

CHAPTER-6

THE PRESENT STATUS OF THE BODO FESTIVALS IN THE CONTEXT OF CHANGING SOCIETY

The word status means position or conditions. The Bodos are one of the aboriginal inhabitants of this land. Their festivals have been changing since its initiation form till date. The changes are continuous processes. It is said that modernity does not mean forgetting of traditions. The tradition is the foundation of modernity in real changes. The modernity will be meaningful if any changes take place through acceptable modification of traditions in modern outlook.

India is the country of socialist, secular multi-ethnic, multi-cultural. The Bodos are not isolated in their society alone. The socialist and secular fabrics are distinctly apparent in their society in many aspects. For example- The Bodos are not only the followers of traditional *Bathou* religion. Apart from traditional *Bathou* religion, they follow the religions like – the Christianity, the *Satsang* by Sri Sri Anukul Chandra Thakur, the *Ek Saran Nam Dharma* by Sri Sri Sankhardev, the *Shirdi Sai Baba*, the *Brahma Dharma* by Gurudev Khalicharan Brahma, etc. Event there are many sects like - the *Rupamuni Bathou*, the *Zangkhras Bathou*, the *Bibar Bathou*, the *Joynarayan Bathou*, the *Bishnu Bathou*, the *Swrzigiri Bathou*, etc. among their *Bathou* religion. Some of them worship the *Bathou* by offering flowers, some of them by sacrificing domestic animals. They are concentrated in many areas. The various religion worshiper Bodos have almost same traditional rites and rituals, culture, costume, mores, etc. But the Christian Bodos has been seen as parting from their traditional rites and rituals, ceremony, culture, etc. though they are accepting language and costumes. In this context certain changes in the Bodo society are seen in some aspects including the celebration of various festivals. The present acculturation culture is applied to the Bodos also.

1. The present Status of the festivals and ceremonies relating to life cycle of an individual in the Bodo society:

The traditional ways of selecting the land for building houses of the Bodos have become impossible specially in the urban areas. It is because of the due attraction towards urban and semi urban areas. The traditions of *Nomano*, having three rooms like *Ising*, *Okhong* and *Khophra* have also been rarely seen among them. Previously the granary was the first to be build before building other houses in the selection of new house compound. This process has also not found now-a-days. It is said that in town and city dwellers no requirement as the Bodo traditions and believe could arise. The daughter is also getting few shares of her parent's property in some of the villages along with the property rights of previous one.

The Traditional and chief religion of the Bodos is the *Bathou*. The Bodos of today also accepted many religions of the land as stated above though maximum of the Bodos belongs to the Hindu mode of worship except Christians.

i. The traditional five *bad* systems:

The traditional five *bad* systems – *Ogorbad*, *Phongslothbad*, *Daokhibad*, *Khaoalibad* and *Khoulwbwdbad* of the Bodos have also seen changed. Though the acceptances of first two *bad* are continuing in traditional Bodo society the *Daokhibad* and *Khaoalibad* are rarely seen in the Bodo society nowadays. The existing of *Khoulwbwdbad* is seen among the rural areas by and large. The punishment and the penance (*Udrainai*) system in the Bodos in connection of the *bad* are seen very simple now a day. The Bow-Methods of penance in the Bodo society is rarely seen among the followers of the *Zangkhras Bathou* only at present with slight variation.

ii. The opening of door ceremony and others:

Today some of the Bodos do not perform this tradition but they pray before the *Bathou* by burning earthen lamp and incense sticks and offering a pair of betelnuts, two pieces of one rupee coins, etc. The temporary transfer of guardianship or selling of the baby, marriage to her/his father /mother to avoid dire events, etc. of the newly born baby is unknown by the Bodo society at present. Along with blessing (*Dwi Sarnai*), the celebration of birth day, ceremonial cutting of hair of

the boy baby, feeding to newly born child, etc. are found in urban areas among the Bodos. The celebration of birth day, hair cutting, feeding, etc. are rare in rural areas.

iii. Marriage:

At present, the Bodo marriage system is slidely changed. Most of the marriage in the Bodo society takes places in the *Brahma* mode though the *Hathasuni* or *Bathou* marriage systems are the prerequisite in the most of the rural traditional Bodos. The standards arrange marriage system is presently more popular. The marriage like the *Gwrzia Lakhinai Haba*, *the Kharsonnai Haba* and the *Dongkha Habnai Haba* are found very rare in rural areas only among the Bodo society. The *Hinzao Bwnanwi Lainai Haba* and *Dwnkhar Langnai Haba* are not known at present. The widow and widower re-marriage is continuing till today. Though polygamy is found rarely but polyandry is not found in the Bodo society. Second marriage with the consent of the first wife is rare at present in the Bodo society. The yearlong marriage arrangement of the previous traditional Bodo society is minimizing at present though some of the tradition like - *Hwoa Gwdan Nainai*, *Picking Pon*, taking *Malsa* and *Barihaga*, etc. and tearing of *Nirikh*, *Bishna Sara*, *Athmongla*, etc. are existing. The tradition like – the *Biban Langnai*, the *Gangkhan Hwnai*, the *mamai mara*, *Oma Khobthang Zanai*, etc. have disappeared. The tradition of the *Biban Langnai* is settled with payment of little money. At present one or two discussion among the bride and groom parties are sufficient for arrangement of marriage. The uses of the *Bwirathi* with traditional dress are found very colorfully in present Bodo marriage. The Christians solemnize the marriage with their religious rites. No change in marriage system among the followers of Joyguru, Ek Saran Nam Dharma, etc. religious Bodos are found from their traditional marriage system at present.

iv. Social customs of the Bodos relating to Death:

It is said that previously some of the Bodo people disposed off the death body by throwing open in the deep jungle. It has totally abolished by the Bodos at present. At present the death body of the human being after confirmation is done by burying and burning after following lots of traditional rites and rituals. The

Sradhya ceremony is observed by following rites and rituals as per set systems of the village. It is said that slide changes have been taking place from previous one. For example the prayer meeting and songs and feasting are also seen in present day under large pandal with white clothes. The erections of memorial tomb, etc. are also seen by the family or organization in memory of death person in various villages.

2. The present Status of the Seasonal and Agricultural festivals:

i. The Present status of the *Bwisagu* Festival:

The *Bwisagu* is one of the greatest festivals of the Bodos. The Bodo people love this festival with their heart and soul. This festival is like a lotus that has been blossom in the fertile land of the Bodo society and culture with new fragrance among the beautiful flowers in the nature of earth. The Bodo people who live in plains, river valley, hill sides and etc. areas are celebrating this festival from the time immemorial.

The Heaven is on earth and the nature is created by god. The people can acquire happiness living on earth of nature. ‘Truth is beauty and beauty is truth’— John Keats has said. *Saitham Sivam Sundaram*. Truth is Siva, Siva is God and Siva or God is beauty. Where there is truth there is happiness. Where there is truth and happiness, there is the festival of joy. The *Bwisagu* festival gives all happiness to the Bodo people. The earth is the natural mother. The nature is the mother. The life, it is changeable. The changeable nature, changes everything. The old-changeable changes yielding place to new. So the poet Tennyson most probably sings—

“Ring out the old, ring in the new
Ring happy bells, across the snow:
The year is going, let him go;
Ring out the false, ring in the true
Ring out the grief that saps the mind.
For those that here we see no more;
Ring out the feud of rich and poor,

Ring in redress to all mankind.”

(Tennyson: In Memoriam Ring out, wild bells.)

The Bodo people get some leisure after the heavy works of harvesting is over. They get few relax and look forward hopefully the period of ploughing and sowing crops for the forthcoming year. The men folk tend their garden, repairing of their houses. The women folk start working in their loom for the household use and for the forthcoming *Bwisagu* festival, for giving away to their near and dear ones. The men folks collect the fire woods or fuel from the nearby jungles for the summer use. At this moment the nature has changed. The dust storms, drought like situation, tepid weather begin to hold slowly and steadily and new blue colour cloudy sky begins to appear. Trees like the coral, the *palas*, the mango, the *sisu*, etc. are in blossom. Leaves are sprouting on most trees, grasses are becoming green, the birds are tuning in, the first showers are falling and there is fragrance in the air. The water in the rivers, streams, tanks and lakes are getting in. One tends to get a little forgetful in this atmosphere, songs seem to spring to ones lips unbidden, and if one is young the heart flutters a little, perhaps in yearning. The cuckoos are begins to coo; beneath the new leaves of the trees. All these signal the advent of the *Bwisagu* to the Bodo people.

