of ritual of the dead is observed by poor people of the society. They can finish off the rituals within a short period by offering wine to the people gathered for the ritual.



2.2.2.2 Nema or Nemba kaam :

This type of oritual of the dead ies observed ley people belonging to the middle class. They celebrate the ritual of the dead for two to three days. The family of the deceased person offers wine and rice and arranges for song and dance performances and completes the rituals.

2.2.2.3 Kaam-maata :

Kam-maata is a large celebration for the deceased. It is observed by the well to do/rich people of the society. Although the rules and rituals are similar to Nemba Kaam but the offerings of wing rice etc. are in larger preoportions and for a longer period of time it is celebrated through song and dance performances and the Kam-maata ritual is more akin to festivities and merriment.

2.2.2 Maaitini Hepni

Maaitini Hepni is stage of crying for the deceased person while offering him food. On the very next day of conducting the ritual of Kam-maata, this ritual is conducted as farewell for the deceased soul for the last time by feeding him well through offerings.

In this ritual the family and the relatives of the deceased person remember the memoreis and with tearful eyes offers 'Maai' (rice), 'Na' (fish), 'Ti' (water), 'Waak kan' (pork meat) and 'Mera' or 'Sokot' (wine) and gives farewell to the deceased soul.

There exists the societal rule of crying separately while offering every item to the deceased with the below mentioned sad lyrical lines.

"O' Awa, mang uponi ha-aaiseli

Uponi tiku che ling

Puloni haa aai linung,

Pulani tikuaai linung

O' Awa, daai lagina dondi

laginabo awa"



(Meaning : O' father you leave for your own land, drink your own water, it will be a crime if you stay on another's land, you will be punished for that father.) (Upen Hari koch, Phulore, aged 65)

2.2.3 Owai or Owao Utraini

Another social ritualistic celebration of the koch society is Owai Utraini or "Deodhwani". The koch society believes that it is possible to know about things through deodhwani by use using supernatural powers. Diseased people or people heavily suffering from various problems take recourse to "deodhwani" for ailment or solution to their problems.

There is no particular place for owai utraini to be held. It is arranged in the court-yard of the "noktaang/Aajeng" who is supposed to leave her duty or vacate her position as noktaang or aajeng. In the selection process of the noktaang, if the nominating person remains absent in the ritual, the "oja", upon whose body, super natural power enters after the enactment of deodhwani runs to the house of the nominating person with possessed spirit. When she finds her at her home, she beats her with broom or a stick. If she is not at her home the possessed oja would pour water inside her house or at her bed. After doing this the oja returns again trembling and shivering to the ritual and lies senseless. Only when, the outgoing or the previous oja sprinkles water and rubs mustard oil on her, she regains her sense. In this way aajeng or noktaang or deusi or thengdhara is appointed by oja who is a libra or born under the seventh sign of the zodiac. The person who takes the responsibility of deusi, has to follow or maintain various rules and ethics.

2.2.4 Laaidawa custom

If a husband of a koch family dies, on the ritual day, the family of the deceased person brings all the items used by him before the society, live clothes, utensils, knives, axe, spear etc. These items are accepted by the relatives of the deceased person, especially the woman-



folk. Accordingly, if the wife passes away before the husband, the items used by the woman are brought before the society and the relatives of the deceased woman accept the items. This custom prevalent in the Koch society is called "laaidawa" system.

2.2.5 Basek bala custom

In some of the clans of the Koch society "ghar-jowai" custom (keeping the son-in-law in the bride's family) exist. In the Tintekia Koch society it is called "nokjawai laini". If a couple is married under this system and the wife passes away, then, the husband or son-in-law is expelled from the household by his father-in-law/mother-in-law. As he does not have his own house and driven out from father-in-law house, he has to live his life staying in his relatives' homes. This custom of the Koch society is called "basek-bala",

Findings and conclusion :

Until and unless the social customs of a tribe are scientifically studied as components of a folk society, it is not possible to get a wholistic picture of societal stage or the social system of that tribe. Systematic study of the customs of a tribe clears the picture of the distinctive identity of the tribe as well as its cultural changes with similar clans or tribes, with this objective in mind this study hopes that it will open multiple dimensions of studying the social customs of the Tintekia Koches. The findings of this study are mentioned below :

1. In social celebration or rituals the use of 'mera' or 'kesa laapani' or ethnic wine, prepared at home is circulated, in almost all of the society of the different tribes in Assam. From that viewpoint, the Tintekia Koches are similar with the other tribes.
2. Considering the wide circulation of 'mera' or 'kesa laapani' or wine, it may be safely assumed that 'mera' or 'kesa laapani' is their traditional customary practice.
3. Keeping in view of the advantageous position enjoyed by the women folk in social system and social customs, the social system of the Tintekia Koches can be assumed as matriarchal.



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3. Niranan Koch (61 years), Male, Rtd. Teacher, 2 No. Derapathar, Hojai, Assam
4. Shukracharjja Koch (50 years), Male, Teacher, 2 No. Derapathar, Hojai, Assam
5. Kobendra Koch (49 years), Male, Teacher, 2 No. Derapathar, Hojai, Assam
6. Bobita Koch (39 years), Female, Anganwadi Worker, 2 No. Derapathar, Hojai, Assam
7. Binita Koch (42 years), Female, Anganwadi Worker, 2 No. Derapathar, Hojai, Assam
8. Bibha Rabha Koch (41 years), Female, House Worker, 2 No. Derapathar, Hojai, Assam
9. Ranjana Koch (28 years), Female, House Worker, 2 No. Derapathar, Hojai, Assam