

“Wngkham Wngkhri Gelenai: A Traditional Children’s Game Of The Bodos Under Chirang District In Assam”

Mwina Basumatary¹, Prof. Indira Boro² and Dr. Bijit Brahma³

¹Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Bodo, Bodoland University, Kokrajhar, Assam,
mwinabasumatary91@gmail.com ORC ID: 0000-0003-0972-768X

²Professor, Department of Bodo, Dean, Faculty of Languages, Bodoland University, Kokrajhar, Assam, India,
indiraboro379@gmail.com ORC ID: 0000-0002-0174-0022

³Assistant Professor, Department of History, Sova Ram Borgoyari College, Runikhata, Chirang, Assam, India
bijitbrahma87@gmail.com ORC ID: 0000-0001-6082-7729

Abstract

Playing games is one of the integral parts of Bodo culture. Since ages, the people have been playing various games for entertainment and balance mental health. In the same way, the Bodos also played different games corresponding to other tribes or communities. Wngkham Wngkhri game is a children’s game, played in open space by forming a group. This children’s game represents various aspects of Bodo society, economy, culture and religion involving history, livelihood, work culture, food habit, music instruments, dance, songs, law, customs, beliefs, dressing, marketing and conducting markets. At present, such game is mostly seen in the remote Bodo dominated villages. The influence of modern technological gadget had prompted punitive impact on the traditional children’s game of the Bodos, which is a serious matter of great concern for its preservation and promotion.

Keywords: Children's Games, Rules, Socio-economy, Culture and Benefit.

Introduction

Playing games is one of the important parts of society that cannot be ignored. Playing games brings dynamic spirit and encouragement which is important for challenges in life. In the same way, children’s games play an important role in children’s life. For instance, through playing games one can refrain from negative thoughts, bad deeds, fatigue, laziness and fiasco. Through game, various characteristics of socio-economy, culture and religion of particular tribe or community can be seen in the form of livelihood, work affairs, food habit, music, dance, songs, customs, beliefs, dressing, marketing and conducting markets etc., (Boro, 2019, pp. 3-4). Thus, according to Robert A. George, “Play is a form of expressive behaviour common among all human beings and manifested overtly in all cultures” (Dorson, 1982, p.173). Apart from this, through

children’s games, a manifestation of the past livelihood of the Bodos, and the days spent with traditional music and songs can be brought to the surface.

Interestingly, the Bodo children select a place for playing Wngkham Wngkhri game which is located at the corner of homestead garden covering banana tree, bushes, bamboo tree, or a place where people hardly trespass. Since the time immemorial, a manifestation of children’s eco-friendly nexus and use of natural objects taken from nature was seen in this game. This game is one of the significant parts of the children’s life for development of good health, positive spirit and sound mental health. Likewise, S. N. Sarma has clearly articulated that, “Sports and pastime are integral part of a vibrant social life. A nation or a community devoid of these life sustaining activities is physically and mentally retarded and is devoid

of gusto for life” (Sharma, 1989, p.319). Since the ancient period, the Bodo children have been playing some traditional games by maintaining certain rules and regulations. However, these days, children are gradually abstaining from playing traditional games. Over and above, with the development of science and technology children are easily being influenced by them. Indeed, Wngkham Wngkhri game was one of the common games of the Bodo children. In this game, certain elements of society, economy, philosophy and culture of the Bodos are being highlighted by the children. These characteristics are broadly discussed in this article.

Aims and Objectives

The objective of the study is to highlight one of the traditional children’s games especially Wngkham Wngkhri which is normally played by the villagers. In this context an attempt is made to outline rules of playing games and to study how this game is associated with the aspects of society, culture, economy, religion, polity, environment and livelihood.

Area of the Study

The area of the study covers Chirang district under Assam, India. An attempt is made to stress on one of the traditional games of the Bodos better known as “Wngkham Wngkhri” that is normally played by the children living in village areas.

Methodology and Sources

For the study a descriptive method is being adopted. Apart from that, an observation method is carried out by visiting villages which are located at the outskirts of the town.

As a source material primary and secondary are being embedded. Under primary source, interview and observation are conglomerated. Besides, for secondary sources, published books, unpublished thesis and articles are included.

For the observation, some rural villages are visited that covered Sampur Balabari under P.O- Runikhata, P.S.- Runikhata, District- Chirang, Assam; Tilokgaon under P.O.- Tilokgaon, P.S.- Basugaon, District- Chirang, Assam; Dottopur, P.S.- Sidli, District- Chirang, Assam; 2 No. Hadan Aojhargur, P.O.- Ananda bazar, P.S.- Bijni, District- Chirang, Assam.

