



Forests and the socio-cultural life of the Boros

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Abstract

This paper explores the intricate relationship between the Boro tribe of Assam, India, and their surrounding forests. It highlights how the forests are not just an environment for the Boros, but also their home, temple, and supermarket. The paper examines the various ways in which the Boros utilize forest resources for their daily needs, including food, medicine, construction materials, and handicrafts. It also delves into the deep cultural significance of the forest for the Boros, showcasing its role in shaping their identity, traditional practices, and spiritual beliefs. The paper further discusses the impact of forest conservation efforts on the Boros' socio-cultural life, acknowledging both the benefits and challenges faced by the community. Finally, it emphasizes the importance of considering the cultural and livelihood needs of the Boros when formulating sustainable forest management practices.

Keywords: Boros, Forests, Socio-cultural life, Livelihood, Traditional practices, Festivals, Beliefs

Introduction

Assam is a country in Northeast India. This is a country of people of different languages, cultures and ethnic groups. There are many different types of characters in the film. In this regard, the issue of tribes comes up naturally. One of the most important aspects of the discussions of the tribes of Assam is their relationship with the forests. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the relationship between their livelihoods and forests, the impact of forests on their livelihoods, and the needs of forests.



Importance and Significance of the Study

The forests are not just an environment for the Boros; they are their home, their temple, and their supermarket. The Boros intimate relationship with the forests serves as a powerful testament to the interconnectedness between humans and nature, offering valuable lessons for sustainable living and cultural preservation.

The significance of the forest for the Boros extends far beyond its material and spiritual benefits. It is a source of identity, a symbol of resilience, and a testament to their harmonious relationship with nature. The Boros understand that the health of the forest is directly linked to their own well-being, and they actively participate in its conservation. Their traditional knowledge and practices offer valuable insights for sustainable forest management, ensuring that the lush tapestry of their socio-cultural life continues to thrive for generations to come.

Methodology :

This study employs a comprehensive approach, utilizing both primary and secondary data. Primary data collection involves field surveys, questionnaires, and interviews, offering an on-the-ground perspective of the *Kherai* Puja and the role of the *Doudini* (Deudhani) of the Bodo tribe. Secondary data from articles and books complement the primary findings, providing a holistic understanding of the subject.

Extent of the study:

Changkhati village of Golaghat district and the Padumoni village under the Dibrugarh district of Assam has been taken as sample area to study. Because many people of Boro tribes are living there.

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore the intricate relationship between forest resources and the socio-cultural life of the Bodo tribe in Assam, India.
2. To document the Bodo tribe's traditional practices, beliefs, and customs associated with forest resources



3. To examine the various ways in which the Bodo tribe utilizes forest resources for their daily needs
4. . To investigate the socio-cultural significance of the forest for the Bodo tribe.
5. To assess the impact of forest conservation efforts on the Bodo tribe's socio-cultural life.
6. To identify strategies for promoting sustainable forest management practices that consider the cultural and livelihood needs of the Bodo tribe.

Tribes of Assam:

There are many instructions about Tribal people in the Article 366 (25) of Indian Constitution. In this Article it is clearly noted that Tribal are those, which are included in the list under Article 342 of Indian Constitution.

As per Indian Constitution some Tribes of Assam are—

A. Hill Tribes :

1. Sakma 2. Dimasa 3. Garo 4. Hajong 5. Mhar 6. Khasi 7. Jayantia 8. Sinteng 9. Nar 10. War 11. Bhoi 12. Lingnam 13. Kuki 14. Lakher 15. Man (Tai) 16. Naga 17. Karbi 18. Mizo 19. Pawai 20. Lalung (in Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao district) etc.

B. Plain Tribes

1. Barmans of Cachar 2. Bodo (Bodo Kachari) 3. Deuri 4. Hojai 5. Sonowal Kachari 6. Lalung (Tiwa) 7. Mech 8. Mising 9. Rabha 10. Dimasa 11. Hajang 12. Singpho 13. Thengal Kachari 14. Khamti 15. Garo etc.

