

Chapter: V

Religious Life of the Bodo

Bathou is the traditional religion of the Bodo. It is based on the belief of supreme God called *Bathou Bwrai*. The term *Bathou* is combination of two words 'Ba' and 'Thou'. 'Ba' means five (5) and 'Thou' means deep or profound principles¹. Thus, the word *Bathou* signified five-fold principles. *Bathou Bwrai* is worshiped in different names like *Bathou Raja*, *Song Raja*, *Kouria Borai* etc. *Sijou* tree is the symbol of *Bathou Bwrai* for which *Bathou Bwrai* is also known as *Sijou Borai*, *Sijou Gosai* etc.². Polytheism is the character of traditional *Bathou Dhwrwm*. However, all gods and goddesses are regarded as subordinate to *Bathou Bwrai*. At the same time, the idea of one God as the creator of universe is always present in the mind of Bodo. There is no beginning and end for *Bathou Bwrai*. No father and no mother for *Bathou Bwrai*. He is the one who creates everything. He is the creator, he is the destroyer, he is the preserver, he is the protector, he is the giver and God of all souls.

Bathou Altar:

When a plot is selected for the purpose of construction of *Noma No*, a place is reserved for *Bathou* altar in the courtyard towards east-south direction, not so far from the eastern portion of proposed side of *Noma No*. A *Dahab*³ is made in circle shape for worshiping *Bathou*. Its diameter is around 2 or 2.5 feet and height is around 1 feet. In the middle of the eastern part of *Dahab*, a hole is dug in which a stone, a pair of rupees coins and some milk are poured and planted a *Sijou* plant (*Euphorbia Splenden*) by the house owner. Plantation of *Sijou* plant is must as it symbolized the existence of *Bathou Bwrai*. At the right side of *Sijou* tree, a basil plant is planted. *Jatrasi*⁴ plant is also planted at left side of *Sijou* tree. Then on *Dahab*, three bamboo sticks are placed in triangle shape. One stick is in the eastern side, one is in the northern side and another one is in the southern side of *Bathou Dahab*. These three sticks of bamboo are jointed together at the top in triangular which is left till the completion of the construction of *Noma No*. During the foundation of *Bathou* altar, a *Daosa* (fowl) is offered in the name of *Bathou Bwrai*⁵.

Final construction of *Bathou* altar is done after the completion of the construction of *Noma No*. For making *Bathou* altar, family has to offer prayer with the help of *Oja* which is known as *Gwtwi Gwtang Baounai* (offering to departed souls). Fowl, areca nut, betel leaves, rice, *Dhub* (a kind of incense sticks) etc. are main offering items of this ceremony. The place of *Gwtwi Gwtang Baounai* is in the southern side of courtyard. In *Gwtwi Gwtang Baounai* ceremony, *Oja* chants mantra mentioning names of departed souls of the family. The names of earlier kings, legendary heroes and heroines of the Bodo like *Gambari Sikla*, *Sikwna Jwhwlao*, *Dwimalu*, *Kwrwm Sikla*, *Jarapagla* etc. are also mentioned while chanting mantra. The main purpose of this *Puja* is to give farewell to departed soul of the family and to purify the house from *Sua-Suti* (impure). It is also believed that by performing this *Gwtwi Gwtang Baounai* they tried to expel the evils (*Athma*) from interfering into the construction of *Bathou* altar. In this *Gwtwi Gwtang Baounai* ceremony, *Or* (Fire) is regarded as the witness of entire process and its presence is made in the form of pair of *Dhub*. When *Gwtwi Gwtang Baounai* ceremony is over, the construction of *Bathou* altar is began⁶.

Before the actual construction of *Bathou* altar, head of the family seeks permission from *Bathou Bwrai* for final construction of *Bathou* altar and pull out the existing three sticks of *Bathou*. A great care is taken during the time of erection of *Bathou* altar. A mature bamboo is cut for the purpose of making *Bathou* altar. The entire process of making *Bathou* altar has to be done by that single bamboo which is cut down for the purpose. Only *Awoya Gubwi*⁷ is allowed to use in the construction. After cutting the bamboo, nobody is allowed to cross the bamboo. If one crossed that bamboo, that bamboo cannot be used for the purpose of construction of *Bathou* altar. *Mwnda Awoya*⁸, *Awoya Burka*⁹, *Awoya Tere*¹⁰ etc. are not allowed to use for construction. The entire process of construction is to be completed within a day just after cutting of the bamboo. If the construction is not completed in a day then the bamboo which was cut for the purpose shall not be used in the next day. So, a newly bamboo is required for the purpose. In this case also the construction is to be completed on the same day i.e. the day on which the bamboo was cut¹¹. It is totally forbidden to take two days or more in the construction of altar with the same bamboo. Total numbers of posts of *Bathou* altar are sixteen (16) and five rings for fencing¹². Each ring of fencing consists of three round of slit bamboo. For this purpose a long bamboo is cut into three pieces¹³.