Wngkham Wngkhri Game

The Wngkham Wngkhri is an important children’s game of the Bodos. Since ages, the Bodo children including male and female living under Chirang district have been jointly playing this game. The children play this game by forming different groups and by making boundary walls with sand or dust that was considered as a house. Generally, for making houses, children collect natural leaves of banana, tarai plant or branches of the tree or bushes. This game is normally played with certain rules and regulations. Thus, this rule and regulation of the game is discussed below.

Rules of Playing Wngkham Wngkhri

This game involves certain rules such as formation of groups, selection of a place, gathering and use of natural objects.

Formation of Group

In the course of playing Wngkham Wngkhri children normally form two sets of groups. While playing games both boys and girls children play together. Interestingly, for playing games, children make houses with the branches of trees, bushes or leaves. In this game, girl children are seen taking a role of the Bodo women and boy children are seen taking a role of the Bodo men how practically they take role as active participation in the society. Girl children sweep with brooms, fetch water, plant paddy, grind paddy, weave traditional attire, pluck vegetables, cook rice and curry, do marketing, take care of a child, give feed to pig, give food to poultry. On the other hand, boy children give fodder to domesticated animals, do ploughing, spading, chop firewood with

axes, hunt and do different work as normal men practically do in reality. Apart from these, boy children make instruments of kham (drum) with banana stem, sifung (bamboo flute), empty snail shells are made as jotha (cymbal). In this way, a reflection of children's singing and dancing by playing kham, sifung and jotha, in a traditional pattern of Bodo religious performance of Kherai (traditional Bodo religious rituals) are seen. Again, among the children role taken by them as priest, oja (healer or initiator or one who calls the spirit), Doudini (lady performer of rites) and making a grand party with meat and rice beer are seen. Furthermore, we can see taking on the role of husband and wife, taking care of the children, going to a girl's house to make a daughter in law, getting married, and the hearty welcoming of the bride and groom. Children also act like a king, queen, prince and prince, noble, ministers, commander of the army, soldiers and fight against each other by making weapons such as knives, swords, spear etc. with straw, hay or wood.

While playing game, children normally sleep in artificial houses by spreading leaves over the ground or by putting small woven cloths on the ground. Some act like wild animals such as a tiger, elephant, rhino, bear etc., and others act like guardian of the house who stand awake at the door by guarding the household members against wild animals. Likewise, door guards protect the owner from the ferocious wild animals. At the time of playing games, children are also seen going to a relative or neighbour's house for dinner or lunch. Besides, marketing and buying meat for the guests constituted part of Wngkham Wngkhri game.

Selection of the Playground

The children select a convenient and isolated place for playing a game which is either located at the corner of the house or far from human trespassing or under the tree or banana garden or bamboo plants (Boro Thunlai Afad, 2006,

p.260). Prior to the playing game, children form a group thereafter, select a place.

Game Articles

For playing Wngkham Wngkhri game children collect necessary natural articles that embed leaves, branches of tree, fruits, flowers etc. Apart from that, children play games by collecting stones, sand, dust, and earthen pots thrown as trash. Furthermore, they also take small cloths and khamphlai (wooden stool). Children often observe parent's unwanted articles which are thrown away or yet to be put into dustbin are later being collected by them for the use of game articles.

Social Aspect

Back in the old days, it was difficult to marry off an unskilled girl who did not know the art of weaving a traditional cloth. Therefore, parents used to force their daughters to learn the art of weaving and designing of traditional cloth instead of sending them to schools for procuring education. Thus, the Bodo girl or women become expert in weaving traditional attire. In times of weaving cloth, girls used to sing a folk song. It is believed that, in the course of weaving traditional cloths, folk songs helped the weavers with positive energy to carry on the work. This social picture can be found in the Wngkham Wngkhri game, where children imitate their parent's art of weaving and designing of cloth by singing a folk song. Along with this, if the Bodo girls or Bodo women did not know the household chore such as sweeping, cleaning house, planting of paddy, grinding of rice, drying of rice, carrying of food in container on their head, cooking food, was not looked upon as women or girl. These activities of the girl or women are also found in the children's game. Along with this women characters such as marketing, gathering or picking of snails or crabs, buying vegetables, domesticating poultry or pig and helping the boys in marriage especially in distribution of food and water are also seen in Wngkham Wngkhri game. Over and above, a

manifestation of babysitter taking care of the child by carrying on her back singing a lullaby in the absence of the house owner or parents is seen in Wngkham and Wngkhri game. This folk song or lullaby is as follows.

