



Ecology in Cooking Utensil of Bodo Society: A Cultural Study

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Abstract: The analysis on the Bodo Traditional way of living shows that there exists a very close relationship between the Bodos and nature. Hence the ecology appears in their social setting. Generally, the Bodo community has been making and using tools or utensil that are required in their daily lives through their traditional knowledge and understanding. These tools are made of different things which are easily available in their garden yards, such as bamboo, wood, different vegetables (mainly bottle gourd) and different plants. For instance: ‘Topsi’ (mortar and pestle) is made out of wood, ‘Kadou’ (bamboo spatula) is made out of bamboo, and many more in the list. Similarly in Bodo society every tool related to cooking is recognized as an important subject of material culture in Bodo Folk Culture. Besides, the influence of science and technology is gradually degrading the subject matter of Bodo folk culture can be rightly said.

Key Words: Bodo Society, Ecology, Traditional Utensil of Cooking, Value in Modern Society.

1. Introduction

The analysis on the Bodo traditional way of living reveals its close relationship with nature. It is because they have been trying to keep the flow of the society traditionally by depending on nature since the time of their foreparents. For instance, living in a place surrounded by rivers, animal habitats and forest covered state of Assam they required certain things or elements to gather their traditional food i.e., the wild vegetables, to hunt animals for meat and tools for survival etc. received from the nature have been provided by the environment of that particular region. These methods have been again learnt and accepted by their successors as Bodo cultural and traditional knowledge in relation to the existing environment as a means of survival. As a result, the study of the manner of Assam’s environmental influence in their social existence appears as a subject of Ecology. The general explanation of ecology is the study of the relationships between living organisms and their physical environment. Similarly, the English word “Ecology was first used by Ernst Haeckel in 1869... The word is derived from the Greek *oiko* meaning home. Ecology might therefore be thought of as the study of the *home life* of living organism” (Begon, Colin and et). It means the study of a house or a household and its relationship with the surrounding is the main subject of Ecology. As a result, with the help of ecology people can learn how to adapt themselves in various environments.

In order to sustain their daily lives, people have selected suitable locations and build houses, developed society, covered their bodies by wearing clothes, started cultivation based on seasons, domesticated animals, used tools and utensils procured from nature as needed, depended on nature for food too. Each of these subjects is entitled as subjects of culture in the social setting of human beings. Each of these subjects fixed by environment can be studied in relation to cultural ecology which is a part of ecology. Similarly, the Bodo community also has been able to create and also put to use various utensils needed in their day-to-day lives by depending on nature as a result of their traditional knowledge and understanding. All of these are able to find a place as a subject of material culture in Bodo Folk Culture.

2. Methodology:

In this article an attempt has been made to present a discussion based on descriptive method. Further the relevant data of this has been collected from both primary and secondary sources. As a primary source, data are collected by centering the indigenous Bodos of Kachugaon region under Kokrajhar district. Also, the secondary data are gathered from the books written by prominent authors like Indramalati Narzary and Binay Kumar Brahma on the subject of culture.

3. Utensils Having Relationship to Cooking in Bodo Society:

Generally human life being lived having dependency on nature is known as materialistic. Therefore, the Bodo community, the moment their culture is discussed we come to know that in order to carry forward their culture their requisite tools are received from the nature by themselves. In the Bodo society various tools which are being in use depending on the nature of work are made of bamboo, trees, different vegetables (particularly bottle gourd), different plants which are found in handy in their own yards and forest gardens. Likewise, the tools used by the Bodos which are related to cooking are discussed below:

1. Utensils made of bamboo
2. Utensils made of wood
3. Utensils made of plant species
4. Utensils made of plant-based fruits

3.1 Utensils Made of Bamboo:

In the nook and corner of every Bodo village household garden different plant both big and small along with different kinds of bamboo thickets are seen to be planted and these are again used in societal works. Therefore, different easily available tools are made out of bamboo and also some of the tools found in every Bodo family kitchen are made of or shaped out of bamboo for use, such as- sagong (bamboo masher), kadou (bamboo spatula), abwijangi/abwidangi (kind of basket), sandanga (big sieve), sandri (small sieve), hasung (bamboo pipe) etc. are worth mentioning. These tools are used whenever the need arises and as such are kept in any spot selected inside a kitchen. Thus, when we observe their usage, we can find:

Sagong (bamboo masher): It is use to mash vegetables while preparing Bodo curry which is eaten as a stew by twisting. For example: dry jute leaves curry (narji), black gram curries (sobai johol) and so on.

