

CHAPTER - V

CULTURAL LIFE

Culture is the way of life of group of people, consisting of learned pattern of behaviour and thought passed on from one generation to the next. The notion includes the group's beliefs, values, language, political organisation, and economic activity, as well as its equipment, and techniques, and art forms (referred to as material culture).¹ Cultures are developed by and transmitted through societies, which can be defined as self-perpetuating human groups. The culture of a particular group of a people binds them together as a social entity. It acts as a binding force, holding people together by common thoughts, beliefs, and traditions. It also helps to regulate human nature, even interfering to some extent with how often and what the individual should behave or eat. Cultures also define reality, influencing one's perception of the world and explaining the supernatural.

The cultures of a society change gradually, picking up new ideas and dropping old one's; but many of the culture of the past have been so persistent and self-contained that the impact of sudden change has torn them apart, uprooting their people psychologically. Sometimes cultures of the modern world change with such rapidity that members of an older generation can easily feel that the whole fabrics of their standards and beliefs are thrown out now.

The Bodos has always been living as a social animal from the remote past. The Bodos, who live in a society, conform to the standards of thought and behavioural patterns including their customs, habits, beliefs, values and institutions that bind them together as a social entity. The elements of Bodo culture are a part and parcel of the Mongoloid (Kirata) culture. In his monograph on *Ao Naga Tribes of Assam*, W.C. Smith mentioned thirteen outstanding characteristics of Mongoloid culture. Of these the Mongoloid Bodos have at present retained five modified characteristics common to other Mongoloid (Kirata) people; namely, (i) they have the habit of betel-chewing; (ii) they have the aversion to milk as an article of food; (iii) they have a simple loom for weaving cloth; (iv) they have a large type of shield used in war; and (v) they have often changing residences in isolated regions with a crude (primitive) form of agriculture.²

The Bodo culture is very rich and multifaceted. The Mongoloid Bodo culture of Assam has influenced the Indo-Aryan Assamese culture to a great extent and vice versa.

RELIGION:

Religion in essence involves belief in supernatural entities towards which sacred attitudes are directed. Any kind of religious beliefs had recognised the existence of one or more deities, spirits and demons, one or more souls, providence, magic and so on. The notions like sacred and profane are subjective feelings of fear, wonder, veneration evoked by the supernatural. "Religion may be defined", as G., Thomson observes, "as a system of practices and beliefs on assumption that the world is subject to the control of supernatural force or agency which can be influenced by prayers and sacrifices, and is apprehended by faith as opposed to reason".³

Assam and its earlier name of Kamarupa, is better known to the Hindu India as a land of magic and witchcraft with its famous Tantric shrine of *Kamakhya* with which it is frequently associated together *Kamarupa-Kamakhya*.⁴ The very name *Kamarupa* by which Assam was known in the medieval period signifies a land of necromancy and magic, and it 'has a religious association.'⁵ According to the Puranic legend *Kamadeva* here recovered his original form after having been burnt by the wrath of *Siva*, and so the country was named *Kamarupa*. This indicates that *Kamarupa* is a land where even a dead man could be restored to life. The popular belief is that in *Kamarupa* a man can take any form he desires (*Kama*—Desire: *rupa*: Form).⁶ It is to be mentioned here that in Bodo, *Kam* means burnt and *rupa* means form, hence, *Kamarupa* means getting back of original form after burnt. It has been very significantly pointed out by Dr.S.K. Chatterji that "the worship of the Great mother in some of Her various shrines of Assam and East Bengal particularly in *Kamakhya* near Gauhati, is looked upon as being originally Kirata or Tibeto-Burman."⁷ The *Yogini Tantra* frankly confesses that the religion of the *Yogini Pitha* is of *Kirata* origin: *Siddhsi yogini-pithe dharmah kairatajah matah*.⁸ On the other hand, the *Kalika Purana* broadly describes the original inhabitants of Kamarupa as *Kiratas*.⁹ According to K.L. Barua, "Bodo people were no doubt the *Kiratas* and *Mlechhas* spoken of in the Mahabharata".¹⁰ In the accounts of the medieval travelers and writers magic appears to be a noticeable feature of Assam. There is a story associated with Mardana, the disciple of Guru Nanak. Mardana was bewitched by a woman and transformed into a lamb and was later on restored to his original human

form by the Guru. The story that anyone who visits Assam is changed into lamb has received wide currency all over India.¹¹ The Muhammedan chronicles also observed that the people of Assam practiced magic and sorcery. “Whoever happens to step into the land, becomes enchanted and cannot find his way to come out of it. The idol temple of Kamakhya, Lunachumari and Ismail Jogi are notorious for magic and sorcery”.¹² Even today sorcery and magic are practiced in many parts of the province and are resorted to for various purposes. Thus, from the foregoing discussion, it appears that religious practices of the Bodos are predominant in Assam since remote past.

Religion has played a paramount role in the life of the Bodos. Influence of religion is discernible in every important activity of Bodo socio-economic and cultural life. They have followed their own religious systems which are free from influence by other religions. “The religion of the Bodo”, as B. H. Hogdson observes, “is distinguished, like their manners and customs, by the absence of everything that is shocking ridiculous, or incommensurable. It lends no sanction to barbarous rites, nor does it hamper the commerce of life with tedious insane ceremonial observances”¹³ Their religion ‘confines itself almost exclusively to the propitiation of the superior powers by offerings and sacrifices’.¹⁴ It is customary that in events whether it is birth, naming, marriages and funeral, is first invested to perform the preliminary sacrifices to the gods. In fact, “A Bodo is born, is named, is weaned, is invested with the toga virilis, without any intervention of the priest, who is summoned to marriages and funerals chiefly, if not solely, to perform the preliminary sacrifice, which is indispensable to consecrate a feast, for no Bodo will touch flesh, the blood of which has not been offered to the gods”.¹⁵ It is true that though their worship seems to be consists ‘starry host’ of sensible objects with impressive reference of the power, “but still adored as divine, and even as a divine Unity.”

Belief of Bodos in one God:

Bodo traditional religion and its intrinsic ideas are unique. Their religion is essentially monotheistic in nature. It speaks of only one God whom they called *Bathou*. He is infinite called *Obong laori*, the creator of all creatures known as *Swrjigiri*. W.W.Hunter observes that “in matters of religion, although they (Bodos) acknowledge but one supreme God, they also believe in the existence of numerous evil spirits, whose wrath must be continually appeased by prayers and sacrifices”.¹⁶ Though they believe in

the existence and active participation in the affairs of men of certain invisible spiritual beings who are considered to be the authors of sickness, famine, earthquake etc, but they have the conception of the supreme God and the Goddess or of the both.

Bodos believed that *Bathou* created the universe from His formless existence. He descended on the Great Void with His human characteristics, viz., five organs of knowledge and five organs of action. In Bodo language there is an expression about the Heavenly voice of God, thus:

Laoba laoswm, Kaoba kaoswm,
Ada gwswm, Doiao barswm

Here the meaning of *Lao* is organs of knowledge and *Ba* means five; therefore, *Laoba Laoswm* refers to five organs of knowledge. Likewise, *Kao* means parts or pieces and *Ba* means five, and hence, *Kaoba Kaoswm* means five parts of the body or five organs of action. The literal meaning of *Ada* is elder brother, it suggests a deeper meaning, i.e., first, noblest man; *Gwswm* means heart, *Dwiao* means into the river or ocean and *Barswm* means jump, therefore, *Dwiao Barswm* means jump into the worldly life of the ocean.¹⁷ The underlying meaning of the expression is that Infinite God with noblest soul and the purest heart assumed the form of man with all human characteristics and descended on this earth to live a worldly life here below. It implies that the Boundless Deity, though transcended of the world, is yet imminent in all his manifestations. It also speaks of incarnation of God.¹⁸

Bathou is attributed to the creation of five elements of creation. *Aham Guru* uttered five words, and these are *Ong (om)*, *Hhring*, *Kling*, *Fut* and *Che* at regular intervals, and with the utterance of these five words, five elements were created and these are *Ha* (Earth), *Dwi* (water), *Bar* (Air), *Okhrang* (Sky) and *Or* (Light).¹⁹ *Aham Guru* is the infinite God to the Bodos, at His first appearance in the universe in the form of man. He called Himself *Shri borai*. He is also known as *Jiw Borai* or *Siw Borai*, which must have subsequently been transformed into *Siva* by the Hinduism.²⁰ According to their traditional believe, *Shri Borai* first created His own wife *Shri Buri* and then the first man, who is known as *Monsing Sing*. *Aham Guru* is the creator of all and *Shri Borai* is His own incarnation.²¹

The Boros of the northern bank of the Brahmaputra valley narrate their origin of creation in relation to the worship of *Bathou* the supreme God among the Boros. *Bathou*

represents the five elements of creation. He is also known as *Sibrai* (Siva). *Sibrai* with the help of his wife created this universe and the first man, *Monsinsin*. As *Monsinsin* remained a long-life celibate, *Sibrai* and his wife created *Darimuba*, the male and *Singridouba*, the female in order to propagate the human population or the mankind (*mansoi*). *Bathou* created the *Siju* Plant (*Euphorbia splendens*), the first tree which stands as an emblem of the supreme God at the altar.²²

B.H. Hodgson calls the religion of the Bodos “The Natural Religion of Man”.²³ He further remarks, “A good many of the household or national divinities of the Bodo are elemental gods, chiefly rivers. Batho, however, the chief god of the Bodo, is not an elemental god”.²⁴ Some authors like Stack, Gait and others have opined that Bodo religion is animistic.²⁵ According to Rev. S. Endle, “The religion of the Kachari (Bodo) race is distinctly of the type commonly known as ‘animistic’, and its underlying principle is characteristically one of fear or dread”.²⁶

But the scholars like Dr. P.C. Bhattacharya asserted that “Bodos are not animistic. They are worshippers of *Bathow* (*Bathou*), the Supreme God. They have minor gods and goddesses. They believe in ghosts and spirits also. But the conception of the Supreme God is Predominant”.²⁷ Huxley has reiterated the theories of Aristotle that all the primitive religions are monotheistic in their origin.²⁸ It may be said that Bodo religion is not animistic in nature, but share the same status with the ancient *Rg Vedic* religion. Different Bodo legends, folklores, and rituals have adumbrated the belief of the Bodos in one personal God *Bathou Borai* or *Bathou Raja* who is the Supreme Lord and the creator of all. *Bathou* is attributed with five elements of creation, five best qualities, viz., truth, knowledge, power, beauty, goodness.²⁹

The Traditional Religion of the Bodos:

The traditional religion of the Bodos is known as *Bathou dwhwrwm*. The principal deity of *Bathou* is the *Bathou Borai* who is worshiped as the Supreme Beings and *Bathou buri* is His consort. *Bathou* is the guardian of the family interest and family honour. The worship of principal deity *Bathou* is never represented in idol form, but is well in evidence through his living symbol, the *Sijou* plant (*Euphorbia splendens*), which is often to be seen in the Bodo homestead surrounded by a circular fence of split bamboo. That the *Bathou* is worshiped as Supreme Being by the Bodos is testified from the expression of the following old saying:

*Mwidera gabw Odal gudiao,
Bodoa gabw Bathou gudiao.*

(i.e., Elephant cries under the tree of Odal,
The Bodos pray under the altar of *Bathou*.)

It is difficult to say since when the Bodos have followed the tradition of *Bathou* worship but it is believed that the Bodos have followed their traditional religion since time immemorial. *Bathou* is still worshiped by the Bodos as their principal deity. *Bathou* worship is very old is evident from the hymn or mantra performed in *Bathou* rituals:

*Aia thaidwng aikhou gardwng,
Apha thaidwng aphakhou gardwng;
Teobw bwrai Bathou moharazakhou
Phuizinw garakhwi zwngw.*

(i.e., My mother died and I removed her to the cremation ground;
my father died and I removed him to the cremation ground;
but we have not given up the worship of *Bathou*,
the old one and the Supreme king above all.)

The Philosophy of Bathou Religion:

The basic foundation of any religion is belief and hence religion and philosophy are very closely related to each other. The fundamental philosophy of the Bodos and their morale codes are deeply inherent in *Bathou Dhwrwm* or *Bathou* religion. *Bathou* is the chief deity of the Bodo pantheon, and there is element of 'five' in the name of deity. The name *Bathou* is the compound word of two formations -*Ba* means five and *thou* mean deep; hence, *Bathou* means the 'five deep spiritual Entity'.³⁰ The supreme deity known as *Bathou Brai* is the custodian of the five basic elements of creation. Therefore, the *Bathou* is associated with the numeral five in His quality and function. The *Euphorbia splendens* is characterised by five ridges and five depressions, which corresponds to five elements of creation and represent truth, knowledge, power beauty, and goodness. This particular plant befittingly symbolises *Bathou*. The Bodos believe that the *Sijou* plant was created first among the vegetations in this universe and men took shelter under its shadow,³¹ hence they accepted it as a symbol of the Supreme God *Bathou*. The philosophy of Bodo is intimately connected with the numeral five of

Bathou is evident from the hymn or *mantra* performed in *Bathou* rituals. The hymn runs thus:

Thaigirni khonga khongba
Sijouni siria siriba
Siphungni gudunga gudungba
Bathouni bandwa bandwba
Boro bwraini asara phongba.

(The *ou* fruit has five ridges, *Sijou* plant has five edges, *Siphung* (Bodo flute) has five holes, the altar of *Bathou* has five rings, and the Bodos have five principles.)

The followers of *Bathou* religion try to pursue the teaching of five basic principles in their day-to-day life. *Bathou* emphasises the necessity of five-fold self-realization. These are: (i) Realisation of the *Sijou*, the Supreme soul; (ii) Linking up the *Jiwma* (human soul) with the *Sijou*, Supreme Being; (iii) Realisation of *Mainao* (the Goddess Lakshmi), (iv) Realisation of five great element of creation, viz., Earth (*Ailong*), Air (*Agrang*), Air (*Khoila*), Light or Fire (*Sanja-burli*), Ether or Sky (*Raj Khungri*); and (v) Realisation of the need of worldly affairs.

The religion is based on the following five preaching: (i) Prayer and meditation of God, (ii) Helping others to acquire religious knowledge, (iii) Helping and offering alms to the poor and needy, (iv) Love and affection for all, (v) Make united effort to solve the complex problem.

