

## Material Culture of the 'Saraniya-Kachari Tribe' of Assam

**Prof. Prafulla Kumar Nath**

Department of Assamese, Gauhati University

**Chandana Barman**

Research Scholar, Gauhati University

***Abstract :** The Saraniya-Kachari tribe is one of the sub-section of the greater Bodo group. Their common identity is kachari, who belongs to the mogoloid stock of people. The different group of 'Kirat' or 'Mongolia' ruled in different parts of ancient kamrupa since the time immemorial.*

*The word Saraniya may be born out of the concept of 'Saran'. That is taking shelter in vaisnisism. The tribal group of people who were hinduised by taking 'sarana' under vaisnava saint (or 'gosai') were later known as 'Saraniya-Kachari'. It includes Bodo, Rabha, Moran, Chutia and any other tribes of Assam. The saraniya-kachari used to write 'Saraniya' as their title after initiation of vaisiniva faith and religion. These people live in different parts of Assam, but their highest population is found in Baska and Odalguri. On the other hand they live in Darrang, Bongaigaon, Barpeta and Nalbari in a few villages. This paper deals with the material culture of the saraniya-kachari people of Assam.*

***Key-words :** Saraniya kachari, mongoloid, kirat, assimilation, material-culture, folk craft, folk art etc.*

### **.01 Purpose of the study :**

The main purpose of the study is to highlight the material culture of the Saraniya-Kachari tribe of Assam.

### **.02 Scope of the study :**

Saraniya-Kachari being a tribe belongs to the Bodo group it will help for study of the tribal people who were hinduised and change their

early tradition and entered into the greater Assamese society. It will help us to study about the social mobilization and social change in response with the change of religion.

#### **.03 Methods of study :**

The method of study is descriptive. As it is a topic of material-culture of the saraniya-kachari tribe of Assam, the author followed the descriptive method for study of the theme.

#### **.04 Limitation of the study :**

The folk culture of the saraniya-kachari is very rich. As such, excluding folk literature, social folk custom, and other aspect, our study is limited to the material culture of the saraniya-kachari tribe.

#### **.05 A review to related literature :**

Extensive study about the community has not been done till date except works has been done in different times. The 'Census report of Assam' 1891 includes saraniya along with the Rabha, Madahi, Mahalia. Totla and other tribes of Assam. In the statistical accounts of Assam (1960-61) includes saraniya-kachari along with other people of Bodo group like 'Barman' lived in Kachar, the Bodo-Kachari, deuri, hojai, lalung, mech, missing (miri), Rabha, sonowal-kachari, thengal-kachari which included in the schedule tribe list.

The book edited by Dhiren Mahaliya entitled as 'Saraniya kachari janagosthir ruprekha' all the aspects of the tribes has been focused including their ethnic identity, folk-life, religion and culture, contribution to enrich the greater assamese society etc. The book written by Babu Rabha Hakacham entitled as 'Saraniya Kachari Sanskriti aru Lokosahitya' includes folk literature along with social folk custom, folk-belief etc.

Sonbar Baruah discussed about the marriage system of the saraniya kachari in his book entitled as 'Saraniya-Kachari paddhati' where the

puberty-rites along with other rites related with marriage system of Saraniya-Kachari has been discussed. In another book 'Saraniya kacharir Kristi sanskriti' the same author Baruah has discussed social and agricultural folk-custom of the saraniya-kachari tribes of Assam in analytical way, where he includes folk songs of the tribe where he feels necessary.

Another book written by Dhaneswar Hazuri entitled as 'Saraniya Kacharir Khadya Sanskriti aru jibon gatha' the author tried to focus about the food-habit of the tribe along with the role of women in folk cooking within them.

'Saraniya-Kachari Samaj aru Sanskriti' is another important book about the tribe where different aspects of the tribe has been focused, including origin of the tribe, their language, society and culture, food habit, dresses and ornaments, ethnic sports, their political consciousness since early times to the present context.

