

Religious Belief and Practice among the Khamti People: A Review on Lakhimpur District of Assam

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ABSTRACT:

I intend to analyze the artistic concept of the Khamti people in Assam along with their archaeological which remains in literary sources. In fact, it is seemed that in the early from of Buddhism had penetrated into this land as early as 3rd century BC and it maintained its hold over this region till a radical change took place in it in the 7th /8th century AD. The first part of the topic will discuss about the rulers of Kamarupa did not patronize Buddhism and Kamarupa, though lying close to Bengal, remained free from the influence of the faith. There was the gesture engendered by the genuine feeling, on personal respects, for the foreign pilgrim rather than any pro-Buddhist sentiment on the part of Bhaskarvarman. In second, the Buddhism or its part like Vajrayana prevailed in Kamarupa and that the grants of the period indicate only a change of faith from Saivism to Vaishnavism. Buddhism is flourished both Kamarupa and Srihatta and popular in Assam. Buddhism in ancient Assam was that the faith prevailed in the even before the introduction of Hinduism and Buddhist sites. In forth it will show the important contribution of the Buddhist council was held in Kamarupa. Not only this, it consist all the points like objectives, review of the paper, need of study with historical understandings. In the last part of the topic some new conclusion are drawn at the end.

KEY WORDS: Demographic apparatus, Economic status, their social formation and Buddhist Culture etc.

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I. INTRODUCTION:

Khamti is one of the ethnic groups of Assam and belongs to the Tai race. The Tai is a generic name denoting a large branch of Mongoloid family. They were the original inhabitant of the west China and then came to north of Burma in the time immemorial. They came to Assam in the 18th century and settled in Tengapani south of Sadiya. Now they are concentrated in Changlung, Trirap and Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh and at Narayanpur of Lakhimpur district of Assam. They are followers of Buddhism and they used Tai Khamti language. Change is a unique phenomena and law of nature. The social structure is subject to ceaseless change. Society as a complex of social relationship never stands without change. In sociology, social change is the change in society and society is a web of social relationship. Hence social change is the change of social relationship. These social relationships reflect in various type of social institution like family, marriage, religion, economy etc. As a result, there exists a rich tradition of tribal studies in our country. The investigator wants to study Khamti society as a tribe in respect of change and continuity. Khamti is one of the ethnic groups of Assam and belongs to the Tai race. The Tai is a generic name denoting a large branch of Mongoloid family. They were the original inhabitant of the west China and then came to north of Burma in the time immemorial. They came to Assam in the 18th century and settled in Tengapani south of Sadiya. Now they are concentrated in Changlung, Trirap and Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh and at Narayanpur of Lakhimpur district of Assam. They are followers of Buddhism and they used Tai Khamti language.

II. OBJECTIVES:

The main objectives of the study are–

1. To study the traditional socio-cultural system of the Khamtis.
2. To find out the causes of changes.
3. To identify the areas where changes are taking place.
4. To find out causes of continuity of some aspects of religious life of the Khamtis.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

However, scholars are not consonance with the fact and propounded different theories and opinions regarding its prevalence in early Assam. The book of the eminent scholars like Lila Gogoi, M Neog, P. Gogoi, E.T. Dalton who write on culture and history, language, ethnology, Tai culture, political relations of the Khamtis etc. Through '*Tai Sanskritir Ruprekha*', *Asomar Sanskriti*, *Buddha Sanskriti* entrusted Khamti religion, language, their art and culture. In the book '*Asamiya Sanskriti*' edited by H. Neog and B.M. Das write on '*Asomar Janajatiya Sanskriti*' in which we find the Khamti culture. M. Neog entitled '*A Buddhist Tribe of Assam: The Khamtis*' dealt with the religion of Khamtis. He writes a note on 'Khamti' in the book '*Asomar Janajati*' edited by P. C. Bhattacharyee in which he explains the origin, present situation, physical structure, dresses, language etc. of Khamti community.

Geetanjali Boruah also writes on the topic "Khamti" in the book entitled "The people of India: Assam, edited by B.K. Bordoloi and R.K. Athaparia where she establishes almost all the sides of socio-economic aspects of the Khamtis. Now we are trying to introduce some of the reviews of literature on the change and continuity forwarded by different social scientists. Indian sociologists like Ram Ahuja, Yogendra Singh, M.N. Srinivas, A. R. Desai etc. have written about change and continuity of Indian society. Ram Ahuja writes on "Social change in India" in the book. In this book he writes on social development, goals, planning and hinderence of social change. R. S. Mann in his book entitled: "Social Change and Social Research" provides an overview of social change and its concept, theories, mechanism, types and conditions and implications and future projections of change. Yogendra Sing in his book "Social Change in India", mentions contradictions and challenges of social change, social transformation and any other aspects relating to social change.