The various *Bwisagu* related words has come into existence. When a child is born during the *Bwisagu* period the name of the baby is kept as ‘*Bwisagw*’ ‘*Bwisag*’, etc. if the child baby is boy; and if the baby is girl; her name is kept ‘*Bwisagi*’, etc. Different words are used with different verbs to mean the words like — *Bwisagu nang*, *Bwisagu methai*, *Bwisagu zanai*, *Bwisagu borai*, *Bwisagu bidai*, *Bwisagu bainai*, *Bwisagu phagla*, *Bwisagu phagli*, *Bwisagu bao*, etc. The *Bwisagu* has developed many Bodo words --- when the work is to be done before *Bwisagu* but could not done up to *Bwisagu*, it is called *Bwisagu barnai* (*Bwisagu* over, that is the work has deferred). When there is lot of enjoyment, it is called *Bwisagu nangnai* (arrival of *Bwisagu*). The dance in *Bwisagu* is *Bwisagu mwsanai* (dance), the *Bwisagu* song is *Bwisagu methai*, the offering in the *Bwisagu* is *Bwisagu baonai*, the merry-making in *Bwisagu* is *Bwisagu zanai*, etc. The merry-making has changed with the arrival of new age and civilization. In previous years almost

all the merry-making take place in open villages, open field, paddy field, etc. there were no definite places. Now-a-days the *Bwisagu* is celebrated in the place provided for the purpose known as the *Bwisagu Sali* i.e. the place of the *Bwisagu* along with another places. When lots of merry-making has taken place in a particular house, then it is called happening of *Bwisagusali* (place of *Bwisagu*). When a male person is involved in celebration of the *Bwisagu* festival very actively; then he is called *Bwisagu phagla* and the women is called *Bwisagu phagli* (the *phagla* means the crack i.e. it denotes the real merry-maker and the *phagli* is feminine to *phagla*). The *Bwisagu* thus developed into languages also in the modern age.

It is said that the branches of great Bodo family has not been assimilated with Aryan completely. They are sticking with their own culture even today. The examples of it are available with the modern Lalungs, Rabha, Mising, Naga, etc. of the North East part of India and abroad. The Lalung celebrates '*Chot Bihu Mela*', the Misings celebrates '*Ali-Ai-Ligang*' shortly '*Ligang*' in the first week of Pagun, the Rabhas celebrates '*Waikhu*' in the middle of the *Bohag* and *Jet* month of the Assamese months; it is celebrated up to seven days.

The blowing South West wind *Bar-dwi-Sikhla* during the *Bwisagu* is the most significant scientific impact in the economy of the Bodo people. The *Bar-Dwi-Sikhla* brings down water to the earth, makes the land fertile for cultivation. The Bodo community becomes rich with their cultivation in fertile land with various agricultural products. The worship of the *Bwrai Bathou Moharaza*, the supreme God of traditional Bodos is seen common during the *Bwisagu* festival. The *Mwsou Bwisagu* is also common in all traditional and Brahma religion follower Bodos. It is to be mentioned here that the Bodos follows various religions. But at present the way of celebration of the *Bwisagu* festival is almost common to all religious Bodos.

The present *Bwisagu* festival is not lingered in traditional and rural based only. It gives new way of life in the Bodo society in every nook and corner of the Kokrajhar district including all major and minor towns of the BTC. It is celebrated almost all section, religious people of the BTC and singing, dancing, merry-

making feasting, begging, arranging picnics, etc. are the order of the day during the *Bwisagu* festival. Previously it was a rural based. Now-a-days traditional rural based festival has got place in semi-urban and urban areas also. Most of the town and cities and villages get new looks in the *Bwisagu*. Thousands of people get involved in the *Bwisagu Borai* (*Bwisagu* welcome) and the *Bwisagu Bidai* (*Bwisagu* farewell) celebration every year. The various competitions like the *Bwisagu* song, the *Bwisagu* dance, the *Bwisagu* music; the *Bwisagu* Prince, the *Bwisagu* Princes, etc. are the order of the day in various places. The organizations of musical night, cultural night, etc. with famous and popular artists are added new dimension in present day. The well known artist and celebrities involvement in the *Bwisagu* festival has increased the socio-cultural potentialities or relevance's of the festival. The *Bwisagu* would be the prime, popular and greatest festival among the Bodos and others in Kokrajhar - BTC—Assam, North-East, India and even abroad. The *Bwisagu* festival is the sources of songs, dances, music and musical instruments, various Bodo words, traditions, rites and rituals, etc.

ii. The Present status of the *Domasi* Festival:

By and large celebration of the *Domasi*, agriculture related festival of the Bodos is found in the Kokrajhar district. It is said that merriment in this festival is less in comparison with the *Bwisagu*, but the entire Bodo people do not take less importance on it. It has the addition of few varieties of modern delicacies along with previous one. The burning of Mejis representing various gods and goddess are also there event today. It is said that this represents *Laokhar Gossai* or God Khrisna. The tying of tress, offering to the ancestors and few other rites and rituals related with the festivals also exist in present day. The *Domasi* festival reflects various traditions, rituals, beliefs and faiths, foods, culture of the Bodo people.

