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Examining the Kinships System of the Bodo

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Abstract

The Bodo of the North Eastern region of India have their own kinship system to maintain social relationship since ancient periods. Kinship is the expression of social relationship. Kinship may be defined as connection or relationships between persons based on marriage or blood. In each and every society of the world, social relationship is considered to be the more important than the biological bond. The relationship is not socially recognized, it fall outside the realm of kinship. Since kinship is considered as universal, it plays a vital role in the socialization of individuals and the maintenance of social cohesion of the group. Thus, kinship is considered to be the study of the sum total of these relations. The kinship of the Bodo is bilateral. The kin related through the father is known as *Bahagi* in Bodo whereas the kin to the mother is called *Kurma*. The nature of social relationships, the kinship terms, kinship behaviours and prescriptive and proscriptive rules are the important themes of the present study.

Keywords: Avoidance, Kinship behaviours, Kinship terms, Social relationship, joking.

Introduction:

The Bodo are one of the native people of Assam. Racially, these groups of people are of Mongoloid origin. The language spoke by them is a branch of Tibeto-Burman speech family. The Kok-Borok, Mech, Garo, Rabha, Lalung, Sonowal, Deori, etc. are the cognate tribes of the Bodo. They have been inhabited in the northern areas of the Brahmaputra Valley, mainly in Kokrajhar, Darrang, Goalpara, and Kamrup districts. They are assigned different name in different places such as the Bodo in North Bengal, Nepal and Bhutan are identified as Mech or Meche, in between the Sonkos river and the Brahmaputra river they are designated as Bodo, on the Kachari hills, Kachari name is given to them, Dimasa in Dimapur, and Kok-Boro in Tripura (Mondal,2011:8). At present the Bodo represent one of the largest autochthonous tribe in Assam.

In order to explain the kinship A.R. Brown defined as "A kinship system, as I am using the term, or a system of kinship and affinity if you prefer so to call it, is in the first place a system of dyadic relations between person and person in a community, the behavior of any two persons in any of these relations being regulated in some way, and to a greater or less extent, by social usage" (Brown, 1952:52-53). While defining the kinship D.N. Majumdar & T.N. Madan stated as people are bound together in groups by various kinds of bonds which generally based on reproduction, an inherent human drive, and is called kinship (Majumdar & Madan, 1986:84). Kinship is the recognition of relatives either through a blood relationship or through marriage or also adoption. It may be described as a web of social relationships that form an important part of the lives of human beings in every society. However, the exact meaning of which is often debated.

The kinship system of the Bodo may be discussed in following three distinct categories i.e. a) consanguinal kinship b) collateral kinship and c) affinal kinship:

a) Consanguineal Kinship:

The consanguinal kinship is mainly based on blood relationship. The relationships between parents and their offspring or sons or daughter, and that between siblings of the same parents are the universally recognized as

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consanguinal kin (Majumdar & Madan, 1986:84). It is to be noted that for determining the consanguineous kin, only the biological fact or blood relation will not be counted but societal recognition is also an important factor because an adopted child is treated everywhere as biological offspring of the adopter. It is clearly indicated that biological relation is not only the factor for determining consanguinal kin. Following are the consanguinal kinship terminologies found among the Bodo:

	English	Bodo (term of address)
1.	Father's father	*Abwo*
2.	Father's mother	*Abwi*
3.	Mother's father	*Abwo*
4.	Mother's mother	*Abwi*
5.	Father	*Apha*
6.	Mother	*Ai*
7.	Son	*Pisala*
8.	Daughter	*Phisajw*
9.	Son's son	*Phiswola* (term of address *Abwo*)
10.	Son's daughter	*Phiswojw* (term of address *Abwi*)
11.	Daughter's son	*Phiswola* (term of address *Abwo*)
12.	Daughter's daughter	*Phiswojw* (term of address *Abwi*)