The sixteen posts are erected in circle way. Each post represents gods and goddesses of the Bodo. The names of gods and goddess which represent by sixteen posts are given below¹⁴:

1. *Ailung*
2. *Agrang*
3. *Kwila*
4. *Kaji*
5. *Abla Kungur*
6. *Raj Kandra*
7. *Raj Putra*
8. *Bura Ali(Bwrai Ali)*
9. *Sanja Bwrai Ali*
10. *Sari Jumun*
11. *Bima Dibaoli*
12. *Bwisumuti Mainao*
13. *Bwrai Sik Raja*
14. *Mwsa Raja (Bag Raja)*
15. *Basumuri* and
16. *Chouduri*.

The name and position of the posts of *Bathou* altar is shown in the photo figure number: 1

The first fencing ring of *Bathou* altar starts from the bottom of the post of *Mwsa Raja (Bag Raja)* a little above from the ground level. The second ring of the fencing starts from *Basumuri* post. The first fencing ring should go in anticlockwise direction three times. The second ring also should be done in same way as first. The third one should start moving from *Agrang* to *Chwoudury* in anticlockwise direction then from *Chwoudury* to *Agrang* in clockwise direction and lastly *Agrang* to *Chwoudury* in anticlockwise direction. In the same way of third one, remaining fourth and fifth fencing rings are also prepared. All the fencing rings are made with five slits bamboo. If any one of the slit bamboo fall short to make three times round of fencing ring then the whole process for the construction would have to restart with new bamboo as joining of two slit

bamboos is completely against the traditional rule of construction of *Bathou* altar. The entrance of *Bathou* is kept in the western side of altar. To make the door of the altar, the bamboo post which named as *Ailung* is splited into several numbers from its top to the level of second fencing ring and made *Dautu Bika* in rhombus design¹⁵.

When the fencing of *Bathou* altar is over, all sixteen posts except *Ailung* are made slit from top to bottom. It symbolized as pair for each gods and goddess¹⁶. As and when, the processes of construction of *Bathou* altar is completed, an *Oja* examines *Bathou* altar whether it has been properly constructed or not as per traditional norms. If *Bathou* altar is not properly build then entire process for the construction has to be started from the beginning with a new bamboo. The construction of *Bathou* altar could be done at any time or day or month or season except *Bhadra*, *Phus* and *Switra* (Months of Bangla Calendar).

Any female members who may be owner's wife or daughter etc. plaster a place near newly constructed *Bathou* altar and a banana leaf is placed on it. On banana leaf, a pair of areca nuts, betel leaves and *Dhub* are offered. After offering is made, a *Uwal* (wooden mortar) is kept on plaster area and an elderly woman of the family mainly wife of head of the family pounded rice. The pounding of rice in *Uwal* came to be known as *On Denai*¹⁷ (rice powder). After *On Denai*, *Bathou* altar is plastered properly with water by any one of the family member. A holy water is arranged in *Talir Bikong Tona*¹⁸ by the family with the help of *Oja* near the right side of newly constructed *Bathou* altar. The purpose of making of holy water is to purify the newly constructed *Bathou* altar and family as a whole. The head or any member of the family sprinkled the holy water to purify *Bathou* altar as well as family.

After purification ceremony is over, offering is made to *Bathou Bwrai* with following items:

- a. *Tulsi Bilai* (Basil leaf)
- b. *Talir* (Banana)
- c. *Alari Bati* (an earthen pot for illumination)
- d. *Mairong* (Rice)
- e. Milk
- f. *On* (grain rice)

- g. *Goi* (Areca nuts)
- h. *Patwi* (Betel leaves)

After offering is completed, a *Daola Gwja* (red colour cock) is sacrificed in the name of *Batwo Bwrai*. This sacrifice marked the end of construction of *Bathou* altar¹⁹.

It is general practice among the Bodo that when *Sijwou* plant is reached its height above *Noma No*, a new *Sijwou* plant is planted by removing earlier one. Before cutting *Sijwou* plant, house owner has to arrange a ritual ceremony with the help of *Oja* informing to *Bathou Bwrai* that *Sijou* plant is required to cut as its height reached up to the height of *Noma No*²⁰. The ceremony for seeking permission from *Bathou Bwrai* for cutting *Sijou* tree and re-plantation of new *Sijou* tree as well as removing of old *Bathou* altar if necessary, is done with following items with the help of *Oja*:

- a. *Tulsi Bilai* (basal leaf)
- b. *Talir Bilai* (Banana leaf)
- c. *Alari Bati*
- d. *Goi* (Areca nuts)
- e. *Patwi* (Betel leaf)
- f. *Mairong* (Rice)
- g. Milk
- h. Chicken

During the time of offering and sacrifice, *Oja* recites *mantra* in front of *Bathou* altar explaining the reason for cutting *Sijou* and re-plantation as well as removing old altar if required to be done. Then house owner cut a branch of *Sijou* for new plantation. *Sijou* plant is cut three times at bottom by the owner of house. Then other members of family or neighbors are also allowed to join in cutting *Sijou* tree and uprooting the old *Sijou* plant. *Tulsi* and *Jatrasi* are also removed along with *Sijou* and newly *Sijou*, *Tulsi* and *Jatrasi* are planted.