Ao Agwi Ao

Du Agwi Du

Aiyalai Thangdwng Naa Gurnw (Basumatary, 25/06/2022)

In English:

(Clam baby clam,

Sleep baby sleep,

Mom went for fishing with bamboo net)

This folk song is all about a baby how to cajole a child when their mother is not around. It goes in this way, baby do not to cry but to sleep because mother went to catch the fish with jakhai (traditional bamboo craft meant for catching fish)

Interestingly, it is also seen how in the Bodo society a daughter in law is sought by visiting the girl's house with certain rules or custom and after the agreement they are happily married off on stipulated date. Thus, children carefully observe the work of the elders and accordingly act in reality which are also reflected in the Wngkham Wngkhri game. In the children's game, they also get marry and play musical instruments that is made from wood, bamboo, leaves for blowing sound or other materials which are taken from nature. Apart from this, children make road with the branches of trees and necklaces are made with the leaves of adidiga and lewa (cripple rope). From the children's game, some regular activities of the Bodos are brought to the surface. In the same way, boy children also adopt certain day to day activities of the society that man take certain role in the society. Like in the ancient time, how the men did the work in everyday life, all these activities are also adopted by the children in this game. These activities of men such ploughing, making a

ridge, threshing of paddy, winnowing, making of songrai and sandri (traditional tools for winnowing net that resembles to flat rice net made of bamboo), construction of house, Kami making (flat and long bamboo split for making roof) and a man who does not know how to make them are not considered as a man in olden days. Therefore, man used to learn this art or work to proof oneself a man. Man, with skill of these arts are considered by the society as a complete man. Thus, Wngkham Wngkhri game, male children are also seen taking an active role of the man that us usually done in the society. From this perspective, boys are seen playing making an artificial toys, cup and plates and houses with natural leaves or branches of the three. Apart from this, activity of trade and opening of shops are also presented as it is normally executed in reality. In this regard, children used to make groceries out of natural objects such as stems of bananas are shown as meat, stones are made as eggs, natural leaves are made as vegetables, betel nut leaves or skin of wood or banana stems or branches of three or bamboo are made as weight measuring tools. Thus, the Bodo livelihood is conspicuously presented. Besides, girl children absorb certain characteristics from elders or mothers that are required to be a complete woman. In a similar pattern, boy children also learn to adopt certain responsibility from their fathers or elders that is necessary to be a complete man (Basumatary, 2011, pp. 193-194).

It also one of the interesting habits of the Bodos that since the ages, they like to visit their relatives or neighbour's house for tea or food which can be looked upon as integral part of the Bodo culture which can be brought to light in children's game. In children's game particular role of the married life and their activities or role in the society are clearly depicted in their game. Apart from this, in the Bodo society there is a tradition how a mediator or middleman are hired by the family for establishing a social relationship or life partner for their marriageable sons or daughters. In the

same way, the children are seen in similar pattern especially in Wngkham Wngkhri game which is a manifestation of the Bodo tradition. Thus, a clear picture of the Dewani (mediator of life partner) who plays as a social role in mediating between two sides of the families that normally take in the society can be seen in children's game.

Cultural Aspect

From the cultural point of view, certain elements such as food habits, work, beliefs, custom, weaving cloths, thoughts, enjoyment, songs and dance, dressing etc. are conglomerated. In the same way, culture and tradition of the Bodos are identified and such culture is being projected by the children through children's Wngkham Wngkhri game. One of such culture can be taken as an example that how the Bodos construct their house, this kind of house making are imitated by the children and shown in their Wngkham Wngkhri game by raising a dust that is considered as wall of the house and make windows and doors by putting a branch of the trees or bamboo. As mull or weaving is considered one of the famous cultures and occupations of the Bodo women. Likewise, children used to collect left out threads from their mother's weaving and imitate it by making a sudam (small cloth). The weaving profession was kind of every Bodo woman that is being woven at free time. That's how leisure time is spent by the Bodo women. Besides, boys are seen taking a role of the men, how they participated in agricultural fields for cultivation especially in processing of weeding, ploughing, raising a wall for storing water, carrying seedlings on their shoulder with bamboo pole and women transplanting paddy and carrying food for men in the field that constituted Bodo culture are seen in children's game (Basumatary, 2011, pp. 192-193).

