

CHAPTER-2

THE SOCIETY AND THE CULTURE OF THE BODOS: IT'S CONTINUITY

2.0. Race:

The groups of people who have defined language, identical physical features, aboriginal inhabitants, have their own develop rites and rituals, custom, traditions, etc. is known as race.

2.1. Community:

'The word community is derived from Latin word namely *Com* means *together* and *munis* means to *serve*. Thus community mean to *serve together*'.¹ An individual established common likeness, common ideas, feeling, traditions, etc. along with other individual living and serving together. It is called community. It is a narrower sense of society. The Bodo society is the accumulation of villages, rural and urban communities. The Bodo society is made with various village communities.

2.2. Family:

Family is one of the oldest institutions of the world. It is found even in the most primitive human society. "The word *family* has been taken from the Roman word, '*famulus*' meaning *a servant*. In Roman law the word denoted the group of producers and slaves and other servants as well as members connected by common descent or marriage".² A family is a more or less durable association of husband and wife with or without children, or a man or a woman alone, with children. The family is the backbone and primary unit of social structure. It is the oldest, first and foremost institution.

2.3. Society:

Society is the larger unit of family. Long ago the Greek Philosopher Aristotle expressed that 'Man is essentially a social animal by nature'. Man cannot live without society. Society is the name given to social relationships by which every human being is inter-connected with his fellowmen. It is the extension of individuality, the vehicle of personal identity, the means of the continuations of

personality through generations, the nurse of youth, the arena of manhood and womanhood, etc.

2.3.1. The emergence of Bodo Society:

The present Bodo society is the evolution from immemorial periods.

a. The myths relating to creation of Man:

Myth: The prose narratives which are told in the society in truthful manners are called myths. The first things are told to the ignorant people who accept the things to be truthful. Myths are always associated with theology and ritual and for which Bascom said that 'myths are embodiment of dogma and they are usually sacred'³. The origin of the world, mankind, death, characteristics of animals and birds, fishes; demons, etc. are narrated in the truthful manners in various myths prevalent in the present world of human being. There are myths relating to the creation of the human being, gods and goddesses, ghost and spirits, birds, animals, etc. in the Bodo society. The Bodos believe that they have been created by the great god '*Aham Guru*' on this earth.

Originally the 'God *Aham Guru*' created two birds with good intention in mind with his power of creation; one male and the other female (*Pakhi-Phakhini*). The female bird laid three eggs. Then there was a voice from the God *Aham Guru* that three different lives would be born from the three eggs in course of time after a long gap. The female bird began to sit on the eggs. But thousands of years passed sitting on the eggs and there was no sign of birth of any life. The female bird broke an egg out of curiosity, but no sign of life could be seen inside the egg. Then the female bird became sorry. Suddenly there came another heavenly voice with an advice not to break the other two eggs, otherwise the universe would be destroyed. The voice advised the female bird to spread the broken pieces of egg here and there. As it was done, evil spirits, ghosts, various insects, plants and trees were born. The newly born creatures, the spirits and ghosts roamed about here and there helplessly finding no food for them.

The earth was not created by the God till that period. The God *Aham Guru* felt the necessity of the creation of the earth after the creation of some creatures. Then the

God ordered the birds and the other small creatures to bring soil from the bottom of water, unfortunately none could bring the soil from the nether world, which was well guarded by the watchmen of the king of the nether world. The God *Aham Guru* sent two old fishes *Magur-Maguri* to nether world to bring the soil. The old fishes *Magur-Maguri* went to that land and collected as much soil as they could but, on the way they were caught red-handed by the guards. They were heavily punished physically and snatched away the soil they were collected by the guards. On their return *Magur-Maguri* died on the way and remain untraced. Then the God *Aham Guru* sent the birds and other creatures to find out the whereabouts the *Magur-Maguri*. After a long search the crow found the old *Magur-Maguri* lying dead on the water and informed to the God *Aham Guru* accordingly. Having the news of the death of *Magur-Maguri* the God *Aham Guru* sent the mongoose (*Neolai*) to the heaven to fetch the ‘death stick’ (*Mora laothi*) and the ‘life stick’ (*Jia-laothi*) from his bed room. The common *moyna* (*Daoshri*) was sent to bring the ‘fan of sorrow’ (*Dukhuni gisib*) and the ‘fan of peace’ (*Sukhuni gisib*), while the parrot was sent to fetch the leaves of the ‘*lairanglai*’, a kind of tree. The dead bodies of *Magur-Maguri* were first beaten with the ‘death stick’ and then with the ‘life stick’. Soon the *Magur-Maguri* came back to life. The God *Aham Guru* enquired them about their experience of their trip to the nether world. *Magur-Maguri* narrated their experience. The God *Aham Guru* was requested to create the earth with the small quantity of the soil sticking to heads of the *Magur-Maguri*. The God consented to do the same. The Bodo Kacharis believe that as the Earth was created with a small quantity of soil, and thus the area of the land is very smaller than the area of water. After creating the earth the *Aham Guru* sent a small bird (*dao thifling*) to test the soil with her legs and to see if the earth had become hard by the rays of the sun. The small bird (*dao thifling*) informed the God *Aham Guru* after testing properly that the earth was not properly hard. Then the God leveled the earth. At the time of leveling some portion remained high and some low. The high portion became the hills and the low portions became the plains, rivers, ditches, etc.

