

Women in Bodo Proverbs: An Analytical study of Gender, Culture, and Society

Birhang Basumatary¹, Dr. Laishri Mahilary²

¹Ph.D Scholar, Department of Bodo
Bodoland University, Kokrajhar

²Asst. Professor, Department of Bodo
Bodoland University, Kokrajhar

Abstract

Proverbs constitute an important component of Bodo oral literature and serve as repositories of the collective wisdom, cultural values, beliefs, and social experiences of the Bodo community. Among the various themes represented in Bodo proverbs, women occupy a significant place, reflecting their roles and status within family and society. This study examines the representation of women in Bodo proverbs and analyzes how these proverbs portray gender relations, cultural values, and social perceptions. The study is based on an analytical examination of selected women-related proverbs collected from published sources on Bodo folklore and literature. The analysis reveals that Bodo proverbs depict women in diverse roles such as mothers, wives, daughters, and homemakers, highlighting their contributions to family welfare and social life. The proverbs also convey advice regarding women's conduct and responsibilities, describe perceived characteristics and behavioural traits, express traditional beliefs about women, and emphasize the importance of motherhood and maternal affection. At the same time, many proverbs reflect patriarchal attitudes and gender-based expectations prevalent in traditional Bodo society. Thus, women-related Bodo proverbs function not only as carriers of cultural knowledge but also as instruments for transmitting social norms and gender values across generations. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship between gender, culture, and society in the context of Bodo folklore and oral traditions.

Keywords: Bodo Proverbs, Women, Gender, Culture, Society, Folklore, Oral Tradition.

1.Introduction

Proverbs have been used orally in Bodo society since time immemorial and continue to play a significant role in the cultural and social life of the Bodo people. A proverb is a short and popular saying that expresses a general truth, moral lesson, or practical advice. Although proverbs often carry a literal meaning, their deeper significance usually extends beyond the direct meaning of the words. They serve as repositories of collective wisdom, reflecting the experiences, values, beliefs, and social norms of a community.

Regarding the nature of proverbs, M. Leach defines a proverb as “the summing up of everyday experience in getting the world as it is.”¹ This definition suggests that proverbs are concise expressions of practical wisdom derived from real-life experiences and observations. As a form of oral literature, proverbs preserve traditional knowledge and provide guidance for human behaviour in various social contexts.

Women occupy a central position in Bodo society and contribute significantly to both family and community life. Consequently, numerous Bodo proverbs portray the roles, qualities, responsibilities, and social expectations associated with women. The study of women-related Bodo proverbs provides valuable insights into the cultural attitudes, social values, and gender perceptions embedded in Bodo society.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study are:

- i. To identify and analyze Bodo proverbs related to women.
- ii. To examine the social perceptions and attitudes toward women reflected in Bodo proverbs.
- iii. To study the social functions of women-related Bodo proverbs in society.
- iv. To understand the relationship between women, culture, and society as reflected in Bodo proverbial traditions.

1.2 Methodology and Data Collection

The present study is analytical and descriptive in nature and is based on secondary sources of data. The data have been collected from books, journals, research articles, dissertations, and collections of Bodo folklore. Selected proverbs concerning women have been analyzed to understand their representation, social perceptions, and cultural significance in Bodo society.

2. Discussion

Proverbs occupy a significant place in Bodo society and culture. They form an important part of the oral tradition of the Bodo people and have been transmitted from generation to generation. Bodo proverbs are not merely decorative expressions; they embody wisdom, moral values, social norms, religious beliefs, and practical knowledge accumulated through the experiences of previous generations. They are used in daily conversations, ceremonies, agricultural activities, family affairs, and social interactions. Through proverbs, the Bodo people transmit cultural knowledge to younger generations, preserve their heritage, and reinforce social values.

The Bodo language contains numerous proverbs related to women. These proverbs can be broadly classified into the following categories. It should be noted that some proverbs overlap across categories because they simultaneously convey advice, describe character traits, and reflect traditional beliefs regarding women.

¹ Chainary, Swarna Prabha (Ed.). *Journal of the Department of Bodo*, Vol. 1, 2009–10. P-13

1. Proverbs that Provide Advice Regarding Women

These proverbs offer guidance on women's roles, responsibilities, conduct, and family life.