Ose is the Bodo word which means one's own which applicable to direct blood relation and comes under the category of consanguinal kin. When introducing one's own parents to the others it is said like this *Apha Ose* (person speaking), *Bipha ose* (terms of reference). It is in case of the father. For the mother it is called as *Ai Ose* (person speaking), *Bima Ose* (term of reference). The term of the reference, *Bida-Pongbai Ose* is applied to brothers of the same parent or at least of the same father or mother. In the same way the term of the reference *Bibo-Binanao Ose* is to the sisters of the same parents. The term of reference *Bida-Binano Ose* is used to the elder brother and younger sister. The term *Bibo-Pongbai Ose* is used to the elder sister and younger brother. The relationship between a person and his elder brother's children of both the sex is called *Biptoi-Biyadoi Ose*. The cousin brother and sisters do not come under the *Ose* kin group and used the term *Bida-Pongbaini-Fisa-Bida-Pongbai* meaning the brothers being the children of the brothers (Mushahary, 1986:105). The term *Bida-Binanaoni-Fisa-Bida-Binanao* or *Bida-Pongbai* or *Bibo-Binano/Bibo-Ponbai* is applied to the children of the elder brother and younger sister. In case of the children of the elder sister and younger brother the term *Bibo-Pongbaini-Fisa-Bibo-Pongbai* or *Bibo-Binanao* or *Bida-Pongbai* or *Bida-binanao. Bibo-Binanaoni-Fisa-Bibo-Binanao* or *Bibo-Pongbai* or *Bida-Pongbai* or *Bida-Binanao* term is used to refer the relation between the children of the elder sister and younger sister

b) Collateral kin:

An individual's siblings and descendent of their siblings can be termed as collateral kin. The collateral kin are these sibling's of an individual's lineal, or direct kin. In simple terms, it may be described as sort of the side branches of a family. It mainly includes sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, niece, nephews, and even cousins etc. The following are the collateral kinship terms of the Bodo:

Collateral kin

	English	Bodo (term of address)
1.	Father's elder brother	*Ayong*
2.	Father's younger brother	*Adwi*
3.	Father's elder sister	*Anwi*
4.	Father's younger sister	*Anwi*
5.	Father's brother's elder son	*Ada*
6.	Father's brother's younger son	*Phongbai*
7.	Father's brother's elder daughter	*Abo*
8.	Father's brother's younger daughter	*Binanao*
9.	Father's sister's elder son	*Ada*
10.	Father's sister's younger son	*Phongbai*
11.	Father's sister's elder daughter	*Abo*

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12.	Father's sister's younger daughter	*Binanao*
13.	Mother's elder brother	*Amai*
14.	Mother's younger brother	*Amai*
15.	Mother's brother's elder son	*Ada*
16.	Mother's brother's elder daughter	*Abo*
17.	Mother's brother's younger son	*Phongbai*
18.	Mother's brother's younger daughter	*Binanao*
19.	Mother's elder sister	*Ayong*
20.	Mother's younger sister	*Madwi*
21.	Mother's sister's elder son	*Ada*
22.	Mother's sister's elder daughter	*Abo*
23.	Mother's sister's younger son	*Phongbai*
24.	Mother's sister's younger daughter	*Binanao*
25.	Elder brother	*Ada*
26.	Younger brother	*Phongbai*
27.	Elder sister	*Abo*
28.	Younger sister	*Binanao*
29.	Elder Brother's son or daughter	*Biyadoi*
30.	Younger Brother's son or daughter	*Biyaiyong*
31.	Sister's son	*Biyanwi*
32.	Sister's daughter	*Biyanwi*

c) Affinal Kinship:

The relationship that formed on the basis of marriage is known as affinal kinship. They are the in-laws which included mother-in-law and father-in-law, sister-in-law, brother-in-law but it doesn't stop there. It is said that the desired for reproduction resulted two kinds of bonds i.e. 1) the bond between spouses and their relatives on either side and 2) the bond between parents and their children, and that between siblings, i.e., children of the same parents. The first kind of bond is called affinal kinship as it arises out of a socially or legally defined marital relationship. It is the kinship which does not linked through the blood. In another words the *affinal kin* are the kin, who do not connected to each other through blood (Majumdar & Madan, 1986:84). Thus, the ties resulting from marriage or relationship establish by marriage generally known as affinal relationship. The following are the affinal kinships of the Bodo:

	English	Bodo (term of address)
1.	Father's elder brother's wife	*Ayong*
2.	Father's younger brother's wife	*Madwi*
3.	Father's elder sister's husband	*Amai*
4.	Father's younger sister's husband	*Amai*
5.	Mother's elder brother's wife	*Anwi*
6.	Mother's younger brother's wife	*Anwi*
7.	Mother's elder sister's husband	*Ayong*
8.	Mother's younger sister's husband	*Adwi*
9.	Husband	*Pisai*
10.	Husband's father	*Apha*
11.	Husband's father's brother	*Apha*
12.	Husband's father's brother's wife	*Ai*
13.	Husband's father's sister	*Ai*
14.	Husband's fathers sister's husband	*Apha*
15.	Husband's mother	*Ai*
16.	Husband's mother's brother	*Apha*
17.	Husband's mother's brother's wife	*Ai*
18.	Husband's mother's sister	*Ai*

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19. Husband's mother's sister's husband	*Apha*
20. Husband's grandfather	*Abwo*
21. Husband's grandmother	*Abwi*
22. Husband's elder brother	*Beoai*
23. Husband's brother's wife	*Abo*
24. Husband's elder sister	*Bajwi*
25. Husband's younger brother	*Bibwnang*
26. Husband's younger sister	*Agwi*
27. Wife	*Bisi*
28. Wife's father	*Apha* (term of address *Bwraipwr*/*Bihao*)
29. Wife's mother	*Ai* (term of address *Buripwr*/*Bikunjw*)
30. Wife's father's brother	*Apha*
31. Wife's father's brother's wife	*Ai*
32. Wife's father's sister	*Ai*
33. Wife's mother's brother	*Apha*
34. Wife's mother's brother's wife	*Ai*
35. Wife's mother's sisters	*Ai*
36. Wife's father's sister's husband	*Apha*
37. Wife's mother's sister's husband	*Apha*
38. Wife's grandfather	*Abwo*
39. Wife's grandmother	*Abwi*
40. Wife's elder brother	*Gumwi*
41. Wife's younger brother	*Agwi*
42. Wife's elder sister	*Beoai*
43. Wife's younger sister	*Bibwnang*/*Agwi*
44. Wife's sister's husband	*Salti*
45. Son's wife	*Bihamjw*
46. Son's wife's father	*Biai*
47. Son's wife's mother	*Zamaizo*
48. Daughter's husband	*Bijamadwi*(*Zaoisw* terms of address by Father-in-law/mother-in-law)
49. Daughter's husband's father	*Biai*
50. Daughter's husband's mother	*Zamaizo*
51. Elder brother's wife	*Bajwi*
52. Younger brother's wife	*Beoai*
53. Elder sister's husband	*Gumwi*
54. Younger sister's husband	*Bwinai/Bibwnang*
55. Step father	*Pipa Batul*
56. Step mother	*Bima Batul*
57. Co-wife	*Bihari*
58. Step son	*Pisala Batul*
59. Step daughter	*Pisajw Batul*

Sex of Speaker:

In the Bodo kinship system, the kinship term indicates the sex of the speaker's except few terms like "*Ayong*". The term "*Ayong*" denotes both male and female individual who is elder or senior to the speaker's father or mother's elder sister. The kinship terms given below used to indicate the speaker's sex i.e. male and female: *Abwo, Apha, Adwi, Ada, Pisala, Pongbai, Gumwi, Amai* etc. are all indicates the male kin terms whereas *Abwi, Ai, Pisajw, Madwi, Abo, Binanao, Bajwi, Anwi* etc. are female kinship terms (Brahma, 2016).