After many thousand years had passed, human beings were born from the two eggs. That was the beginning of the human beings on the earth and the Bodo-

Kacharis are descendents of those human beings born from the two eggs. From the first egg *Man-Sin-Sin Borai* (male) and *Man-sin-Sin Buroi* (female) were born and from the second egg *Diba Borai* (male) and *Diba Buroi* (female) were born. Just after their birth the four human beings desired to go to heaven. But heaven was meant only for those who were free from any kind of sin. The God *Aham Guru* however allowed them to go to heaven with the warning that during the journey if any one of them looked back then he or she would fall down on the earth. On this condition *Diba Borai* and *Dibi Buroi* and *Man-Sin-Sin Borai* and *Man-sin-Sin Buroi* started for heaven. When they had reached mid-way, there was some quarrel on the earth among the creatures. Hearing the noise of the quarrel *Diba-Borai* and *Dibi Buroi* looked back and all of a sudden they fell down on the earth. After few days they approached the God *Aham Guru* and requested him to provide them with enough food. In reply the God *Aham Guru* told them: “The children of your original human being *Man-Sin-Sin Borai* and *Man-sin-Sin Buroi* would come to live on this earth. You will get worship from them and you will be their saviours.” So, *Man-Sin-Sin Borai* and *Man-sin-Sin Buroi* were the first human beings created by ‘*God Aham Guru*’ and their children are believed to be the ancestors of the different groups of human beings, the Bodo–Kacharis being one of such groups.⁴

“The social structure is important system of elements which lasts and which everybody takes account of. The social structure offers a number of courses of action. Thus social structure is a definable morphological element, the social anatomy; it is maintained and given its ultimate form by organizational decisions”.⁵

Social life is the essence of human life. The social life grows out of constant patterning of social interactions and relationship. The Bodo people falls in minimum categories of structure and organization in their social living like--- *individual—family---clans (mahari)---tribes*. The Bodo *mahari* or *ari* are the clans like *Basumatary*, *Dwimary*, *Narzary*, *Mwshahary*, etc. The Boro Kochari, *Dimasas*, etc. are belongs to Bodo tribes.

The creation of different social groups or *maharis* of the Bodos is known from the popular story amongst the Bodos:

‘In a certain period, the Bodos lived in an undisciplined and unsystematic state of things. The society was full of undesirable activities and the atmosphere was unhealthy to preserve the traditional social customs and the people of the society realized the necessity of creation of the different groups for certain specific works and duties. A great convention of all the Bodo people was held to solve the burning problem of the society. To that convention the first human being *Mwnsing Sing Bwrai* came down from Heaven with the help of a golden ladder to the earth and presided over the convention. The convention was attended by all Bodos irrespective of age and sex. The first human being *Mwnsing Sing Bwrai* conducted the proceeding and helped to solve the problems faced by the Bodos. It is said that the convention lasted for twelve years. Along with other things the groups called *ari or hari* were created by *Mwnsing Sing Bwrai* for the Bodos’.⁶

Surat Narzary deals the myths of *Chandw Baodia* in his “*Chandw Baodia*” mythological drama. ‘In the drama a convention for solving the problems arises after the sin might be happen due to the touching on the bodies of the two unmarried sisters *Asagi-Bwisagi* by *Chandw Baodia* while freeing them from *Maya Ze* (Magical Net) when they were trapped in the net of *Chandw Baodia* planted himself. Here also the first Human being on earth *Mwnsing Sing Bwrai* came with the Golden ladder on hand from heaven to earth and presided over the judiciary convention long twelve years and thought about the various aspect of the Bodo people including *Bad* system, worship of *Bathou Bwrai* and *Kherai*’.⁷

There are some social groups or ‘*aris*’ or *maharis* in the Bodos. It is a kind of kinship. It is based on Totems. It bears the suffixes of the name of an individual denoting their surname like - *Birdao Basumatary*, *Indra Dwimari*, *Swmbla Mwsahary*, etc. The suffixes *ari* or *ary* is added in most part. The ‘*ari*’ or *mahari* was nothing but the distribution of the works or responsibilities in different social activities or custom in previous years. It has emerged as title after name at present time. In the Bodos it is not division of labour or caste like in their Hindu neighbours.

b. The *Ari* or *Mahari* (Clans) of the Bodos:

1. SWARGIARY: The Bodos of this group claim that they are direct descendents of the God *Bathou Bwrai*. They are entrusted to the duty of worshiping the God. In *swargw* (heaven) + *Ari* > *Sawrgwari* = *Swargiari*, *Sargiari*. ‘They are known as heavenly folk’.⁸ The *Oza* and *Douri* were selected from this group in previous days in the Bodo society.

2. BASUMATARI or BASUMATARY: The word *Bwiswmata* in Bodo means ‘mother earth’ in English. *Bwiswmata* + *ari* > *Bwiswmatari* > *Basumatari*. They are the earth or ‘Earthly folk’. They are related to any matter related to land and known to the landlord class of people. ‘These groups of people are the Mother Earth Sect’.⁹ The *Basumatary* is derived from *Baisamatary* or *Bwiswmatari*.

3. NARZARI OR NARZIARI OR NARZI: The *Narzi* in Bodo means dry leaves of the jute in English. The clan or group *Narzari* comes from *Narzi*, i.e.- *Narzi* + *Ari* > *Narzari* or *Narzinari*. They are responsible for collecting and preservation of *Narzi*. The taste of *Narzi* is bitter taste. It is favorite curry of the Bodos and has medicinal values. It is used in various customs of the Bodos. The present Bodo or Mech society of the West Bengal of this group uses the surname *Narzinari*.

4. MUSAHARI OR MACHAHARY: The Bodo word *Musa* or *Mwsa* or *Masa* means tiger in English. So, it is *Musa* + *ari* > *Musahari*, *Mwsahary*, etc. This group of people is not allowed to kill tiger. Further they have to remain without food for a day and to purify, when they hear about the killing of a tiger. Their real duty was to ensure safety of the domestic animals from the danger of the tiger attack in previous days. The *Baglary* is the Assamese translation of *Musahari*.

