

Koch-Rajbangshi People of North Salmara Sub-Division: Social Festivals and Customs

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Abstract

This study examines the social festivals and customary practices of the Koch-Rajbangshi community in the North Salmara Sub-Division of Assam, highlighting their cultural significance and links with agrarian life. Using historical records, field surveys, and household-level data, the study documents major festivals such as Bishuwa, Pushuna, Katigacha, Gocha Dia, Ag Anan, Ori Magan, and Suddhi, and analyses their role in preserving traditional beliefs and social cohesion. The findings reveal that agriculture strongly shapes the community's cultural identity, while persistent educational, economic, and infrastructural disadvantages contribute to socio-economic backwardness. The study underscores the need for inclusive development while safeguarding the community's rich cultural heritage.

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Introduction

North Salmara Sub-Division was a small part of Great Koch-Kingdom. At the very past the area was under the reign of Maharaj Narayana. Later, the area was under the reign of Bijni State. The first owner of this estate, Raja Kumud Narayana was the 12th descendant of Moharaj Narayana. It is seen that before the days of this Kumud Narayana the said area was not experienced with proper development in all respects. It can be said that the time from which the new thoughts and assumptions about their legal right of fundamental prosperity and autonomy has been fermented and garmented and later it was seedling out to a complete sphere that we see today. Different kinds of organization for the ethnic group are now, on the road. From this point of view it can be said that more or less, the time from the first decade of the 20th century to the Pre-independence period, is sharing the conspicuous rising trend is socio-economic as well as cultural life of the Koch-Rajbangshi people of the stated area. However, the area is, presently complex on in case of its inhabitants in relation to their religion and custom.

Statement of the problem

Koch-Rajbangshi people and historical background of North-Salmara Sub-Division is my groundwork problem. The Koch-Rajbangshi community is one of the major population groups of Assam. They are living, more or less in all parts of state. But the community is still regarded as very backward. These groups of people is generally settled in the plain areas of the state and based on primary occupation mainly on agriculture, Educationally they are much behind the main stream of the country. Their socio-cultural life is still based on tradition. The North-Salmara Sub-Division OF Bongaigaon district is a traditionally abode of this community. However, being a major population group, the Koch-Rajbangshi community is playing a significant role in the socio-cultural functioning of the state. Hence it is essential to know the main problems and causes of their backwardness and historical background of North Salmara Sub-Division to find out the ways and means to solve them.

The objectives of the study

The main objectives of the study are:

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1. To find out the problems and causes of their backwardness and to find out the ways and means to solve the problems.
2. To analyse the Koch-Rajbangshi community inhabited in the sub-division.
3. To analyse historical background of North Salmara sub-division.
4. To analyse the North Salmara Sub-division old and new structure

Hypothesis

The following hypotheses are taken to be tested evidence of studying the problem.

1. The Prevalent traditional social-custom discourages new innovation and techniques.
2. The Koch-Rajbangshi community is carrying a big amount of manpower but no work.
3. Very low per-capital income is the main reason illiteracy and unhealthy living condition of the community.
4. Low quality of working force is the main cause of low per capital income.

Methodology and database

Some common techniques will be used to survey the area to find out history of North Salmara sub-division. At the pre-field work the theoretical knowledge was gathered by reading some books and journals relating to the problems. Data collection, tabulation and analysis will form the core of this endeavour questionnaires will be prepared for the household survey. Three principal sources such as written records, Field survey and survey maps have been tapped for collecting relevant data concerning the study. Written records, aiding in the present work are various type ranging from settlement reports, census have books, survey report etc.

Koch-Rajbangshi People of North Salmara Sub-Division : Social Festivals and Customs : Bishuwa

Bishuwa is the most important traditional festival of the community which is observed from the pre-historic period. This festival begin on the day of 'Makar Sankranti' (14th April) and continue for a period of seven days. This period of seven days is called 'Sat Bishuwa'. This festival is very popular and affectionate among the people. Through this festivals they welcome the new year. This festival is based on some traditional folk culture i.e. customs and 'loko biswas'. In this festival some traditional customs and rituals are observed relating with their agricultural activities as well as their social and domestic life.