HISTORICAL UNDERSTANDING:

Change is a law of nature. In our society changes are bound to come. In some societies these changes are very slow while in others are rapid and fast. But no society can escape from changes. The Govt. of India also has launched some welfare programmes in deferent sphere of society for bringing changes in respective areas. As a result, social scientists are, therefore required to carry on some studies on different aspects of "change" and "continuity" among them. Indian Constitution also provides different scope for socio-economic development of tribals and non-tribals for uplift of their socio-economic position. Indian society has been changing from the time immemorial through the process of sanskritisation, industrialization and urbanization etc. But in spite of these social changes and developments Indian society have been maintaining some of their socio-cultural aspects which is the basic characteristics of any society and stand as barrier in the path of social change and development. Likewise, in Assam, introduction of Buddhism, the '*Acariya parampara*' or successor of teachers after the Buddha may help to some extent solving this problem and tried to spread their philosophical ideas towards north. *Thera Upagupta*'s led on Mathura and *Thera Majjhanika*'s Kashmir, both the centers were come under the leadership of *Thera Dhitiika*, who extended the popularity of *Sarvastivada* Buddhism gradually eastward direction to Kamarupa. After that, he covered Mathura, Minara, and king of *Tokhara* and at this last day spent at Ujjayini. Literary and archaeological sources open the path reconstruct the history of early from Buddhism in Assam. The sources like *Rajtarngini* of Kalhana, accounts of *Taranath's History of Buddhism* to some extent proved the existence of Buddhist ideas.

The universe of the present study comprise of entire population of Khamtis of Assam. The respondent will be collected on the basis of purposive sampling method with sample of 100 (one hundred). An interview guide will be prepared for collecting primary data about the villagers, community life of the people. Secondary data will be collected from written documents like books, journal official records etc. The data will be analysed by using statistical method. The interpretation and generalisation will be based on the statistical findings. According to the *Dipavamsa*, the *Mahavamsa* and the *Samantapasaddika*, that after the 3rd Buddhist council held at *Pataliputra* two missionaries namely *Thera Sona* and *Thera Uttara* were sent to *Subarnahumi* with an objective to proliferate Buddhism in that land. The 3rd Buddhist council was held during the 19th years of Asoka's reign and after 236 years of Buddha's *Mahaparrinivana*. During that period, the whole south East Asia was known as *subarnabhumi*. In that period, the probable route to reach over the distinction was only two viz. the land route and the sea route. The land route connected the north Thailand via Assam after passing through Burma and sea route was from port Tamralipti. Perhaps, through the land route via Assam, the missionaries reached over *Suvarnabhumi*. It appears that, Assam for the first time witnessed Buddhist ideas, through the missionaries reached over *Suvarnabhumi*. It appears that, Assam for the first time witnessed Buddhist ideas, through the missionaries crossing the land to reach *Subarnabhumi*. The *Tarnath's History of Buddhism* in India where a story related to *thera Dhitiak*, who converted a Barahmin of Assam namely *Siddha* in to Buddhist is found mentioned. *Thera Dhitiika* was a disciple of *thera upagupta*, who was the preceptor of Emperor Asoka. *Dhitiika* propagated the *Sarvastivada Buddhism*. *Thera Dhitiika* converted the *siddha* who subsequently made the maha Cheyatya Vihara. In the chronological setting, *Dhitiika* flourished between *Ajatsatru* and Asoka. In that sense, Buddhism exists in Assam in 3rd century B.C.