'Early History of Kamrupa' by Kanaklal Baruah, 'The background of Assamese culture' by Rajmohan Nath, 'Social History of Kamrupa' by N.N Acharjya, A comprehensive history of Assam, edited by H.K Barpujari, 'Bodo Kacharir Samaj aru Sanskriti' by Bhaben Narzi, 'A Cultural History of Assam' by Birinchi Kumar Baruah are some authentic books for research about different tribes of Assam. It gives an immense history of different tribes and caste, their migration, assimilation with other tribes, social and cultural change etc. 'A history of Assam' by Sir Edward Gait, 'Buranji-Bibekratna' written by Maniram Dewan Barbhadr Barua, may be regarded as the pioneer works about the history and cultural background of different tribes of Assam. It may be mentioned here that 'the kirat janakriti' along with 'The place of Assam in the history and civilization of India' by S.K. Chattopadhaya and 'The history of the civilization of the people of Assam' by documentary

evidence for standing each and every caste community tribes and their every caste-community, tribes and their ethnicity as a large.

### **.06 Hypothesis**

- a. Saraniya-Kachari is not a single ethnic-tribe but a sub-section of Bodo, who took shelter under hinduism, particularly vaisnavism under the patronage of neo-vaisnava movement.
- b. The community was unorganized earlier, but presently they are trying to give their own identity through developing their language and culture.
- c. Though they speak in Assamese, their spoken language have tribal-pronouaciation and tune which increase the vocabulary of Assamese language.
- d. They have their own fairs and festivals which has unique performing style.
- e. They have their own folk songs, ballads and folk-narratives, which identifies their creativity.
- f. They have their own dances which is very important as performing art.
- g. The people of Saraniya tribe is distributed in different part of the country. Of course, majority of their tribe use to live in the present district of Darrang, Odalguri, Baska, Goreswar, Sonitpur, Bongaigaon and Barpeta.
- h. As the people of this tribe use to live by the side of Bodo, Koch, Nath-Yogi, Kalita along with Mahmandian people, their language and culture has been influenced by the inhabitants living their surroundings.

### **1.0 Introduction :**

The saraniya-kachari tribe is one of the sub-section of the Bodo tribe includes Bodo, Rabha, Moran, Chutia, Sonowal-

Kachari, Thengal-Kachari, Dimacha, Hajong, Lalung, Garo, Mech, Koch etc. Earlier they were identified as 'Kirat'. According to Kanaklal Barua, the common name of the mongoloid people may be 'Kirat'. (Early History of Kamrup, P-7)

They live in ancient Kamrupa since group of people used to live in ancient Kamrupa since very ancient times. In the epic like mahabharata, it has been mentioned that Bhagadutta's arms were filled with that they lived in pragjyotishpur in very early period. The ancient religion of Kamrupa was Kairatoja, as mentioned by yoginitantra 'Siddesi yoginipithe dharma kairataja mata'. (Yoginitantra)

The different group of the kirata ruled in ancient Kamrupa before and after the Ahom entered into Assam. They ruled in different parts of ancient Kamrupa for which the Ahom have to fought against them. At that time all of them were identified as Kachari. The Ahom king fought against the small kingdom of Barahi, Kachari, Chutia, Moran, Daphala etc and bring them under their control. At that time the word Kachari was used to mean all the tribal group like Bodo, Rabha, Karbi, Tiwa, Dimacha, Jayantia etc. Hudson first used the word Bodo to indicate the tibeto-burman group of people. Therefore, Kachari is used to identify the whole group of Tibeto burman language speaking group.

The Saraniya-Kachari belongs to the group of kachari people under mongoloid group. The scholars use of the opinion that the word Saraniya may be born unit of the concept of 'Saran' i.e. take-shelter of Vaisnavism. It denotes the act of coming under religious preceptor of vaisnava saint. According to 'Hemkosh' (Dictionary of Anglo-Assamese Language by Hemchandra Baruah,

1900), it describes as ‘coming under the banner of Hinduism, for example Saraniya – Kachari, Saraniya a title.’ (P. 122, edn. 2020)

In the ‘Chalanta Abhidhan’ edited by Maheswar Neog, it is mentioned as a group of tribal people taking shelter under vaisnavism. It is a process of the religious procedure of vaisnavism, that anyone can take shelter in it irrespective of caste and it was open to all. Therefore ‘Saraniya-Kachari’ may be termed as the people of different kacharigroup who had taken shelter under vaisnavism by avoiding their original rites and rituals. In the words of Bhaben Narzi ‘A few people of Boro-Kachari took shelter under Vaisnava Saint (Goswami) and come to known as saraniya.’ (Narzi, B : Boro-Kachari Samaj aru Sanskriti, 2009, P-8).