(source : census report 2011)

Bodo Tribe

The Boro-Kacharis are one of the oldest ethnic groups in the North East of India and are known as the Plain tribes of Assam. They belong to the large Mongolian clan and as a linguistic



community belong to the Tibetan sub-branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family. Therefore, the Boro or Boro-Kacharis in Assam and Eastern India are considered to be of the Sino-Tibetan Mongolian group.

These Bodo or Boros are called by different names in different states of India. They are known as Boro, Borokchari, Kachari, Mech, Sonwal Kachari, etc. in different parts of Assam. Similarly, one of the major branches of the Tibetan language family is called Bodo or Boro branch. The languages of this group are Boro, Dimacha, Tipra, or Kakbark, Garo, Rabha, Tiwa, Deuri, Chutia, Koch, etc. ¹ In this regard, it can be said that the people currently known as the Boro tribe in Assam are a branch of the larger Boro Kachari ethnic group.

According to Pramod Chandra Bhattacharya, the Indo-Mangoloid or Indo-Tibetan people have been in close contact with other ethnic groups living in Assam and other parts of India: Boro, Dimacha, Garo, Miri, Rabha, The Lalung (Tiwa), Deuri, Tipra, Naga, Mizo, Meitei etc. belong to the Indian Mangaloid or Indian Tibetan species Cultural integration occurred as Negroid, Australoid, Mediterranean (Dravidian-speaking) and Nardic (Aryan-speaking) species interacted and influenced the Mongoloids during prehistoric and historical times. ² The Boro Kacharis belong to the Mongoloid species. The Boro tribe is found in Assam, Nagaland, Tripura, Meghalaya, North Bengal, Bangladesh and Nepal. The Boros are found in parts of Kokrajhar, Goalpara, Bongaigaon, Kamrup, Barpeta, Nalbari districts in the western region, parts of Darang, Sonitpur, Mangaldoi, Lakhimpur districts in the northern part of Assam, and parts of Karbi Anglong and Nagaon districts.

Forests and social life of the Bodos :

The social life of the Boros is very simple of food, clothing, and shelter. They also spend their social life through various festivals. The role of forests in various aspects of this social life cannot be ignored.



Food Habits :

Every ethnic group has different ways of eating, cooking, etc. There are many different types of foods available in the country. Rice is the main food of the Boros. They grow oats, rice, *aijang* and other crops. In addition, the Boros collect vegetables from the forests and eat them. These include *dhekia*, *Kachusak*, *hellachi*, *methakha*, *narasingha* etc. In addition to these, some of their distinctive dishes are discussed below.

Maitha Shak :

Maitha Shakar Anja is the main dish of the Boros. There are two types of *maitha* vegetables – bitter *maitha* and *maitha* Bengal. This vegetable sprouts again within a month after harvesting. This dish is a little bitter to eat. During the rainy season, the Boro women pick this vegetable from the road and feed it to the ploughmen.

Anla Anja :

This is another popular *anja* among the Boros. The rice is soaked for 7-10 minutes and cooked with garlic, onion and turmeric.

Maidru Anja

The Bodos believe that no one knows how to cook this dish except the Boro women. They are made with *khutura*, *lofa*, *lai*, *sariyah*, radish (*mula*), and *dhekia*. These vegetables are cooked without oil.

Thinthe Bata :

There are many different types of foods that can be eaten by the old women such as raw fish powder, dried fish powder, coriander powder, onion powder, etc.

Weaving

These foods are collected from the forests by the Boros and are an essential part of the Boro nation. The Boro women are very skilled in weaving, cutting and picking flowers. It is noteworthy that women who do not know how to weave are called 'Awluri'. The clothes used at home are sewn by the women of Boro at home. These include *dakhna*, *gamocha*, *bar cloth*, *kamal*, *dhola*, *arnai*, cloth taken on the front of the *dakhana*, etc. They include raw flowers - beach eyes, coconut symbol, hagri flower, mountain flower, elephant foot, cat foot, star flower,



tangerine flower etc. It is worth mentioning that they leave the larvae at home and weave yarn and velvet yarn. The influence of forests cannot be ruled out, at least indirectly. In addition, various weaving tools - *tulma*, *mako*, *chiri*, *garka* etc. have to be made from bamboo and wood from the forests.