The *Rajtarangini* of Kalhan, narrates Kashmir king Meghabahans married a Kamarupa prince namely Amritaprabha, who brought with her a Tibetan Buddhist Guru. The Tibetan *Guru* namely *Stunpa*, was from Kamarupa. *Amritaprabha* constructed a lofty Vihara called "*Amritabhavana*" for the benefits of the *Bhikus Stunpa*, the *Guru* brought from Assam, also made some contributions in this respect. It is said that *Stunpa* also erected a stupa namely *lo-stonpa*, who originally hailed from Loh. Loh has been tried to identify with capital of Ladakh. M.A. Stein argued that, *Stunpa* was actually a Tibetan word and from the expression used by Kalhana "*Stunpatadbhashayaprokto*", it is clear that, Kalhana knew the Tibetan term to be equivalent of *Guru* and not, as has been supposed a proper name. According to *Rajtarangini*, Meghabhan falls in the 5th century A.D., and in a similar way, during that period, Balabarman I was the ruler of Kamarupa. It's a strong argument that, Balabarman the ancestral king of *Bhaskarvarman* was a Buddhist or having knowledge of Buddhism and it may be proved that Buddhism flourished in Assam in the 5th century A.D. Here an important point is that Yuan Chawang's remarks on whatever Buddhists were in this state, they did perform their acts of devotion in secrecy. It means that, though in Assam, Buddhism never prevailed in an organized manner, but there had some followers of Buddhism. Yuan Chawang's observation on Buddhism in Kamarupa regarding secret followers arises some problem. It is said that, in a secret manner. On the contrary to that we have ample evidences to show that a spirit of religious toleration duly prevailed in Kamarupa under *Bhaskarvarman*. 'Through not a Buddhist, the king was in the habit of treating accomplished *Sramanas* with respect.' This idea became stronger when *Bhaskarvarman* took part in the great Buddhist assembly organized by *Siladitya* at *Kanyakubja*. *Neog* argued that *Hiuen Tsang*'s observations of secret followers were no other than the existence of some esoteric type of the religion. This view is also supported by *S. Sasadanda*, and he goes to say that this esoteric type may have a reference as *Tantricism* or *Raikhowa*, called in Assamese usually practiced at night.

The archaeological evidences, scattered in different places of Assam and neighboring states, bear some testimony about the prevalence of Buddhism in ancient Assam. First of this category, one inscription discovered at *Nagarjungkondai* of ancient Andhra country of king *Madhariputa*, 3rd century AD., dedicated to *Tambapanna*, who had converted a number of countries into Buddhism along with *Cina* and in the *Karmavibhaga* section of the *Brihastamhita*, the *Cinas* and *Kiratas* are together mentioned. Equally, the *Cinas* and *Kirats* were the army of *Bhagadatta* represented in the great *Kuruksatra* war from Assam. So, the attachment of *Kamrupa* with Buddhism as reflected in the inscription was as old as 3rd century AD. The *Surya Pahar* area of *Golapara* district, the remains basically of stupas, a number of rock cut votive stupas are found. It is found that two of these stupas belong to the 100 A.D. or 100 B.C. Another rock cut votive stupa found, a little south of above mentioned site is dated by *S.K. Sarawati* from 200 A.D. or 400 AD. The prime features of these stupas of *Surya Pahar* area. In *Surya Pahar*, one of the rock cut votive stupas bears three gradually receding rings round the base, from topmost ring is supported the dome almost hemispherical in shape with a flattered top. On the top of the dome, the remnants of *harmika* are also seen. There is another stupa brought out from a cylindrical drum. So, different interpretations can be made, about the stupas of *Surya Pahar*. But it can be presumed that the stupas testify the existence of Buddhism in this land prior to the 100 BC. Another site, namely *Bhaitbari* (*Vadogokugiri*) which was recently earthen down, bear some relics of Buddhism. The area now located in the state of *Maghalaya* formerly, it was an integral part of greater *Kamarupa*. Recent excavation processed under the initiative of *A.K. Sharma* discovered some relics from this area. The unearthed major remains Buddhist in this area is, a mud-cum-brick Stupa.

First, it indicates, the foremost goal of every religious sect is to make closer to the common people with some bold ideological constructs. In this regard, it seems that with the help of bold ideological construct and form of deities the sects of later form gradually presented themselves towards closer to the contemporary social system. Thus, it became familiar for common people which help the process of rapid proliferation of these sects among local inhabitants. Perhaps, in course of time, the follower of other religious faith tried to absorb those types of means and purposes to swift proliferation of their faiths in society. It is fact that a follower of a particular faith either consciously or unconsciously proliferate his faith. Hence, observing the predominance of particular sects, the followers of other faith tried to inculcate the positive aspects of dominating faith i.e. sects of later form, which in course of time gradually turned into the entrance of those positive elements into his own faith. In the initial stage the process runs itself in the psychological level of the followers. But in course of time, it emerged in terms of some valid process. Perhaps, such types of diffusion were occurred in ideology between later form and other religious faiths.