iii. The present Status of the *Khathri-Gasa-Saonai* festival:

The *Khathri-Gasa-Saonai* festival is observed by the Bodo people in very simple manner. It is celebrated in last day of *Asin* (18th Oct) or first day of *Kati* (19th Oct) month of the Assamese by burning light in the agricultural field, at the entrance of residence or house, cow-shed, etc. before sun set or dusk. It was very enthusiastic celebration with participation of children with singing various songs in previous

years. No more enthusiastic celebration is seen though it is celebrated by every household in rural and urban areas at present. In urban areas due to the absence of agricultural field, cow-shed, etc. they simply lights at the entrance of their residences.

iv. The Present Status of the *Amthisua* Festival:

The *Amthisua* festival is celebrated from the seven days of *Ashar* month i.e June 22nd to full one week every year. The rituals of not touching on the granary, no digging of soil, no tilling, no cutting of trees, etc. are done in the rural areas. In some of the villages this prohibition is done only three days. At present the entertainment with competitions like football, kabaddi, etc. among the villagers are performed in most of the rural people with warm participations. It is said that the status of this festival has importance among the traditional Bodos event today.

v. The Present status of the *Wri Hwnai* Festival:

The *Wri Hwnai* Festival celebration is rarely found in Bodo society at present. Despite of heavy works of summer, some youths celebrated this festival as the *Nostho Chandra* meaning the harm moon night. Sometime the edible, non-edible fruits, etc. are done harm at that night by the youths. It has its own status in the traditional Bodos.

vi. The Present Status of Festivals or Ceremonies directly related to agriculture:

The custom, traditions and practices of the *Hal Eozennai Phwrwb*, the *Khwthia phwnai*, the *Khwthia phunai*, the *Mai Gaizennai*, the *Nangwl Zangkhra*, the *Bakhri Gaikhonnai*, the *Mainao Lainai*, the *Wngkham Gwrlwi Zanai*, etc festivals are performed by the Bodos as per their religious rites and rituals. The *Nangwl Zangkhra Phwrwb* is celebrated by the household along with the participants who involved in last sowing of paddy activities. It is most entertaining day. The household serves lots of edible items like - varieties of fishes, pork, chicken, etc. along with abundances of rice bear. Specially this festivals is only the elders who participate in last paddy sowing activities. The eating of new rice festival is seen

most entertaining having lots of edible and potable items like - fishes, pork, chicken, rice beer, etc. by the elders.

3. The Present status of the Religious Festivals:

i. The Present Status of the *Salami Puja*:

The *Salami puja* is celebrated at least two times in a year by traditional Bodos. Every traditional Bodos celebrates this household festival after the *Bwisagu* for the first time, secondly before the *Garza Puja* of the village or the *Wngkham Gwrlwi Zanai Din*. It is also celebrated after any good or bad event of the family. Some traditional Bodos who refrain from sacrificing domestic animals during the *Salami puja* have now offered flowers. The *Salami puja* or festival though it is surrounded to family festival it is also done before beginning of the *Kherai*, the *Garza puja*, etc. festivals of the traditional Bodos in the village and beyond it. It is a kind of purification and celebration in entire traditional Bodo society event in the challenging society of today. The Brahma religious Bodos performs the *Jyogyahati* during New Year and any other events in the family in the name of the *Salami puja*.

ii. The Present Status of the *Dinga Puja*:

The traditional Bodos celebrate the *Dinga Puja* for the purification, welfare and disease free, healthy and prosperity of the village. It is celebrated before the summer cultivation. It has no fixed time or date. The offering varies with sacrificial and non-sacrificial sects in this festival also. In this festival women are not participated though they make some arrangement for the festival. The small children are also not allowed to join in some villages. But after floating away the *Behela* the small children are allowed to join specially for feasting with sacrificed meats. It has large acceptability in the village folks in present day also.

iii. The Present Status of the *Garza Puja*:

The Bodos celebrates the *Garza puja* to purify themselves from the impure that have been made through the participation in various festivals and ceremonies which are order of the season due to the free mixing with each other, eating, merry-making, walking, drinking rice-beer, etc. and to bring peace, harmony, disease

free, healthy and prosperity of the village. Although some of the rituals including the identification of wrong doers have become very simple, almost all the villages of traditional believer Bodos perform the *Garza Puja* at least one in a year. The *Garza Puja* like - the *Lakhi* or the *Mainao Garza*, the *Tulsing Mulsing Garza*, the *Borai Raja Garza*, etc. are the only few *Garza's* that have been celebrating by the Bodos at present at Kokrajhar district.