Bathou religion instructs upon the followers to follow the five-fold principles of love. These are: Love for God, love for man, love for lower animals, love for trees and vegetation, and finally, love for one's motherland.³² *Bathou* propagates hatred for five sins: (i) Sin of murder, (ii) Sin of coveting and stealing other's possession, (iii) Sin of speaking a lie, (iv) Sin of indulging in illicit and unnatural intercourse, (v) Sin of keeping with bad company

Besides, the Bodos have five social laws called *Bad* and these are *Agor bad*, *Daoki bad*, *Kaoali bad*, *Koulobod Bad*, and all the social offences that one could commit are classified into five categories and are dealt with in accordance with these five '*Bads*'.³³ The creation of five elements of creation also related to five principles of the *Bathou*. *Aham Guru*, infinite God, uttered five words, and these are *Ong (om)*, *Hhring*, *Kling*, *Fut* and *Che* at regular intervals, and with the utterance of these five

words, five elements were created and these are *Ha* (Earth), *Dwi* (water), *Bar* (Air), *Okhrang* (Sky), and *Or* (Light).

Monsinsin, the first human being is no other than *Aham Guru* himself who emerged in this Universe in human form with five organs of action and five organs of knowledge, and lived a social life therein.

Thus, this culture of five of the Bodos (Boros) emanated from *Monsinsin* the first figure of human. It is believed that *Monsinsin*, the first man was ripest in his knowledge and wisdom and had handed down five laws to the Bodo (Boro) population to conduct themselves in their social life here on earth, and therefore, it is possible that the idea of five numbers was applied to other aspects of life.³⁴ *Bathou* is, therefore, associated with the multiple of five number and hence is symbolized with *Siju* (*Sijou*) plant (*Euphorbia splendens*) characterised by five ridges and five depressions. Besides, the *Bathou* altar is encircled by five rings of bamboo splits symbolizing five traditional gods as much as the five elements of creation.³⁵

BODO DEITIES:

The Bodos like Hindus appear to be polytheist. Besides, *Bathou Borai* and *Bathou Buri*, they believe in different god and goddesses. The Bodo deities are generally classified into two categories, viz., (1) Domestic deities, and (2) Community deities.

1. Domestic Deities:

The domestic deities worshipped by the Bodos are found in two forms: (i) one is in the form of male deity called *Bathou Borai*, who is worshipped as *Bathou*; and (i) another one is in the form of female deity known as *Mainao* otherwise called *Maothansri* or *Bhulli Buri*. She is consort of *Bathou Borai* and hence known as *Bathou Buri* also.

i. Worship of *Bathou*

Bathou or *Bathou Borai* is worshipped in two ways: one is worshipped in the inner room i.e., in the *Ishing* room of the *Noma No* (main house) and the other is worshipped in the north east corner of yard of the household by installing *Bathou* altar.

In the Bodo household on the northern side main house *Noma No* is constituted east-west lengthwise. There are three rooms, namely, *Ishing*, *Okhong* and *Khopra*. Out of it in the eastern most room called *ishing* there is a provision of Cooking and worship.

The oven of kitchen is laid by the eastern side wall of the *Ishing* while near the northern wall there lie two mole-hill type foundations of sacred altar. This altar is built with earth which is about two inches high and one and half feet long, and is called *daham*. This altar is the place of the God-in-chief *Bathou Borai* or *Sibrai* and goddess *Mainao Buri* (*Mao-thanshri*). At this altar women especially pay their oblation and make offerings. It is the preliminary duty of the family members to offer all items of the daily cooked food to offer to the god and goddesses at this altar before devouring. It is believed that God being the creator of all, the Almighty is to be offered first as a mark of reverence and for His due permission to consume. In this inner room *Ishing* none other than family members can enter, even married off daughter also.

The other provision for worshipping the *Bathou*, the Supreme God, is made by planting sapling of *Sijou* (*Euphorbia splendens*) on the altar of the north-eastern corner of the courtyard.

Bathou Altar:

There is no provision for idol worship in *Bathou* religion, but the *Sijou* plant is considered as the living symbol of *Bathou* or *Bathou Borai*.

At the north-east corner of the courtyard and in front of the granary house, parallel to the room *Ishing* of the main house (*Noma no*), an altar about a foot high is built. At the altar the *sijou* plant (*Euphorbia splendens*) is planted. A little to the south of the *Sijou* tree a basil plant (*tulansi*) is planted. Around the altar there is a fencing of narrow pieces of bamboo-split with nine pairs of small bamboo posts. The narrow pieces of the bamboo splits are twisted five times around the nine pair's pieces of bamboo posts or splits. There is a small passage in front of the altar. The complete altar is known as, *Bathou*, where the god-in-chief *Bathou Borai* is represented by the *Sijou* tree while the goddess-in-chief *Bathou Buri* is represented by the basil *tulansi*. The members of the family worship the *Bathou Borai*, and the *Bathou Buri* regularly everyday in the evening lighting a lamp on the altar.³⁶

ii. Worship of Mainao:

Mainao is the consort of *Bathou* and equally revered with him. The goddess *mainao* is represented in the interior of each house by a bamboo post about three feet high, fixed in the ground and surmounted by a small earthen cup field with rice. Besides offering the daily cook food at this symbol before devouring, females of the family,

once a month, make offerings of eggs. She is the “Guardian of the rice fields” or “the protectress of the paddy fields”. There is a belief in Bodo tribes that in harvesting period if they offer eggs to the deity then it will protect the land and the people and increase the production of rice. They worship her during the *Asu* and *Sali* crops. So, they believe in two goddesses *Asu Mainao* and *Sali Mainao* as the forms of *Lakshmi*. Being the consort of the *Bathou Borai* or *Sibrai*, she is also called *Bathou Buri* or sometimes as *Maothansri*, *Song Buri*, etc. She is the protectors of the household, family wealth and paddy in the field; hence her name is *Mainao*, for ‘*mai*’ means paddy and ‘*na*’ (*nao*) means ‘to keep, to watch over’. It is equivalent to Hindu goddess *Lakshmi*.

She is symbolised by a bamboo pole decorated with a piece of red cloth and planted on a lump of earth raised in the easternmost part of the main house of every traditional Bodo. Where the *Bathou Raja* is symbolised by *siju* plant (*Euphorbia splendens*) and is in every household, *Bathou* altar is installed at the north-eastern corner of the courtyard.³⁷

The Bodos whose basic occupation is agriculture, cultivates variety of paddy crops round the year. So they worship *Mainao*, in the name of every seasonal paddy crops in the hope of profuse growth. So the *Mainao* goddesses are associated with the different varieties of paddy and other seasonal crops, such as, “*Asu Mainao*, *Kharm Mainao*, *Bashmuti Mainao*, *Jhul Manao*, *Damua mainao*”, etc.³⁸

Just beside the altar of *Mainao Buri* in the *Ishing* room an earthen pot is placed where day to day family use of uncooked rice is stowed. This earthen pot is known as *maihandw*. Inside the pot of *maihandw* two pebbles is inserted. These two pebbles are regarded as the symbol of God *Bathou Borai* and Goddess *Bathou Buri*. It is a custom that every day female member of the family who engages in cooking has to venerate the pot of *maihandw* by laying a hand on it before taking out of rice for cooking from the pot of *maihandw*.³⁹

2. Community Deities:

There is a special custom of community worship to the deities of the Bodos for the well being of the community in the village wise which is known as *Garja Hwnai*. The term *Garja* in Bodo bears the meaning of expulsion, i.e. *Garja* or *garjanai* or *Garnai* means expulsion or discharging anything.⁴⁰ And *Hwnai* means acting or performing. Hence *Garja Hwnai* signifies the act of discharging or expulsion. In the

opinion of Bhaben Narzi,⁴¹ an eminent Bodo scholar, *Garja* means ‘*Niskriti*’, in Assamese which connote deliverance of danger or getting off free from danger. But question arises from what things they discharge or from what danger they deliver free? The greatest virtue of Bodo social life is their avowed sanctity. In every walk of life, they strive to preserve their purity at any cost whether it is in the domain of family or in community and nonattendance of it may earn misfortunes to them. To maintain their sanctified social life, they have to undergo through certain religious sanctions. The Bodos had a notion that certain invisible spiritual being called *Mwdai* are the authors of sickness, famine, earthquakes and misfortunes. It is believed that the village people because of their free intercourse in the various functions of religious and social festivals, and their partaking in feast, merry-making, walking and drinking beverage from one house to another house got contamination. Under the circumstances the spiritual beings *Mwdai* of the village turn out to be wrath and unleash varied calamities to the villagers which they called *Mwdai Homnai*, i.e. caught of evil spirit. They also believe *Mwdais* are for the most part had malevolent motives and their ill-will towards mankind be propitiated and bought by frequent offerings of viands. Therefore, village community purify themselves by discharging the evils or pollution and the wrath of evil spirits is appeased by prayers and sacrifices through the *Garja* worship. The Bodos believed that public religious performance through *Garja Hwnai* diseases, famine, and misfortunes of all kinds be removed from the village community and all-round prosperity of the villagers may also be expected. In olden times the Bodos performed *Garja* ceremonies at regular intervals as a means of purification and protection of the villagers.

It should be remarked that the Bodos never symbolise their gods by means of images, their worships being offered to the spirit only. They have neither temple nor any fixed time for worship. The public religious worship is performed outside the houses, usually in an open place of worship generally surrounded by rows of foliated trees or bamboo groves which often to be seen some fifteen or twenty yards from the village and is known as the *Garjasali*. It is also called *Thansali*. In this place, the villagers erect three small hut-type shed to protect the altar from rain and stray animals.

If the individual family or the village community suffers severe trouble from sickness or other like causes, they consider it to be *Mwdai Homnai* or caught of evil spirit and as a deliverance from danger they perform *Garja* worship to eradicate the evil

spirit. Sometimes in the affair of illicit case of some person in the village, the villagers perform *Garja* worship to purify themselves as well as to appease the gods and goddess.

There is a tradition of the Bodos to test out the condition of purity of the villagers before performing the *Garja* worship. In a way to test it, one day ahead of the *Garja* worship, in the evening on the proposed place of the *Garja* worship is cleaned well with holly water and a piece of plantain leave is laid on which a pair of basil leaves, nine grains of uncooked rice is placed together and then covers the entire articles with a *don* (a bamboo basket). On the next day, in the early morning, the things are observed by the villagers. On examining if the articles are found intake, it is believed to be right and if the contents are found in disperse manner, then the villagers or the village is considered to be in impure. Under the circumstances the villagers suspect some one to be involved in illicit or immoral activities where upon culpable persons are compelled to confess before the altar of the gods of the *Garja* worship.

Forms of *Garja*:

There are as many as nineteenth forms of *Garja*. In former times in the performance of each *Garja* were borne upon by each clan of the villagers. The names of different forms of *Garja* are *Lokhi Garja*, *Asu Garja*, *Gao garja*, *Songe Songe Garja*, *Garja Sibsins*, *Garja Dibsins*, *Maoria Garja*, *Saoria Garja*, *Sem Semali Garja*, *Dosomali Garja*, *Bwrai Raja Garja*, *Samo Ramo Ggarja*, *Kalo Dano Garja*, *Nelo Dano Garja*, *Daoyang Garja*, *Molan Garja*, *Thia Garja*, *Gu-Gu Garja*, and *Othoro Shanti Garja*.

According to Kameswar Brahma, there are some gods of *Garja* who are benevolent for the people.⁴² They are:

- (i) *Lakhi (Lwki) Garja*: She is Goddess of Wealth also known as *Mainao*.
- (ii) *Asu Garja*: A kind of winter Paddy crops whose god is worshipped for profuse growth.
- (iii) *Dhan Kubir* or *Dhwn Kuber Garja*: This god is known as god of prosperity.
- (iv) *Borai (Bwrai) Raja Garja*: The supreme God *Bathou Borai* also identified as *Bwrai Raja*. He is regarded as the guardian of the welfare of the family as well as of the village.

God and Goddesses Worshipped in *Garja Hwnai*:

During the performance of *Garja* worship a host of deities are worshipped. These deities are regarded to be attributed with different position and functions. They

are propitiated by offering different kinds of sacrifices in accordance with their positions. Among these deities, however, there exist Bodos and non-Bodos. They are given below:-

Names of Bodo Deities: - 1. *Bwrai Raja*, the supreme God, 2. *Maothansri*, the Goddess of wealth, 3. *Akaishri*, 4. *Jwmwn Jwla*, 5. *Boromali*, 6. *Sainasi*, 7. *Budaru*, 8. *Jekai Bwrai*, 9. *Kobai Bwrai*, 10. *Gambari*, 11. *Dwhwmsri*, 12. *Mwmsri*, 13. *Maoywd Bwrai*, 14. *Maoywd Buri*, 15. *Ai Kamaikhya*.⁴³

Besides, there are other deities who are regarded to be descendants of the *Bwrai Raja*. They are *Bwrai Chodhuri*, *Nisan dhara*, *Phanka dhara*, *Mech-Mechani*, *Koch-Kochani*, *Rabha-Rabhani*, *Hira-Hirani*, *Gangar - Gangarni*.⁴⁴ (The last one is the name of the people of the Bhutan and Sikkim). But the names of these deities are seemed to be the names of cognate segments of the Bodos except *Nisan dhara* and *Phanka dhara*. It seems probable that some of the eminent deified mortals of them are invoked in the *Garja* Worship.

There are several names of *Kungri*, i.e. princess. Their names also addressed by the *Oja* at the time of *Garja* worship. They are - *Alai Khungri*, *Bilai Khungri*, *Ish Khungri*, *Bish Khungri*, *Maya Khungri*, *Shaya Khungri*, *Daisa Khungri*, etc.⁴⁵ It seems that they are in all likelihood merely names of deified mortals of some pre-eminence of their fellow women.

During the performance of *Garja* worship different names of the spirit of *Khubir* also get their place. *Khubir* or *Khuber* is believed to be god of wealth. These include *Ish Khubir*, *Bish Khubir*, *Akhkla Khubir*, *Batana Khubir*, *Kal Khubir*, *Shaya Khubir*, *Maya Khubir*, *Makhana Khubir*, *Langthia Khubir*, and *Patal Khubir*. It is said that the intent of the spirit of *Khubir* is to induce the people to propitiate them by enticing the people for wealth or to perform unnatural work for their favour.

Names of *Harsha* or Non-Bodo Deities:-

It should be mentioned that quite a lot of *Harsha Mwdai*, i.e. non-Bodo deities are placed along with the Bodo *mwdai* in the *Garja* worship. Their names are *Baro Gopal*, *Baro Gopini*, *Thakurani*, *Laokar Gosai*, *Langthia Gosai*, *Boromali*, *Mahadeo Bwrai*, *Shollosa Gopal*, *Shollosa Gopini*, *Jagat Guru*, *Jagat Nath*, *Mahamaya* and Mahomedan saint *peer Saheb*.⁴⁶ The chief of non-Bodo god is *Mahadeo* or *Mahadev*.

He has numerous followers whose names are *Sila Rai*, *Rupa Rai*, *Bera Bhanga*, *Santha Mara*, *Dhamka Mara*, etc.

Bishahari also worshipped in *Garja* whose followers are *Ai Kali*, *Maya Kali*, *Shaya Kali*, *Ai Barmani*, etc.