5. GAYARI OR GAYARY: The *Gayari* clan or groups may have come from the word *Gay* (areca nut) - *Gay* + *ari* or *ary* > *Goyari* or *Gayary*. This group of people is the planters of areca nut. ‘The *Gayari* clan or group originated from the people who were engaged to collect and distribute areca nuts (*goi*) in the convention which was held under the president ship of *Man-Sing-Sing Borai* to settle the matter relating to the illicit love affair between *Chikri Sengra* and *Chikri Sikla*’.¹⁰ They are called areca folk in Bodo society.

6. **OWARI:** The *Owari* clan or group of the Bodos originated from the word *Owa* (bamboo). *Owa + ari > Owari or Owary or Wary*. This group of people is engaged in collecting of necessary bamboos for the *Kherai* festival. Earlier they are known to be the Bamboo planters and its use.

7. **KHANGKHLARI OR KHAKHLARY:** *Khangkhla* is a kind of bamboo like small plant which is used in the *Kherai* festival. This group of people are engaged for collection of *Khangkhla* for the *Kherai* festival and is known to be *Khangkhla + ari > Khangkhleri > Khakhlari or Khakhlary*. The *Khakhlari* is the surname of that clan or group at present in the Bodo society.

8. **DAIMARI:** The Bodo word *Daima or Dwima* means big river in English and the people related to the big river are called *Daimari or Dwimari* at present – *Daima + ari > Daimari or Dwimari*. It is probable that some Bodos use to live in riverbank by catching fishes or as timber merchants or the boatmen in previous days. They are nowadays known as *Daimari or Dwimari*. ‘The river folk. These in olden times were the fisherman class, though its surviving members are now merged among the mass of ordinary cultivators’.¹¹

9. **LAHARI OR LAIHARI:** The Bodo word *Lai* means leaf in English. These groups of people were responsible for collecting of *Lai* (leaf) for the *Kherai* festival where huge leaves are required. *Lai + ari > Laihari, Lahari*. It has become the surname of such clan.

10. **Hajoari:** Some Bodos also lives in hill. The Bodo word *Hajo* means hill in English. Hence the Bodo people who lives in hill or its foothills might have been called as *Hajoari - Hajo + ari > Hjoari, Hajwari*. Some of the Bodo people have the surname of *Hajoari or Hajwari* at present.

11. **MAHILARI OR MAHALARI:** It is believed that the clan or group *Mahilari or Mahalari* originated from the word *mahal* (area). Some group of Bodos were involved in lease of timber *mahals* and were called *Mahalari or Mahilari- Mahal + ari > Mahalari, Mahilari*. ‘It is said to be the equivalent of Mahaldars and to be applied to fishery leases and petty traders in areca nut and betel-leaves and dried fish’.¹²

12. RAMSIARI OR RAMSARI: It is believed that this clan or group originated from a place called *Ramsa* - *Ramsa* + *ari* > *Ramsari* > *Ramsiari*. 'The people of North Cachar Hills called their brothers, the Kacharis as the people of Ram like Ram-sa.¹³ In such way *Ramsa* + *ari* > *Ramsari*, *Ramsiari* may have originated.

13. ISLARY: In Bodo God is called *Iswar* or *Isar*. It is probable that the people who were engaged in preparation for the worship of God *Bathou Bwrai* and Goddess *Bathou Buri* were called *Isari* – *Isar* + *ari* > *Isarari* and later on it comes to be known as *Islary* somewhere *Iswary*.

14. BARGAWARI OR BARGABARI OR BARGAYARI: The Bodo word *bar* or *bwr* or *bor* means blessing in English, *gab* means cry or prayer in English. In the *Kherai* or in the *Garza* Puja the persons who are engaged as the *Douri* or *Oza* (Priest) pray to God *Bathou Bwrai* for blessing. It has suggested that the group might have got its name from the words *bar* (blessings) and *gab* (cry or prayer), *Bar* + *gab* + *ari* > *Bargabari* or *Bargabari* or *Bargayari*. This seems no far difference from *Swargiary* in practical way.

The Bodos of the State West Bengal have some more groups like *Sangphathang*, *Katajari*, *Bamuda*, *Laoari*, *Aeophramari*, *Khakhlaori*, *Bwismata*, *Mandal*, etc. Some Bodos adopting surname Brahma to denote and identify themselves that they are Brahma religious Bodos. Some Bodos take Boro or Bodo surname to identify them as Bodo or Boro, at present. Among those¹⁴ remarkable *ari* or *mahari* (clan) or groups some are rare and some of them are large.

c. Selection of plot for construction of a house:

In Bodo society much more care or precaution is taken about the plot of land to be selected for construction of house. They taste the wind by standing during winter in the plot of land where the house is to be established. They believed that warm air is the indication of various diseases. If the plot of land gives cool air, then an altar is made. In the altar a pair of basil leaves and nine grains of rice are placed on a banana leaf covering with *Don* (a bamboo basket), the side of *Don* is pasted carefully with mud and is left for the night. In the next morning the things are observed after removing the *Don*. It is believed that if the things are all right, the

plot is selected and if the things are moved or displaced, then the plot is not favourable for the family for construction of house. 'The soil is dug out about one yard deep then it is tasted. It is suitable, if the soil is sweet taste; it is medium, if the soil is salty or bitter taste. If the soil is of sour taste, then the plot is regarded as unsuitable for the house construction'.¹⁴ There is the process of purification of all kinds of plot of land with *purohit* for making suitable for building house at present, especially in urban areas.

i. Position of the Bodo Homestead:

A *bakhri* (granary) in the east, *goli* (cowshed) to the south-east, *Nomano* (main house) in the north, courtyard in the middle and *Nosuna* or *Soura No* in the front of the homestead is the process of Bodo homestead. The *Nosuna* or *Soura No* is for the male bachelors and the guest. They had platform houses (*Sangbangla*) like the other hill tribes in previous days. The courtyard in the middle is known as *Sithla* or *Silha*. It is used for doing various works. The house compound of the Bodo people is well fenced.

ii. The secret of Nomano:

The main house "*Nomano*" of the Bodos has three rooms. The rooms from east to west are *Khophra*, *Okhong* and *Ising*. The *Khophra* is used as sleeping of the unmarried girls, the *Okhong* is used as dining room and sleeping room by the guardian and the *Ising* is used as kitchen of the family in previous days. It has only two doors. It has a passage inside from one room to another room. The *Ising* has no separate door from outside having the *Songraza* and the *Bathou Buri* or *Mainao* in the form of *Maihendw* altars and is connected with *Okhong*. The Bodos who still strictly adhere to the traditional beliefs and practices use the main house (*Nomano*) as the kitchen as well as the house of altars of the *Songraza* or *Bathou Burwi* and *Mainao Buri* in the form of *Maihendw*. The *Maihendw* is an earthen jar having two pieces of round stone inside it. Before taking rice for cooking from this jar person should have to salute it first. "The altar is prepared with earth and it is about two inches high and one and half feet long. A little quantity of every item of the daily food is offered to the god and goddess before it is consumed by the members of the family. The Bodos believe that the creator of all things should be offered first any

food before it is taken by them”.¹⁵No one, even the daughter who got married to the other family is allowed entering inside the *Nomano Ising* except family members. If someone entered than *Salami Puja* should be performed for penance otherwise, some calamity may be occurred in the family, they believed even today.

iii. The erection of the *Bathou* altar:

In the north-east corner of the courtyard parallel to the *Ising* of *Nomano* there is the *Bathou* altar in every traditional Bodo family. The altar of the *Bathou* is surrounded by a round fence of small 18th bamboo strips as posts woven by five other bits symbolizing the religious and spiritual principles of *Bathou*. “The altar of the *Bathou* is circled of one and half feet radius in diameter in over ground and three to three and half feet height and the upper radius should be three feet approximately”.¹⁶ “Another rectangular path like altar known as ‘*ali*’ (a path) is added to the north of the main circular altar. It is of 36X6 square inches and is raised to the height of 6 inches. These are made with pure soil from a peak of high land of hillock.”¹⁷ The 16/18 deities are set in the rectangular path like altar known as ‘*ali*’ towards the north-west. The 18th bamboo strips is parted into two after completion of the fencing. The fence is erected by 18th pairs of bamboo strips (post) which are planted in vertical direction. As per *Bathou Thandwi* ---“The first bit having three strips woven in the 18th bamboo strips should be in touch with the ground and the bamboo strips should be downward (*Khuglubnanwi*). This means the life comes in the womb of the mother in the form of pregnancy. This represents the pregnancy in the womb of the mother. The bamboo strips of next bit should be upward symbolizing the delivery from the mother’s womb, the bamboo strips of the third bit should be downward symbolizing the coming to the young age or marriageable after taking birth in this universe. After third bits, the extreme strip of the bamboo in the middle facing towards east should be leave blank and the next strips of bamboo bit should be started from the right of the strip which are absconded blank and the strips should be upward and should be rounded from the strip next to the left of the extreme middle strip which was leave blank symbolizing that the creation has become old and ready to return to the heaven and the last and the five bit of the bamboo strips should be downward symbolizing dead of the living being after coming to this universe. The bamboo strip which is

leaved blank after three bits is to be made pieces and parted into two and the right part to be annexed to the left side below down and the left side should be annexed below down to the right. This is called making of *Daothu Bikha* (Dove Heart)'.¹⁸

The explanation of the Kokrajhar district *Bathou* believers have a slight difference with the bamboo strips and five bits. They make *Daothu Bikha* after two bits of the bamboo strips and they have only 16 bamboo strips as post woven with five bits. Those bamboo stripes like posts represents the Gods and Goddesses from anti clockwise direction from extreme middle facing towards east like - *Aieleng*, *Agrang*, *Khazi*, *Khoila*, *Abla Khungur*, *Raj-Khandra*, *Raj-futur*, *Ali-Bwrali*, *Sanza Bwrali*, *Sari Zwmwn (Bwrlı Buri)*, *Aie Mwnasu (Aie-Dibaolya)*, *Bima Basumuthi*, *Bwrai Sik Raza*, *Bag Raza*, *Soudri* and *Basmuthi*. The *Doathu Bikha* (dove heart) is made after two bits according to them at the posts of the *Aieleng*. The Bamboo splits as post from the Doves heart to clockwise direction represents the deities as per ABRU are – '1. *Mansingsing Bwrai- Mwnsingsing Burwi*, 2. *Si Bwrai-Si Burwi*, 3. *Eheo Bwrai-Eheo Burwi*, 4. *Haphao Bwrai-Haphao Burwi*, 5. *Khwria bwrai- Khwria Burwi*, 6. *Mohela Bwrai –Mohela Burwi*, 7. *Bwrlı Bwrai- Bwrlı Burwi*, 8. *Song Bwrai ----Song Burwi*, 9. *Khwila Bwrai—Khwila Burwi*, 10. *Agrang Bwrai – Agrang Burwi*, 11. *Zwmwn Bwrai --Zwmwn Burwi*, 12. *Hajw Bwrai – Hajw Burwi*, 13. *Gongar Bwrai – Gongar Burwi*, 14. *Rozong Bwrai -- Rozong Burwi*, 15. *Hasung Bwrai – Hasung Burwi*, 16. *Emao Bwrai – Emao Burwi*, 17. *Aham Bwrai – Aham Burwi*, 18. *Mainao Bwrai -- Mainao Burwi*'.¹⁹