Age of Speaker:

In the kinship system of the Bodo, the elder persons cannot be addressed by their personal names without a prefix. One has to add some prefix before calling an elder person by their personal name. A term is used to address the elder without calling their personal names. The prefix "*Ada*" is used in addressing to persons of speaker's elder

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brother's age or who is senior to the speaker's age. Similarly, the "*Abo*" prefix is used while addressing to a woman of the speaker's elder sister's age. While addressing to the person who is senior to speaker's father's age or mother's age, the term "*Ayong*" is used in both male and female, whereas the term "*Adwi*" is used to address the person who is junior to speaker's father's age. Likewise, the "*Madwi*" is used to address a woman who is younger to speaker's mother's age. The term "*Abwo*" and "*Abwi*" is used respectively to address the person whose age is equivalent to the speaker's grandfather and grandmother. While referring to junior male and female person to speaker's age the terms "*Pongbai*" and "*Binanao*" are respectively used, however, their personal name also could be used while addressing to them. It is well known that the age of the person whom one speaks is estimated and suitable kin term is always applied while addressing to anyone according to their ages.

Honourific term:

According to Oxford Advanced learner's dictionary, the word honorific means "showing respect for the person you are speaking to" (Hornby, 2015:755). The term is generally used while addressing to the senior male and female individuals. Among them the term '*Nwngtang'* is used while addressing to the senior male and female person. A suffix '*mwn'* is added to the term '*Nwgtang'* to address a group of elders or seniors. The term "*Nwng*", which means "you" in English is used while addressing a person who is junior or may be less important individual than the speaker or speaker's relation or equivalent to speaker's age. This term i.e. "*Nwng*" became honorific term only when a suffix word "*Tang*" is added i.e. *Nwng+Tang=Nwngtang*. Again while addressing his or her senior person to others, the speaker will use the term *Bitang*. Here, *Bi* means "he" in English and the term *Bi* is used while addressing to junior person. The term *Bi* became honourific only when the suffix "*Tang*" is added to *Bi* i.e. *Bi+Tang=Bitang* (Borgayary, 2016).

Avoidance:

The interpretation of the anthropologists on the subject of avoidance is a sign of respect rather than the bad feelings. The relationship of the avoidance is generally involved the persons of not same sex who have a specific kin relationship with each other. In the opinion of the A.R. Brown, 'on every occasion people came into contact with each other, the possibilities of the corporation and conflict are equally always existed. However, some kinds of the kinship where hostility is regard as manifest it to put restrictions on the growth of intimacy; and hence the kinship usage of avoidance' (Brown, 1976:91-92). The main purpose of the avoidance is to avoid any kind of physical relationship as it would amount to insect (Frazer, 1910).

Some sort of the avoidances has been maintained by the Bodo. Of the avoidance observe by the Bodo, the most rigid being between a man and his wife's elder sister and the younger brother's wife. In true sense of the term a man generally avoids or keep distance from the wife of his younger brother and the wife of his son's, likewise a woman generally avoids the husband of her sister's. It is also to be noted that in the rules of the avoidance of the Bodo, a man may not utter the name of his mother-in-law, father-in-law and vice versa which indicated that he treated the father-in-law and mother-in-law as own father and mother. The patterns of the avoidance have been noticed in brother-sister, father-daughter and father-in-law and daughter-in-law relation. It is said that the relationship between a husband and elder sister of his wife and his younger brother's wife come under the category of avoidance. It is the taboo to call each other's name, freely talking, sitting together and so on (Mushahary, 1986:115).

There is universally avoidance found in the relationship between a man and his mother-in-law and the Bodo are also not in exception. In the relationship of the avoidance, ego must maintain respect, reserve and usually used second person plural form of address. In avoidance relationship, ego always has an avoidance relationship with his parents, children and female siblings, and his parent's generation like his uncles and aunts. Free talking anything he likes to his brothers, sisters and even the cousins also restricted to some extent. Even changing of the cloth before each other or nude in presence of each other are not common or not encourage in accordance with the law of avoidance. It is the custom of the Bodo in case of the avoidance that while sitting husband and wife together in the same place, the wife will leave that place and offers the same place or seat if the elder brother of her husband comes as a mark of respect. If the elder brother touched his younger brother's wife's body it is belief that he will become a *Gandlet* (a kind of leech) in his next life, which indicated that touching of the younger brother's wife by the elder brother is totally taboo and avoidance(Personal interviewed with Gobinda Narzary).