Bathou followers of the Bodos do not worship the Sun and the moon. The Sun and the moon created by the God *Aham Guru* has been enjoying as day and night by all. It is perceived that the burning of the light of earthen lamp of any ceremonial worship is like the worship of the Sun and the moon. But the deities of the rivers, hills, etc. are worshipped in the community worship of *Garja*.

Time of *Garja* Worship:

The Bodos have neither fix date nor any fixed time for *Garja* worship. Of course, *Garja* worship is usually performed two times in a year. The dates for these bi-annual worships are apparently settled by the village elders to meet the public convenience. The first ceremony of *Garja* worship is performed in the *Jeth* and *Ashar* (*Ahar*) month of Assamese Calendar. This ceremony of *Garja* is termed as *Phwjaonai* or *Basainai*, *Garja*, i.e., to let floating away on the river. The oblation made to the different deities by offering various sacrificial materials are placed on the *bhela*, i.e., raft which are made of the plantain trees and set afloat on a river. The special object of this worship is to propitiate the evil spirits who are considered to be authors of the disease like cholera demon or other malignant disease, etc. No one dares to touch these objects, for fear he should become possessed by these diseases. By this act the people believed that the evil spirits are being expelled from the village. The next ceremony of *Garja* is performed in the *Kati* and *Aghana* month of Assamese calendar. This *Garja* worship is known as *Mainao Bwkhangnai*, or lifting of the goddess of wealth. Goddess *Mainao* is also known as *Lwkhi*. Therefore this *Garja* is also called *Lwkhi Garja*. This worship is specially signifying for welcome ceremony of the goddess of wealth to the agrarian village in the hope of profuse harvest and prosperity.

Mode of *Garja* Worship:

(a) *Preliminary Worship of Garja*

There is a custom of performing a bounden ceremony on the eve of worship of *Garja* and is called *Salami*. Its intent is to purify the villagers prior to the *garja* worship. On the occasion of *Salami*, *Douri* made offering of a fowl as an oblation to *Bathou*

Bwrai and then he sprinkles holy water to every household of the villagers as a means of purification which he carries in a pot called *Lotha Gubwi*. The whole villagers have to maintain purity and cleanliness in the night for the performance of *Garja* worship.

The place of *Garja Sali* where the ceremony of *Garja* worship is going to be solemnised is cleaned in advance. For installing the altar three thatch huts, called *Dera* is erected by the villagers. Some essential materials like *Jou* (rice beer), few grains of uncooked rice, and a pair of fresh *Dokhona* (lady garment of the Bodos) and gold ornaments are kept ready inside the shed at night. Though the camp is left without any guard, the things remain intact as no one dares to steal or touch these things for fear of god. Next day in the early morning every householders of the village clean their houses along with clothes, utensils, etc. and then come out to *Garja Sali* for performing the worship. The whole exercise of this pre-ceremony is known as the *Salami*.

(b) *Arrangement of Altar of the Deities*

The villagers construct three small huts type structure in the worship place called *Garja Sali*. Of this a special stilt house called *Baisang no* is erected with a provision of *Jangkla*, i.e., ladder to climb up the house. *Bwrai Raja* is given specific altar in this stilt house. Other lesser gods are accommodate in the another huts arranged for them. Their seats are extended towards the left side of the *Bwrai Raja*.

To accommodate *Harsha Mwdai* or non-Bodo deities, separate hut is erected at a few distance of the right side of the Bodo Deities.

To each of altar two small plantain leaves smeared with vermilion is laid on which a pair of betel nuts and betel leaves, a lighted earthen lamp and burnt incense is placed in the huts.

(c) *Oblation to the Deities*

Different deities are propitiated by offering different kinds of materials and sacrifices in accordance with their nature and positions. For instances, *Bwrai Raja* is offered a male pig, a chicken and a pot of rice beer. In the name of *Maothansri* or *Mainao* (the goddess of wealth), a bunch of ripe banana, a chicken and a jar of rice beer is offered. For *Jwmwn Bwrai* a male pig and for *Jwmwn Buri* a female pig is sacrificed. To the *Maut Bwrai* and *Maut Buri* sacrificial blood of a cock and its head is given. To the *Baro Gopal* and *Baro Gopinis* three pigeons are set free in the air. *Sanyasi Thakur*, a non-Bodo god is given a pigeon.

It is also usual to offer a pair of betel nuts and betel leaves, and a pair of banana fruits along with sacrifices to each god and goddess.

As a rule these oblations are made not by the village community as a whole, but by the *Douri*. From the beginning to the end of the *Garja* worship the entire function is performed by the *Douri* and in his work *Oja* always act as a guide of him. Of course, there are two kinds of *Douri*. One *Douri* is called *Bodo Douri* means for oblation to Bodo deities and the other one is known as *Harsha Douri* employed for offering to *Harsha* or non-Bodo deities. In spite of two *Douris*, still one person is engaged to propitiate the Muslim god *Peer Saheb* or *Nawab Badsha*.

While oblations are made in the name of each deities, the *Oja* or *Oja Bwrai* utter the *Mwntwr* (Mantras) squatting on his heels and in consonant with these *Mantras* offerings are extended to the respective god by the *Douri*. A peculiar custom existed in this ceremony is that while offering is made to the Muslim god *Peer Saheb* or *Nawab Badsha*, the word *Bismilla*, perhaps a sacred name of Muslim god, is uttered at the time of sacrifice of the cock.

“The names of the gods and goddesses differ from area to area. But the major gods and goddesses remain same. A great difference is found among the river-gods of different areas in the same state and its reason is probably due to different names of the rivers”.⁴⁷ The names of different Bodo pantheons found in the *Kherai* or *Garja* worshipped testifies the polytheistic nature of the Bodo religion, wherein the monotheistic belief also reflected through the Great diety *Bathou Borai*. The Bodos believe that god and goddesses have manifested from *Bathou Raja* in order to create the universe.

However the trends of change is noticeable now in the traditional religion of the Bathou. The recent moves towards innovation, has changed the traditional character of the *Bathou* religion. Today, *Bathou* is not a single cult but it has turned to be *Bathouism*, just like the Hinduism, having many new sects, which has added some new rites and rituals to Boro society.⁴⁸ That is why one can see different types of Bathou worship like *Gudi Bathou*, *Bibar Bathou*, *Moni Bathou*, *Zangkhras Bathou*, and so on. The most ancient and original form of Bathou worship is can be seen in *Gudi* or *Bwli Bathou* where the Bathou deities are worshipped with sacrifices of chicken, pigeon, goat, rice beer, etc.⁴⁹ But *Bibar Bathou*, a sect of Bathou worship where no animal sacrifices is

required for offering prayer oblations to the Bathou deities. They worship Bathou with flower and the easily available material used by the devotees. The place of *Doudini*, the female shaman who plays a key role of dancer and mediator between the devotees and the deities has now almost become non-entity. In *Bibar Bathou* the *Doudini* has no role at all. Now there is a trend of division of ethnic group within the Bodos taking their religious affiliation. In the eithies and nineties of the twentieth century there was an organised move under the name of *Bathou Dwhwrwmari Gautum* (All Bathou Religious Union) to introduce innovation and to refine the rituals and related religious practices of Bthou religion. Under their initiatives establishment of *Bathousali* or *Bathou thansali* i.e. temple or place of worship with the Bathou alter at the centre is started in the village. Regular prayers are held in the village of Bathou *thansali* on every Tuesday, the day considered auspicious by the followers of Bathour religion. On this day people also observe certain abstinence and taboo.⁵⁰ In the prayer they have also introduced *Bathou Aroj* i.e. prayer songs. Earlier the practice of *Aroj* or prayer song is quite unknown in the history of Bathou religion. In the occasion of prayer, along with the traditional musical instruments like *Kham* (big drum), *Siphung* (flute with five holes), *zotha* (cymbol), use of Harmonium also become a new feature in the Bathou worship. Many of them have converted to various sects of Hinduism and Christianity who discarded the traditional faith and customs.

Fair and Festivals:

Festivals form an indispensable part of all cultures of the human society. Almost societies whether primitive or modern have their own festivals and these are celebrated in one form or the other from the remote past. Their nature is ascertained by the seasons and religions followed by the people. It is assumed that the present festivals emanated from the beliefs and magical rituals of the primitive man. They performed magical rituals to fertility. William H. Hendelson observes: "Festivals held by the primitive peoples consisted of collective magic or religious rites for propitiation of evil spirits and invocation of friendly supernatural powers. The development of agriculture was accompanied by new festivals, also consisting of magical religious festivals, in connection with the seasons. Specially, with the vernal equinox and the winter solstice. Planting and harvesting were important festive occasions".⁵¹ A hunting-gathering

society, which simultaneously depended on agriculture too, inherited the tradition of celebrating their distinct colourful festivals and religious rituals, which mainly dealt with the passing of seasons. However, hunting has gone long back. Presently, since agriculture is the mainstay, naturally the festivals celebrated by people are closely connected with their original occupation.

Bodos observes various festivals round the year. The nature of their festivals is basically in two forms: religious festival and seasonal festival. Bodos being the agricultural people, most of the festivals are associated with agriculture which may rightly be looked as festivals of fertility. Hence the tradition of their festivals aims to assist in the promotion of abundant harvest.

Kherai Festival:

Kherai is the greatest religious festival of the Bodos.⁵² They have been observing it as a national festival of the community since time immemorial and it is an occasion when the entire atmosphere is agog with much enthusiasm and festive fervour. It is intended to propitiate “*Bathou*” or ‘*Sibrai*’ – chief deity of adoration of the Boro-Kacharis along with ‘*Mainao*’ (the Goddess of harvests) and host of other Gods and Goddess. ‘*Bathow*’ according to them represents the five basic elements called ‘*Panchabhut*’ (viz-the earth, air, water, ether and fire) out of which has emerged the human body and for that matter the entire universe) and the propitiation to this deity is, therefore, held to be on this basic philosophical idea.⁵³

Kherai is performed in the form of worship in conjunction with dance and songs with a view to propitiating *Bathou Bwrai*, *Mainao* and other deities so that the agricultural life of the community may thrive and bring prosperity. The ceremonial side of the festival is but a dramatic in nature and the inner significance of the dramatic prayer is intimately connected with materialistic philosophy of the pastoral Bodos. Therefore, the worship of *Kherai* signifies the materialistic desire of the Bodo people. It is the source of hope and prospect of agricultural life of the community.

The main objects of the *Kherai* festival is found in two ways: (i) The festival intended to protect and promote fertility of agriculture. The Bodos aspire to live happily, they pray for food. Being dependent on agriculture they seek help of god and goddesses to assist them in the promotion of abundant harvest; (ii) It aims to protect the community from misfortune, i.e., from illness, famine, and natural calamities. The

Bodos believe that the deities called *Mwdai* are originators of these misfortunes. Therefore to propitiate the gods and goddesses they perform *Kherai* worship.

Origin of the *Kherai*:

The origin of the *Kherai* is difficult to trace. Varied opinions have been given as regards the origin of the *Kherai*. In the words of Medini Choudhury, the term *Kherai* derived from the word *Kharnai*, i.e., *Khar* means to flee and *ai* means Goddess.⁵⁴ He pointed out a legend behind the genesis of the *Kherai* worship. The legend runs thus: “It says that there was in the olden days an old man named Jaraphagla. He was very fastidious about meals and was popularly known as Manamsu (Mwnamsu) brai i.e. one who does not take anything without first smelling it”.⁵⁵

The old man had seven married sons and used to make passes to each of the seven daughters-in-law. They did not dare to protest. But the youngest daughter-in-law (i.e. the youngest son’s wife) did not tolerate the advances of her father-in-law (i.e. the father-in-law) with equanimity and fled the house one day without anybody’s knowledge.

Jaraphagla went in all directions in search of his daughter-in-law and having failed to trace her, arranged a *Kherai puja*. Originally the songs and dances that went with it aimed at exposing the vices and the outrageous behaviour of old man.

In course of time, however, as is the usual pattern for all Bro-Kachari festivals, aspects of agricultural life of the community came to be pronounced in the features of *puja*. It has in this way grown into a religious festival aimed at enhancing the prospects of the crop”.⁵⁶

There is another legend about the genesis of the *Kherai* worship. In ancient times when Monsinsin Bwrai, the wisest and ripest man, was deeply engrossed in meditation, interrupted by two fairy ladies named Ashagi and Bwishagi. It was apparently sent by the Bulli Buri to do the same. At this the outrageous Monsinsin Bwrai cursed the two fairy ladies Ashagi and Bwishagi to be born as human being in the earth. In course of time Ashagi become mother of a son named Ehiheu and Bashgi also became mother of three sons namely, Bar-thepai, Gola-parshai and Bar-thirsai. They became devout follower of the Bari-Gongtam (One of the trinity god of the Bodos). One day Bari-Gongtam turned out to be very furious against Ashagi and Bwishagi. Out of the wrath the eyes of the Bari-gongtam caught fire and burnt both Ashagi and Bwishagi

who were later on got back the original form of the fairy ladies again and afterwards both of them went back to heaven. *Ehem Bwrai*, the lord, and his consort *De Buri* brought up all the four sons according to the advice of Barigongtam. Of these four sons Ehihiu became adept in the art of singing, dance, music, and warfare. He often used to wander sitting on the pea-cock of Ehem Bwrai.

Ehem Bwrai had a worship place i.e., *Garjasali* where there was a fine *Sijou* tree (*Euphorbia splendens*). One day after offering one pair of white flower under the *Sijou* tree, Ehihiu engaged in deep rumination invoking goddess Bulli Buri who was believed to be originator of all chants. In gratification of Ehihiu's rumination one day at dawn goddess Bulli Buri holding a *Serja* (a four stringed instrument) appeared with smiling face before Ehihiu and blessed him: "Get up son ! I am very much pleased to your worship. Whatever you uttered would be the chants from today and onward." After saying this goddess Bulli Buri disappeared. On rejoicing Ehihiu run up to the lord Ehem Bwrai and De Buri and revered them by kneeling down. Ehem Bwrai then advised Ehihiu to proceed to the house of Khwria Bwrai and Khwria Buri. Accordingly he settled in their house.

One day evening when Khwria Buri propitiating the Bathou Maharaja i.e, god in chief under the altar of the *Bathou*, Ehihiu asked her: "Mother! Do you know where the God Bathou Maharaja lives?" She replied affirmatively, "Dear son, He lives in the heaven." Ehihiu asked again: 'Would he appear if I call him?' Khwria Buri replied again, 'Try to call him.'

Soon after this Ehihiu prostrated to *Sijou* tree of the Bathou altar and began to sing the hymn: "*Dohai, Ai Bulli Buri! Ehem De, Sanni giri Sanja; Mwdaini giri Bwrai Bathou Maharaja!*" i.e., Oh, Great mother Bulli Buri! Ehem De, the east is the origin of the Sun, Bwrai Bathou Maharaja is the chief God of all deities!