The bigger bamboo strips at two entrances is piled for making tight of their bamboo strips. This two bigger bamboo strips is named as *Asagi* and *Bwisagi*. The fencing works is made with a single bamboo. This means that the creator in the universe is the only one.

iv. Plantation of the *Sizou* in the *Bathou* altar:

To plant a *Sizou* one yard deep hole should dug with the sword in the middle of the *Bathou* altar. At the top of the hole one pair betel nuts, lighted *gasa* or earthen lamp, an egg should be offered on a banana leaf. The *Oza* has to chant mantras and give one pair betel nuts, two coins of one rupee, one stone for heaven, middle and neither world, few rice and paddy should be buried inside the hole sprinkling holy

water. Then five *Bathou* believer people put the branch of the *Sizou* plant to the hole and buried. During this period slogans like - *Bathou bwraini zwi*, *Swrzigiri Bathouni zwi*, etc. (Hail for *Bathou*, Hail for the creator) are made under the supervision and continuous chanting of mantras by the *Oza*. A few distances from the *Sizou* towards south a basil (*Occimum Sanctum*) plant and towards north a branch of *Zathrai* (*Justica assamica* Clarke) is to be planted. After planting the *Sizou*, *Basil* and *Zathrasi*, all three plants should be splashed with milk three times. The complete altar is known as the *Bathou*, where the god-in-chief *Bathou Bwrai* is represented by the *Sizou* tree while the goddess-in-chief *Bathou Buri* is represented by the basil or *thulusi* plant and the *Zathrasi* is represented by the daughter of *Bathou Bwrai*. In the upper region of the *Bathou* five curls is made by a white fresh thread (called *khundung owa*), the Bodos believe this to be worldly illusion and affection (attraction) since the creation. The members of the family worship in the *Bathou* regularly everyday in the evening lighting a lamp on the altar.

2.3.2. The Bodo social structure:

The Bodo society is patriarchal in characters but matriarchal characteristic is in no way negligible. The father is the sole authority and guardian of a family. After his death, the eldest son inherits the right to exercise by him and the entire property of the family is distributed among the sons. It is observed that the property remains of mother if/any also will automatically goes to the possession of her sons after her death. In case of sonless family the family has right to keep "*gwrzia lakhinai*" for daughters. Sometime the childless couple adopted male or female child for keeping their future family intake. It is accepted in Bodo society. The adopted children are treated as full members of the family and have property right also. The parents also inherit their property in the name of their daughter and adopted child at present. The social life of the Bodos is a closely compact and well organized manner. Most of the Bodos are agriculturist and generally live in village. A typical Bodo village consists of 50/60 household families. The shape of the village is normally long and narrow. Houses are constructed on both sides of the common street. The community living, team works, fishing, hunting, merry-making, etc. are prevalent among Bodos.

A Bodo village is controlled by a “*Gamibwrai*” (Village headman) or *Gaobura*. He is the recognized leader. He is selected by the villagers in democratic way for definite time period. All the matters relating to the village are discussed in the meetings presided over by him. It is a competent village council. At present a secretary and a cashier posts are also created. A *chawkidar* as well as messenger known as “*halmazi*” is also selected by the villagers. He gets remuneration from village fund. The position of the *Oza*, the *Douri* and the *Puruhit* (i.e. priest of the Brahma religious Bodos) of the village are very high in the society. Each and every person of the village has to say in the village council. The Bodo people are very polite, industrious, lover of culture, worshipers of beauty and the followers of the *Bathou* as supreme God Siva and not animistic. Sidney Endle said ---‘among them are to be found many simple virtues of great price, i.e., honesty, truthfulness, straightforwardness and a general trustworthiness deserving of all honour.’²⁰

2.3.3 The role of the women in the society:

In the Bodo family the girl has to stay her entire life in the boy’s house after marriage. In case of sonless family the family has right of social acceptability to keep “*gwrzia lakhinai*” (keeping a boy or male permanently by marriage) with family property rights to the daughter. The parents also inherit their property in the name of their daughters, at present in the Bodo society.

The Bodo women have special status in the Bodo society. Generally the domestic works is divided in sex wise but there is no division of works in marital status in the Bodo society. “All the household works like pounding of paddy, cooking of food, preparation of local beer, fetching of water from the stream or river or sometimes from a far well, collection of firewood, spinning and weaving, nursing and looking after infants and children are done by the female. Besides domestic activities the Bodo women takes active part in the agricultural activities also.”²¹ They help the male members by uprooting the sibling of paddy, showing the paddy sibling, reaping the ripe paddy, etc. The position of the Bodo women in the family is almost equal to that of men. The entire property of sonless goes to the daughters; even the married daughters also get shares. The Bodo women could earn property within the family by rearing domestic livestock and birds, ducks, etc. She may or

may not share her property with other members of the family. They are not only the house keeper but they are the mistress of the entire family.

‘A girl child may inherit family property. As a young widow or a divorcee can remarry if she so desires. Instances of unjust deprivation of such women can call minuscule in Bodo society. If a girl fails to get married for certain reasons such as physical incompatibility or failure to get suitable groom until it is too late to get married, she is adjusted a portion of parental property against which the male children are not expected to grumble. In the absence of a male heir the parental property naturally goes to the female children’.²²The female members contribute in authoritative activities with consultation to their male counterpart in the family.