It is to be noted that the sixteen (16) posts of *Bathou* altar represent sixteen (16) gods and goddesses of the Bodo. No doubt, they are closely associated to *Bathou* altar however, their places of worship are reserved outside *Bathou* altar towards north from the middle of northern side of *Bathou* altar. Only *Bathou Bwrai* and *Bathou Buri* (wife of

Bathou Bwrai) are worshiped inside *Bathou* altar. The places of worship of *Bathou Bwrai* and *Bathou Buri* as well as sixteen (16) gods and goddesses are known as *Pathali*. Among *Pathalis*, *Ailung* goddess occupied first place in the extreme north of *Bathou* altar and *Pathalis* of gods and goddess like *Agrang*, *Kwila*, *Kaji*, *Abla Kungur*, *Raj Kandra*, *Raj Putra*, *Bwrai Ali (Bura Ali)*, *Sanja Bwrai Ali*, *Sari Jumun*, *Bima Dibaoli*, *Bwisumuti Mainao*, *Bwrai Sik Raja* and *Mwsa Raja (Bag Raja)* are to the south of *Ailung Pathali*. In this line there are fourteen (14) *Pathalis* in serial. Remaining two *Pathalis* i.e. *Basumuri* and *Chwoudury* are placed towards west from *Ailung Pathali*. Five *Pathalis* are reserved for *Bathou Bwrai* and *Bathou Buri*. The total number of *Pathali* is nineteen (19) including two inside *Ishing* room of *Noma No*. The two *Pathalis* of *Ishing* (inside *Noma No*) are known as *Mainao* and *Songraja*. Sometimes they are also known as *Duari Buri* and *Duari Bwrai*. They occupied north east corner of *Ishing* as the places of their worship. The place of *Mainao* is in the extreme corner of *Ishing* room and *Songraja* occupied the place near *Mainao* in western side²¹.

Bathouism believes in five principles which have deep philosophical significance. *Bathou Bwrai* is the creator and custodian of five basic elements²². The main basis of *Bathouism* and its philosophy is to espouse the social fabrics, customs, economic institution, beliefs and practices as well as rites, rituals and ceremonies of the Bodo²³. Five elements of *Bathou* are given below²⁴:

- a. Earth or Soil
- b. Air or Wind
- c. Water
- d. Fire and
- e. Sky

The five elements of *Bathou* have been identified with gods and goddesses of the Bodo as *Ailung* goddess is identified with earth or soil, *Agrang* with water, *Khoila* with air, *Sanja Bwrai Ali* with sun or fire and *Raj Khandra* or *Rajkumbre* or *Rajkhungri* with sky²⁵.

The five principles of *Bathou* are as follows²⁶:

- a. To procreation by means of birth.

- b. To get marriage
- c. To get misery and distress
- d. To get destiny
- e. To die

The five principles clearly denote that in the life of man it is required to reproduce offspring by entering into marriage. It is also indicated that life is full of misery and happiness. One may rejoice but that should be within the limit prescribed by god. *Gurus* of the Bodo formulated the principles of joyfulness. The principle to get destiny teaches that man should be calm and patience when he faced any problems. He should remember god and worship god by performing *Kherai*, *Garja Puja* etc. The last principle i.e. to die says that man is not immortal. If birth, there will be death. Man will become old. He will die sooner or later according to the will of God. He comes alone and will go alone without accompanying anyone or anything like land, money, property, sons, daughters or relatives etc. Devotion to God became primary duty of each and every individual²⁷.

The five basic teachings of *Bathou* are as follows:

- a. To acknowledge *Bathou Bwrai* as Supreme God.
- b. Worshipping of *Bathou Bwrai*, the Supreme God.
- c. To admit *Bathou Buri* or *Mainao Buri* as goddess of agriculture and wealth.
- d. Realization and worshipping of five elements of *Bathou* (earth, water, fire, sky and wind) and
- e. Positive thinking and doing good deeds on this earth²⁸.

Five preaching of *Bathou*:

- a. Advocates on prayer and meditation for god.
- b. Service to others and religious discourse to achieve the knowledge of *Bathou*.
- c. Helping and charity to poor and needy person.
- d. No harm should be done to living beings and all the living being should be respected and
- e. To live and to do anything unitedly to short out any trouble or difficulty.

Following are the five-fold principles of love which to be followed by the followers of *Bathou*:

- a. Loved to God
- b. Loved to man
- c. Loved to animals and other creatures
- d. Loved to plants and
- e. Loved to native land²⁹.