Bodo:

“बोसोरसे आबाद जायेखौ दागाब,
हिनजाव हाबा रोडिखौ गाब”²

English Rendering:

Do not cry for one year of famine;
cry for an incapable woman.

This proverb emphasizes the importance of a hardworking and capable woman within the family. It reflects the traditional expectation that women play a crucial role in maintaining household prosperity and family welfare. The proverb therefore serves as both social advice and moral instruction.

Bodo:

खान्थाल जाबा आथा नाडो,
हिन्जाव लाब्ला लेथा नाडो³

English Rendering:

Eating a jackfruit leaves your hands sticky;
marrying a woman brings difficulties in family life.

This proverb reflects the belief that marriage, like many important life decisions, brings responsibilities and challenges. It emphasizes that family life requires patience, adjustment, and commitment.

Bodo:

न गोबायखौ दा दांदाव,
हिन्जाव रान्दिखौ दा एदाव⁴

English Rendering:

Do not tamper with an old house;
do not joke with a widowed woman.

This proverb advises people to behave cautiously in sensitive situations. It reflects traditional social norms regarding respect and appropriate conduct toward widowed women.

2. Proverbs that Describe Women's Character and Nature

These proverbs reflect perceptions of women's personalities, behaviour, strengths, weaknesses, and social characteristics.

Bodo:

“सिखा गोदाना सान्थाम,
हिनजाव गोदाना दानथामा”⁵

² Boro, K.K.(Translator): *Boro Kacharini Khuga Methai-Bhaben Narzee*, p-36,

³ Kerkatary, Dipali. *Batra Bhao (Proverbs)*. First Edition, 2006. P-9

⁴ *ibid*.P-31

⁵ Boro, Dr. Anil: *Serja Shipung*, p-112, Reprint:2015,G.B.D. Publishers, Chowringhee Road, Kolkata-16

English Rendering:

A new knife lasts for three days;
a new bride lasts for three months.

Although the proverb literally refers to a newly purchased knife and a newly married bride, its deeper meaning suggests that the true nature and character of a person can only be understood after a period of observation. Through such comparisons, Bodo proverbs communicate insights into human behaviour and social relationships.

Bodo:

“बिमाया नायो मोखाडाव
हिनजावा नायो सिफियाव
फिसाया नायो खस’आव”⁶

English Rendering:

A mother looks at the face,
a wife looks at the pocket,
and a child looks at the fold of the dokhona.

This proverb illustrates the different concerns and responsibilities associated with family relationships. A mother observes the face of her child to understand his or her condition and emotions. A wife looks at the pocket because she shares responsibility for household management and family welfare. A child looks at the fold of the dokhona in expectation of gifts or sweets.

In Bodo society, the mother is regarded as the foundation of the family. Therefore, when a daughter resembles her mother in behaviour and character, people often say:

Bodo:

“बिमा जोलै फिसा”⁷

English Rendering:

Like mother, like daughter.

This proverb emphasizes the influence of mothers in shaping the character and behaviour of their children.

Bodo:

“जेसेबाखि बुडाथों गोदै गोदै
बियो जादों बिहारि”⁸

English Rendering:

Even if the words are sweet,
it is still a co-wife.

This proverb reflects the traditional belief that co-wives often maintain hidden rivalry despite outward expressions of affection. It is used to describe relationships characterized by jealousy, competition, or insincerity.

⁶ Boro, K.K.(Translator): *Boro Kacharini Khuga Methai-Bhaben Narzee*, 2nd Edition-2019, P-35

⁷ Brahma, Purnasmriti Kalita & Brahma, Aleendra. *Abwi-Abwoni Khuga Rao*. First Edition, 2016. P-4

⁸ Kerkatary, Dipali. *Batra Bhao (Proverbs)*. First Edition, 2006. P-18

3. Proverbs that Express Beliefs About Women

These proverbs reveal traditional cultural beliefs, attitudes, and social values associated with women in Bodo society.

Bodo:

“आबादखौ माव खाथियाव,
फिसा हिनजावखौ हाबा हर गोजानावा”⁹

English Rendering:

Grow your crops close to home,
but marry your daughter to a family far away.