The Bodo woman is the centre figure as the *Doudini* in the *Kherai* festival and the *Bwirathi* in marriage ceremony. At any cost the *Doudini* and the *Bwirathi* must be the woman. The *Doudini* is facilitated by the *Douri* and the *Oza*. They play very important role in the performance of various puja, etc. They gather materials or make preparation for the household or outside household pujas. The work like cooking pure rice beer (*Gwthar Zou*), gathering betel nuts, cleaning the houses, washing cloths and utensils, pounding rice powder, etc. for the puja. They can also participate in preparing and serving food and drinks. Now a day, they are the bearer of the *Mainao* or *Lwkhi* from the *Garza*, *the Kherai*, etc. festivals.

The educated Bodo women understand their rights and privilege at present. With the rising sun of the Indian Independence the Bodo women are also not running behind in the fourth wall of the kitchen in the Bodo family. The enrolment of girls in different educational institutions is quite good though it is lower than the Boys. The parents of the Bodo family are also quite sincere about their daughter's education. Previously the conservatism towards sending their female child to the distance place for educational activities has been reduced tremendously. They are grasping new and new one option for their career building. Today there are good numbers of doctors, engineers, teachers, clerks, nurses, police, gram-sevikas, Ashas, Anganawadi workers and helpers, peons, security guards, etc. from the educated Bodo women. A few numbers of contractors are also there from the Bodo women. Some of the Bodo women also capable to set up weaving centers, farming

and other cottage industries, shops, etc. some are vendors in different parts of their habitat. Some women politicians are also found in the Bodo society. Many Bodo educated women are holding the good positions in government jobs as well as political affairs. Hence, it could be sum up that the Bodo society gives almost equal status to women to their men counterpart.

2.3.4. The Religion of the Bodos:

The *Bathou* is the traditional religion of the Bodos. The *Bathou* incorporates rites, rituals, social norms, ethics and philosophy of the Bodos. The philosophy of the *Bathou* religion is based on:

Sizouni siriya siriba,

Thaigirni bikhonga khongba,

Boroni siphungni gudunga gudungba

Bathouni bandwya bandwba

Boroni bwraini raoya fongba

i.e. the sizou plant has five spines, the indica fruits has five ridges, The Bodo flute has five holes, The *Bathou* has five philosophy (Knot) and the Bodo elders have five preaching.

This is the basic philosophy of the *Bathou*. The *Bathou Bwrai* is their chief God and *Bathou Burwi* is their chief Goddess. It was also belief that they worshiped the *Bathou* by animal sacrifices. The Bodos of today also accepted many religions of the land like - *Brahma Dwhwrwm* by *Kalicharan Brahma*, *Cristianity*, *Joyguru* by Anukul Thakur, *Ek Saran Nama Dharma* by Sri Sri Sankardev, etc. The *Brahma Dwhwrwm* is other religions of the Bodos established and propagated by Kalicharan Brahma during the renaissance periods of the Bodos i.e in the first half of the 20th century. The worshipers of the *Bathou* have also divided into various sects like - *Rupamuni Bathou*, *Zangkhrao Bathou*, *Buli Bathou*, *Bibar Bathou*, etc. Maximum of the Bodos belongs to the Hindu mode of worship except Christians.

2.3.5. The Food habits of the Bodos:

The Rice is the stable food of the Bodos. At present the Bodos who are living in the urban areas are taking roti and other fast foods. The rice is also supplemented

by plentiful of vegetables procures from their cultivation, jungles and markets nearby their villages and towns. They procure the vegetables from the jungles like - various types of wood mushroom, fern, *Laphasaikho*, *Zwglauri*, *Dousrem*, *Wngkham gwzang*, *nakhi*, *gangamala*, *Khungkha*, *burithokhon*, *raidwng*, *Sibru*, *Khera daphini*, *singri*, *Daophenda*, *Khiphibendwng*, *Manimuni*, *Khangsingsa*, *Nwrsing*, *Onthaibazab*, etc. even today. Some of the vegetables are used as medicinal purposes also. They have the habits of taking the meats like - pork, mutton, deer, pigeon, ducks, bird, turtle; hare, etc. and almost all kinds of fishes. They have the custom of community hunting and fishing for food. Their favorite meat is pork. They do not eat the beef, the meat of cat, dog, snakes, etc. Almost all the household of the villages and even the town dwellers rear pigs. They eat the meat of their domestic as well as forest animals with rice and with the *Zou* or *Zumai*. One of the folk song about the food habits of the Bodos is:

Dang duli thopola baro mosola,
Na bedor mwnbwla khali ondola.

i.e. *Dangduli* kept the 12 spices in a packet. When meat and fishes are found only *Ondla* (rice powder) is used or cooked.

The *Napam* is prepared from dry fishes and is their favourite food. It is like a pickle but have to cook before eating. The *zou* or *zumai* (rice beer) is prepared from the rice. It is favorite drink by the Bodos. They have the habit of using *kharwi* or *khardwi* (alkali potash) in their curries. The *Onla*, *Meoyai* (Bamboo shoot), *Narzi*, *Mwitha*, *Sobay*, etc. are their favourite curries.

Some Bodos have the habit of smoking *biri*, *cigarates* and taking tobacco and eating habits of betel nuts. The traditional Bodo family has the habits of offering betel nuts to the guests. They also offered rice beer to the aged people in ancient days. But today the rice beer is replaced by tea, etc.

2.3.6. The social offences of the Bodo society:

The social offences in the Bodos are known as *bad*. Traditionally the offences of the Bodos are - i) *Ogarbad*, ii) *Phongslothbad*, iii) *Daokibad*, iv) *Khawalibad* and v) *Khoulwbwdbad*.