Apart from culture of art, the Bodos are skillful in making crafts with bamboos that are required for household chore and agriculture. Through this, the Bodo culture emerged. Since the ages, the Bodos used certain tools that are

required for domestic use and agriculture. These tools made of bamboo and timber that are used for domestic purpose such as songrai (bowing fan made of bamboo) and sandri (separator of grains made of bamboo), sandanga (drier of meat and fish made of bamboo), darha (bamboo mat), gaihen (wooden grinder pol) and oual (wooden grinder container), jekhai (bamboo fishing tool), khobai (fish container made of bamboo), rua (axe), bamboo basket container and vegetable container. In addition, some agricultural tools embodied mwi beda (breaker of soil made of wood), nangal (plough), jungal (yoke), hasini (mover of dry weed made of bamboo pole and wood). Again, for the use of tool for weaving such as salkhuntha (pillar used for weaving), thaad (weaving frame that smashes threads) and gandwi (long wooden pole used for wrapping thread), maakhu (shuttle), Jenther or Jonthor (wheeled thread spinner), khadini (swinging tools that's tied to the thaad), swrkhi (rolling tool that coils the thread), mushra (thread pole), baaleb (flat bamboo pole used for designing or crochet), gonsha (long stick used for designing on), baan gwja, khada (bamboo container used for carrying soil) all these were made by themselves. In the same way, children used to make all these articles or tools that are being taken from the mother nature and use them in Wngkham Wngkhri game (Boro Et. al., 2015, pp. 2-3). The banana stem was used for making a bag which was pulled out and folded in the middle with equal proportion and thread used to be tied to its stem that resembles the manufactured bag and hung on the shoulder. Again, leaves of the three are made as money that used to be put into the bag.

Apart from this, girl children used to wear traditional dokhona of the Bodo during Wngkham Wngkhri game that is normally worn by the adult Bodo women. Since the dokhona of their mothers become too big, as a result, old dokhona which are over used by their mother are collected by the girl children and worn by the girl children just to show themselves as women. The putting of dokhona represents a

symbol of the Bodo culture which is woven with rich designs that are absorbed from nature.

Historical Aspect

From the historical perspective, it is also brought to the surface how the Bodo people also established a Bodo or Kachari kingdom in Assam. In this context, the Bodos also produced considerable numbers of kings, queens, princes, nobles, ministers and soldiers. children used to fight against each other by forming two rival groups with an artificial weapon that are made from hay and straw or Bamboo or branches of tree and occupy a territory as it happened in history. All these historical scenarios are clearly projected by the children in Wngkham Wngkhri game.

It is also interesting that children also highlight the tough livelihood of the Bodos, how they sustained their life by taking shelter in rural or forest areas which often caused man and animal conflict living among the wild and ferocious animals. The children are also seen guarding their home from wild animals and crying like wild animals. In addition to that, children are also seen telling their wives not to get frightened of the wild animals instead instill courage. From this game, an inference can be drawn, how the Bodos lived their lives among the wild animals which made them courageous, strong in spirit and sustain in tough situations (Basumatary, 2021, pp. 95-97).

Benefits of Wngkham Wngkhri Game

The children's Wngkham Wngkhri game has several benefits that can be availed by the children through this game. In this regard, the aforementioned discussion has been made from different perspectives. Such as, work of girl children is reflected in the children's Wngkham Wngkhri game that conglomerate sweeping, drawing water, grinding of grains, weaving, designing of clothes, plucking of vegetables, cooking, carrying of food to the paddy field, planting of seedlings, giving fodder to pigs, marketing. It is also seen how women take active participation in religious activity right

from their childhood stage. For instance, the girl children learn some basic household chores and work and absorb as necessary duties that normally women take in the society for being a woman. On the other hand, boy children are seen taking an active role in their Wngkham Wngkhri game that is usually taken by men which reflects clear indication of societal consideration as men for taking such role such as making bamboo craft that includes songrai sandri (rice fan, grain separator), house construction, ploughing, farrowing, harvesting of paddy, threshing, fanning of rice or winnowing, spading, cutting firewood and hunting of animal etc. In addition, boy children learn to make some traditional musical instruments from the branches of trees and wood that are normally made by the Bodo men in the society and used on different occasions. Such instruments imbed siphung (flute), kham (long drum), serja (violin). In the same way, boy children imitate the instruments being made and played by the elders and make use of the branches of tree, trunks, pieces of wood and leaves are made as blowing instruments, drums and violin and practically play in Wngkham Wngkhri game. Apart from this, children's game clearly brings to light the tough and challenging livelihood that the Bodos lived among the infested wild animals in rural areas. Wngkhri game. In this regard, children used to guard their houses from the wild animals which is visible in children's game. From this game an inference can be drawn, that boys used to learn the art of providing security to their household members from the elders. Over and above, the Bodos had a tradition of going to relative's house, this tradition builds a strong family network in long run. Thus, children imitate some tradition of the Bodo society and practically make use of it in Wngkham Wngkhri game.