Worship of *Bathou*:

Worship of *Bathou* is of two types. They are household or family worship and community or village level worship. In household worship all the deities including Supreme God *Bathou Bwrai* are invoked by family concerned every day in the morning or evening³⁰. For the purpose of worship it is compulsory for each family to install *Bathou* altar at their courtyard in the appropriate place. Both husband and wife of the family offer prayer. Sometimes all family members also take part in the household prayer. In certain *Pujas* like *Mainao Bwkangnai*, *Mainao Tisonnai*, *Noaoni Udrainai* etc., presence of *Oja* is must. In such *Puja*, family cannot performed the worship without *Oja* as he is the one who converse to gods, appeal to gods by chanting mantra.

Likewise household worship, the Bodo also worshipped all gods and goddesses in community or village level worship. Generally community worship is performed by villagers once in every year. For the purpose of community worship, temporary *Bathou* altar and altar for other gods and goddesses are made at a suitable place or selected site. All members of the community of a particular area are participated in community or village level worship. But in some *Pujas* like *Hambai Hwnai*, women are prohibited to take part. In community or village level worship, the presence of *Oja* is compulsory. Without *Oja*, community or village level worship cannot be conducted³¹. Idol worship is not prevalent among the Bodo. They worship their gods and goddesses with symbolic elements³².

Udrainai:

Before conducting any religious ceremony, the Bodo perform *Udrainai* (penance). It is mandatory to purify each and every house of the village as well as village as a whole and persons of the village for the performance of successful religious rites. There are two types of *Udrainai*. They are *Noaoni Udrainai* (family penance) and *Gamini Udrainai* (village penance). These two types of *Udrainai* are done at village road. However, *Noaoni Udrainai* is performed at the nearest road of household. According to the nature of crime, *Udrainai* ceremony is also performed at the river bank. The selected site of *Udrainai* ceremony is required to be cleaned and plastered properly with mud and water. This ceremony is performed under the supervision of *Oja* who is assisted by *Dwori* (village priest). On the plastered place, offering are made in north-south direction. Offering items are *Talit* (banana), *Mairong* (rice), areca nuts, betel leaves, *Dhub*, pigeon, fowl, etc. After offering is made, pigeon or fowl is sacrificed by *Dwori* on the advice of *Oja* who also chants *mantra*. In this ceremony, offering are made to two gods namely *Bathou* (in southern side as shown in the following picture) and *Mohadeo* (in northern side as shown in the following picture). A *Talir Bikong Tona* which contained holy water is placed in between the offering place of *Bathou* and *Mohadeo*. After the end of *Udrainai* ceremony, *Dwori* (village priest) sprinkled the holy water in each and every house of the village including the persons of the village to purify. In case of individual *Udraiinai*, holy water is sprinkled only in respective house and its family members. In certain areas this ceremony is also known as *Salami*³³.

Hambai Hwnai:

Among the yearly religious ceremony, *Hambai Hwnai* is performed firstly and other ceremonies followed³⁴. However, natural calamities or disasters or unwanted problems faced by the villagers before performance of *Hambai Hwnai*, in such case *Garja Hwnai* is carried out first and then *Hambai Hwnai* is performed. *Hambai Hwnai* is celebrated by the village folk as a whole before starting agricultural activities. But women are debarred from participating in this ceremony. No specific date is required for the purpose of this religious ceremony. At present, it is mainly performed in the month of *Bwisak* and *Jet* (Bengali calendar). Through this ceremony, they tried to propitiate agricultural god for having a bumper harvest. *Hagrani Mwdai* (jungle gods or devils) and

gods of insects are also appeased through this ceremony for not to harm the agriculture. It is generally acted upon at river bank. The selected place is required to clean and plaster properly.

The following items are required for *Hambai Hwnai* ceremony:

- a. Banana
- b. Rice
- c. Areca nut
- d. Betel leaves
- e. *Aozar Bibar* (flower of *Lagestromia Assamica*)
- f. Banana peels
- g. Banana leaves
- h. Rice-beer
- i. *Opri* (rice malt)

Different livestock like fowl, goat, chicken, pigeon, etc. are also very essential items of *Hambai Hwnai* ceremony. Without *Aozar Bibar* and *Opri*, performance of *Hambai Hwnai* ceremony is incomplete. It is indicated that without two articles namely *Aozar Bibar* and *Opri* this ceremony cannot be executed³⁵. First offerings are made and afterward sacrifices are carried out by *Dwori* with the help of *Oja*. At the end of ritual, flesh of sacrificed animals are cooked and consumed by villagers who participated in the ceremony. At the time of departure from the place of *Hambai Hwnai*, they throw *Opri* in the place of *Puja* as well as in the surrounding area of *Puja*. This marked the end of *Hambai Hwnai* ceremony.