2.3.7. The *bad* system of the Bodos:

1. Ogorbad:

The *Ogorbad* offence in the Bodo society is due to i) illicit sexual relation with any opposite sex or sexes. ii) Physical assault on one's own mother, father, grand-mother or grand-father, iii) Killing of a cow, etc.

2. Phongslotbad:

The *phongslot bad* offence is due to touching of the body of girl or woman of any caste with ill motive, if someone cuts the tail or leg of a cow, eats the meat like cow, fox, cats, etc. and sex relation with wild or domestic animals.

3. Daokhibad:

This offence takes place if somebody eats the meat left half-eaten by a tiger or a vulture, if somebody receive goats, pigs, cocks and pigeons in exchange of a cow. If somebody trades in earthen pots, skins of animals or fish. If the husband is beaten by his own wife is the *Daokhibad* offence.

4. Khaoali bad:

Khaoalibad offence is due to - if somebody uses the coins or utensils given with the dead bodies; if someone sells out the bulls or cow after the period of one year from the date of purchasing.

5. Khoulbwdbad:

Khoulbwdbad offence is - If someone deliberately accuses somebody and puts blames on some others without any reason.

The offenders of the above five *bad* have to penance as per the tradition in the Bodo society along with fines as fixed in the village meeting.

i) The penance (*Udrainai*) system in Bodo:

Previously the penance (*Udrainai*) system in Bodo for offence of *Ogorbad* relating to illicit sexual relation was made with burning of hut. It is not seen today.

ii) The bow-methods of penance of the Bodo society:

If any person is convicted of charges of five categories as discussed above then he or she must perform penance under the *Bwrla Udrainai* (bow penance). The guilty person offers a chicken to the *Bathou Bwrai*. From the body of the sacrificed chicken some pieces of the meat are de-touched and thrown to the sky with the help of a bow and arrow. The *Ogorbad*, *Phongslothbad*, *Daokhibad* and *Khaoalibad* offences are purified by nine, seven, five and three bow methods.

It is called three bows method, if three pieces of meat of the chicken are thrown to the sky three times and thus it is called five bows method when five pieces of meat are thrown to the sky and so on.

iii) The Brahma system of penance:

The Brahma religious Bodos penance through *Ahuti* (burn Offering). “The followers of the Brahma Dharma perform penances according to the *bad* system. But, so far as the method of performance of the penance is concerned, there is the system of charging penalty among the followers of bow-method. Besides the payment of the penalty a guilty person has to perform *ahuti* at his house”.²³

iv) The Traditional Bodo penance system at present:

At present the traditional Bodo people neither follow the bow method nor the burning of thatch hut method. The simple way of penance method is always seen. It is also seen that the amount in the penalty have increased tremendously depending on the nature of the crime.

For this work a place is selected near the river bank or in the open field. Three altars are prepared facing towards east in a line by *Douri* under supervision of *Oza*. The middle altar is for the *Bathou Bwrai* having 1+3 *Laizam* (a kind of plate like object made with banana leaf or banana sheath having five angles), the altar in the left is for the *Santhi Santhi 18 Santhi* having 1+9 *Laizam* and the right is for the *Garza Garza 18 Garza* (*Garza* Gods) having 1+9 *Laizam*. One at the top *Laizam* is for one cluster banana, a pair of betel nuts, a pair of lighted *dhub* and a pair of red-white flags. In another *Laizam* prasad, *Goi Khili-phathwi khili* (piece of betel nut), etc. are offered. One pair pigeons and two or a chicken is/are sacrificed for the

Santhi Santhi 18 *Santhi* and the *Garza Garza* 18 *Garza* respectively during continuous chanting of mantras by *Oza*. It is done by the *Douri*.

Then the *Oza* chants his *mantras* again in the *Bwrai Bathou* altar. One *Douri* (*Bodosa*) takes a pot called *Dona* (a kind of pot made with banana sheath) in front of him. The *Douri* takes a *Singri Lotha* with full water mixing with milk, few rice (somewhere 9 rices), one ring of 9 metals or ring of dub grass and coin. This mixer of water, milk, etc. is flown slowly to *Dona* by a bundle of 9 branches of dub grass, one branch of basil and one branch of *Zathrasi*. This is called the *Dwi Santhi Bwkhagnai* (lifting holy water). The offenders have to drink a mixer of cow-dung with *dwi santhi*. The *Dwi Santhi* is to sprinkle in every household for purification. After penance, the offenders are reaccepted as a normal person in the Bodo society. The penance works have been doing in this manner at present. The burning of hut methods of penance also did the same after burning of hut.

a) One of the *mantras* recites on the occasion of penance of illegal sexual relations under *Ogorbad* offence:

Aham Mahadeo Maha Pharbu. arw swr dongbaw; Aileng, Agrang, Khoila, Khaji, Rajputur, Rajkhandra, Sang Raja, Song Raniphwr dongbaw. Burli Buri, Ai Manasw, Ai Dibaolimwn dongo. Isingao dongo Ai Mainao, Maothansrimwn dangbaow. Khwnasong Aiphor Aphapwr. Nwngthang mwnha Danilo Mwdai nonga Orai dinni Mwdai. Amakhazwng amwkhizwng dai nwngdwngmwn, Dinwi bininw udrainai zabai. Zerwi dai khalamdwnmwn biswrw bebaidinw sasthi hwnai zabai zwng. Arzwng saobai, Mansi khi, mwsoukhi, Omakhini dwi lwnhwbai zwng biswrkhou. Daini giria dai khalambai Apha, Nimahani giria nwnswr. Mwidera gabw odal gudiao Mansia gabw Mahadeo Mahaphorbuni khathiao. Nimaha hwdw Aiphor Aphaphwr. Dinwiniphrai dai daphor dahomswi. Naha mwiha thangbla daidongo hwnnanwi Nana rwkhwm maya zananwi Sigi sogo dakhalamswi. Dohaide Aiphor Aphaphwr Manni debotaya manao thanangwn Gole gole khulumw zwngw. (Gugurub Khulumw).²⁴