First day of this festival they cleans their houses and compound. They cleans their cowsheds and the garbages with the 'Jharu' and the basket keep on road side. The head of the family or any one of the adult person of the family collected 20 kinds of medicinal plants and keep it on varanda or just above the front door people keep it in every houses and gateway also. After completion of this part of the festival, on the same morning, they bath their cows and put on the neck a garland made of brinjal, gourd etc. then they take their cows to the river or pond to bath. On the way they use Dighloti pat (one kind of tree with long leaves) to tap their cows. These customs are practiced for protection to their domestic animals and family members from diseases and other life hazards. On the same morning, all the family members take (Saptaras'') : (bitter : made from seven kinds of medicinal plants). They believe that taking of this 'Saptaras' prevent them from diseases. On that day they eat one special itema of (curry) food from some medicinal vegetables. In this festival, some societies of the community arrange sports competition also. At present cultural functions also arranged traditional 'Nritya Geet's of the community are performed. Most of the people offer 'sarai' or 'thogi' to their 'Griha devata' and other duties. In different 'Mandir' or 'Than' they observed. In some 'Mandir' or 'Than' they observed 'sat tithi mela' also on the seventh day of the festival. Some worshiper sacrifice, goat, duck or pigeon to the

deity in this 'Sat Tithi Mela'. 'Rangali Bihu' also observed by the community during the period or Bishuwa or on any day or days within the month of 'Bohag'. But this festival is observed in Public Places by arranging sports competition and cultural function where Bihu dance, Bihu songs 'Husuri' etc. performed.

Pushuna

Pushana is the most important festival of the community. This festival begins on the last day of the month Push/14th January and continues it at least there or four days. This festival also known as 'Domahi' or 'Domasi'. (During the same period, other communities of the state also observed this festival, but they observed it as 'Magh Bihu' or 'Bhogali Bihu'. This festival is observed after harvesting the wet crops. First day of the festival every people bath early in the morning and burn 'Bhelaghor' which are made of bamboo and straw. Then they offer a 'sarai' or 'thogi' to their 'Griha Devata'. After this activities all the family members eat 'Doi', 'Chira', 'Pitha' (cake), 'Mah-karai', 'Topola bhat' etc. The head of the family then put on the black and white spot to their cows. In this festival they prepared different kinds of food such as 'Chira' (Flatten rice), different kinds of 'cake', 'Mah Karai', 'Topola Bhat' etc. During the period the festival they visit their friends relatives and neighbours and invite them for feast. People of different groups go door to door and performed their traditional 'Nritya Geets'. In exchange of it every family offer them a few amount of many and beg their blessing to them. After the festival and every group arrange a 'Lokbhat' (feast) from the collected money. Previous day of the 'Push-Sankranti' people observed some customary activities. Every family tie their fruit trees by 'tenwal' (ribbon liked thin line made from bamboo). This function is called also wrapped by nine lines of new thread. This function is called 'Ghor ber'.

Katigacha

This festival is observed in the day of Ahin Sankranti (last day of the month Ahin). In this festival every family light some lamp, locally known as gacha, in the paddy field and other agricultural gardens. They also light lamps in front of every house, gateway and cowshed. The main aim of the festival is to welcome the Goddess Lakshmi. They also pray to god for allround protection of their crops. Lamps are placed on bamboo stick about 4-5 feet above the land surface. The lamp with the stick called Gacha and the activity of lighting lamp is observed with first day of the month Kati on which day the goddess Lakshmi comes in the paddy field (belief of cultivators). So this festival is called 'Katigacha' people believe that on the first day month 'Kati' the Lakshmi Devi (goddess of money) exist in the paddy field. So, people observed the festival to welcome the Devi on the previous day evening lighting lamp (gacha) in the paddy field. They also light lamp under holy basil and pray their Griha 'deveta' for their allround Prosperity

Gocha Dia

Other customary functions related with agricultural activities are 'Gocha Dia' and 'Ag Anan'. The first day of plating paddy is observed as the function of 'Gocha Dia'. On that day the selected persons (male) of the family plants nine 'gocha' of paddy (Kathia) in already prepared field observing a series of customary functions.

Ag Anan

'Ag Anan' is another important customary function observed by the cultivators. This function observed to begin the harvesting activities of wet rice. On a selected day, one of the selected person of the family (generally the head of the family) go to the field and cut nine 'gocha' of matured rice and bring it home following some customary functions. This function is called 'Ag Anan'.