As soon as the Ehihiu uttered this hymn, *Obong* and *Laoree* appeared standing on the *Khamplai* i.e., low stool and revered folding two hands towards Ehihiu, Khwria bwrai and Khwri Buri. Both Khwria Bwrai and Khwria Buri indeed astonished to see their own son-in-law and daughter. Then Ehihiu said to Khwria Bwrai and Khwria Buri: "O, mother and father, your son-in-law Obong is the chief God Bathou Maharaja and your daughter *Laoree* is the *Mainao* or Goddess of wealth". After few while *Obong* and *Laoree* disappeared. Meanwhile *Khwria Buri* fell in trance due to the effect of chanting

of *Ehihiu* and began to dance induced by the rhythm of music round the altar of the *Bathou* demonstrating the role of different deities in a dramatic manner. The melodious sound of music played by *Ehihiu* reached far and wide where upon villagers gathered to the house of *Khwria Bwrai* and *Khwria Buri*. They also got involved in the dance with *Khwria Buri* and *Ehihiu* by praising and shouting loudly, “*Ehihiu, Ehihiu, Ehihiu*” Since then before harvesting of the paddy *Ehihiu* started to worship *Bathou* by performing *Kherai* in the house of *Khwria Bwrai* and *Khwria Buri* every year with accompaniment of music and dance. It has in this way grown into *Kherai* worship as it started first in the house of *Khuria Bwrai* and *Khuria Buri*. Hence the term *Kherai Hwnai*, i.e., *Kherai* performance.

Subsequently *Ehihiu* emerged as a medicine man called ‘*Oja*’ of chanting in the worship of *Kherai* and *Garja*. He used to teach way of chanting and other related skills like playing music and dance as well as the rule of religious worship of the Bodos. Under his supervision *Khuria Bwrai* became the first *Douri* (profferer to deities) and *Khuria Buri* became the first *Doudini* (female Shamanist) among the Bodos. It is the customary of utterance of ‘*Ehihiu*’ while dancing in the *Kherai* worship and is still current among the Bodos. In any invocation *Ehihiu* first uttered the name of the lord ‘*Ehem De Guru*’ i.e., Oh, Lord *Ehem* and *De*. The hymns of invocation of the deities of *Ehihiu* runs thus: *Swrgwao dongo / swrgw ni anan gosai; patalao dongo Tulsi deo, binifrai raobw gwia, raokoubw mwntia. Khwnasong khwnasong, lama dotani Mugasong, angni batrakou ese khwnasong. Sanni giri sanja, mwdaini giri moha fwrbu / Bwrai Bathou moha raja / Bathou hwnw Badndwba, Sijou hwnw siriba, Boro bwrai asarabw fongba. Khwnasong khwnasong, lama dotani Mugasong, angni batrakou ese khwnasong. Hajw thikinini ha gwtar, dwisa Jijirini dwi gwtar, meru girini ragam ragam onthai, lwitwa bwbwnai, ai Mwnaswni dwi, jo kalambai jwng. Purga onni ali, khankla tubai sari sari, mwkna gaibai lari lari, mwkna bibara aini gontongni bali. Gupur jwngti orjwng danswrang kalmbai. Dhup-dhuna saonanwi mwdmfru mwdwm hwbai, Ram Tulansi sonani akhtamjwng lahai luhai kalambai. Aiya twidwng aikou garhwidwng, apaya twidwng apakou garhwidwng, teobw Bwari Batou moha rajakou, pujinw garakwi jwngw. Mwidera gabw odal gudiao, mansia gabw Bwrai Bathou moha rajaniyao. Khwnasong khwnasong, lama dotani Mugasong, angni batrakou ese khwnasong. Daoboalai swmakwi, daokayalai purakwi, dwima-dwisani onthaiya, ultaywi*

bwhwiyakwi. Switwni mwdaia switwao thanangou, manni mwdaia manao thanongou, nwnghangmwnha danilo mw dai nonga, orai dinni mw dai. Beba jagranw beba hwgwn, ush jagranw ush hwgwn, dikura jagranw dikura hwgwn, sreng sreng laijamao, goi-pathwi, thailit hw bai; arw gangnai ukhwinai nwi hwbaonwswi jwng. Phwidw, phwi Bwrai Bathou moharaja. Mwithahaji Rangrashi barigongtam. Khwnasong khwnasong, lama dotani Mugasong, angni batrakou ese khwnasong. wjwng hai swr swr dongbaoyw, Lokhi Garja, Asu Garja, Gao garja, Songe Songe Garja, Songe Songe Fwrja, Garja Sibsini, Garja Dibsini, Maoria Garja, Saoria Garja, Sem Semali Garja, Dosomali Garja, Samo Ramo Garja, Kalo Dano Garja, Nelo Dano Garja, Daoyang Garja, Molan Garja, Thia Garja, Gu-Gu Garja, Othoro Shanti Garja. Arw swr swr dongbaoyw? Ailong, Agrang, Koila, Kaji, Rajputur, Rajkandra, Song Raja, Song Rani, Alai khungri, Bilai khungri, Mwnasw, Burlli, Bhandari, Kumari, Basmuti choudri, Rwnpagli, Rwnchondi, Ai Maothasrimwn dongo. Nwi apa, Bwrai Bathou maharaja ! Arw aifwr apafwr, jwngni koroni jangsikou bwgarlangdw. Pisa-pisou jebw jirat, onnanwi lakidw. dwhwn doulot rangkaori, nwngtanganw jabai giri. Kobordar ! kobordar !! kobordar !!! dwhwrwmmni mwdaia dwhwrwmaonw thanangou, switwni mwdaia switwao thanangou. Nwi apa Obonglaori, Bwrai Bathou Moharaja Mohafwrbu! (Boibw jo kulumbai).

English rendering: “*Ehem De*, In the heaven there is the God of heaven (religion), In the nether world there is the *Tulsi* God. There is none else, none is known, but thee, oh father. Listen oh you men; there is the *Mugasong* tree of side road, Listen to me. The east is the origin of the Sun, the God is the chief of the deities, Oh *Bwrai Bathou* the Great king. *Bathou* is said to have five rings of bamboo, the plant *Sijou* is said to possess five edges, the old Bodo injunction also is five fold. The holy earth of the hill-top, the spring water from the stream, the pebbles of the centre earth, the float water of the mother river *Mwnasw*, we have gathered all these. The crease of powder of rice is placed, here are the rows of *Khankla* grass and *Mwkhna* plants fixed in line, the flower of *Mwkhna* is placed as ornament of mother’s nose. And light the oil flame. Scented incenses and resins are burnt. That flowed down Ram *tulunsi* and gold ring is whirled. My mother died and I removed her to the cremation ground, my father died and I removed him to the cremation ground; but we have not given up the worship of *Bathou*, the old one and the Supreme King above all. The elephant whines at the *Odal*

tree; Man cries at the door of Lord *Bathou* Maharaja. Cranes have not turned black; Crows have not yet turned white. The stones and rocks of the rivers have not drifted in the opposite of the current. Ye are deities of truth, should abide by the truth. Ye are the deities of honour, should remain in honour. Ye are not deities of to-day, ye are deities of eternal. Who like goat be offered goat, who want pig be given pig and who choice chicken be offered chicken. Mind ye gods, we have given ye, all your choice. Further here is the areca nut, banana placed on the rows of leaves. Come great father *Bwrai Bathou* Maharaja, *Mwita Haji*, *RangRasi*, *Bari Gongtam*, (i.e., creator, preserver and destroyer) all in one and the omniscient gods. Who are here on this side? *Lwkhi Garja*, *Asu Garja*, *Gao garja*, *Songe Songe Garja*, *Garja Sibsins*, *Garja Dibsins*, *Maoria Garja*, *Saoria Garja*, *Sem Semali Garja*, *Dosomali Garja*, *Bwrai Raja Garja*, *Samo Ramo Ggarja*, *Kalo Dano Garja*, *Nelo Dano Garja*, *Daoyang Garja*, *Molan Garja*, *Thia Garja*, *Gu-Gu Garja*, and *Othoro Shanti Garja*. And who are there on that side? There are *Ailong*, *Agrang*, *Khwila*, *Khaji*, *Rajputur*, *Raj kandra*, *Song Raja*, *Song Rani*, *Alai khungri*, *Bilai khungri*, *Mwnasw*, *Bwrlu*, *Bhandari*, *Kumari*, *Basmuti*, *Choudry*, *Rwn pagli*, *Rwn Chondi*, and *Ai Maothansri*. Oh great father *Bwrai Bathou* Maharaja and great mother ! Come ! Remove the thorns and straws that are still on our heads. Oh, Father be merciful ! And keep on your (Bodo) sons and all creatures. Of the wealth and riches, you are the master of these. Be careful! Be careful! Be careful! Ye are the deities of truth, should abide by the truth. Ye are the deities of honour, should remain in honour”.⁵⁷ Hereafter *Ehihiu* bow down before *Bathou Bwrai* by kneeling down).

On the *Kherai* and *Garja* worship this prayer is addressed to *Bathou Bwrai*, the chief God of Bodos and their other lesser deities. The prayer first introduced by *Ehihiu* thus passed from generation to generation in the mouth of the Bodos till to-day. The legend of *Ehihiu* is most common in the mouth of older generation of the Bodos and even this day.

From what has been stated above it would seemed clear that *Kherai* worship did not originate from Jarapagla. Jarapagla is neither incarnation of god nor a deity to be found among the deities of the Bodo religious worship. He is a simple human being who worships *Bathou Bwrai*. In a way to trace his run off daughter-in-law he sought help of *Kherai* as a means of divination which is usual practice of the Bodos.

Forms of Kherai worship:

According to the nature of worship the form of *Kherai* may be divided into four: (i) *Asu Kherai*, (ii) *Sali Kherai*, (iii) *Nokhor Kherai* (Family Kherai), (iv) *Phalw Kherai*.

(i) *Asu Kherai*: As the Bodos are entirely dependent on agriculture for their subsistence, they perform a *Kherai* during the month of *Ashar* or *Shaon* on the night of dark moon with the expectation of abundant harvest of *Asu* crops. Hence the term is *Asu Kherai*. This *Kherai* is also known as *Umrao Kherai*.

(ii) *Sali Kherai*: The tradition of this *Kherai* worship is being carried on to seek help from god in order to protect and promote good harvest of *Sali* (*Maisali*) or winter crops. So it is called *Sali Kherai*. This *Kherai* is performed in the month of *Kartik* (September-October month) on the night of dark moon. *Sali Kherai* is meant for corn-mother *Mainao*. She is the goddess of fortune to the people of agricultural economy and is also identified with paddy. She is also known as *Lwkhi* or *Lakshmi*. So this *Kherai* is also called *Lwkhi Kherai*. The common term of this *Kherai* is *Dwrshwn Kherai*.

(iii) *Nokhor Kherai* (Family Kherai): This *Kherai* is performed for the well being of the family. So the *kherai* is called *Nokhor kherai* or family *Kherai*. The Bodos believed that due to evil influence of god and goblins illness or misfortunes occurs in the family. So whenever they met such calamities they perform *Kherai* to propitiate the offended spirits.

(iv) *Phalw Kherai*: *Phalw Kherai* is meant for the welfare of the whole community or village. In Bodo *Phalw* means gathering in great numbers and as the whole villagers gather in great numbers for this *Kherai* worship it is called *Phalw Kherai*. The Bodos, as has been explained already, worship numerous god and goddess whom they supposed to be propitiated in order to ward off evil spirit from the village and to ensure welfare of its members. Therefore they perform this *Kherai* during the month of *Magh* particularly on the night of full moon called *Maghi Purnima*. Sometimes it is also called *Danshrang Kherai*, as has been performed in the bright night of the full moon.

Deities of Kherai worship and Offerings to them:

During *kherai* worship different gods and goddesses are worshipped along with *Batou Bwrai*, the chief of God and offering of sacrifices also differ depending on the nature of the god. *Bathou Bwrai*, the great God is offered sacrificial head of the pig and

its blood along with areca nuts and betel leaves. *Agrang* who is regarded as general of *Bathou Bwrai* is given a cock. *Khoila*, the messenger of god-in-chief is offered a cock. *Kaji*, minister of god-in-chief is given a goat. *Song Raja*, the custodian of the animals is offered a red cock whenever the hunters used to go for hunting in the jungle. *Rajkandra*, the grandson of god-in-chief is given sacrificial head of pig and its blood. *Aileng*, the body guard of god-in-chief is offered a cock. *Alai Khungri* and *Bilai Khungri* both princesses of Bathou Raja who are given pig. *Bhandari*, the goddess of the rivers and the custodian of fishes is worshipped by offering a cock. A cock is sacrificed to *Ronchandi* who is regarded the goddess of war. *Bulli Buri* is regarded as the goddess of medicine and mantras and is given a pig. A Muslim god known as *Nawab Badsha* is offered a cock. For *Laokhar Gosai*, the god of cow herds is given a pair of peigon.

Mode of Kherai Worship:

(a) Materials Collection for Kherai worship

To perform *Kherai* worship, collection of some materials are indispensable which are as follows: one *Sijou* plant (*Euphorbia splendens*), one *tulansi* plant (*Ocimum sanctum*), three pieces of the *bijuli* bamboo with twig, *On* (rice powder), eighteen pairs of *Khankla* plant (a kind of sacred plant), eighteen pairs of *Mwkhna* or *Lwkhna* plant, four pieces of *Jati* bamboo, nine pieces of *Dubri* grass (a kind of sacred grass), a ring of gold, plantain leaves, two bunch of banana fruits, *goi phonaise* (areca nuts 80 pieces), *phatwi distase* (betel leaves 20 x10 pieces), *Sindur* (vermilion), *Dhup* sticks (incense sticks), *Dhuna* (a kind of resin), *Guphur khundung aowa lemsase* (white cotton yarn), mustard oil, *Jeowari* (earthen lamps), *Aluwa mairong* (uncooked rice), *Jou* or *zumai dabkanwi* (two pot of rice-beer), *lota gubwi gongnwi* (a pair of water vessel of brass metal), *Khurwi gongse* (a bowl of brass), Some quantity of *khun* (cotton), a piece of *Gambari Khamplai* embedded with copper (a low stool made of *Gamari* wood).

For sacrificial purpose in the *kherai*, a pair of pigeon, one chicken, a full grown cock, a swine, and a pair of egg are indispensable.⁵⁸ Besides these, some musical instruments such as a pair of *Kham* (big drum), two *Siphung* (long bamboo flute of five holes), a pair of *Jotha* (cymbal), and few weapons like one or one pair *Thungri* (sword), one or one pair *Dahal* or *Dhal* (shield) are essential part of *Kherai* worship.

