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RESEARCH ARTICLE

SOCIAL CUSTOMS AND BELIEVES OF THE TEA COMMUNITY OF ASSAM: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

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Abstract

India is a co-habitation of different casts, socio-cultural, religious groups of people. It is also observed in Assam, the state in the North-East India. It should be noted that the state of Assam has a reputation worldwide in the field of tea production. Since the beginning of tea production in Assam in the 19th century, the Tea Community social group of Assam has been formed with a large number of people working hard in the tea gardens. In this way tea farmers living in Assam since 19th century have become an independent community with their own social and cultural characteristics. The Tea Community of Assam has a lot of individual Characteristics in the socio-cultural aspects. This study attempts to discuss their social folk customs and believes.

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Introduction:-

From the first half of the 19th century tea cultivation started in Assam on a business basis. For the first time in the Forest of Assam, the tea tree was discovered by the British brothers, Robert Brush and C.A Brush. Later on, the British started cultivation of tea and started to plant tea gardens in different parts of Assam. Initially local and Chinese workers were hired in the tea gardens of Assam, but later on a large number of workers were brought from different parts of India. In this way, for the expansion of tea cultivation, workers were imported from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Madras and Maharashtra.¹ The 'Tea Tribal' group has been formed from these workers and their descendants from different parts of India. There are more than hundred communities among the Tea Tribe itself.² They are as follows – Munda, Chautal, Urang, Chaura, Kharia, Bhumij, Kurmi, Gowala, Kalindi, Koiri, Tasa, Tati, Telenga, Bauri, Bania, Rajak, Rajuar, Rajput, Hari, Hira, Manki, Ghatuar, Korua etc. In this case, the Tea Tribe which is formed in a combination of different communities has been seen to be refilling the society, culture of Assam with its individual characteristics. So In this study, we discuss about the social customs and believes of the Tea community of Assam.

The objective and important of the study:-

The main objective of this study is to find out social and cultural background of the Tea Community of Assam. Moreover to establish as a group of own socio-cultural characteristics of people that living in Assam.

Methods and scope of the study:

In this study, we discuss about the social customs and believes that related with birth, marriage, death and religious faith of the Tea community. In this discussion we apply descriptive and analytical method.

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Main Discussion:-

Social customs and believes own a large part of cultural studies. The social customs, traditions create some rules and regulations that is followed by the community. There are some social believes & thoughts behind every social customs. The social customs and believes are not created by one individual but in the interest of the society these customs and believes are born. It is compulsory for the group to abide by the customs and believes. Otherwise if anyone stand against these, the society can isolate that person.

The social customs and believes of Tea community of Assam:

The Tea Community maintains various customs and believes in their personal and social life, of course these customs and believes include their religious thoughts, rational ideas and also blind reforms.

The social customs and believes of Tea Community of Assam is describes as –

Customs related to birth:

The people of Tea Tribes do not allow the mother to do any household work and to touch other people or things after giving birth. When a child is born, they create a noisy and happy atmosphere by beating ‘kahi-bati’(plate, bowl) at home and believes that doing so can reduce the fear of the child. After six days, the mother takes a stone to worship goddesses of child, praying for good health of the baby. After seven or nine days shaving his/her hair. On the 21st day of the child birth, relatives, neighbors are invited to the program which called ‘sua gusua’ (a reform festival) ³. The mother can do household work at home after this event. The Tea Community people also celebrate the occasion of the ear-piercing of the child. The person who is able to do this work is welcomed by giving ‘Tamul-Pan’, dresses etc. Some communities among Tea Tribes choose good name for the child with the help of ‘Brahman’.

Customs related to marriage:

There are different rituals of marriage among the different tribes of Tea Community. There is a rule of marrying within the same *Sampradai* (cast, community). They cannot marry among same *Gotra* (like same family, relatives). In case of formal marriage ‘GuaVonga’ ceremony is held when bride and groom finally agree to get married from both families. The bride and groom has allow a ritual to keep *Katari* (a small knife) in their hands until the marriage is over and they do so to avoid any ‘Opai Amangal’ (misfortune things). In Tea Tribe, they get married by the tradition of ‘HomeJagya’(a burnt offering). On the day of the wedding, the bride wear an iron *Kharu* (bracelet) gifted by the groom and it should be removed from her hand only if her husband dies. On the day of wedding, the bride’s sister or brother welcomes the groom to washing his feet. In Tea Community, married women always cover their head with ‘Urani’(a veil).

Customs related to death:

The Tea Tribe of Assam, usually burn the body of the death person with help of bamboo, wood etc by following some kind of rituals. The relatives of that death person keep fasting for three days and on 3rd day they arrange a funeral ceremony called ‘tiloni’. On 11th day, they give a feast (bhoj) to their relatives, neighbors etc .

The religious and social believes of Tea Community:

Tea community’s people offer *puja*(worship) many goddesses to avoid any kind of misfortune, ill-luck, calamities, improving cultivations etc. One of theme is ‘Manasha Devi’(goddess of snack) among them . They believes that the goddesses of snack blessing them with baby boy.

Conclusion:-

The Tea Community is known as an important socio-cultural group in Assam by its individual characteristics. Although globalizing has some influence on their social and cultural aspects, but modernism has not been able to wipe out their own traditions.

End Notes:-

1. Shilpi Sikha Gogoi, Chah Janagosthio Samajat Narir Sthan, Thesis Submitted for The Degree of M.Phil, Assamese Department, Dibrugarh University, Assam, p.1
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3. Luhit Kumar Borah, Asomor Chah Janagosthio Samaj aru Sangskriti, p.43

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