W.W Hunter (1881) admits saraniya as a local tribe like other tribes of Assam (A statistical Accounts of Assam) Rev Chidni Andle had divided the Kachari People on the basis of Brahmaputra into two groups in his famous book ‘The Kachari’. The saraniya, mahalia and fulgoria lived in the north bank of Brahmaputra and other group in the south bank as the observation.

The Saranias are basically kachari, which includes Boro, Rabha and different group of Kachari or Kirat, having their tribal identity. Sankardeva tried to united the people of ancient Assam by giving them shelter in vaisnasism, therefore Garo, Missing, Bhot, Naga, Kaivarta and many people came to take shelter under vaisnavism.

According to the census report of India, 1881 the different tribe and their population are meantioned below :

Tribe	Population	Tribe	Population
Modahi	13,145	Mahalia	6,198

Rabha	56,285	Saraniya	4,718
-------	--------	----------	-------

### 1.01 **The material culture of the Sarania-kachari**

Culture may be defined as a system of derived needs and an organized system of purposeful activities. Culture gives the identity of a particular race. Culture has different aspect out of which this paper deals with the material culture only. Material culture is an important branch of folk culture. It contains all the materials used by us in our daily life. Our house, dresses and ornaments, cooking system, art and architecture are all included in material culture. Material culture is the man-made part of the environment. It may be classified into different aspects, for example-

- Folk-crafts
- Folk-Art
- Folk-Architecture
- Folk-costume
- Folk-cookery

#### 1.01.1 **Folk Craft :**

Folk crafts is one of the important element of material culture. It indicates the standard of living of a particular race, caste or community. Folk art reflects the socio-economic and artistic mind of a particular community. The handicrafts and folk art gives the identification of the love for of a particular area of a village. The usefulness of folk art is universal and it is not limited to fulfill day-to-day need. It has its association with religious performance and other social and cultural activities.

The folk art of Saraniya-Kachari may be divided into different categories for example :

- a. Soil art (Mrit Silpa)
- b. Animal art
- c. Weaving art
- d. Oil-shad art
- e. Sugar-cane prepared art
- f. Art of cookery
- g. Bambo and cane art

The Saraniya were not skilled in material art but they have their proficiency in weaving, bamboo and cane art, cookery and art of soil.

In the soil art they have shown their artistic talent. Sutuli, Dhupdani, Dhunadani, earthen lamp are prepared by the people of saraniya community very well.

Different parts of animal are used as art-form by the Saraniya-Kachari in their day-to-day life. Skin, teeth and hair of animal are used in different purpose. The horn of dear also is used in different purposes.

The Saraniya Kachari were artistic in preparation of cloths. The ladies prepare their cloths at home. They like the green colour very much and prepared chadar, mekhela, gamocha etc and earn their livelihood through weaving.

Once they used to prepare the oil from the oil-seeds at their own. But, this practice has been very rare in the recent times.

They cultivate sugarcane and prepare molasses at their own way. Therefore the use of sugar among them is very rare.

The bamboo and cane is used in different purposes. It is used to building house and preparation of other household materials.

### **1.01. Folk Art**

Folk art is one of the important part of material culture. The feelings and emotions of human beings are being expressed through folk-art. It has its own beauty, sweetness. It can be divided into three categories. They are folk-drama, folk-music and folk dance.

‘Folk-drama’ is very popular among the people. The dramatic performance is very popular and it has its glorious past. The Saraniya-Kachari are associated with different dramatic performances. In the lower Assam there are some kind of dramatic performances named as (i) Dhepa Dhulia, (ii) Pati Dhulia. It is performed in any particular socio-cultural functions. Though there is no particular episode of subject matter in dhulia performance, but the dhulia used to sing some satirical stories and made the situation lovely. The dhulia used green mokcha (gamocho) in his head and used white shirt and dhoti. It is important institution for amusement.