This proverb reflects traditional beliefs regarding agriculture and marriage. The first part highlights the practical importance of cultivating farmland near the household for better supervision and protection. The second part reflects the traditional preference for marrying daughters into distant families or villages in order to minimize social interference and maintain family harmony.

Bodo:

अखा खोरोमनाया हानो रोडा,
हिनजाव खारसननाया हाबा रोडा¹⁰

English Rendering:

Thunder does not always bring rain;
one who rushes into marriage lacks practical skills.

This proverb reflects the traditional belief that important responsibilities should not be undertaken hastily. It emphasizes the value of preparation and maturity before marriage.

4. Proverbs that Portray Mothers and Maternal Qualities

These proverbs highlight the importance of motherhood, maternal love, care, sacrifice, wisdom, and the respected position of mothers within the family and community.

Bodo:

बिमा दं जाना थां
बिमा गैया नायना थां

English Rendering:

With a mother at home, one is fed before departing;
without her, one leaves empty-handed.

This proverb highlights a mother's nurturing role and her concern for the well-being of family members.

Bodo:

बिमानि आयथिं सिडाव सोरगो¹¹

English Rendering:

Heaven lies at a mother's feet.

⁹ Muchahary, Rujab: “Baidi Bithing Baidi Saorathai”, 2016, P-103

¹⁰ Boro, Dr. Anil: *Serja Shipung*, Reprint:2015, p-112

¹¹ Kerkatary, Dipali. *Batra Bhao (Proverbs)*. First Edition, 2006. P-35

This proverb expresses deep respect and reverence for mothers and emphasizes their sacred position in family life.

Bodo:

रायै बुयै लामायव दोनब्लाबो बुडो आइ

जाहोयै लोहोयै बामना लायोब्ला बुडो मालाइ¹²

English Rendering:

A mother's rebuke is still love;

a stranger's kindness is never a mother's love.

This proverb emphasizes the unique and irreplaceable bond between a mother and her child.

Bodo:

बिमादैयानो जा बिमानैयानो जा

बिमा बायदि दानो बहा¹³

English Rendering:

Whether it is an aunt or another woman,

none can be like a mother.

This proverb highlights the incomparable place of a mother in a child's life and emphasizes that no one can fully replace maternal affection and care.

3. Conclusion

The analysis of women-related Bodo proverbs demonstrates that proverbs function as important repositories of cultural memory and social values within Bodo society. These proverbs portray women in diverse roles, including mothers, wives, daughters, and homemakers, while reflecting traditional expectations regarding their behaviour, responsibilities, and moral character.

The study further reveals that proverbs serve as vehicles for transmitting gender norms, cultural beliefs, and social values from one generation to another. While many proverbs acknowledge the significant contributions of women to family and community life, they also reflect patriarchal attitudes and gender-based assumptions prevalent in traditional society. Therefore, the study of women in Bodo proverbs contributes to a deeper understanding of Bodo culture, social organization, and gender relations.

References

1. Boro, Indira. Harimu Arw Boro Harimu. First Edition, 2017. Bodo Publication Board, Bodo Sahitya Sabha.
2. Boro, Dr. Anil: Serja Shipung, Reprint:2015,G.B.D. Publishers, Chowringhee Road, Kolkata-16
3. Boro, K.K.(Translator): Boro Kacharini Khuga Methai-Bhaben Narzee, 2nd Edition-2019, N.L. Publications, Kokrajhar
4. Brahma, Liladhar. Boro Bathra Bhao. Second Edition, 2003. Ansumwi Library, Kokrajhar.

¹² *Ibid.*, P-46

¹³ *Ibid*, P-35

5. Brahma, Purnasmriti Kalita & Brahma, Aleendra. Abwi-Abwoni Khuga Rao. First Edition, 2016. N.L. Publications, Panbazar, Guwahati.
6. Kerkatary, Dipali. Batra Bhao (Proverbs). First Edition, 2006. Dibakhar Chandra Kerkatary, Howly, Barpeta.
7. Chainary, Swarna Prabha (Ed.). Journal of the Department of Bodo, Vol. 1, 2009–10. Gauhati University, Guwahati.
8. Muchahary, Rujab: “Baidi Bithing Baidi Saoraitai”, Purbayon Publication, Satmile, Gauhati University, Guwahati-14, Assam, 2016