Secondly, dominance of *Koiratoz* sect in religious sphere of Assam quite important in this regard. It seems that majority of the followers a particular sect stands apart to understand the total ideology of the sects in stead of acquiring only fragmented phases of that ideology. Already it is narrated that the similarity between *Koiratoz* and later form of Buddhism in terms of ideology and customs like permitting to take every kind of food, coition with women etc. Thus, perhaps for these similarities which led to those less understandable followers to acquire some fragmented parts of total ideology which were neither fully under *Vajrayana*

not totally form Koiratoz sects. Therefore, visually it reflects some religious assimilation while actually there was some interchange of ideas took place among various religious beliefs.

Thirdly, the Tantric process was an autonomous practice. There was no bar to absorb or disqualified the morals of particular sects. It is quite clear that autonomy in any sense always became the factor of changes and new entrance. For instance, wide autonomy led to emergence of certain worshipping process of other faith. Therefore, certain processes of worship were there while these resemble with the worshipping process of more religious faith. In that sense, it is not impossible to observe these assimilations in a general overview.

The most crucial aspect within the sects of later form was to uplift the women position and steps taken to removal of caste biasness. Frequent occurrence of Dombi girls and women in those Dohas and Charyas reflects these remarkable elements. The factor behinds these elements indicate the steps taken to gain popularity among local inhabitants. The Charyas reflects the sharp dominance of the Brahmins on higher strata of society while peoples belonging to lower strata remained apart from those Brahminical upheavals. There was no dependable source to raise argument about deep prevalent of Koiratoz sect among the lower strata of the society. As a matter of fact, the people of lower strata either willingly come closer to the sects of later form or turns their views through benefit of higher position in these sects. On the contrary, to attain Nirvana embrace of women required in most of the sects of later form of Buddhism. But, in a caste based Brahmin dominant society, probability occurs only through the women of lower strata can be applicable on these processes. On the other hand, in direct review, women position was far better. For instance, Laskshimikara Devi was the propounder of Sahajiyana sect, and the reference of Sahajayogi Cintamani. More precisely, it was a subtle process, under which the whole system runs. But the ways and means to placing of women to superior position were bold enough. In this regards, assumption can be made that the sects of later form were raised some outstanding elements like removal of caste biasness and upliftment of women.

Despite these, ultimate corollary of the later form in Assam was not so prosperous. It was disappeared in the religious scene of Assam from 15th /16th AD. onwards. The reason behinds its disappearance from prominent religions in Assam indicates, constant interchange of religious ideas with other religions while genesis of new sects formation can be seen within the banner of later form. In this process, autonomy of tantric practices further fueled the decay released forces. However, interchanges of religious ideas were not only responsible for creation of the gloomy atmosphere of that period. It was gloomy when flexible ideas of various sects interchanged with each other and impossible to detect whether any religious ideas were in matrix of that gloomy situation. Precisely, it seems that a combined religious ideology were on process among those disciples however they were not aware about what forms of religious ideology did they promulgated. Perhaps, these disciples were belongs to less understandable in terms of total ideological construct of the various sects prevalent in contemporary society. This process, further leads to the development of profane and profligacy ways and means abundant in contemporary social system. These newly emerged religious trends were responsible for to some extent in creation of some occult practices in Assam. In that atmosphere, mention may be made about emergence of Ratikhowa sect in Assam while elements of Buddhism, Saivism, Skatism are observed in a combined way.

IV. CONCLUSION:

Apart from these Stupas shrines also found in this region. In fact, B. Mukharji argues that the original circular shrine belonged to Buddhist faith and in the recent times the Votive Chaitya in the centre has been removed to make place for alter of Surya.' The scope of the present study lays the entire population of the Khamtis in Assam. It is worth mentioning that the Khamtis of Assam, at present are concentrated at only four villages at Kherajkhat mouja in Narayanpur circle of Lakhimpur district of Assam. The four villages are Bor-Khamti, Borpathar, Gosaibari and Sribhuyan. Only a few numbers of them are living in Tipling and Tunijan for which they cannot recognize as village and they participate in the other four villages in any functions. This is an interdisciplinary research work with the verity of discipline to show how a particular community which is comparatively smaller in size has undergone changes to face to all devouring factors to globalisation.

NOTES AND REFFERENES

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