‘Ojapali’ is another folk dramatic performance among the saraniya-kachari and it is has some peculiarities in performance. Among the two types of ozapali suknnani is performed in the workship of Goddess Durga, but other socio-cultural functions are followed by byah-goat ojapali.

The saraniya-kachari termed the nagara nam as ‘pal-nam’ and it is performed in a group. The pathak plays an important role in pal nam and he described the theme with dances and acting.

### **1.01.3 Folk Music**

The saraniya-kacharies are rich in folk-music. The folk-music reflects the life and livelihood of the people which may be divided into

different sections according to its use. A few songs are sung with a view to fulfill the needs of religious performances. The saraniya-kachari used bamboo as a symbol of *Mahadeva* and thus performed bah-gosains puja, which is very popular among them. It is generally performed in the spring time starting from 1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> baisakh with different religious performances. The songs sung for this purpose has a closer link with religious belief.

The Saraniya-Kachari termed Goddess Manasa as Goddess maju and to pleasure this particular Goddess they sung a number of songs which reflects the religious as well as the cultural aspects of their life.

Many a songs are sung by the saraniya-kacharis, out of which mention may be made about the bator-pujar geet or aai-nam. The songs are associated with female goddess kamakhya or aai which have nine forms. They sung the song of opeswari (fairy) with naibedya to save themselves from her evil-spirit.

The saraniya-kachari belived mother goddess and prayed her to cure themselves from death and diseases. There are many religious songs associated with this goddess.

They worship goddess kamakhya (bhagawati) and mahadev and for their pleasure organized bhakat sewar geet as a religious performance. It is also known as '*sacharg puja*' or '*burha dangoria puja*'. These songs were devotional in nature.

Another section of songs has no connection with religion. It is also performed by some songs. The songs are connected with some fairs and festivals. These songs are termed as bambol pita geet, Moh-Kheda utsabar geet, songs associated with fishing trip etc.

Folk-dances are very popular among the saraniya-kachari people of Assam. The dances associated with '*goch lowa*' (first paddy cultivation), Mahkheda nritya, nawan-k-howa nritya, palu poha nritya, masmariya nritya (dance of fishing), jakoi nritya, palu nritya, goswani

nriya and so on. These dances are very helpful for amusement among the saraniya-kachari people of Assam.

#### **1.01.4 Folk architecture**

It is a man-made part of material culture which fulfills the required needs of the people.

Architecture includes the method of building houses. It is made according to the needs of the society. It is not built for praise or others satisfaction. Generally it is made with the materials available locally. It is also depend upon the climate and the environment of the nature. The saraniya-kachari has its own architectural design which is used by them. As they depend upon agriculture, so the houses are made with natural resources. Generally wood, bamboo, straw and other natural resources. The roofs are generally covered with a kind of grass (ulu kher) and the doors and windows are made with bamboo, Khagori and wood. The walls are covered with mud, cow-dung etc.

The houses are made to fulfill different needs and as such they made bar ghar, gohali ghar, bharal ghar, randhani ghar (kitchen), gosai ghar (prayer house) etc.

#### **1.01.5 Folk costume :**

The tribal people of Assam are very expert in preparing colourful dresses, the saraniya – kachari are also no exception to this. They used separate dresses for different sexes. They used green coloured dresses as their own dress. Gamocha, chadar, Mekhela, rumal (handkerchief) etc are prepared at home and for this they wave it to fulfill their needs.

The traditional dresses are used in different social and cultural functions. Now-a-days they are attracted for the modern dresses. But the age-old people use their traditional dresses.

The Saraniya-Kachari women use less ornaments in comparison with others, ornaments are used to increase the aesthetic beauty. It is often quoted that – *'cleanliness develops bari, dresses focus 'nari'* (women).

The saraniya–kachari women used to wear ornaments in ear, neck, nose, hand and legs. Generally 'Phuli' was used in ear, chandrahari and dugdugi in neck, kharu, bala, gamkharu in hand, nakphuli in the nose etc. Though they used traditional ornaments, now-a-days the new generation has been attracted for the changing environment using modern design and technique.