Garja Hwnai:

Garja Hwnai is performed to drive away the unholy spirit and deities who have evil designs and create diseases³⁶. In this religious performance, *Mainao* (goddess of wealth and prosperity) is also welcomed. There is no fixed date for the ceremony of *Garja Hwnai*. At the same time no fixed numbers of *Garja Hwnai* to be performed in a year. Both the date and numbers of *Garja Hwnai* in a year mainly depend on the intending villagers. *Garja Hwnai* is performed to encounter any severe problem or difficulty like epidemic, natural calamities, unwanted incidents etc.³⁷. It is asserted that

there are nineteen (19) different kinds of *Garja*. They are- i) *Lwkhi Garja* ii) *Asu Garja* iii) *Maoria Garja* iv) *Tia Garja* v) *Seo Seo Garja* vi) *Daoyang Garja* vii) *Tong Tongyali Garja* viii) *Daoyang Garja* ix) *Gao Garja* x) *Gu Gu Garja* xi) *Seo Seo Fwrja* xii) *Garja Sibsinsin* xiii) *Garja Dibsinsin* xiv) *Saoria Garja* xv) *Samsemali Garja* xvi) *Dosomali Garja* xv) *Samoramamo Garja* xvi) *Kolodano Garja* xvii) *Nelodano Garja* xviii) *Molan Garja* and xix) *Ataro Garja*³⁸. However, it is not an easy task to identify all the *Garja* but some of them are considered to be benevolent *Garja* gods and goddesses. *Lakhi Garja*, *Asu Garja*, *Dhan Garja* and *Borai Raja Garja* are considered as benevolent gods and goddesses³⁹.

Both Kameswar Brahma⁴⁰ and Bhaben Narzi⁴¹ mention about the existence of non-Bodo *Garja*-god or *Harisa Mwdai* (Aryan gods) but this view is rejected by Indramalati Narzari⁴². However, at present follower of traditional *Bathou* religion used to worship non-Bodo gods and goddesses of others religion during the time of *Garja Hwnai*. It is not known to us that when and how the Bodo started worshipping of gods and goddesses of other religion. Gods and goddesses of the Bodo of *Garja Hwnai* are *Bathou Bwrai*, *Maotanshri*, *Akaishri*, *Jwmwn Jwla*, *Bormali*, *Sainasi*, *Budaru*, *Jekai Bwrai*, *Kobai Bwrai*, *Gambari*, *Mwnshri* etc. Among *Harisa Mwdai* (non-Bodo gods and goddesses) are *Mahadeva*, Muslim god *Bismilla* or *Pir Saheb*, *Gones*, *Baro Gopal*, *Mahamaya* etc. Other than major gods and goddesses, minor gods and goddesses are varied from region to region and place to place in *Garja Hwnai*. But major gods and goddesses of the Bodo always associated in *Garja Hwnai* in every nook and corner of the Bodo inhabited areas where traditional followers are being settled down⁴³.

Place of *Garja Hwnai*:

Garja Sali is the place for performing *Garja Hwnai*. Every Bodo village has this place since ancient time till today. If a new village is formed, the villagers with the help of *Daodini* select a suitable site for *Garja Hwnai*. Once site is chosen, it remained forever⁴⁴. One day ahead of actual day of *Garja Hwnai*, *Garja Sali* is cleaned. A temporary *Bathou* altar is erected for *Bathou Bwrai* on which a *Sijou* plant is also planted. Huts for other deities are also build for time being for the purpose of *Garja Hwnai* where due respect are given to those deities. At present, it is also seen that just adjacent to the place of *Garja Sali*, place of *Harisa Mwdai* (non-Bodo gods) has been

reserved for worship. In the evening of the same day, *Udrainai* (purification) or *Salami* is performed⁴⁵ for the purification of village and villagers. In ceremony, both *Oja* and *Dwori* played a significant role. In the process of purification, holy water which prepare for the purpose is sprinkled in whole village as well as villagers. In *Garja Hwnai* ceremony, articles like *Talir Bikong* (Banana peels), *Talir Bilai* (Banana leaves), *Sika* (Sacrificial sword), *Don* (bamboo basket) etc. are arranged and prepared. On the day of *Garja Hwnai*, all the gods and goddesses of the Bodo as well as *Harisa Mwdai* are offered prayer with following items:

1. *Talir* (Banana)
2. *Mairong* (Rice)
3. *Goi Pitai* (Areca nut)
4. *Patwi* (Betel leaves)
5. *Jwo* (Wine)
6. *Daodwi* (Egg)
7. *Dhub* (a kind of incense sticks)
8. Holy water
9. *Tulsi Bijwo* (branch of basil leaves)
10. *Jatrasa Bijwo* (branch of a kind of tree used in religious activities)
11. *Alari Bati*
12. *Daosa* (Fowl)
13. *Bwrma* (Goat)
14. *Dao* (Chicken)
15. *Parwo* (Pigeon)
16. *Oma* (pig) etc.