At present time the ladies of the village are also participating in the celebration of the *Garza puja* in the works of introducing and collection of the *Lakhi or Mainao* in large numbers for their household. The small children are also not allowed to join in some villages. But after finishing the sacrifices of domestic animals, the small children are allowed to join specially for feasting with sacrificed meats in some villages.

iv. The Present Status of the *Marai Puja*:

The *Marai puja* is offered to the snake Goddess or the *Bisohori* or *Manasha* Goddess for saving human being from the danger of the serpent Goddess and welfare of the village or the family. It is a kind of family as well as village puja. In ancient days this festival was celebrated up to 7 night and 7 days. It is celebrated one day and one night at present day. Children cannot participate in this *Marai* festival of the Bodos. It is believed that this puja should be offered three consecutive years. It is said that the *Marai puja* is similar to that of the *Bisohori puja* perform in a family along with the *Salami puja*. The *Bisohori puja* is offered in almost all the places of Kokrajhar with the *Salami puja*. The non-sacrifice sects of traditional *Bathou* worshiper offer flowers in the puja. The previous *Marai puja* is very rare at Kokrajhar district now.

v. The Present Status of *Narasiga or Narazonai Puja*:

The some of the agriculturist traditional Bodos celebrate the *Narasiga puja* in the villages in Kokrajhar district once in a year very simply. It is celebrated in the *Magh or Phagun* month of the Assamese month after accomplishment of harvesting of *maisali* crops. It is said that this festival is celebrated for keeping human and domestic animals free from all kinds of diseases and make them peace

and happiness along with good harvesting to their Gods and goddesses. The women are not participated in the *Puja*. In some villages children are not allowed to join. The puja is lead by the *Oza*, the *Douri* and the guardians of the villages.

vi. The Present status of the *Kherai* Festival:

The *Kherai* is the greatest religious festival of the Bodos. 'It has seen two systems of performing the *Kherai* amongst the Bodos since now. First is the celebration of the *Kherai* with the help of the *Doudini* from ancient period and other is the celebration of the *Kherai* without the *Doudini*'.¹ It is said that under the leadership of Dhuparam Basumatary 'The *Soudo Assam Bathou Mahasanga*' was formed in 1957 with few religious minded people. They introduced new system of the *Kherai* celebration in the Kamrup District without *Doudini*. It was the new system of the *Kherai*. But it had not been accepted by all the Bodos even in Kamrup district.

The *Kherai* celebration with the help of the *Doudini* has also been divided into two by passing out of the time. One of them is celebrated the *Kherai* by sacrificing domestic animals which is traditional and the other is celebrated the *Kherai* by offering flowers - red, yellow and white colour; lead by Joynarayan Basumatary in the middle of the 20th century.

'There is a *Garzasali* in the north-east corner of the *Kherai* worshipping place. The temporary *Garzasali* is prepared for it. One *Gasa* is lighted in the *Kheraisali* first and then the *Oza* is allowed to heal the *Doudini* in the *Garzasali* by enchanting mantras. The healing of the *Doudini* is seen in three forms - *Gwrsikhangnai* (Hiccupping), *Wlwnghikhangnai* (Healing) and *Doudini Zakhangnai* (falling under trance). Then the *Doudini* is paraded to the *Kheraisali* from the *Garzasali* and perform the *Kherai* worship there'.² The materials and tools like the *Kham*, the *Siphung*, the *Zotha*, the Swords, the bat, the Shields, the Dresses, etc. to be used in the *Kherai* worship is purified and the *Oza*, the *Douri*, the *Doudini* and others are introduced in the *Douri*'s house after purifying or offering puja in the *Bathou* altar of the *Douri*. Then they are paraded to the *Kheraisali* after playing musical instruments for few while. Sometime this introduction is also done in the *Garzasali*. It is said that in ancient time all the offering is done by the *Doudini* herself. It is seen that all the offering is done by the *Douri* himself under the

supervision of the *Oza* while drinking of flesh sacrifice chicken blood and sacrificing of some chicken by the *Doudini* herself on behalf of the god and Goddess is seen at present.