#### **1.01.6 Folk cookery**

Folk-cookery is one of the most important classification of material culture. The saraniya-kachari has its own tradition of collecting, preparing and presenting food which indicated their special attention about cookery and food-habit. Generally the geographical environment influenced the food-habit of the people. The sarania kachari are being agricultural in general, they used rice as their prime food. The food-habit of saraniya-kachari has a similarity along with the other tribal people. They used vegetables as well as fish and meat as their diet.

The most popular drink of the saraniya – kachari is cherap. They use cherap as their traditional drink. It is very essential in all their fairs and festivals. It is also very essential for the bhakti-puja or sewa. It is also offered in other religious celebrations. The bhaktas named the cherap as 'kacha-rasa'. They prepare 'suroshi' or 'bakhar' at home for the preparation of cherap.

## 1.7 Conclusion

Folk culture of a particular tribe reflects the cultural richness of a society. The material culture of the saraniya-kachari shows the wide-spread cultural achievements through architecture, folk art, folk crafts, folk cookery, folk costume etc. This paper reflects different aspects of the material culture of the saraniya-kachari community of Assam. Like other tribal people the Saraniya-Kachari people also bears the traditional culture of their fore-fathers, but after the assimilation with the hindu-culture, they tried to reform themselves with the changing society and thus tried to reform themselves with the changing society and thus tried to reform themselves to improve their habits and customs. Freedomn of women is one of the special character of tribal people of Assam. The saraniya-kachari women were healthy, laborious and they took major part in their social system. The costume design as well as folk cookery, folk arts and craft the women-folk took active part accordingly.

## Bibliography :

1. Acharjya, N.N. : The History of Medieval Assam, 1966
2. Baruah, B.K. : A cultural history of Assam, L.B.S Publication, Guwahati, 1969
3. Baruah, K.L. : Early Histroy of Kamrupa, Shilong , 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, 1966
4. Bordoloi, N.P. : Asomor Loka Sanskriti, 1972, Guwahati
5. Baruah, B.K : Asomor Loka Sanskriti, Bina Library 8<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2005
6. Baruah, Sonbar : Saraniya - Kacharir bibah paddlati, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition

7. Bhattacharyya, P.C (ed) : Asomor Janajati, Layer's Book Stall, 1999, Reprint.
8. Bhuyan, S.K. (edited) : Deodhai Asom Buranji D.H.A.S, 1962  
: Satsari Asom Buranji, DHAS, 1960
9. Chatterjee S.K. : Kirata-Jana-Kriti, Calcutta, 1951
10. Choudhury, P.C. : The History and Civilization of the people of Assam to the 12<sup>th</sup> century, 1966
11. Chatterjee, S.K. : The Place of Assam in the history and civilization of India, Gauhati University, 1955
12. Deka, Nalini : Saraniya-Kachari Samaj Sanskriti, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, 2002
13. Gait, Sir Edward : A History of Assam, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, 1984
14. Gogoi, Chou Lokeswar : Asomor Lokasanskriti, Vol-II, Krantikar Prakashan, 2011
15. Gogoi, Leela : Asomor Sanskriti, Bina Library, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, 1990
16. Goswami, H.C. (ed) : Purani Asom Buranji, Rp.1982
17. Hakacham, Babu Rabha : Saraniya-Kachari Sanskriti aru Lok Sahitya, S.K.D.C, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, 2012
18. Hazari, Dhaneswar : Saraniya Kachari Khadya Sanskriti Narir Jiban Gatha, S.K.D.C 1<sup>st</sup> edition, October, 2015
19. Hunter, W.W : A statistical account of Assam, Vol 5, Calcutta, 1879
20. Mahaliya, Dhiren (complier) : Saraniya-Kachari Janagosthir Ruprekha, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, 2012, S.K.D.U
21. Narzi, Bhaben : Boro-Kacharir Samaj aru Sanskriti, Bina Library, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition (1966), Rp. 2009
22. Nath, Rajmohan : The Background of Assamese Culture, Shilong, 1948
23. Neog, Maheswar : Purani Asomor Samaj Aru Sanskriti 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, 1985.

24. Sarmah, N.C : Asomiya Loka Sanskritir Abhas, Bani Prakash:  
guwahati,1995.

S.K.D.C : Saraniya Kachari Development Council

D.H.A.S : Directorate of History and Antiquarian Studies