Festivals of the Boros:

The festivals of the Boros are discussed below

Kherai

Kherai is one of the major festivals of the Boros. The place where *Kherai* is held is called *Kharaishali*. This is a festival or puja in which a bamboo with a stem is first cut. The root of this bamboo should be cut into 2.7 feet or 3 feet long pieces and made into 18 pairs. These poles should be buried around with some protruding 10 feet below and 2.7 feet above. Then the whole poles are wrapped around the bamboo poles in five turns. After three turns, a road is left between three pairs of poles. This is made by rolling a pair of beads through this road - like 'x'. This is called '*Davathu Bikha*'. Then the foundation is made in the middle of the place and seedlings of *Siju*, *Tulsi* etc. are planted. It turns out that - this organization cannot be done without forests.

Bathou

The main religion of the Boros is the *Bathou* religion. In the villages of the Bodos, every household has a *bathoshali* in the courtyard. This is the place where the seedlings of *Siju* are planted and Lord *Mahadev* is worshipped. Similarly, *Lakshmi* is worshiped alongside the stars.³

***Baisagu* :**

Baisagu is a major festival of the Boros. This *Bihu* is celebrated for three days - *Garu Bihu*, *Gosai Bihu* and the third day is *Manuh Bihu*. There are many different types of vegetables and fruits that can be eaten on the day of *Garu Bihu*. They also celebrate *Bihu* by eating *pitha-pana*. They play *kham* (drums), *sifungbanhi*, *jathatal*, *tharkhataka* etc. and are celebrated by young and old alike. Therefore, it is important to understand that the instruments used in *Bihu* are made of bamboo and wood collected from the forests.



Findings and Conclusion

The Bodo tribe has a deep-rooted connection to the forest ecosystem, which has shaped their unique cultural identity, traditional practices, and dependence on forest resources for their sustenance and livelihood.

- The Bodo tribe possesses a wealth of indigenous knowledge and practices related to forest management, resource utilization, and traditional belief systems. This knowledge is essential for the sustainable use of forest resources and the preservation of the tribe's cultural heritage.
- The forest provides a wide range of resources for the Bodo tribe, including food, medicine, construction materials, and handicrafts. The tribe's traditional harvesting methods, processing techniques, and conservation practices contribute to the sustainable use of these resources.
- The forest plays a central role in the Bodo tribe's socio-cultural life. Their spiritual beliefs, folklore, rituals, and festivals are intricately linked to the forest, highlighting its profound significance in their cultural identity.
- Forest conservation efforts have had both positive and negative impacts on the Bodo tribe. While conservation has contributed to the preservation of the forest ecosystem and the biodiversity it supports, it has also restricted the tribe's access to traditional resources and affected their livelihoods.
- To promote sustainable forest management practices that consider the cultural and livelihood needs of the Deuri tribe, it is essential to engage the community in decision-making processes, provide them with alternative livelihood options, and support their cultural practices.



Conclusion:

After examining all the aspects discussed, it can be said that forests are closely related to the social life of the Boros. In other words, without forests, their lives will be challenged. In this regard, the need for forests in their lives cannot be denied. However, the number of forests is decreasing compared to the past, i.e. there is a lot of deforestation. However, the number of trees planted is very limited. Therefore, it is doubtful how far their social life and way of life will survive or continue without forests. Therefore, it is important to plant more trees and seedlings instead of destroying forests to maintain the balance of nature. Therefore, it is important to plant more trees and seedlings instead of destroying forests. In other words, the true evaluation of the issues discussed can only be achieved if the mentality of preserving the relationship between forests and societies and cultures is developed.

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End Notes

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