‘In *Doudini*-less *Kherai*, all the offering is done by the *Douri* himself. There is no relation between the playing of the *Kham*, the *Siphung* and the *Zotha*. The *Douri* offers puja and the players of the *Kham*, the *Siphung*, the *Zotha* and dances around the *Kheraisali* with the groups of girls go on. This dancing has no relation with puja offering. Because offering in puja is done by the *Douri* himself.’³

The *Doudini*, the *Oza*, the *Douri* and the players of the musical instruments like - the *Kham*, the *Siphung*, the *Zotha*, the dancers and audience or the worshipers is a must in the *Kherai*. The chanting of the *Oza* for healing the *Doudini*, tunes of musical instruments- the *Kham*, the *Siphung* and the *Zotha* in dances of the *Doudini* with gestures and postures of the Gods and goddesses, drinking of chicken flesh blood on behalf of the God and Goddess and offering of Chicken by the *Doudini*, offering of *prasads* and sacrificing the chicken as per the advice of the *Oza* and helping the *Doudini* by the *Douri* at any cost and groups of dancer along with the audiences is inseparable with the *Kherai* Worship.

The anarchy of offering, *prasads*, sacrificing of domestic animals and flowers of red, white and yellow colour and the necessary of the *Doudini*, the *Oza*, the *Douri*, musical instruments with players of the *Kham*, the *Siphung* and the *Zotha*, etc. is arising due to absence of definite written records and the guidelines for the *Kherai* festival. The *Oza* is not come from the theosophical society of the modern world so the variations from one *Oza* to another and one place to another could be taken place. Event the name of the same Gods and Goddesses are different in different places.

Apart from those internal problems the expenditure of the *Kherai* worship is very high and unbearable in certain cases. It has no definite and fixed day of worshipping the *Kherai* worship. Some of the *Kherai* worshippers select Tuesday as the holy day for the *Kherai* worship. The *Kherai* worshipping by sacrificing

domestic animals and offering flowers has also become their internal as well as external problems.

Apart from that the following status of the *Kherai* festival can be highlighted:

a. The *Kherai* festival as a traditional cum National Festival of the Bodos:

The *Kherai* festival is regarded as a traditional cum national festival of the Bodos. It is a symbol of hope, desire, and aspiration of the human being for peace, happiness and prosperity in the worldwide. The ancient records suggest that the *Kherai* worship was taking place during the era of kings for their success in war and peace. There is an instance that the powerful Koch King Naranarayana also had to perform the *Kherai* 'puja' to satisfy 'Mahadeva' (*Bathou Borai*), with the Bodo dancers before starting the war against the Ahoms in second half of the 16th century. It has been described in the "Darrangraj Vamsavali" retold by K. Brahma as follows:

"Pratham Nishat dekha dile sadasiv
Apanar niti arilihi kiyo;
Kachari mote abho kariye nachan,
Tor joy haibe kailo swarup basan,
Ehibuli Mahadev antardhan bhaila,
Setana lobhiya Raja Sambhar sapaila."⁴

Somkoch nadir tirat thana gari,
Patila nachan jata amila kachari,
hangsa, paro, mada, bhata, mohis, sukar,
Kukura, sagal, upahar nirantor,
Patila nachan tatha madal bojai,
Sahara majat tulilanta deodhai"⁵

i.e. At the first night the 'Sadasiva' (Mahadeva or Bathou Borai) appears in the dreams of the King Naranarayana and asked why the king had given up his system of worship, (here the system of worship of the Boros have been mentioned, as because offerings of animals and birds had been mentioned and also the use of

wine or 'mada1, which were essential at the *Kherai puja* of the Boros) and advised him to arrange dances of 'Kherai puja, to worship 'Him', saying so 'He' disappeared. As soon as the king got up from sleep, he realized the, dreams and ordered his followers to arrange a '*Kherai puja*' with the dances of the Kacharis by the bank of the Sonkosh river where sacrificed the ducks, parrots, buffaloes, pigs, cocks, goats and wine. While dances took places along with the *Kham* (drums), the Doudini, the Deodhai or 'Deoda' explained all the things before the crowds." So it is observed that the *Kherai* was the traditional and national festival of the Bodos since time immemorial. At present, it is observed as the same.

"The *Kherai* performance is not limited only to an art form or a dance, but presently its scope has been extended to a festival. It is also correct that this performance acquire much festival behaviour. The Boros regard the *Kherai* performance as their national festival. Unlike many other folk dance forms, the *Kherai* is totally free from erotic elements. It is devotional in content and ethical in theme as well as ritual in context"⁶ - retold by M.S. Hazoary.

b. The *Kherai* festival as the Bodo Cultural Heritage:

(a) The *Kherai* is a part of cultural heritage of the Bodos inherited from the time of immemorial. As the Bengalees have the Durga puja and the Kalipuja, the Ahoms has Aliailigang or Ligang, the Christian has 'X mass', the Muslims has 'Eid', the Bodos has the *Kherai* festival. It is performed to propitiate the 'Borai Bathou', i.e. the Almighty God in the form of worship and dances. The *Bathou* worshippers practice to propitiate the *Borai Bathou* for universal peace and brotherhoods.

