

# Hogra Dance: A Unique Performing Art Of The Sonowal Kachari Tribe Of Assam

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## Introduction

Assam is a home to a diverse range of indigenous tribes and communities, each with its unique culture, traditions and languages. Among the tribes, the Sonowal Kacharis, one of the largest plain tribe of Assam and is a branch of the great Kachari race. The Kacharis are described as the aborigines or earliest known inhabitants of the Brahmaputra valley. The Sonowal Kacharis, are of Mongoloid origin and belong to the great Bodo group and they nostalgically trace their close relationship with the Barmans of Cachar District, Boro Kacharis of Lower Assam districts and Dimasas of North Cachar Hills District. They presently inhabit in several districts of Assam such as Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Sibsagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, Lakhimpur and Dhemaji.

The Sonowal Kacharis have rich cultural traits and unique social, cultural and religious practices which have made them distinctly different from the other tribes of Assam. They have rich oral tradition which have passed from one generation to the other. They also have some unique performing art and dance forms which they perform during the celebration of some festivals. One among them is Hogra Dance.

The present paper has made an attempt to study the unique dance form of the Sonowal Kachari Tribe of Assam.

## Objective of the Study :

- 1) To know the manner in which the hogra dance is performed.
- 2) To understand the significance of performing the hogradance.

**Methodology :** The study involves both primary and secondary source of data. Primary data have been collected through field study and interview with leading personalities of the Sonowal Kachari tribe and also some elderly people belonging to this tribe. Books and journals are referred to get additional information regarding the topic.

About the Sonowal Kacharis :The Sonowal Kacharis tribe is one of the ancient tribal group of Assam. Regarding the origin of the tribal group there is no authentic documents in written. Based on the rich chronicles the elderly people have arrived at some conclusions about their origin, migration and settlement.

Endle writes about the physical features of the great Kacharis , In fact figure they show a distinct approximation to what is known as the Mongolian type i.e. they have square set faces, projecting cheek-bones, with almond shaped eyes and scanty beard and moustache'. The use of the term 'Sonowal' also have many legendary explanations. One legend throws light on the origin of the term 'Sonowal'.

### **1.Bordoloi B.N & Thakur GC Sharma: Tribes of Assam Part-II, Ghy**

The King Baan had for sons Dimasa, Garo, Bhalukbir and Hogra. These four established their own kingdom in different parts of the region. Dimasa established a kingdom in Dimapur or Kachar named as Kachari Kingdom. Garo established his kingdom in Garo Hills, Bhalukbir did it as Balipara as Aka Kingdom and Hogra moved towards Sadiya along with one thousand followers and took refuge in the Miri villages. Subsequently they shifted to the bank of the river Kundil. Three of the Miri villages namely Hagu, Likam and Dafla merged their identities with those of the Sonowals and they formed three separate clans viz Hagumiri, Likamiri and Daflari. 2

### **Discussion :**

The Hogra dance is one among the dance form of the tribe and it is unique in its pattern because of the narration of the story while performing the dance. Benu Bora states 'Hogra means a boar and for the sacrifice of animal in Baithou puja , the hunt of a wild boar was done. He also says that under the leadership of the great Kachari Hograbir, the hunting of wild boar was made. So the dance form under the guidance of Hograbir came to be known as Hogra dance. Mohan Sonowal writes ,' Hogra means a wild boar. It has been said that after the completion of the customs of the celebration of the Baithou Puja , description is made how the hunters hunted the wild boar and this is shown by dancing. This dance form is the Hagra Nritya . This dance explains the difficulties faced by the hunters during hunting to the audience. Some appear as a boar and the chief hunter get ready with bows and arrows with their costumes. At the end of the dance it is narrated how the animals were sacrificed before the worshipping places such as before Baithou and Burha Brhi Xaal( place of worship), While hunting they sang songs which said about the experiences they had while hunting. These songs have been transmitted from one generation to the other and showed the superstitious nature of the people. For instance they considered it as an ill omen if a wag tail bird crossed the hunters on their way towards hunting. The songs narrated that they killed the bird and proceeded for hunting. The songs depicted the story of Hograbir during hunting. The journey of their hunting was stated in the songs and say that when Hograbir and his associates did not return from hunting , his wife "Lakhoi" was worried and went in search of her husband keeping her baby in the hands of the nanny. The nanny to console the baby gave rice beer in the mouth of the baby and the baby stopped crying. These songs related to the hunting gave a description about the hunting expedition of Hogravir . They dance and narrate all these stories and perform Hogra dance.

A myth says , Hiranakhya the king of the Asuras was killed by Lord Vishnu during his boar incarnation. The Sonowal Kacharis are the followers of Lord Shiva and they are Vishnu and killed the incarnation of Vishnu the boar. This is the reason why some clans of the tribe sacrificed human beings before the Burha Burhi Xaal. With time when human sacrifice was strictly banned

, the sacrifice of human being was replaced by animals. By this they symbolically try to explain the revenge of the killing of their forefathers. They sacrifice a boar immediately after the Baithou worship and prior to the Bahag bihu. This is observed in the month of

## 2. Ibid

March before the harvest starts. The Hogra dance is still practised among these tribal group with immense faith and belief.

Researchers and Folklorist have made statement regarding the performances of Hogra Dance. Researcher of this community opine that the Hogra Dance is more to be considered as a community programme than a religious a sacrificial ceremony. As the dance is performed prior to the celebration of Bohag or Rongali bihu we can take this as an art in the form of narration and dance describing the entire process of food collection and hunting. It has been said that in the earlier days hunting was an enjoyable experience and while returning from hunting the hunters performed different activities to entertain themselves. Hogra Dance is once such kind of a dance. Hograbir led the group along with the hunters, the boar, Jakh-Jakhini and other persons carrying with them Jakoi and Khaloi(Tools used while fishing). As time went things started changing and in order to make the dance form interesting and attractive several changes have been added to the original forms of dance. Even though changes have occurred, the original and unique form of dance is found to be practiced among the community.

The unique form of performing arts needs to be preserved and documented so that the originality remains the same . In the era of globalization, modernization, assimilation and acculturation with the other caste and community of Assam there might be linguistic variation in the songs of Hogra Dance, the costumes used while performing the dance might have changed. So necessary steps need to be taken for preserving and promoting the rich cultural form. Recording of the original dance has to be made so that the new generation could know the correct and right form of the dance.

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