Ori Magan

‘Ori Magan in another customary (tradition) of the community. It observed on the full moon night in the month of ‘Push’. On that night young boys are visit door to door singing some traditional song without using any musical instrument. In exchange ‘Grihastha (respective family) offer them rice or money. This tradition is called ‘Ori magan’ (begging). It is also an agricultural related tradition. At the beginning and ending of song they sound as ‘A shibe’ or ‘Shibe Shibam Shibe’. From this sound an idea is exist that this begging tradition is related the begging activity of Lord Shiba.

Suddhi (Ombubashi or Amoti)

Koch Rajbangshi community of the study area observed a traditional festival called ‘Suddhi’ which is generally observed as the festival of Ambubashi by the other community in the area. ‘Suddhi’ means pure. This festival is begin on the 7th day of the month ‘Ahar’ and end on the 11th day of the same month. People believe that like a woman, the Bashumati (Earth) also become ‘Ritumati’ (Pollution) on the 7th day of ‘Ahar’. During this pollution period of the Bashumati, cultivators do not works any kind of agricultural activities like ploughing, digging, cutting of the earth etc. performance of Puja or any other religious functions also prohibited during this period. On the 11th day of people cleans their houses, courtyard, gateway etc. by cowdung mixing with water. Then they light lamp of the ‘Than’ of their ‘griha devta’ and offer a ‘Sharai’ (Thogi) of fruits, milk etc. then they take their traditional food like ‘doi-chira’ (Card and flatent rice) and seasonal fruits. Non-vegetarian people are take a meal with meat, fish etc.

The Koch-Rajbangshi community is one of the major population groups of Assam. They are living, more or less in all parts of state, but the community is still regarded as very backward. These grow of people if generally settled in the plain areas of the state and based on primary occupation mainly on agriculture, educationally they are much behind the main stream of the country. The North-Salmara Sub-Division of Bongaigaon district is a traditionally abode of the community showing about 37% population to the Sub-divisional total. However being a major population group, the Koch-Rajbangshi community is playing a significant role in social festival functioning of the state. Hence it is essential to know the main problems and causes of their backwardness and to find out the ways and means to solve them.

The primary objectives behind the study is to exhibit socio-festival aspects of the Koch-Rajbangshi community living in the North Salmara Sub-Division and to evaluate their impact on socio festivals of the community. From the study of socio-cultural festivals aspects of the people it is found out that agricultural being the mainstay of the people is responsible to a great extent for its stagnation in socio-festival and slow growth of literacy in other. A characteristic feature of dresses also found among them. Both traditional and modern dresses used by the people. They used their own hand made traditional wearing at home. During festive occasions or when they go out home or from the village, they were ‘dhoti’ long pent and shirts, while the poor people were Angsa and shirt. School boys generally wear pent and shirt. Girls were ‘Churidar’ and ‘Mekhela Chaddar’. The women folk were home made ‘Patani’ or ‘Mekhela Chaddar’ which is wrapped round the body to the ankle wearing of different kinds of ornaments is also a tradition. The culture of wearing ornaments among the Rajbangshi in the Sub-Division is very old. The ornaments wear is forehead are shapati and tickly, phoolkari, ear rings, kanpacha,, jhumka, dool etc. wear in ear. On nose they wear nakaphool, nolo, noth nose ring etc. Different types of chains or neclas wear on neck. On hand round the wrist they wear different types of ring like ornaments such as shakhal, kharu, banti, bala etc.

The study has advanced the basic of social festival aspects of the Koch Rajbangshi community in the North Salmara Sub-Division in details. The community is educationally economically and culturally very backward. They live in poor economic condition and always suffer from poor health because of

lack of proper facilities for education, transport and communication, agriculture, medical treatment, job opportunities of existing facilities. Lack of opportunities for absorbing the rapid growth workforce (manpower) lack of supply of power facilities, landlessness etc. are the main causes of socio-economic backwardness of the community.

Conclusion

The North Salmara sub-division is situated in the western part of the state Assam. The study reveals the fact of the ecological setting and historical background of the district it is found that the flat topography with scattered small hill and tills' is almost all parts of the area and other natural resources like forests, fishes and available arable lands play a vital role in the evaluation of the community. From the study of socio-economic and cultural aspects of the people it is found out that agriculture being the mainstay of the people of responsible to a great extent for its stagnation in economy in one hand and slow growth of literacy in other.

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