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Joking Relationships:

Joking relationship is an extreme degree of familiarity expressing through joking relationship which reverse of the avoidance relationship. It may also be called as mutual reciprocity. It is stated that the term "joking relationship is a relation between persons in which one is by custom permitted, and in some instances required, to tease or make fun of the other, who in turn is required to take no offence" (Brown, 1952:90). The joking relationship may also be considered as a peculiar combination of friendliness and antagonism. It includes expression and also arouses hostility to some extent but it would not be taken as seriously as there is pretence of hostility and a real friendliness. Joking relationship is one of permitted disrespect (Brown, 1952:91).

The Bodo also do observed joking relationship between a man and his wife's younger sister or between a woman and her husband's younger brother. The joking relationship that practiced among the Bodo are as follows:

a) Joking relationship between sister-in-law and brother-in-law i.e. wife's younger sister and the husband.
b) Joking relationship between sister-in-law and brother-in-law i.e. wife and husband's younger brother.
c) Joking relationship between grandfather and the granddaughter.
d) Joking relationship between grandmother and grandson.

It is rightly observed that the relationship of the grandparents and grandchildren is always considered in the term of love and affection rather than the discipline and authority. The grandparents treated their grand children more liberally and allowed them to do anything or behave anything in such a way which the parents would normally thwart. When the grand children are sufficiently grown up, the relationship between them turned to the joking in nature and the relationship between the grandfather and granddaughter is like that of the husband and wife, in the same way the relationship and behaviour between grandmother and grandson in term of the joking relationship (Mushahary, 1952:114). It is commonly found that the joking relation is always existed between grandparents and grandchildren, and very oftenly grandparents used to impart moral education, cultural tradition, practices, beliefs and thoughts of the society as a whole as well as communities.

Joking relationship is prevalent between a man and wife of his elder brother and between cross cousin brothers and sisters or even between parallel cousin brothers and sisters. The relationship between the man and his wife's younger sister is of husband and wife nature in the context of the joking relationship among the Bodo. R.N. Mushahary (Mushahary, 1952:116) says that "this rule is in consistent with the permissible levirate and sororate marriage in the society". In the joking relationship two persons may be potential mate if they are not the nearest kin. In the Bodo society some of the noted terms used in the joking relationship are as: *Bima Kale, Bida Kale, Bibo Kali, Binanao Kale* etc.

Bodo joking relationship between grandparents and grandchild: When a grandchild, who is mature and attain the age of marriage, could not find suitable girl for marriage or fail to have love affairs with any girls than the grandmother used to cut the following joke as:

If you do not have any lover you marry me instead staying as *Jiya Balonda* (*Jiya Balonda* means a man who is already crossed the marriage age) as your time for marriage has come or seems to be over. Similarly grandfather cutting such type of joke saying *Adhungari* (Mature or aged woman/girls who is outside the marital life is called *Adungari* in Bodo) to his mature granddaughter when she failed to married on time. The reason for joking or teasing relationship is nothing but encouraging or instigating their grandchildren to enter into the marital life in proper age or in proper time (Personal interviewed with Gopinath Borgayary).

Conclusion

We may conclude with the words that all the kinship relation of the Bodo i.e. consanguinal, collateral and affinal has their own sphere of influence as well as importance and plays a very crucial role in the daily life, rituals and ceremonies in their society. The use of these kinship terms brought a healthy relationship in a particular family or in and around the family i.e. village, locality as well as in the society as a whole. The consanguinal kinship maintained a peaceful relation and co-existence among the members of a family as well as balanced the relationship between the parents and the siblings. The use of collateral kinship conveyed closeness relationship among the side branch or members of a family. Whereas the affinial kinship relations help the society to build a complete social relation between two parties i.e. husbands kins and the wife's kins. In other word it helps the society to build a

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system through which the society tried to maintain the social relationship of the community or society in good equilibrium. Again kinship is socially important because of its connection to obligations, social rights, responsibilities and power, inheritance of property and status, etc. From such considerations, the study of kinship system of the human beings has become an important area of interest for many social anthropologists.

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