Arrangement of Kherai Altar:

There is no fixed shrine for *Kherai* ceremony. The ceremony is performed according to the convenience of worshippers. It is usually choose an open space like the grazing field. In one corner of plot of the field selected for the installation of altar is cleaned first. The earth used for the altar is generally brought from the hill or high up land. The altar of earth is prepared in length wise starting from the south and ends in the north and divided into two parts. A white cloth is hung up on the first part of the altar. It symbolises the existence of infinite formless god *Obong laoree*. In the main part a *Sijou* tree (*Euphorbia splendens*) is planted as symbolising *Bathou Bwrai*. The *Sujou* tree is encircled by a round fence of five pair of bamboo splits which is twisted five times on the eighteen pairs of bamboo post symbolysing the religious and spiritual principles of the *Bathou* philosophy grouped in five. Close to the *Sijou* tree a sapling of *jatراسي* on the north side and a *tulansi* (basil) on the southern side is planted. A pebble as a symbol of truth and an egg as a symbol of creation or fertility also placed beneath the *Sijou* tree. A *jeowari* (an earthen lamp) is lighted under the *Sijou* tree. A bamboo twig tied with white cloth as a symbol of peace is planted on the altar. It is called *Jatha* in Bodo. Two more bamboo twigs are planted in the front door of the altar. To the north of the *Sijou* tree, about a size of 360 x 90 x 60 centimeter of earth is raised in a line called *bwiswmatani ali*. In this raised earth from the main part of the altar to the northern portion some plant of *khankla* (a variety of sacred plant) are planted in rows leading to the northern end, where *Mainao*, goddess of wealth is benignly installed. This northern part of the altar symbolises the beautiful and prosperous Mother Earth. Five pieces of plantain leave is laid under *Sijou* tree as tray on which five shares of areca nut and betel leaves and other sacred things are placed. A brass pot called *lota gubwi* filled with pure water along with twigs of *jatراسي* or *tulansi* (basil) plant and a gold ring immersed on it is kept on the foot of the *Sijou*. This water is sprinkled as holy water on the altar. One or two swords and shields are also kept in the altar. The surrounding of the entire altar is kept pure by burning scented materials like *dhup* (incense sticks), *shal duna* (a kind of resin) and *chandani*. Two holy persons, a *Douri* (male) and a *Doudini* (female) remain as the holy custodians of the altar and they perform all the religious rites till the end of the ceremony. Though there is the *Douri* or *Oja* to conduct the worship (*puja*) it is the *Doudini* or female dancer who represents the various stages of the rituals. Her dress

dokhona is red and she keeps her hair unbound. The *doudini* and *Oja* have to observe a fast for one day before the ceremony.

The entire process of preparation of the *Bathou* altar, right from the beginning till the end, is accompanied by ritualistic music.

The whole length wise altar symbolizes a holy road from the Earth to the Heaven, The ideal of philosophy of here, indicates a holy link between the God of heaven and the human beings of earth created by him.⁵⁹ A piece of cotton thread which is tied on the bamboo post with green leaves indicates the unending principle or the law of creation of the Creator.

The worship of *Kherai* continues for consecutive three days and nights. Two drummers beat two *Kham* (a kind of big and long drum) keeping the rhythm of the dance of the *Doudini*, two persons play on *Jotha* (cymbals) and two flutters play long flute *Siphung* maintaining the pace of different dances. In the whole exercise of the worship *Doudini* perform the ritualistic ‘*Kherai* dances’ (Prayer dances) demonstrating different forms of dances representing god and goddesses to the accompaniment of music. The *Doudini* is the key players among the dancing jesters of the *Kherai*.

Thus the *Bathou* altar is prepared and *Kherai* worship is carried on by the Bodo people.

Performance of Kherai:

The formal procedure of *Kherai* performance embarks on getting ready of preparation of altar. On the *Kherai* day after sunset the *Oja* kneeling on the backside of the *Doudini* starts chanting of *mantras*, while *doudini* (a female oracle practicing necromancy) sits on the *Gambari Khamplai* (a low stool of *gamari* wood) in the front of the *Bathou* altar till the prayer is over (the recitation of chant as been already explained). While thus sitting *Doudini* enters the profession of the shaman on getting a supernatural call and starts shaking and she utters *Ehihiu, Ehihiu, Ehihiu* three times. This stage is called *Doudini onsrainai* or *wlwngikhangnai*. As soon as she stands up and while the instrumental music with the deep sound of the *Kham* (a kind of big drum), the sweet wailing of the *Siphung* flute and the clangor of the *Jotha* (cymbals) create a mystic atmosphere, she begins her dance. She moves round the *Bathou altar* and sprinkles holy water all around from the pot and dances stooped forward, counter clock wise, with a

shuffle of slow left foot and right foot, which is accompanied by music. As she goes on dancing a time comes when she falls into a trance and she is possessed by the gods and goddesses. In this stage she acts as a medium of men and the gods or goddesses. By this time she has the power of foretelling the future and can uncover the hidden things. Now she dances vigorously accompanied by the music of drums, flute and cymbals. The music varies keeping in tune with the various dances. If there is a mistake in the beat of the music the *Doudini* may stop and show irritation. She may be joined by other worshippers in a circle, but they should not touch her for it may interrupt the dance. As she dances the *Doudini* imitates the nature of the gods and goddesses. When she imitates *Ronchandi* she holds a sword and a shield in her hands. After the dancing is over she makes prophecies about the welfare of the people and the crops.

While dancing *Doudini* demonstrates as many as eighteen kinds of dances. A few dance forms may be mentioned here. In the *Bathou Gidingnai* the *Doudini* moves round the altar of *Bathou* dancing slowly to the music of drums, flute and cymbals. In the *Chotrali* the *Doudini* dances with a sword and shield demonstrating war dance in honour of *Ronchandi*, the goddess of war. *Khujwma phonai* is another war dance showing the tactics of annihilating the enemies. *Khopri Chipnai* is also a war dance demonstrating the technique of self defence in the battle field. In this dance *Doudini* holds a sword and a shield in her hands. *Gandoula bwnnai* dance presents the tactics of catching the enemy in the battle field. *Shagwlaow bwnnai* dance exhibits preparation of warfare and the propitiation of god *Abla Khungur*. *Nao bwnnai* dance is in honour of *Laokha Gosain* or Lord Khrishna which displays the greatness of the God. Through the *Khamao barkwnnai* dance the *Doudini* performs the form of propitiation to god *Rajkandra*, the grandson of *Bwrai Bathou Maharaja*. She climbs up the drum (*Kham*) while dancing it. In the *Dao thwi lwngnai* the *Doudini* takes the blood of a sacrificed cock in a cup and standing by the altar drinks it up. *Or mononai* is a dance where she puts the burning wick of a light into her mouth. *Mwsa khaori* dance is performed to propitiate god *Khoila*, the messenger of *Bathou Bwrai* with sword and shield in her hands. It demonstrates the sentiment of satisfaction after the victory in the war. In *Maoji mengbrang gelenai* the *Doudini* demonstrates the playfulness of the spotted cat symbolizing the recovery of a patient in the family. This form of dance is performed specially in the family *Kherai*. There are more than a dozen of varieties of dance such

as *Mufur gelenai*, *Sha Gwlao bwnai*, *Jara pagl Mwsanai*, *Badali mwsanai*. Besides these, there are some more dances like *Thentamali*, *Sara Nisla* which are not related directly to the religious context of the *Kherai* festival.

At the end of *Kherai* rituals the worshippers symbolically retrieve *Mainao*, the goddess of wealth in the form of uncooked rice and paddy kept in two *dons* (bamboo basket) from the ground altar through *Doudini*. A pig is sacrificed to her with necessary *mantras*. Music goes on. The *Doudini*, who has been possessed by the goddess, addresses the people in the voice of *Mainao*: ‘Oh Bodo children, where are you going to take me? If you take me today you will cast some quantity on water, some on fire, and you would neglect me. I would not go with you. You would go back the way you have come.’ entreat

Meanwhile *Oja* entreat to *Doudini* for favour of the worshippers and prays: “You must come Mother *Mainao*; without you how can we survive? You are our life, on your mercy everything exists. We cannot leave for a while in your absence. If you do not visit our houses you will be touched by sin, for you will have to drink the blood of our heads. O mother, you must come to us.”

At the repeated request of the worshippers through the *Oja*, *Mainao*, the source of wealth, assures the people that she will not forsake them. She says: “Let us go dear children, and try to keep me at utmost care, I shall dwell in your houses, and worship me daily, for your wealth will go on ever increasing”.

As *Doudini* expresses eagerness to accompany, she stands up and starts to dance again. Soon after this the worshippers become delighted and dance with her. After a few moments *Doudini* holds on the two bamboo post in the front of the altar and she suddenly loses her sense. In such state of affairs, *Oja* and whole worshippers make an utterance glorifying on the name of the *Bathou Bwrai*. Afterwards *Oja* sprinkles the holy water on the head of the *Doudini* on which she regain her sense. Soon after it *Kherai* worship also comes to an end.

It is to be remarked here that the Bodos have traced their dance and music to *Bathou* or *Bathou Bwrai*. *Kherai* is the main spring of varied forms of Bodo dances. The various artistic dances exhibited by the Bodo damsels and youths are emanated from ritualistic dance of *Doudini* during the *Kherai* worship.

The worship of *Kherai* is performed very seldom by the Bodos for two considerations. It is too extravagant affairs for the common people and for busy agrarian people it is a time consuming activity. All these customs refer to the traditional religion only. In modern time a large sections of the Bodos have adopted a Vedic religion termed '*Brahma*', while another section is converted into Christianity. The traditional religious rites are no longer in vogue among the Brahmas and the Christians of the Bodo community.

BAISAGU:

The Bodos celebrate *Baisagu* - a festival with a myriad of colours and merry making. It is primarily a religious pre-harvesting and post-harvesting ceremonies. The agricultural cycle starts with the arrival of spring season. And as spring arrives, it is celebrated on a large scale to pray to the Almighty for a bumper crop as also to thank Him for his providence. It is the cherished festival of the Bodos celebrated to welcome the advent of the New Year and bid farewell to the old year. *Baisagu* is celebrated generally from the last day of the month of *Chaitra* called *Sangkranti* and the first week of *Baisakh* i.e. in mid April and lasts for seven consecutive days. During this festival period no work is done and the whole period is spent in merry making, singing, dancing and feasting etc. The term *Baisagu* is derived from Bodo word '*Baisoni agu*'. '*Baiso*' means year or age and '*agu*' means start, i.e. the starting of the year or age.⁶⁰ Thus *Baisagu* marks the onset of a new year for the Bodos.

Baisagu is known *Bihu* in Assamese. Regarding the origin of the word *Bihu*, the experts presented the various explanations and definitions currently available. In the words of M. M. Choudhury, "The '*Bihu*' according to their belief, comes from a conjunction of two Boro words, viz. *Bi* and *Hoe*. *Be* means to beg and *hoe* means give. By observing *Bihu* they beg of the Creator fertility to land and prosperity to the families. This is a festival of great rejoicing and mutual begging and giving".⁶¹ Another such definition tries to link *Bihu* with *Mahabishub* (vernal equinox) and *Jalabishub* (autumnal equinox) but considering that the respective dates of equinoctial occurrences, i.e., March 21 and September 23, do not quite coincide with the days of the year when the three '*Bihus*' are observed, that explanation doesn't appear to hold good. Another theory tries to establish a link between *bihu* and Tai words *boi-hu* (*boi*-to bless, to make obeisance with palms; *hu*-cow) and *poi-hu* (*poi*-festival; *hu*-cow). Observance of the

first day of *Bohag Bihu* as *Garu* (cow) *Bihu* lends some veracity to this explanation.⁶² P. C. Choudhury remarks, “The *Bihu* dance constitutes to this day an important element of Assamese culture and has evidently a non-Aryan feature in it”.⁶³ The Bodo *Baisagu* starts on the *Sangkranti* day. On the last day of *Chaitra* the Bodo women sweep, clean and rub with cowdung the houses and the yards. They also wash the old and new clothes and male person prepare new rope to replace old one in the New Year. Besides, the women prepare various kinds of food like *phita*, *enthao*, *chourai*, *laru* etc. particularly for offering to their ancestors on the day of *Mansi Baisagu*.

On the day of *Sangkranti*, the first day of *Mwsouni Baisagu*, meant for cattle worship starts. On this day in the early morning children or women prepare the garlands of the pieces of *lao* (bottle-gourd), *phantao* (brinjal), *haldwi* (turmeric) and bitter-gourd with the string of *teoywl* (strip of tender bamboo split). These woven wreaths are put on the horns of their herds. The horns are smeared with oil and ashes mixed with oil and pounded rice flour are applied in patches on the body of the cattle. The cattle are then taken to the nearby river or lake for bathing. The cow-herds while driving away the cattle for bathing they recites the following rhyme:

lao za phanthao za,
bwswr bwswr er hanza hanza
bimani khither phipani khither
nwnswr zagwn halua geder
bima gaide badi daza
phipha bolod badi za
bari khonani embu bonggla

*bibadi za gidir bonggla.*⁶⁴ (i.e., Eat gourd eat brinjal, grow up year after year, to spite your mother and father, you will be large bullocks; do not be short statured like your mother; be large like your father, like the frog in the corner of the garden.)

The cow-herds also strike with sprigs of *Dighiliti* on the back of the cattle and recite the following rhyme:

Dighiliti mwsouni muli,
dudali zagwn gai khukili,
dighiliti laoti khri khri ganthi

*zwngni mwsoua zagwn bolod zathi.*⁶⁵ (The whip of the *Dighiliti* has a great medicinal value for cows. Its strokes make cows yield more milk. Every he-calfs will grow to be almighty bull; all will be big and tall.)

The cow-herds throw the pieces of gourd, brinjal, turmeric towards the cattle while bathing in the river or lakes. Then the cattle are left free in the field for grazing. At the end of bathing, the old ropes (*phaga*) are thrown away through the legs of the cattle, as a symbolic casting off of the evil spirits of the cattle. In the early morning the guardian of the house fasten a bundle of the leaves of *garla* (cane), *dighiliti*, *bagrikhop*, *mokhna* branch (a shrub), and the flower of the *khatri* (a shrub similar to the turmeric) and wreath of vegetables prepared for the cattle in the rafter of the roofs, on both side fencing of the gate, in the weaving shed *Ishan Sali* and in the well as a protection against thunder and lightning, but these leaves do not have any mantras written on them. They also believed that this custom can ward off the family members from bewitching by the sorcerer or evil spirits. This custom is known as *nwzwr dannai* in Bodos. The cattle-sheds are cleaned and an old basket filled with cowdung along with an old broom is kept on the outskirts way of the house hold. This is the sign of casting off of all the evils. In the evening a fumigation rites of burning a smudge of vegetables left after garlanding the cattle along with paddy chaff, *salduna* (resin of *shorea robusta*) and some kind of medicinal leaves is performed in front of the gate of the cattle shed. The custom is practiced to drive away of mosquitoes and other insects from the compound. It is also a custom to waft the smoke of smudge with new bamboo fans before its use on the belief that it will give cool breeze in hot summer. Afterwards cattle are brought to cattle shed and fastened with new ropes. Along with the cattle rites some other rites relating to men are also observed. The *Oja* chants mantras for the well-being of the People and keeping the people free from any disease etc. This is known as '*Lama Danthenai* (side tracking the way).⁶⁶

The Bodo people observed cattle worship rituals in order to protect the animal from evil spirits, disease and death, because the chief instrument of agriculture is the cattle. Rituals were observed to promote their fertility. It is therefore evident that the worship of cattle reflected the materialistic desire of the people and cattle was held in high esteem not only because it was an aid to agriculture but it was also a standard of the wealth. In the former Bodo society a man was respected who possessed a large

number of cattle. The village peasant having large cattle shed is preferred by the girl as their prospective father-in-law. A village peasant who has no cattle is considered poor and disregarded in the society. There is an old saying in the Bodo folk: “*Gwbwr sarhwnw gwijarwngwi.*” i.e., a wretched peasant of having no dung to dispel.