As and when offering is over, *Dwori* sacrificed *Daosa* (Fowl), *Bwrma* (Goat), *Dao* (Chicken), *Parwo* (Pigeon), *Oma* (pig) etc. for different gods and goddesses with the help of *Oja*. In the process of sacrifice, *Oja* chants *mantras* and gives appropriate direction to *Dwori* for sacrifice. The items for sacrifice seem to be varied from one place to another place. The sacrifices are done by two *Dworis* i.e. Bodo *Dwori* (Bodo *Dwori* for Bodo gods and goddesses) and *Harisa Dwori* (*Harisa Dwori* for *Harisa* gods and goddesses). Bodo *Dwori* sacrifices for Bodo gods and goddesses and *Harisa Dwori* for *Harisa Mwdai*. During the entire process of *Garja Hwnai* women are not allowed to take

part in the ceremony. However, if *Garja Hwnai* is performed in the name of *Mainao Garja*, *Asu Garja*, etc., women are permitted to go to *Garja Sali* after the sacrifices are made to bring *Mainao* to their respective houses which came to be known as *Mainao Tikangnai* or *Tisonnai* (carrying of goddess of wealth)⁴⁶. Religious activities of *Garja Hwnai* used to be over by evening. Immediately after the completion of *Garja Hwnai* ceremony, sacrifice items are cooked collectively by the villagers and consumed.

Kherai Hwnai:

Kherai Hwnai occupied top most position among the religious festivals of the Bodo⁴⁷. It is observed for two purposes- i) for well being of private life and ii) for well being of public life. It also can be said that it is performed for over all development, peace, prosperity, security etc. of the community. But, regarding different kinds of *Kherai*, some negation is seen among the scholars. Dr. K. Brahma⁴⁸ and Dr. A.K. Boro⁴⁹ mentioned four (4) *Kherai Hwnai* namely- i) *Darchan Kherai (Lakhi Kherai)* ii) *Umrao Kherai (Achu Kherai)* iii) *Phalo or Phalw (Danchran Kherai)* iv) *Noaoni Kherai (Family Kherai)*. On the other hand, Bhaben Narzi⁵⁰ gives only three kind of *Kherai Hwnai*- i) *Achu Kherai* ii) *Sali Kherai* iii) *Noaoni Kherai*. Again Binoy Kumar Brahma and Birendra Giri Basumatary, in their opinion there are five (5) kinds of *Kherai Hwnai*⁵¹. They are *Asu Kherai*, *Maisali Kherai*, *Palw Kherai*, *Noni Kherai*, *Daoha Kherai*. It comes to know that scholars are not in consensus about the numbers of *Kherai*. It may be because of the local variation as well as convenience of localities. The name of gods and goddesses of *Kherai* may be varied but original nature of *Kherai* remains unchanged.

Place of *Kherai Hwnai*:

For the performance of *Kherai Hwnai*, there is no fixed place. Any suitable place is selected for the purpose. In case of *Noaoni Kherai Hwnai* (family *Kherai*), the place of worship is arranged in a suitable place which should not be far away from the house of concerned family. The selected place is cleaned properly. After cleaning it, a temporary *Bathou* altar is erected as per traditional norms. Besides *Bathou* altar, *Kangkla Hebnai* (Italic fencing of bamboo) is made adjacent to *Bathou* altar towards northern side and sixteen *Kangkla Pipang*⁵² are erected attaching to *Kangkla Hebnai* as places of worship for sixteen lesser known gods and goddesses of the Bodo.

There is no fixed day for the performance of *Kherai Hwnai*. Generally, it is celebrated at the end of harvesting. However, *Noaoni Kherai* is performed when family required at any time.

Items required for *Kherai* Puja:

- i. *On* (grain rice)
- ii. *Talir* (Banana)
- iii. *Mairong* (Rice)
- iv. *Goi* (Areca nut)
- v. *Patwi* (Betel leaves)
- vi. *Talir Bikong* (Banana peels)
- vii. *Talir Bilai* (Banana leaves)
- viii. *Jwo* (Wine)
- ix. *Daodwi* (Egg)
- x. *Dhub* (a kind of incense sticks)
- xi. *Sika* (Sacrificial sword)
- xii. *Thungri* (sword)
- xiii. *Dahal* (shield)
- xiv. *Dwi Gwtar* (Holy water)
- xv. *Tulsi Bijwo* (branch of basil leaves)
- xvi. *Jatrasa Bijwo* (branch of a kind of tree used in religious activities)
- xvii. *Tona*
- xviii. *Alari Bati*
- xix. *Kongkla Bipang*
- xx. *Awoa* (Bamboo)
- xxi. *Kundung Aoa* (white thread)
- xxii. *Gambari Kamplai* (a low tool generally used in religious ceremonies)
- xxiii. *Oma* (Pig)
- xxiv. *Daosa* (Fowl)
- xxv. *Bwrma* (Goat)
- xxvi. *Parwo* (Pigeon)
- xxvii. *Dao* (Chicken)
- xxviii. *Hangsw* (Duck) and etc.

The important musical instrument that to be used in *Kherai Hwnai* are one pair of *Kham* (big drum), one pair *Jota* (cymbal) and one pair *Sipung* (flute).

Oja, *Doudini* and *Dwori* take main role in *Kherai Hwnai*⁵³. It is the duty of *Oja* to recite *mantras*, *Doudini* to dance for the propitiation of deities and *Dwori* to sacrifice various livestock for different gods and goddesses and also to assist *Oja* and *Doudini*⁵⁴. *Doudini* danced with music without singing any song.