(b) The flutists, the drummers, the cymbalists and the dancers get their chance to show their performance in the *Kherai* festivals. The interested persons are influenced by those activities and gather knowledge of it. It is observed that the *Kherai* dancer cannot refrain himself from attending the *Kherai* whenever he knows or learns.

(c) It is said that the dances like – the *Bodo Khristi Mwsanai*, the *Mwsaglangnai*, the *Sothrali Mwsanai*, the *Dahal Thungri Sibnai Mwsanai*, the

Zaraphagla Mwsanai, etc. remain as the status of cultural heritage of the *Kherai* festival amongst the Bodos.

c. The *Kherai* as Religious cum Social festival:

(a) The *Kherai* festival is a combination of religious, spiritual as well as a social festival of the Bodos. All the worshippers of the *Bathouism* irrespective of economic conditions, the villagers as well as persons from all walks of life gather together and come close to each other in the *Kherai* festival

(b) The *Kherai* dances are associated with the worship of *Borai Bathou* and 16/18 different deities. Demonstration dances of 16/18 items to propitiate 16 different Gods and Goddess are grouped into the *Kherai* class of dance along with few sub dances. Rhythmic steps and virile movements with well poise harmony are the distinguishing features of the *Kherai* dance. In such way the dancers and the learners have chance to learn many techniques naturally through the *Kherai* dances.

(c) The *Doudini*, the *Oza*, the *Douri*, the *Kham*, the *Siphung* and the *Zotha* players and the worshippers have to perform the *Kherai* according to the traditional primitive as well as modified rules. The worshippers of the *Bathou* and the *Kherai* performers along with the dancers and audiences have to follow these rules. It is found that the youth as well as the followers of the *Bathou* religion have the capacity to maintain the rules and discipline of the *Kherai* of the *Bathouism*.

(d) Last but not least, the *Doudini* gives moral teaching to all the human beings how and why the people should arrange a *Kherai* in every year. She gives advice to the people how to take care of the *Mainao* the Goddess of wealth (*Lakshmi*) and it's necessary in living. She gives predictions of past, present and future for human being. The moral teaching of the *Doudini* is praiseworthy among the Bodo society event today. It is said that it is the silent educators for the Bodos.

d. The *Kherai* festival as preserver of Bodo culture:

i) The *Kherai* festival is the source of offering to the departed or demised souls. Before starting the *Kherai* festival the *Kherai* party and the *Kherai* organising committee is offered items like clothes and other to the departed souls. This is called as *Gwthwisi Baonai*.

ii) The worshippers, the dancers and the musical instrument players follow the *Doudini*. At present the '*Bodo Harimu Affad*' has been trying to project the different kinds of steps of the *Kherai* dances with proper documentation. In this way the dancers and the worshippers gets chances to learn the steps of different kinds of the *Kherai* dances.

iii) The *Kherai* festival is celebrated for the propitiation of the *Bathou* i.e. Almighty God and 16/18 other Gods and Goddess for good harvest, cultivation, protection from diseases, bad events and misfortune throughout the year and for peaceful and the welfare of all the human being of the world. The *Doudini* demonstrates altogether 16/18 different major dances fostering the posture and gestures of the 16/18 different Gods and Goddess in the *Kherai*.

iv) The *Doudini* performs the worship through different dances. She gives primitive style of demonstration dances of war with enemies and wild forces, protection of their belonging from the enemies, control of emotion, peaceful living in the society, etc. The youths follow as a rehearsal of war and peaceful co-existence in the society.

v) The modern form of folk dances of the Bodos viz. the *Bodo Khristi Mwsanai*, the *Mwsaglangnai*, the *Bagurumba Mwsanai*, the *Sothrali Mwsanai*, the *Dahal Thungri Sibnai Mwsanai*, the *Khophri Sibnai Mwsanai*, the *Daosri Delai Mwsanai*, the *Maigainai Mwsanai*, the *Mwsaglangnai*, the *Bardwisikhla Mwsanai*, the *Sikhri Sikhla Mwsanai*, etc. have developed through the *Kherai* dances. It is live example of preservation of the Bodo culture through the *Kherai* festival.

e. The *Kherai* festival as the Source of Bodo 'Sangeet':