Kadou (bamboo spatula): It is a tool which is very close to every Bodo family. It is use to handle cooked rice in a pot for eating and also for preparing rice beer, in order to make sure that the rice is cooked properly and not over damp and sticky. It is also seen to be used by the Bodos as a proper spatula to cook some traditional curry, such as- snail curry (samo), rice flour curry (ondla) and for some other curries too.

Abwijangi/Abwidangi (traditional basket): In Bodo culture this tool is made small sized with three legs as a stand and a handle to hold. Making sure that no dirt can reach the contents in it, it is shaped quite high. It is use as a basket while plucking or gathering vegetables and in washing too. But nowadays its usage and the habit of using it is seen to be disappearing from many Bodo families.

Sandanga and Sandri (big sieve and small sieve): Sandanga is also a kind of Sandri but it is larger in size. Though sandanga is use to sieve paddy seeds and sandri is use to sieve rice grain, the Bodos also use them both to sundry meat, fish and some other things in relation to cooking.

Hasung (bamboo pipe): In relation to cooking, the use and shape of hasung in Bodo culture is found to be of two kinds. These are- fermented dried fish hasung and air blower to lit fire. For the air blower hasung, neither too big nor too small sized rounded bamboo is cut by taking one foot measurement and removing the joins of the bamboo to keep it hollow in order to blow air through it. On the other hand, for the fermented dried fish hasung, one of the two joins in a bamboo is kept and for this big sized bamboo is mainly used.

Apart from these, some more tools which are made of bamboo and having not much relation to cooking are also found. These tools are mainly used in local rice beer preparation of the Bodos. These are ‘Laothai’ (like a ladle, it is used to serve rice beer) and ‘Jantha’ (it may be called strainer, which is used to separate the rice from liquid beer). Likewise, they also use ‘Songrai’ (winnowing) a tool use to clean rice grain is also worth mentioning.

3.2 Utensils Made of Wood:

In running their household, the Bodos use more of various wood made tools than bamboo made tools. Among them, their tools in use having relation to cooking are noticeable. These are- topsi (mortar and Pestle), uwal-gaihen (wooden rice pounder) and khaamphlai (foot stool). Their usage and social importance can be seen as-

Topsi (mortar and pestle): In the sphere of cooking, mortar and pestle has been able to gain a special place in the kitchen of every Bodo family. Along with mortar, pestle (topsi akai) is also made of wood. Though its usage is still prevalent in village household yet some people have started using pestle made of iron as it seems to be easily available in the market. Also, the rich families have replaced it with mixer machine.

Uwal-Gaihen (wooden rice pounder): This is also a very important tool for Bodo families and it can be studied as having relation to cooking, because it is very necessary to pound paddy seeds and turn to clean rice grains. Further uwal and gaihen is use for grinding rice flour to prepare curry on any day and various traditional edibles such as rice cake (pitha), pancake (sitao) etc. during ‘Domasi’ festival of the Bodos and for whitening grounded black gram before cooking etc. generally the Bodos carve uwal out of Dumbro (Fig) wood and gaihen out of sal wood for better long lasting. It is known that in olden days because making of uwal and gaihen is very difficult as well as time consuming, the Bodo people would carry their uwal and gaihen along with them whenever they go to settle in a new land by clearing forest covered lands. But nowadays it can be rightly said that the influence of science and technology is replacing its place.

Khamphlai (foot stool): It also stays in Bodo kitchen to be used for sitting. Some people tried to name it ‘Khamphlai Dable’ (meaning short stool). Generally, in Bodo society we can find an example of a phrase ‘Khamphlai- Dokhla’ to mean a poor family by comparing to a khamphlai (foot stool). It is made either big sized or small sized. Also, it is made of different woods. But the khamphlai (foot stool) made only of Gambari wood is being used by the Bodos in certain society related activities or ceremonies can be seen. For instance, it is used in Bodo matrimony to let the bride sit on is noteworthy.