In *Kherai Hwnai* different kinds of dance are performed to please *Bathou Bwrai* and other traditional god and goddesses of the Bodo⁵⁵. According to Sekhar Brahma⁵⁶, there are eighteen different types of shamanistic *Kharei* dance. Some of the important *Kharei* dances of the Bodo are *Bathou Gidingnai*, *Mwsaglandnai*, *Khwjwma Ponai*, *Gandwola Bwnai*, *Mupur Gelenai*, *Kamao Barkwnai*, *Tungriao Gakwnai*, *Dao Twi Lwngnai*, *Maoji Membrang Gelenai*, *Mwsakaori Mwsanai*, *Kopri Sibnai*, *Jarapagla Mwsanai*, *Tentamali Mwsanai*, *Nao Jaonai Mwsanai* etc.

The Bodo worship following eighteen gods and goddesses in *Kherai Hwnai* ceremony⁵⁷:

- I. *Songraja (Bathou Bwrai)*
- II. *Mainao (Bathou Buri)*
- III. *Ailung*
- IV. *Agrang*
- V. *Kwila*
- VI. *Kaji*
- VII. *Abla Kungur*
- VIII. *Raj Kandra*
- IX. *Raj Putra*
- X. *Bwrai Ali (Bura Ali)*
- XI. *Sanja Bwrai Ali*
- XII. *Sari Jumun*
- XIII. *Bima Dibaoli*
- XIV. *Bwisumuti Mainao*
- XV. *Bwrai Sik Raja*
- XVI. *Mwsa Raja (Bag Raja)*

XVII. *Basumuri* and

XVIII. *Chouduri*.

Bodo society is a multi-religious society at present. Some Bodo are converted to Hinduism, some to Christianity and other religion⁵⁸. However, a good number of Bodo are still retained their traditional religion following traditional religious beliefs and practices which practiced by their ancestors. As of now, all the rites, rituals, ceremonies and other religious practices that are associated with the religious life of the Bodo as discussed above are followed and practiced by the traditional practitioner with or without modification.

Endnotes

1. A. K. Boro, "Traditional Religion of the Bodos: From Traditional Practices to Institutionalisation" in *Religion and Society in North East India* edited by D. Nath, DVS Publisher, Guwahati, 2011, p. 176 & R. N. Mushahary, *Social History of the Boros of Assam: A Study of Oral History*, Unpublished PhD thesis submitted to NEHU, Shillong, 1986, pp. 133-136 & Satyendra Nath Mondal, *History and Culture of the Bodos*, Edited by Bonny Narzary, Satali Mondal Para, Jalpaiguri, West Bengal, 2011, pp. 220-221.
2. SHBA, pp. 133-136.
3. A altar made with soil for worshipping gods.
4. A kind of plant used by the Bodo in their religious ceremonies.
5. Interview with Haita Bargary, Age-50, Occupation- *Oja*, Vill.- Gwjwnpuri, P.O- Jaharbari, Dist.- Kokrajhar, Assam on 08/10/2015.
6. *Ibid*.
7. A kind of bamboo generally used by the Bodo in their religious as well as social functions.
8. A bamboo that does not have its point or highest part.
9. A kind of big bamboo.
10. A kind of tiny or small bamboo.
11. Interview with Santosh Bathou Narzari, Age- 72, Occupation- *Oja*, Vill.- Shyamtaibari P.O.-Serfanguri, Dist.- Kokrajhar, Assam on 03/05/2015.

12. SHBA, p. 146 & RSNEI, p. 117.
13. Two pieces will be of equal length which is used for the purpose of posts of *Bathou* Altar. The length of the two posts will be four to five feet as the height of *Bathou* altar is about three to four feet height. Another piece was used for the purpose of fencing by making rings. From the two equal length bamboo posts, sixteen numbers of posts are prepared.
14. Interview with Haita Bargayary, Age-50, Occupation- *Oja*, Vill.- Gwjwnpuri, P.O- Jaharbari, Dist.- Kokrajhar, Assam on 08/10/2015.
15. Interview with Neripen Boro, Age- 63, Occupation- *Oja*, Vill.- Lailong Para, P. O.- Rowta, Dist.- Udalguri, BTC, Assam on 10/01/2017 & Interview with Premnath Basumatary, Age- 60, Occupation- *Oja*, Vill.- South Baraghor P.O.- Charaikhala Dist.- Kokrajhar, BTC, Assam on 29/09/2015.
16. Interview with Ala Narjary, Age- 57, Occupation- *Oja*, Vill.- Nighamkola P.O.- Bilaspur Dist.- Kokrajhar, BTC, Assam on 22/09/2015.
17. Interview with Satiram Wary, Age- 55, Occupation- *Oja*, Vill.- Jalpaiguri, P.O.- Salakati, Dist.- Kokrajhar, BTC, Assam on 09/10/2015.
18. A kind of folded pot made from banana peels for containing holy water during religious ceremonies.
19. Interview with Baburam Narjary, Age- 59, Occupation- *Oja*, Vill.- Birhangaon, P.O.- Salakati, Dist.- Kokrajhar, BTC, Assam on 17/09/2015.
20. Interview with Ranjit Basumatary, C/O Late Kamleswar Basumatary, Age-55, Vill- 16 No. Mazabary, P.O.- Haltugaon, District- Kokrajhar, Pin-783370 on 29/12/2014.
21. Interview with Suren Basumatary, Age- 66, Occupation- *Oja*, Vill.- Deolguri, P.O. Harisinga, Dist.- Udalguri, Assam on 10/01/2017 & Interview with Haita Bargayary, Age-50, Occupation- *Oja*, Vill.- Gwjwnpuri, P.O- Jaharbari, Dist.- Kokrajhar, Assam on 08/10/2015.
22. Sekhar Brahma, *Religion of the Boros and their Socio-Cultural Transition*, DVS Publication, 2006, p. 16 & RSNEI, p. 176.
23. RBSCT, p. 17.
24. *Ibid.*, 16 & HCB, p. 220.
25. SHBA, p. 134 & HCB, p. 220.