The second day of *Baisagu* is called *mansi Baisagu* meant for men, but starting with worship of their supreme God *Bathou Borai*. It is observed in the first day of the New Year. The first day of the Bodo New Year is customarily welcomed at dawn by playing the flute of ritual music of a particular *kherai* dance called ‘*Chatrali*’ dance. The custom meant for destroying the eggs of the snake.⁶⁷

According to the custom of the Bodos, they throw the old earthen cooking utensils on the first day of the New Year and replace them with new ones. Every members of the family put on new dress. After cleaning the main house *Noma no* and *Bathou* altar, every member of the family takes bath and they offer worship to the *Bathou Borai*. The next stage is offering of food like *phita*, *enthao*, *chourai*, *laru* etc. along with chicken and *zou bidoi* (rice-beer) to their ancestors and recently dead relatives, the food being placed in a corner of the yard. After ancestor worship, there is a ceremonial eating of fowl meat cooked with a bitter herb leaves called *Khungkha*. In Bodo custom eating of bitter food is essential to sever one’s tie with death persons. Likewise the eating of *khungkha* in New Year signifies the severance of one’s all connection with the old year and greeting of happy New Year. On the first day of the New Year, in the early part of the morning sons and daughters of each household touch the feet of parents and elders who bless them in return. The young boys and girls exchange each other of love and forgive each other’s misdeeds of the past. It was customary for the mothers and sisters to offer gamocha towels—*phali* among the Kacharis to members of his family and to close relatives.⁶⁸ The elderly women of the household generally visit their local medicine man (*Oja*) with *zou* (rice-bear) and cocks as gift on the first day of New Year. In return the *Oja* gives them amulates (*tabiz*) to be used for the New Year.

Towards evening, when they discharged all rites, all elderly people start drinking their national beverage *zou* and show a tendency to dance. From next day, singing song with music and dance become a regular feature of merry making festival day of *Baisagu Rongjanai*. On this day, every family becomes the centre of merry making and people

of all walks of life take part in it. The young boys and girls gather together to sing song and dance in the open field or from house to house. While young men play on the *siphung* flute, the *kham* (drum), the four stringed *serja*, and beat out rhythm with a piece of split bamboo *tharka*, girls dance in bands and play on the jew's herbs *gongwna* and small cymbals *jotha*. The damsels also sing the song inviting other friends to greet the New Year as follows:

dehai lwgwphwor jwnggha gwdan bwthwrni
riua riu dengkhwjwong siphungni
janji khaphra khaphra mwsadini lwgw mwsadini
bringda bring bringda bring khamni dengkhwjwng
haila huila mwsadini lwgw mwsadini
thing tho thing tho jotha damnai
bagrum bagrum mwsadini
serjani dengkhwjwng
*baidemlai sidemlai mwsadini.*⁶⁹

(English version of the song:

Come oh friend to celebrate the new year
 To the tune of the flute
 Let the waist be fastened to dance
 To the beating of the drum
 Dance bend and unbend
 To the sound of the cymbal
 Dance leaps and bounds
 To the tune of the *Serja*
 Dance leaning your body both ways.

In the festival elderly women also took active part in dance after drinking rice-beer. While a few men play their drums of *kham*, the wonderful *siphung* flutes and *thorka*, the women, some of whom are married and even pretty aged, at first they put their hands on their hips, sway upper portions, bending slightly in the waist, gradually opening out their arms, they dances with the rhythm of music. While in their dance they also sing the following song:

Dwi Jijiri samo khingkiri

Sonani jinjiri lwi bajwi

*sonani jinjiri.*⁷⁰ i.e. River Jjiri curved snails, golden chain oh sister-in-law, golden chain.

Another important feature of Bodo *Baisagu* festivity is begging known as *maginai*. The dancing parties visit house to house of the village and even the village of others and ask for rice-beer or substitutes. On the occasion they sing the following song:

wi bajwi wi bajwi

Ophri bajwi ophri

Ophri gwiabla----daodwi lwi

bajwi daodwi.

daodwi gwiabla

*chourai lwi bajwi chourai.*⁷¹

i.e. Oh sister-in-law sister-in-law, rice-beer rice-beer, if you don't have rice-beer---eggs, sister-in-law eggs, if you don't have eggs, oh rice cake, sister-in-law rice cake.

The elderly folk of the village bid good-bye to the day of *Mansi Baisagu* of the New Year by singing the song. In their song they lamented the trends of changes of the present day *Baisagu* celebration. The song runs thus:

Owani Kanjong khanai khankw

Gwdwni dina bwjwng thankw

Wngkhamni ali bedorni akhai

Zouni phukri gwilia lwi

*Bajwi gwilia.*⁷²

i.e. Hair dressing with bamboo comb, where the olden days has gone, plenty of rice, plenty of meat, abound with rice-beer is no more, no more sister-in-law no more.

In the entire festivity, there is joy and dance and song along with melodious echo of various indigenous musical instruments played on the occasion. During the *Baisagu* season, echoes of songs and musics come from various directions of the village and forest even at midnight, day after day, night after night. The songs that are sung cover such themes as the weaving of cloths, description of female qualities, personal satire, indoctrination and pastoral songs of pleaser and pain, union and separation, hope and despair. These songs are spontaneously outburst of powerful passions from the mouths of unlettered elderly folk and the bachelors and maidens of the Bodos.

In the earlier times they observed the third day of *Baisagu* as *Saimani*, meant for dogs; the fourth day is *Omani*, meant for swain; the fifth day is *Daoni*, meant for fowl; the six the day is meant for ducts and other birds; and the seventh day is meant for receiving relatives and friends. But now-a-days, though *Baisagu* lasts for seven days, the rituals meant for propitiation of dogs, fowls and swains are hardly practiced. In the seven day they again clean their house ceremonially, take a purifying bath and seek apology from their elders for any omissions and commissions that may have been committed during the *Baisagu* period. In carrying out such consecutive long day's festival they are very largely aided by their closely clannish organization. P.Goswami remarks, "Kacharis, at one time followed a pattern in which each of the seven days had some function assigned to it".⁷³

During the *Baisagu* Bodos maintain some disciplines. First, they try to avert quarrel for fear that they would take birth cows or dogs in next life. Secondly, they refrain from sitting on the chairs, stools and *Khamplai* or *pira*. This custom is observed as a mark of respect to their parents and elders.

Baisagu is thus celebrated as the season of hope and joy. Though festival is performed along with dance and songs, it has its basis for the desire of fertility and welfare and that the entire complex at one time has served a religious purpose.

Among the *Brahma dharma* followers the celebration of *Baisagu* is found slight different from the traditional Bodos. The village community performs *Ahuti* at Brhama temple or in a common place on the first day of the New Year through the Brahma priest. Consumption of *zou* or rice-beer is prohibited till the end of the *Ahuti*. It is to be mentioned that among the Brahma followers many of them have given up of drinking of rice-beer on the occasion of *Baisagu*. They simply enjoy by singing and dancing together. The young boys and girls collect alms by singing and dancing from door to door and finally arrange a feast out of their collection. On the other hand, Bodo Christian converts neither worship *Bathou* nor perform *Ahuti* during *Baisagu*. There is no dancing and merry making among the Christian Bodo society. They also refrain from taking rice-beer.

Domasi:

The Bodos celebrate the *Domasi* festival with great enthusiasm. It is also known as *Magw* as it is celebrated in the month of *Magh*. It is a harvest festival of winter that

marks the gathering of harvest. They observe it as the festival of feasting and enjoyment. On the eve of the day, called *Sankranti*, i.e., the last day of *Push* month, it is a customary to tie the fruit bearing trees of the household compound with the strings of paddy straw or bamboo strips before the crack of dawn. This custom is called *Denkw Kanai*.⁷⁴ It is believed that by doing this the fertility of the tree is increases and bears more fruits. Further, on the *Domasi* day they put a mark about two inches of water mixed with cowdung around their granary as a symbol of confining the *Mainao*, the goddess of wealth. From this day till the end of the month of *Magh* no paddy is taken out from granary. The members of the household take ritual bath in the early morning. On the eve of the *Domasi*, women get busy preparing varieties of rice-cakes and other refreshments. Before consuming these eatable items and rice are first offered to “the flying, the sinking and the moving”, that is, to birds, to fishes, and to animals like dogs and pigs. It is called *Akhai Sarnai*. The varieties of rice-cakes like *enthao*, vaporised cakes *pitha* and sticky rice *chourai*, *sobai gwan*, *laru*, etc. and rice-beer are served to relatives, friends and guests. On the seventh day of *Domasi* (sixth *magh*) they again clean the utensils, sacrifice fowls to *Bathou*, their god and go out carol singing, collecting eatables. They call this custom *maginai* or begging.

The young men, particularly the cowherd boys go to the field, preferably near a river bank, build a makeshift hut *bilagur* with paddy straw or dry plantain leaves and green bamboo. There they also arrange a bon-fire. They spent whole night in feasting, merry-making, dancing and singing. At the crack of dawn, ‘before the crows come out of their nests’, the first day of *Magh*, the leading cow herd kindle the *bilagur* ceremonially uttering the prayer in this manner: “*Jai, jai, jai; Jwngni lagwni jai, khwlani rog biadia khwlaha thangthwng, swanabhani rog biadia swanabha thangthwng, sahani rog biadia saha thangthwng, sanjani rog biadia sanjaha thangthwng ; Jwngni lagwa maini daini, jai jai mai mai jathwng ; Jwngni lagwni mwsoua ganda pisabadi soklo boklo geded bwlwgwra jathwng ; Jai mansia jwngni mwsoua mai jayablabw jadwng hwnnanwi jwngkou bukrub sukrub kalmdwng mwn, bi mansia nidanwi din thangthwng*”.⁷⁵

i.e., Glory, glory, glory - glory to our village!

In the recitation he is accompanied by the other boys. The plain meaning of the prayer is that disease may not visit their village, that their village may be filled with

paddy and riches, that their cattle may be large and strong like the rhinoceros, that those person who had beaten them even though the cattle in their charge had no eaten up those persons paddy may suffer long and much. Glory, glory, glory - glory to their village!

Afterwards all boys take their bath and start their begging house to house for eatable items and rice-beer. Thus the Bodos enjoy *Domasi* festival with all out feasting and rejoicing.

Katri gasa:

Katri gasa is the festival of the autumn and is closely associated with nature and agriculture. *Katri gasa* is celebrated on the last day (Sankranti) of the month of Ashin (Septemember-October). After cultivation the agrarian Bodo community awaits the days of harvesting. At this time of year, the vast land of paddy fields turns green with sprouted crops. At that time, the Bodo society celebrates *Katri gasa* in a befitting way. *Katri gasa* is a solemn function observed simply without any extraneous rituals. The fun and frolic, joy and enthusiasm prevalent in *Baisagu* are totally absent in *Katri gasa*.

On the day of *Katri gasa*, both outside and inside of the houses are cleansed properly. Courtyard of the houses which is regarded as an integral part of our village life is given a new look with a fresh coating of cowdung mix mud. The house-wives of the family visit the paddy fields and whirl a piece of *sewari* (a long bamboo stick appliance of weaving) over the paddy plant and pray for protecting paddy plants from pests. The cultivator goes to his paddy fields, lights the rows of earthen lamp in the paddy field. In the evening lighting an earthen lamp evening prayer is made before the *Bathou* altar with the expectation that it will give a good harvest in the year.

Invoking Goddess *Mainao* (Goddess of wealth) to the home, earthen lamps are lit in the granaries, cow-sheds and inside all houses. The people of the village visit their neighbours wishing a good harvest to the respective family. Rows of earthen lamps lighted in a vast area of paddy fields dazzles like a star in the sky in the evening.

The tradition of the *Katri Gasa* aims to assist in the promotion of abundant crops. The agrarian community believes that the burning lamps in their paddy fields on *Katri gasa* might protect crops from the insects. It is a single day function and that too without any colour. The Assamese neighbours celebrate *Katri gasa* as a *Kati Bihu*. "The rituals associated with *Katri gasa* are unquestionably non-Aryan in their origin. But many scholars try to give it an Aryan tinge by linking it with the new-Vaisnavite

movement initiated by Sri Sankardeva, but the basic character of *Kati Bihu* is absolutely non-Aryan".⁷⁶

With rapid industrialisation, people become more dependent on industry rather than agriculture. In search of job and opportunity people have migrated from villages to the towns and cities. The village based *Baisagu* is also transformed into a town or city base festival. As a result, *Baisagu* lost its past glory and tradition. *Baisagu* and *Domasi* keep hold of their identity in a changed world. But *Katri gasa* is fighting for its survival with the frail light of earthen lamp burn under the altar of *Bathou*.

Amthisua:

Amthisua is a seasonal as well as agricultural festival based on the fertility cult. This festival starts on the seventh day in the month of *Ashara*. It is observed as a special occasion of holiness but not for merry-making. The Bodos believe that during this period the Mother-Earth menstruates in order to prepare herself for her fertilizing work and consider this period as *Sua janai* or unclean. During this period ploughing is forbidden, digging of earth is tabooed and the farmer remain at home for a week without any work. During the period entering in the *bakhri* or the granary also tabooed. Even the agriculturist Bodos refrain from cutting the useful trees on the believed that it would make impure (*Sua*) on it, and may prevent further growth of the tree.

The young boys and girls enjoy by feasting with seasonal fruits like jack fruits and mango fruits. On the seven day the women folks throw away their old broom sticks and replace them by new ones. They rub the floor and the wall of their house with mud as a mark of purifying unclean period. Thus the *Amthisua* ends on seven day.