3.3 Utensils Made of Plant Species:

Plant refers to small kind of plants. Such small plants found in forests are being used by the Bodos as an important means in their day-to-day lives. Through this, the example that the Bodos establish close relationship with nature by adapting to the geographical condition of their region and sustaining their lives is very evident. So, to name such tools in use that have relation to cooking would be Hasib (broom) and ‘Narji Kesri’ (kind of container). In the village household, in order to sweep kitchen floor and other dirt of the house broom made of thatch grass is particularly used. The Bodos have a very close relationship with thatch (thuri) grass, because the moment they are free from their household chores or work, the men would go to cut thatch to build a hut and the women would basically go to cut thatch to make brooms. Also, in order to bring home the cut thatch they would carry a pole (bathi; especially it is made from a bamboo) along with them. That is why in Bodo society by centering the act of bringing home of cut thatch is connected to seeing and proposing a girl of marriageable age for marriage and finally bringing her home. We can say that this whole act gave birth to Bodo proverbs- “thuri nubla bathi garw” (when you see the thatch, you drop the pole) or “jerao thuri nuyw beyao bathi garw” (where you see the thatch, it drops the pole). Apart from these, to sweep the nook and corner of their yards a broom made of small stems found in between the leaves of a coconut tree is also seen being used in Bodo society.

On the other hand, it is known from the sources that the stems of kasi flower (white reed grass) is made into ‘Narji Kesri’ (kind of container) to store dry jute leaves for future use. It is also known that some people used to make it out of ropes. But we can say that its usage has disappeared from us.

3.4 Utensils Made of Plant-Based Fruits:

Along with consuming or using some fruits as food, the Bodos could also use these in their daily work lives as tools. Among them the coconut shell is used to measure the quantity of rice grain for cooking and to sieve 'karwi/kardwi' (local soda) called 'Karwi Kolong' is noticeable. Likewise, it was also known that it was used as a small bowl to prepare rice cake. Further the Bodos in addition to eating bottle gourd as curry, it is allowed to ripe fully then the seeds taken out and a hole of hand sized big is made within to store salt and different small objects. Similarly, we can also see some kind of small gourd like shells being used as a mug or even as a jug. These examples show that they depend on nature to sustain their lives.

4. Relationship of Ecology with Usable Cooking Utensils of Bodo Society:

The mention of Bodo folk culture brings to light the subject of ecology which is stick to it. The Bodos very well know how to establish relationship with nature and which and in what manner the objects of nature can be used in their works. In order to prepare the tools needed in their daily lives they have been planting varieties of plants both big and small in their surroundings. For instance, as most of the tools in Bodo society is made of bamboo, they have planted bamboo in their gardens so as to be able to meet the need. Likewise different kinds of plants are also seen in their gardens. Those plants along with providing pure oxygen for them to live healthy, also makes the place cool during summer season as a result of constant wind. Further it is found that bamboo also act as a financial support in times of financial crisis.

Thus, we can find areas where the lifestyle of the Bodos is found to have relationship with ecology by balancing the environment. In the traditional Bodo society different tools used in various categories of work along with different tools kept for use in kitchen are provided by nature itself. And they disappear in nature only. Therefore, these are known as eco-friendly materials. Here no ecological harm has been seen. As time passed, it is also seen that they have created new tools as required by them.

5. Findings and Conclusion:

"Ecology in Cooking Utensil of Bodo Society: A Cultural Study" -There are some findings which have been found in the discussion of this topic. These include:

- In Bodo society every tool having relation to cooking is recognized in folk culture as subjects of material culture. Their forefathers have accepted these tools as a gift of nature and their successors have accepted it as traditional knowledge and been able to keep the flow up to the present generation.
- The Bodos have accepted whatever the nature has provided in their region and displayed it as an area of culture and tradition. Because they have learnt to sustain their lives using only the things provided in a particular region. As a result, in the day-to-day lives of the Bodos it is found that along with the different cultural areas the techniques of making and using of different tools also differ.
- Nowadays in many Bodo village families even though we see the social value and examples of usage of the aforementioned tools, yet the hands that prepare or make seems to belong to people of other community. However, we can say that if we do consider the people of new generation, as soon as the batch of their grandparents will end the traditional knowledge of making these tools will slowly disappear with them. As a result, it is also seen that the people of other community had gave a business set up to it for their livelihood.
- Science and technology are slowly drifting away the Bodo lifestyle from nature and bringing in the concept of artificial elite culture to Bodo society. It can be said that it is the influence of modern technology that is destroying some areas of Bodo material culture along with Bodo tools that has a relation to cooking.
- Along with these, the capitalism concept of western culture has entered the Bodo society only to destroy the nature just like any other influences; hence their relationship is gradually dying.

The Bodo tribe recognized as the main tribe of Assam state in the north-eastern corner of India has been sustaining their lives in their own traditional manner. Nowadays the new generation of Bodo community has adapted to the geographical condition of their birthplace to sustain and in doing so have shown their cultural dimensions, yet the effect of climatic changes and the influence of other culture has shown slight changes in the Bodo folk culture.

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