26. RBSCT, p. 16 & Phukan Ch. Basumatary, "Bathou as an Ethic Religion: Archetype of Religious Practice and Tradition of the Boros" in *North East India Past and Present ethno-History of Tribes and other Communities*, Volume 1, Edited by Oinam Ranjit Singh, Global Publishing House, India, 2016, p. 69.
27. RBSCT, p. 16.
28. RSNEI, pp. 178-179.
29. RSNEI, p. 179 & SHBA, p. 135.
30. SHBA, pp. 142-143.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 143.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 146-147 & RBSCT, p. 15 & RSNEI, p. 177.
33. Interview with Gunaram Daimary, Age-65, Occupation- Ex. Village Headman Vill.- Majgaon, P.O.- Bhakatpara, Dist.- Udalguri, Pin- 784190 on 27/01/2016 & Binay Kr. Brahma, *Boroni Fwrbw*, N.L. Publication, Kokrajhar, 2011, p. 25.
34. Interview with Amarendra Mushahary, Age-78, Occupation- Ex. Village Headman, Vill.- Batabari, P.O.- Aflagaon, Dist. Kokrajhar, pin- 783346 on 17/11/2016.
35. *Ibid.*
36. Dr. Kameswar Brahma, *A Study in Cultural Heritage of the Boros*, Bina Library, Guwahati, 1st Ed. 1998, rept.2009, p. 127 & Dr. Kameswar Brahma, *A Study of Socio-Religious Beliefs, Practices and Ceremonies of the Bodos with Special Reference to the Bodos of Kokrajhar District*, Punthi Pustak, Calcutta, 1992, p. 179.
37. ASSRB, p. 190.
38. Bhaben Narzi, *Boro Kocharini Somaj Arw Harimu*, Chirang Publication Board, Kajalgaon, 2011, p. 154 & Binay Kumar Brahma, *Boroni Subung Harimu*, N.L. Publication, Kokrajhar, 2012, p. 31.
39. ASCHB, p. 129.
40. ASSRB, p. 189.
41. BKSAH, p. 154.
42. Indramalati Narzary, *Boro Harimu Arw Tunlai Bijirnai*, Kokrajhar, 1st Ed. 2005, 2nd Ed. 2010, p. 23
43. ASSRB, p. 187.
44. BHATB, p. 25.

45. ASSRB, p. 189.
46. Interview with Jatindra Brahma, Age- 59, Occupation- School Teacher, S/O Late Jarmoni Brahma, Vill.- Ouguri, Dist. Chirang, Assam on 23/05/2016.
47. Interview with Ramen Ramchiary, Age- 65, Occupation- *Oja*, Vill.- Huzuwa New Colony, P.O. Koklabari (Simla Bazar), Dist.- Baska, Assam on 09/09/2016 & Rupnath Basumatary, “Kherai”, in *Arjinai*, A Souvenir of 100 years Centenary Kherai Festival of Shyamgaon Village, Edited by Robin Bargayary, Kokrajhar, 2007, p. 87 & ASSRB, p. 174.
48. ASCHB, p. 112.
49. Dr. Anil Boro, *Folk Literature of the Boros: An Introduction*, Adhunik Prakashan, Guwahati, 2001, p. 14.
50. BKSAH, p. 160.
51. BSH, p. 13; Birendra Giri Basumatary, *Boro Harimuni Mahar Mushree*, N.L. Publications, Guwahati, 1993, pp. 37-38.
52. A kind of reeds used by the Bodo in their religious ceremony.
53. ASSRB, pp. 179-183 & BF, p. 20 & BSH, p. 17 & BKSAH, pp. 166-173 & BHMM, p. 37.
54. RSNEI, p.180 & ASSRB, p. 183.
55. ASSRB, p. 179.
56. RBSCT, p. 15.
57. RSNEI, p. 179.
58. RBSCT, pp. 20-21 & RSNEI, p. 179.