The similar believe also found among the local non-Bodo Hindus. They also practice similar taboos as practiced by the Bodos. They celebrate *Ambuvasi* festival in the *Kamakhya* temple at Guwahati of Assam with grand and pompous. The Mother Goddess is the presiding deity of this renowned temple. It is believed that during this time the goddess is unclean due to her menstruation period. "The conception of the Mother Goddess is mainly based on vegetation and fertility rites and as such the Mother Goddess *Kamakhya* appears to be an agricultural deity".⁷⁷

Bhatheli Ceremony:

Bodos perform the *Bhatheli* ceremony. It is also known as the *Parwa* in some parts of the Kamrup districts. It is primarily a magical rite associated with fertility

cult.⁷⁸ This ceremony confined to the western districts of (old) Kamrup and (old) Goalpara and also to certain parts of (old) Darrang District, adjacent to Kamrup. They plant a tall decorated bamboo in field, make a small hut close by and offer there eatables, a black pigeon and black goat for their gods and goddesses and pray to them that they cause no harm to the village and that leave the people peace and go downstream. Bodos (Kacharis) symbolize the departure of the gods by putting the offerings and the pigeon and the goat on a raft and letting it loose in the river. *Bhaltheli* means going down stream.⁷⁹ The intent of the ceremony is the public expulsion of the evils, usually once a year, so that the people may take a fresh start in life after becoming free from all dangers to them. Originally *Bhaltheli* was a ceremony associated to tree-worship.⁸⁰ Bamboo symbolises the male generative organ, i.e., phallus. Rightly does Endle observes, “The *Parwa* is a tall bamboo pole draped with rags, flags etc., taken from the village on the last day of the *Bihu*, and put up in a field alongside a tree, where the people amuse themselves by dancing, wrestling and tom-toming etc., around it. It is possible that this may be relic or survival of phallic worship, the *Parwa* taking place of the *lingam* or phallus”.⁸¹

Phusli Haba (Doll Marriage):

Pushli or *Puthli Haba* is another religious festival and is prevalent among the Bodos in the districts of Nalbari, Barpeta, Kamrup, Darrang and Sanitpur. This festival is usually held just after the *Baisagu*, i.e., *Bohag Bihu* of Assamese. It is a doll marriage having a deep sense of religious character. *Pushli* or *Puthli* means doll or toy and *Haba* means marriage. Therefore, *Pushli Haba* means doll marriage. It is the symbolic representation of the first man and woman according to the mythology prevalent among the Bodos.⁸² The dolls are made of straw in the name of *Diba Borai* and *Dibi Buroi* or *Raona* and *Raoni*, who were believed to be deities of wind and rain.⁸³ Before the actual festival, the villagers collect thatches from the roof of each family to fashion idols of the god and goddesses with the help of mud. For eyes they put Job’s tears. The villagers group themselves into two parts, one for the grooms *Raona* or *Deba Borai* and the other for the brides *Raoni* or *Debi Buroi*. A mock marriage is performed and gifts made of plantain sheet are presented to the brides.

On the following day, at noon, a plantain raft is made and the idols of the divine grooms and brides are taken to the river in a procession. A grown up maiden plays the

role of the mother of the brides and weeps. The raft is decorated with flower and floated in the river along with the idols on it.

The Bodos believed that *Raona* and *Raoni* would be satisfied to provide sufficient rain in the earth for cultivation. They believed that the deities would send *Bardoi Sikhla*, the symbolic girl of the wind and rain to the earth to bestow fertility on the field. This peculiar sort of festival is aimed at enhancing the fertility of the field and is related to the procreation cult of primitive forefathers.

Moho Honai:

Moho Honai festival is current among the Bodos of Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Darrang and Sanitpur districts of Assam. *Moho Honai* is celebrated to drive away mosquito. But another interpretation says that it is related to the driving away of the tiger. The young people of the village with their sticks about the later part of the November and early part of the December walk out by shouting and dancing from door to door, in front of each and every household to ask for alms. They arrange a feast jointly with the alms collected.

This festival bears similarity with the *Sonarai-Puja* prevalent in the old Goalpara district. The tiger deity worshipped in the month of *Push* and the festival associated with the worship is known as *Sonarai Puja*. In olden days Assam was full of dense forest with wild beast including tiger. The tiger created havoc in the village life of people by killing man as well as their cattle. Therefore the people propitiate tiger deity to appease it. As the tiger bear golden colour, the deity of tiger is known as ‘*Sonarai*’.⁸⁴ The song of Sonarai puja runs thus:

“*Bagh namil re Chitia phakra, Bhor bihane namil bagh manus kambraia. Mular moton dath delir moto matha, Bhati hoite namil bagh manus kamraia.*”⁸⁵ i.e., spotted tiger has come down, in the midnight has come after killing man. The tiger with gigantic teeth and head come down.

The tradition is also current in some areas of old Kamrup. *Moho-ho* song found in Belsar area of the undivided district of Kamrup clearly refers to the tiger instead of mosquito. The text runs thus: *thupri haure thupri hau / kana kuja ek phal hau // lari lari yaote / sonar kadi paote / sonar kadi rupa mala / amer ghor deikba bhala // baghbol chateni / girighar khateni // ami magia khao / baghar kharane yao // baghe bule janiya / ami maru haniya* //⁸⁶ i.e., Be assembled, the blind and hump-backed be one sided, we

live on alms, we start for tiger. After knowing that it is tiger, we kill the tiger by striking.

From the above song it becomes clear that the *Moho-ho* festival was originally associated with the practice of the driving away of the tiger. The Bodo-Kachari synonym of tiger is *maca (mosa)*. The Bodo-Kachari equivalent of the Assamese verb *Kheda* (driving away) is 'ho'. So the meaning of the term *moho-ho* is driving away of tiger. The Assamese term *moho-ho* may come from the Bodo-Kachari word *moca-ho*. Hence, we may say that the original purpose of the *Moho-ho* festival have been lost.⁸⁷

Magic and Witchcraft- Beliefs and Practices:

Tantrikism, the main source of magic and charms, are believed to be originated in Assam. It has been intimately associated with Kamarupa-Kamakhya, the *Mahapitha* of the *Tantras*, and the *Puranas* (*K.P.*,51/64) from early times.⁸⁸ It is believed that the cult travelled from Assam and Bengal to Dravidian India.⁸⁹ Wilson also believes “that Assam, or at least the north-east of Bengal, seems to have been in a great degree the source from which the Tantric and Sakta corruption of the religion of the *Vedas* and *Puranas* proceeded.”⁹⁰ Eliot holds the same view.⁹¹ “It is quite likely that this land, with her non-Aryan elements, contributed to the origin and growth of the system”, and “the final form of which was given by the assimilation of both Hindu and Buddhistic ideas.”⁹² Quaritch Wales believes “Tantrikism is definitely of non-Aryan origin.”⁹³ The Aryans only systematised it.⁹⁴ The originator of high antiquity of the cult of Tantrikism of *Kamarupa-Kamakhya* is pointed to out to the *Kirata Bodos*.⁹⁵ Thus the origin and practice of magic and witchcraft are as old as the antiquity of the Bodos.

Sorcery and Magic:

Sorcery and magic practiced by the Bodos are resorted to mainly for three purposes: (i) Used for the wellbeing of agricultural enterprise to ensure the success of their work (ii) Engaged to safeguard their cattles from ailments (iii) Employed for hunting and fishing.

In fact, magic and sorcery, are in vogue and resorted to for various purposes such as to avert misfortunes, to get rid of ailments in men or beasts, to cure snake bite, to introduce sleeps in others, to inflict harm to adversary. Even some sorcerers are believed to be attributed with the power to raise wind, calm it or change its direction by specific spells. They also believed that every serious and sudden death is brought by

Bhut or spirit. The popular names of these wandering ghosts are *Bhut*, *Pret*, *Pisac*, *Daitya*, *Kuber mw dai*, *Jokho*, *Jokhini*, *Khetra*, *Doi khetro*, *Dakini*, *Angrw mwnda*, *Harai bankhw* etc.. Some of these spirits are considered to be benignant and occasionally to render help to the people in an unseen way. Besides these spirits, there are private ones known as *Bira* kept by the *Oja* or village medicine-man. They are employed also to do harm to the adversaries.

They employ various forms of spells called *Muhini* to persuade man or animal for self desire. It is of five folds.⁹⁶ i. *Mwider muhini*, specially applied for catching and taming the wild elephants; ii. *Daorai muhini*, resorted to persuade a woman to follow man or vice-versa; it is also called *Haina muli*; iii. *Kkhwira muhini*, it is also practiced to persuade a woman to follow man or vice-versa; iv. *Raj muhini*, used to subjugate king and his family in the palace for self favour; v. *Sobha muhini*, particularly make use of captivating the spectators by the players of drama or theatre.

All diseases, however, are ascribed to supernatural agency. The sickman is supposed to be possessed by one of the deities, who racks him with pains as a punishment for impiety or neglect of the god in question. Hence, not the medicine but the exorcist is summoned to the sick man's aid. The exorcist is called by the Bodo, *Oja*.⁹⁷

In religious ceremonies also they employ *Oja*. The *Oja* has both the functions of physician and sorcerer. He "is generally armed with shells and, cowries, by the manipulation of which he professes to be able to foretell prosperity or the reverse to those who consult him. These officials are supposed to be competent to deal with the ordinary ailments of village life by indicating the approximate method of propitiating the offended deity (*modai*), whose anger is held to be the cause of all the ills that flesh is heir to."⁹⁸

It is the custom of the villagers to perform some sorcery in order to avert evil spirit for the wellbeing of the community in every year. In between May and June while new water comes in volume the villagers gather in a place outside the village and sacrifice animals and poultry and offer wine, bananas, betelnuts and leaves in the names of different gods and goddesses. They also place a goat's head or a pair of living pigeon in a raft and set afloat on a river to propitiate river god. This is called *pho jaonai* or

Bhasani.⁹⁹ The river god is called *Doini modai*. Such rites, as they belief, may prevent occurrence of illness, famine, misfortune and natural calamities in the village.

Witchcraft is universally dreaded by Bodo.¹⁰⁰ Witches are supposed to owe thier noxious power to their own wicked studies, or the aid of preternatural beings. The male person who practices witchcraft is known as *Daina*, and if female is called *Daini*. They are believed to have the power to ward off evil spirits, effects of spells, evil eyes and various maladies. As a sorcerer he has the power to inflict disease and death upon the adversary. The practice of *mayadhop hogarnai* (casting of spells) is prevalent whose intent is to resort to do harm to the bride and bridegroom during the marriage ceremony. It sometimes make the victims senseless leading even to death. The usual practice of *Daina* or *Daini* to do effective harm to the adversary is the practice of *Job phobnai*. The common mode of *Job phobnai*, i.e., to bewitch a person is to acquire some personal relics of the man in advance such as a lock of hair, used cloths, paring of nails, etc. These materials are tied with a piece of bone and is buried or hung up on a secret corner, where upon the victim is supposed to suffer or die.

The most dreaded witchcraft prevalent in Bodo is known as *than thin daini*¹⁰¹ and is usually practiced by women. It is believed that the person who is adept in this craft have the mystical power of vanishing. Through charms a *than thin Daini*, while sleeping at night detach her or his head from the body and move out for hunting the desired prey in the village.

The use of curative spells are very common against spirits, diseases and sickness which are believed to be caused by spirits; to ward off the malevolent powers of knots that cause sickness, disease and various kinds of misfortunes. Cure is effected by various ways such as *mwntwr jharinai* (muttering charms), *dai jharinai* (sprinking charmed water), *tabis gannai* (putting amulate), *khasini gannai* (tieing charmed threads) and spitting.

The Use of Oracles and Diviners:

Cleromancy, an art of divination is commonly practiced amongst the Boro-Kacharis. To find out the particular god who has brought a particular disaster to the family or to find out whereabouts of a missing domestic animal and for many such sundry purposes, commonfolk approach the village *Ojha* (oracle) who advises them through cleromancy.¹⁰²

Doudini is a dancing oracle. She dances during the *Kherai* festival and seems to practice necromancy, another form of divination to speak out the happenings of the times to come. In times of plague, pestilence, famine, etc., the powers of such diviners are called into service in a special *Puja* by the Bodos. Rev. Sidny Enddle gives a vivid description of this *puja*. He writes, “The ceremony is a prolonged one, often extending over many hours: and the *Deodani*, whose faculties are apparently quite absorbed in what she is doing and who seems for the time to be lifted above the world of time and sense, gradually works herself up to a state of excitement bordering on frenzy. At this stage, which is only slowly attained, a goat is brought forward and the *Deodani*, with one stroke of the long sacrificial sword, known as the *imfi* and reserved exclusively for such purposes, severs the victim’s head from the body. Most of the blood is held to be offered in sacrifice to the *madai*, before whose emblem the animal has been slaughtered; but some part is said to be sprinkled on the persons of the assembled worshippers. It is at this climax of the *puja*, i.e., at the sacrificial slaughtering of the goat, that the *Deodani* is supposed to become possessed of the knowledge she is in search, i.e., the name of the offended deity who has brought about the plague, etc., and also the best method of propitiating his anger”.¹⁰³

Belief in Omen:

The Bodos are a superstitious people. They religiously believe some peculiar codes in their day to day life. They generally believed in omens of good and bad. One set of the bad omens related to animals. The caw-out of crow (*daokha*) by hard striking of its feather perching on the dry branch of the tree is a signal of imminent danger. The peculiar terror-striking (voices) cries of the owl (*phesa*) and the horned owl (*dao hudu*) are believed to be portentous of impending peril. The cawing of the cock at odd hours of the night, particularly in the evening is considered inauspicious. If it is hen then it is taken more serious and the hen is immediately killed by the householder. If a dove sits on its roof and coos the family must offer food to the cowherds. If a black winged vulture sit on the roof of the main house (*noma no*) or enters into the living house is considered an evil sign of householder. On this case the householder has to worship before the god *Bathou Borai*. The *Brahma dharma* followers perform an *Ahuti* and pray to god. The moving of a dog in the court yard by dragging its buttock is an indication of misfortune of the family. If a person sees a cat crossing the way from left to right side

on the eve of journey it is believed that some obstacles or dangers are sure and the purpose of journey would be fruitless. The mewing of a cat by moving round the house and howling of a dog with their faces directed towards the sky are indication of coming of danger. Similarly striking of tail in the cow-shed by the cow also considered a bad sign.¹⁰⁴ The entry of the cow or owl into the living house is considered an evil sign for the household. On the other hand, the cawing of crow gently looking to the kitchen and cock fighting is believed that some guests are visiting the house. If a vulture or a crow vomits in the yard, it predicts getting of wealth by the householder. Sitting of a pink-neck vulture on the roof of main house (*noma no*) is a very good sign for the householder. It is believed of visiting of their God *Bathou Borai* in the house. The family offers prayer to God *Bathou* in the event of such an occurrence. On the way of the journey of a person if a dog moves ahead of him, it predicts getting of wealth.