As the marriage is a social custom of the Bodos. Marriage directly connects to the society. It is marriage that establishes a social network and reflects maturity and endless responsibility in the society. These societal

activities are copied by the children and played in Wngkham Wngkhri game which is one of the significant aspects of the livelihood.

There are certain implications of human livelihood where people get sick and fall into health deterioration for the recovery and treatment, patients are taken to the doctors in the same way, children used to turn as doctors and nurses in their game and treat the sick people. This is one way of information that children supply to their companions and can be taken as encouragement to pursue in their studies as well who can practically make a good career in the long run.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, the Wngkham Wngkhri game of the children. However, through this game various aspects such as culture, socio-economy, history of the Bodos are also highlighted by the children. In fact, the rules and process of playing a game that includes gathering natural objects which are needed for playing manifested how this game is associated with the environment as well. Selection of place for playing also determined an undisturbed scenario of the children's game. Teamwork formed the biggest cooperation in this game. Because, this game conglomerated the formation of groups for taking part in various occupations or activities. Lastly, children present a conspicuous picture of the day today activities of the Bodos and it has significant benefits as well which can pass good information among themselves and one can easily learn from their companions.

References

1. Basumatary, G. B. (1994). Rongjanaini Gejerjwng Gelenay, Boro Harimuni Mohor Mushri. Bodo Publication Board.
2. Basumatary, Mwina. (2021). "Traditional Children's Games of the Bodos with Special Reference to Chirang District." Unpublished M.Phil. Dissertation. Bodoland University. Kokrajhar.
3. Basumatary, Sukumar. (2011). Boro Khuga Thunlaini Oja Sukumar Basumataryni Swrji Bihung. Barama: Bodo Publication Board, Bodo Sahitya Sabha.
4. Brahma, Chanakya. (1988). "Borofwrni Gwdwni Kela." In Padmashri Madaram Brahma (ed.) Rupesree (Raithai Khontai). 1st Publication.
5. Brahma, Nijira. (2019). "Boroni Bwlw Nangwi Karnai Gwiywi Kela." In Research Journal of the Department of Bodo. Bodoland University Kokrajhar. Vol. 6.
6. Boro, Hangsadhar. (2008). Thunlai Harimu Bithun. N. L. Publications.
7. Boro, Jogen, Daimary, Rita and Narzaree Bhupen, 2015. "Impact of Globalization to Traditional Games and Recreation of the Bodos." IQSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science. Vol.20 (3).
8. Boro, Rita. (2019). "Traditional Games and Recreations of The Bodos with Special Reference to Baksa District." Unpublished Thesis, Gauhati University.
9. Boro Thunlai Affad. (2006). Raithai Bihung. Manuscript Select & Publication Sub-Committee, Bodo Sahitya Sabha.
10. Dorson, R. M. (ed.). (1982). Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction. University of Chicago Press.
11. Narzaree, Bhupen. (2003). "Brahmaputra Upatyakar Boro Sakalar Samajik Lokachar: Eti Vislesanatmak adhyayana." Unpublished thesis. Gauhati University.
12. Sharma, S. N. (1989). A Socio-Economic and Cultural History of Medieval Assam 1200 A. D. – 1800 A. D. Pratima Devi.

Informant:

Daduri Basumatary. Age-50. Village-Tilokgaon. P.O- Tilokgaon. P.S.- Basugaon. District-Chirang. Assam. Pin-783372. Date-25/06/2022. Time- 11:00 pm.

Mwina Basumatary is a Ph. D research scholar of Bodoland University, Kokrajhar, India. Currently she has been working as Asst. Professor in the Department of Bodo in Sova Ram Borgoyari College, Runikhata.

Prof. India Boro is working as Professor in the Department of Bodo at Bodoland University, Kokrajhar, India and currently holding the charge of Dean, Faculty of Languages. Due to her several contributions in literary work, she has been awarded the prestigious Praban Borgoyary Award 2019, Sahitya Akademy Award 2021 and Venus International Women's Award 2022.

Dr. Bijit Brahma, is a principal of Sova Ram Borgoyari College, Runikhata, India. He is the author of several journal publications.