The *Kherai* festival is the sources of Bodo 'Sangeet', inherited from the time of immemorial. Songeet is the proper mixing of song (rhythm), music and dance. The *Kherai* festival has folk narratives or mantras and songs, traditional music with traditional musical instruments and dances. The folk narratives are narrated in the form of mantras by the *Oza* and the *Doudini*. The proper songs are sung by the co-dancer in groups in more than 16 types of different dance items. The *Doudini* is the main dancer and other co-dancers followed her and the music of musical instruments like the *Kham*, the *Siphung* and the *Zotha* continues from the

beginning to end of the *Kherai*. It is said that the Sangeet evolved from the *Kherai* festival among the Bodos.

f. The *Kherai* festival as the Source of Bodo Culture:

It is said that the *Kherai* is the sources of Bodo culture. It has sources of folk dances, traditional musical instruments like - the *Kham*, *the Siphung* and the *Zotha* of the Bodos, tunes of musical instruments, incantations, songs, rites and rituals, customs, etc. of the Bodo society. It is said that without *Kherai*, *the Bathou* worship is meaningless and vice-versa. It has the appeal for universal peace for the entire human being.

The status of the *Kherai* festival gets challenges in their existences in modern days. But, it is seen that traditional *Bathou* religion orientated Bodo people are trying to propagate, preserve their age old traditional *Kherai* festival with slide modification from time to time.

vii. The Present Status of the *Mohaloya Puja*:

This festival is not seen among the traditional or *Bathou* religious Bodos. It is celebrated by the Brahma religious Bodos by *Jyogyahati* (burn offering) in the worshiping place or temple of the village in the *Omabwisa* day of *Ashin* month. There is no feasting in this festival; prayer is made to the departed soul of the family and the villages. The present status of this puja is growing and participants are also growing.

viii. The Present Status of the *Saraswati Puja*:

The *Saraswati* is worshipped on *Vasant Panchami*, a *Hindu* festival celebrated every year on the 5th day in the *Hindu* calendar month of *Magha* (about February). The *Saraswati* is known as the goddess of knowledge, music, arts, wisdom and learning. It is known as the *Bwrlu Buri* in traditional Bodos. The Bodos specially the school going students celebrates this festival through offering their prayer to blazing fire by *Jyogyahati* or *Ahuthi* (burn offering) in large number. All the educational institutions having the Bodo student become agog with celebration of these festivals with attractive dresses and ornaments by the students of various

ages. Some of the families in rural as well as urban areas also perform this puja or festival in their household.

ix. The Present Status of the *Umrao puja*:

It is said that The *Umrao puja* is celebrated in place of the *Garza puja* once a year during *Jeth* month of Assamese. It is celebrated for protection of the villager from bad wind who bring bad deities and as a result of which the villagers could be suffered from various diseases like diarrhea, cholera, sicken fox, etc. It is also said that this puja is celebrated united despite of various religious groups of Bodos in different villages. The status of this puja in Kokrajhar district is very rare.

x. The Present Status of Celebration of the *Bathou Day*:

The celebration of '*Bathou Day*' is new origin in formal way. The *Bathou San* is celebrated in the second Tuesday of the *Magh* month of every year by non-sacrifice sects of the *Bathou* religious Bodos with various colourful programme under All *Bathou* Religious Union (ABRU). The *Bathou* worshipers of different places celebrate this fair with different programme as suited to different *Bathou* committees from anchalik, district as well as central level. It has got large public attraction in present days like the others religious groups of people in some Bodo situated areas.

xi. The Present Status of various festivals of other religious people in Bodo Society:

It is seen that the Bodos also embrace various festivals of other religious as well as society. The Bodos are taking part in the Hindu festivals like – the *Bol Bom* (Shravani Mela) celebrated from 1st Shrawan to full moon of Shrawan, the *Kali Puja* also known as the Shyama Puja or Mahanisha Puja in Kartik (November), the Durga Puja in October, the Lakshmi Puja in Magh purnima (october), Shivaratri puja Maha Shivaratri in February, Rangwali Holi or known as Dol Jathra in Assam in February in large number, etc. Apart from that the Christian Bodos participates in X-Mass and other religious activities, Satsangi Bodos participate in various festivities relating to Satsangi, the Vysnavite Bodos in various festivities of Vaisnavism, etc.

Conclusion:

The traditional festivals of the Bodos have same positions as previous with certain modification by the stakeholders. The *Bwisagu* is the greatest seasonal festival event today. The *Kherai* festival is the sources of Bodo culture, traditions, songeet, preserver of Bodo cultural heritage, etc. The *Kherai* festival of the Bodos has the universal appeal for peace and harmony for all human being. Certain modifications are done for adjusting with modern outlook in some of the festivals of the Bodos. The festivals of the Bodos are the sources of songs, dances, music and musical instruments, various Bodo words, traditions, rites and rituals, etc.

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