The Bodos observes some taboos strictly. No one of the family members is allowed to cross their courtyard through the centre carrying an axe or a hoe or a bamboo pole on the shoulder. A woman also should not cross it with an earthen jar of full water. It forebodes death of some one in the family. The man of the family must not set foot on the uncleaned courtyard in the early morning; otherwise, it shortens their life span. Therefore, it is bounded duty of the women of the house to sweep the courtyard even before the get up of the men folks. Whistling in the night is restricted. It signifies the invitation of the *modai* or devils.

In their day to day activities also they believe some augury. After parching of rice cakes *chourai* iron pan is must be sprinkled with fresh water; otherwise, it will bring suffering of heart burn disease to the person. When a person goes out for fishing at night he carries a knife along with him on the belief that the devil called *harai bankho* can't do any harm to him. Likewise the women along with their children whenever they visit to their relatives they also carry a knife with them. In the time of lunch or dinner playing of flute is tabooed. It is believed that the players would incur lose of teeth. The Bodos cut the tail of the fish which they catch first in fishing with their teeth, and believe that by doing so more fish will be caught. They consider it an ill omen to get a *Ganda gageb* fish in the first catch. It is believed that the earth of the oven inside the *Ishing* room secures the children of the house from all sorts of danger. Therefore, when

a mother sets for her parents' house along with her children, she will soften a piece of it with her saliva and put a circular mark on the forehead of the child.

There are also premonitions which are concerned with the automatic throbbing of a part of the body. In the period of crescent moon the throbbing of right eyes, limb of hands or body in the case of males and the left eyes, limb of hands or body in the case of females are considered auspicious. The throbbing of any of parts of body, namely eyes, limb or body which is opposite to the above is considered inauspicious.

One set of the Bodos omen are related to the dream phenomena. The biting of black cat or pricking of buffalo in the dream is an evil sign. It foretells some one to be hurted by his enemy. If some one stung by the *singgi* fish in the dream, it forebodes pain of body or scolding of his friend. The dream of fish, if it is white and flat like *phitikri*, *rou*, *barli*, it is believed by the Bodos to indicate money and good fortune. The dream of call of nature is believed to indicate lose of money while treading on the droppings of animals foretells getting of honour. Dream of white elephant, crossing of the river or a Shadow and swimming of river is regarded as lucky or auspicious. On the other hand, the dream of bamboo or meat cutting, lose of teeth and marriage is considered as ill omen.

The people believe in omen of days too. Particular days of the week and month are considered auspicious or inauspicious for starting some works. Sunday is auspicious for choosing the bride, Saturday and Tuesday is good for starting *Asu* paddy plantation. On Thursday exchange of paddy is restricted. In the month of *Magh* entering into granary is taboo.¹⁰⁵

Methods of weather forecast:

The Bodos also have some customary methods of weather forecast. If in the dusk the grasses are wet with dew, immediate rain is out of question. The *huri udoi jabla* i.e. flakes of tinged cloud moving very close to the Sun during sundown portend a long spell of drought while a ring around the midday sun indicates early rain. Ants going up in swarms to an elevated place indicate that flood is imminent. Praying mantises flying low in swarms are an indication that there will soon be a lingering rainy weather. White ants on flight mean imminent rains too. If fleas lay eggs on cowdung while it is raining, there will be no let up in the near future and the rain will continue for a long time.

Early rains are predicted also when a pigeon stretches its wings in the sun. There will be continuous rain for days together if goats graze outside while raining. Howling of a jackal before and after sunset indicates dry and rainy days respectively.¹⁰⁶ M.Choudury observes, “These beliefs have been thrown up by long collective experiences of the wisemen of yore, and the fact remains that modernism and changed outlook on life have not been able to minimize their value. One may call it conservatism or anything but even the highly educated Boro-Kacharis unconsciously attach great importance to these beliefs which, they honestly feel, have intrinsic values”.¹⁰⁷

Dance and Music:

Dance forms an essential part of all Bodo festivities and is an important connection of some of their religious ceremonies like *Kherai* worship. Dances have been associated with religion from remote past. From the temple ruins of Deo- Parbat as well from architectural ruins of Tejpur, dancing figures have been recovered. In the Vanamala Varmadeva (9th century) reference has been made to the existence of female dancer in the temples. Different forms of *Kherai* dances have emanated from *Bathou* worship. It is entirely religious in motive. It is popularly known as *Khrerai Mwsanai*. The *Kherai* dance is performed by rhythmic movement of body and feet accompanied with poses and gestures of hands to the tune of music, suggesting various ideas and sentiments.

One of the most graceful and fascinating dance of the Bodos is the famous *Bagurumba* which Bodo maidens perform to relax themselves. It is full of vivacity - the maidens hop and swing, bend and unbend, and at times give the impression of fluttering butterflies. The origin of the dance is associated with the appeasement of five traditional gods - *Ailong* (god of earth), *Agrang* (god of water), *Koila* (god of air), *Raj kumbre* (god of sky), and *Sanja burli* (god of light). The term *Bagurumba* is the compound word of three formations - *Ba*, *gurum* and *ba* meaning Oh hail, gods and five respectively. The complete meaning - Oh hail the five ancestral gods.¹⁰⁸

Bardaichikla mwsanai is a folk-dance of the Bodos. They dance during the *Baisakh* or *Bohag* month (April-May). In Bodo language *Bar* means wind or storm, *dai* means water and *chikla* means maiden or a deity, and *mwsanai* means dance. They believe that this *Bardaichikla* in the month of *Baisakh* comes to save and give new life to her dry and dying plants and trees.

Bodos also have dances associated with the marriage ceremony and the springtime *Baisagu* festival and winter festival *Domasi*. Besides, *Na gurnai* (fishing dance), *Mai gainai* (paddy plantation dance), *Maigong Khanai* and *Daosri delai mwsanai*, etc. are very important dance among the Bodos. These folk-dances have their own particular characteristics which express the aesthetic values and the emotion of the community and the realities of their day to day life.

Music and Musical Instruments:

Music in Bodos has been a vital part of their culture. Dances of Bodos are closely connected with music. The music is provided by diverse instruments of a simple kind, capable of producing excellent rhythms and melodies. The dancers, in their turn, follow the rhythm by instinct and habit, without much difficulty or perseverance. The most part of musical instruments are of home manufacture.

The Bodos, of course, have not much musical instruments. It consists of the following description:

(i) *Kham*: It is a large and long drum made of wood having both head ends covered with cowhides, which is a cylindrical-shaped drum. The size of the drum is about 2½ or 3 feet diameter and 3½ to 4 feet in length. The manufacture of this instrument is generally done from the trunk of trees such as *Sama*, *Khantal* (jackfruit), *Odal*, *thaijou* (mango), and *Serfang*, etc. It is used in solemn occasions particularly at *Kherai* and *Garja* worship.

(ii) *Serja*: A four stringed wooden instrument with *muga* silk strings which is played with a bow like a violin. The body of hollow part of lower portion is covered with hides of *Mwphou* (iguana) or she goat. It consists of four accessories, namely, four puthis or tuning knobs, one *gorai* (bridge), on bow made of bamboo and *Odal* fibre or hair of horse tail. It is used in the ceremonies like marriage, *Baisagu* and *Domasi* festivals, etc. The instrument made of *Bwmbw rwndw* wood produces best melody sound. It is also made from the trees like *Sijou* (*Euphorbia splendens*), *Chitwna* and *Khantal*.

(iii) *Siphung*: There are two types of flute. One is a big bamboo flute a yard long and one inch in diameter with only five finger holes for playing. This instrument is played at *Kherai* and *Garja* worship. It is a customary to play this flute on the early morning of the first day of *Baisagu* on the believed that it would destroy the eggs of the

snakes. Another bamboo flute is smaller and short but seven finger holes for playing. This flute is played on ordinary occasion.

(iv) *Bingi* (*Bin* in Assamese): A kind of one stringed musical instrument which is played with a bow like a violin. The lower portion of the wooden body looks like cup which covered with hides of iguana or she goat. It is played in ordinary occasions.

(v) *Gongwna*: The *Gongwna* is a type of vibrating reed or wind instrument similar to Jew's harp. It is made of bamboo or sometimes with horn. It is cut out of a thin slip of bamboo about 4 inches long and ½ inch wide. It is so cut that a thin tongue runs down the centre of the slip connected therewith at one extremity only. One end of a short piece of string is fastened to the Jew's harp, and to the other a small bamboo handle is attached. The instrument is held between the thumb and forefinger of the left hand, placed between the teeth so that they touch it lightly, and the string is given a succession of sharp tugs by means of the handle held in the right hand to emit the distinctive sound. The *Gongwna* is usually accompanies with drum during the festival of *Baisagu*.

(vi) *Kaowang*: *Kaowang* (*konjuri* in Assamese) is a larger kind of cymbals in pairs, in shape like the two big cups of brass and about 6 inches in diameter. It is procured in the markets. It is usually played in ordinary occasions.

(vii) *Jotha*: *Jotha* (*Monjira* in Assamese) is a smaller kind of cymbals in pair, and in shape not unlike two small cup of brass. It is obtained in the market. It is used in solemn occasions, such as *Kherai* and *Garja* worship. It serves as an accompaniment for the *Kham*, but has no separate part to play.

(viii) *Jab-khring* or *jab-sring*: It is known as *Ramatal* in Assamese. This instrument is a kind of castanets made of hard wood used in pairs on the fingers to make rattling sounds as a rhythm for dancing. It is made of multiple small round piece of metal sheet which is inserted in the handle of wooden frame. It is usually used in the festivals like *Baisagu* and *Domasi* and in the marriage ceremony. It is of course played by the women while dancing.

(ix) *Jajrang-ga*: It is a kind of reed instruments like the *Gongwna* made of *thanga* or *batha-bibung* reed. It is played in *Baisagu* and *Domasi*.

(x) *Thorkha*: A kind of clapper instrument of bamboo. It is constructed out of short piece of thick bamboo about 2 ½ feet length, split in length wise in the middle but

closed at one end and open at other end. Its sound of clapping is used as a rhythm for dancing as an accompaniment of other music, but has no separate part to play.

Of late, many changes are move stealthily in the sphere of Bodo music. There came use of new musical instruments such as harmonium, guitar, violin, tabala, use of small drums, etc.

Games and Amusements:

Games and sports formed an integral part of Bodo social life. Some of them were even related to rituals and customs. There are many games which may be given as below:

Bwrla gaonai: One of the popular forms of recreation of the Bodo is the game of archery called *Bwrla gaonai*. In the former days competition of arrow-shooting between the men of one village challenging those of another was held. Sometimes among the friends of men divided into two for competing each other. It is played in two ways. In one match the competitors are required to shoot a fixed number of arrows to the fixed marked target from a certain distance. The groups who can shoot maximum arrows in the target are considered to be winner of the games. In another game a person or competitors is regarded to be winner who can shoot the arrows in farthest distance. The shooting of archery in the sky is a customary in Bodo for atonement. It also forms an indispensable weapon for hunting. It happens to be play thing for children to carry it with their movement. Though it is considered to be national games but its use is fast disappearing among the Bodo folk. In the custom of Bodo penance method shooting of arrows is obligatory.

Hang-gudu Galenai: The game is played in the after-noon till the fall of dusk. For the purpose the boys or sometimes girls divided into two parties. The parties take their places on opposite sides of a line, and one rushes out and touches an opponent and tries to get back without drawing breath, which is shown by his shouting all the time *Ha-du-du*, from which the game takes place. As he or she enters the hostile territory he or she must continue to shout out a series of verses *Ha-du-du*. Should he or she cease shouting the rhyme or be captured himself or herself, he becomes 'dead', and takes no further part in the game, which is carried on in succession by other members of his side until they are 'dead' or have succeeded in capturing all their opponents.

Bata: *Bata* is most popular indigenous game among the Bodos. The game is played with *Laoti* means stick with which an object of very short *Bata* i.e., short object is struck as far as he can hit it. The stick or *Laoti* is two and half feet long and the striking object *Bata* is about 4 inches or so in length. It is too short to strike and so the name is *Bata*. The players divide into two; of course they do not have any specific number of players. The *Bata* is placed in a shallow hole or on the vertical pole about one and half feet, and the side which 'fields' stands in a row opposite it. The 'in' player strikes the *Bata* out of the hole or from the vertical pole where the *Bata* is placed with his *Laoti*, and if any of his opponents catch it, he is 'out'. The distance of the ground where *Bata* strikes is measured from the centre of hole or pole with their playing stick by reciting the verses of doggerels thus: "*Ele tele saole jamka bel bata.*" On each end of the reciting is taken as on point, and repeated reciting continues till it reaches out to the striking place of *Bata*. And the process of striking continues till he is not caught by the 'field' stands of the opponents.

The following are the some other Bodo indigenous games:

A kind of wrestling where two persons grasp each other's hands with the fingers interlocked, and try to push one another; tug-of-war with a piece of rope between two parties; *daola choulainai* i.e., cock fighting, where two boys hold one leg with one hand and the one on the opposite shoulder of himself; *mwisw choulainai* i.e., butting at one another like bulls and trying to upset each other; *ada fada* or *amwl dimwl gelanai* (a kind of swimming game played in the river or pool); *amwi mwi*; *Gila kannai*; *daria pantha* ; *kikor* ; *asini bisini*; *khwi gelenai* (game of running after touching) ; *adi diga*; *gor gelenai* ; *gor khannai*; *sheltao gaonai* (a bamboo gun firing game); *dhop gelenai*; *daobo ding-gla tabainai* (walk on stilt); Stone throwing competition; *Takwmalainai* (seek and hide); long jump; high jump ; pitching cowries into a hole in the ground; *megon katenai* (blind-man's buff); a game played with round pebbles like marbles, and others.

In modern times traditional games are rapidly passing out of vogue and with the introduction of British rule, a wide range of new sports such as foot ball, volley ball, carom, badminton, cricket also entered in the field of Bodo games.

Hunting and Fishing:

Hunting forms an important favorite pastime of the village people since olden times. Community hunting is very common in lean season. For catching deers and wild pigs the villagers surround with large nets, usually small patch of jungle, and shouting, yelling and beating drums, they drive animals into the nets. When the prey falls into the nets, the victims are pierced with spears and bludgeons. Hunting with bows and arrows, spears is a common practice. In earlier times catching of wild elephants is also one of the adventurous sports. With the extinction of forest the culture of hunting also now almost disappeared.

Fishing is most favourite hobby for the village folk. Fish form an important item in a Bodo diet. Fishing is mainly done by means of traps such as *Jekai, khoka, khaki, sen, polo, dangi*. These are indigenously manufactured bamboo traps. Besides, they also use various kinds of nets for fishing. A curious custom of Bodo fishing is that of poisoning the rivers. For this purpose they use the native plant's root called *na roo*. Sometimes, herb called *bisongali* is also used. The poison has the effect of stupefying the fish, which float on the surface of the water, and can be collected easily.

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