(i.e. *Aham Mahadeo*, or great lord; who else are there? *Aileng, Agrang, Khoila, Khaji, Rajputur, Rajkhandra, Sang Raja, Song Rani* are there; *Burli buri, Ai Manasw, Aidibaoli* is also there. In the *Ising* Mother goddess *Lakshmi* (*Mainao*) is

there. Please listen Oh Mothers and Fathers, you're not the gods of today only, and you are the gods of all the times. This man and this woman are found guilty and for their offence penance is performed; they have been punished according to their offence. We have set fire on them; they were compelled to take the mixture of the human excreta, cow dung and the dropping of the pig. The wrong doers done the wrong and the authority to give mercy should give mercy. The elephant cries at the foot of the *Odal* tree, while the human being cries before *Mahadeo*, the great Lord. Forgive please, and from today may you not regard them as guilty if they go for fishing and hunting. Do not threaten them in disguise, please, Mother and Father, the gods or honour should remain in the honourable positions, we pray before you again and again.

b) The *mantras* chant during the penance system of *Phongslothbad* and *Khaoalibad*:

Aham “*Wng-Hring-Khling-Phwd-Se.*” *Hey apha sadwngiri Sibwrai, Bima guru Siburwi! Swithwnigiri nwnswrlai, Boinibw bima-bipha mwdai. Ma bungbaogwn, ma phwlagwn; Dinwi zwngni munus nwgwrao, Amwkha-amwkhiya Maothaowi baduya daini Pharikhou maophlangbai Zwngni serao. Ma khalambaogwn— Aie bima guru, Rwikhagiri guru, dohai! Naidaonanwi muzublabw Gaoni khoroo, Naigongnanwi muzublabw Gaoni athingao; Dohai ! Nwnsininw Azwla phisa biswrwb Onnanwi zebw dai phwdw Daphwnangswi. Nwnsini agdal-bugdal Saya-maya mwdai--- Mwdaizwphwrkhon Homthanangwn nwnswrw Khobodar. Zwngni sukhuni songsarao, Beni thakhai zebw khoha Dakhlamswi nwnswrw, Onnanwi baduaphwrkhon Nimaha hwdw. Nazaodw zwngni baonaikhon Baodwng zwngw nwnsini namwi--- Dainwisw phithai-samthai Akhai khobzobwi--- Dhuhub-duna saonanwi, Alari bathi phwzwngnanwi --- Nimaha bidwng zwng, Boibw nwnsini serao. Dohai Aiewi bima guru, Dohai apha bipha guru, Nazaodw zwngni khulumnaikhon.*²⁵

i.e. *Aham* “*Wng-Hring-Khling-Phwd-Se.*” Oh father the owner of tantricism Sibwrai, Mother Master (Guru) Siburwi! You're the owner of truth, Mother-father deities for all. What we have to say or lie; today in the town of our human being unexpected impure offense-able works have been done by *Sjt* and *Smt* near us. What we have to do --- Mother Master, the master of security, *dohai* (salute)!

The spit towards up falls on own face, and the spits downwards falls on own legs; *Dohai* (help) they are also your own child, please donot give any offense to them. You have to control your right and left, deities of mystery yourself please. You donot make any harm in the life of our happiness for this offense, please forgive the impure persons. Accept our offering we offered in the names of you all few fruits, we prayed for forgiveness near all of you by folding hands burning dhub-dhuna lighting earthen lamp. *Dohai* (help) mother master (guru), *dohai* (help) father master (guru), accept our worship or bowing down.

2.3.8. Some changes in rites and ceremonies of the Bodos:

The complete pictures of changes in the rites and ceremonies of the Bodos can be found when it is discussed the rites and ceremonies related with life cycle of an individual of the Bodos. It can be termed as the festivals and ceremonies related to the life cycle.

i. The opening of door ceremony:

The traditional Bodos sacrifice a chicken for opening door of the house in the name of the door owner for the newly born baby. This is known as the opening of *Agh-duari* (front door) and *pass-duwari* (back door) for the new born baby. The meat of the chicken is cooked with the *Usumwi* and feed to the mother. Today some of the Bodos pray before the *Bathou* altar for well being of the newly born baby. At present, some of the Bodo families celebrate birth day like their neighbours. The one of the mantras in the *Bathou* altar in door opening is:

'He Afa swzigiri! Sannigiri sanraza, Okrangnigiri okhrangraza, Barnigiri barmwdai, Dwinigiri dwi khungri, Hanigiri bwiswmuthi ha. He Afa Bwrai Bathou! Dinwi Angni hinzaio /Amwkhya Nwngni onnaiyao Mwzangwi-mwzang Gothokhou zwnwm hwba. He Afa! beni thakhai Ang dinwi, nwngni namwi Dainwisw bibar-bilai-fithai Nwngnw baonai zabai. He Afa onnanwi nwngw Gotho arw bimazwng lwgwse Nokhorni gaswikhoubw Alw gwzwn lakhinangwn. Nazaodw Afa Iswr, Bwrai-Bathou! Angni Baonai arw khulumnaikhou; Dohai'.²⁶

i.e. – Oh father creator! The Owner of the sun is the sun king, the owner of the sky is the sky king, the owner of the air is the Air deity, the owner of the water is water

princesses, and the owner of the land is the *Bwiswmuthi* earth. Oh father *Bwrai Bathou*! Today my wife/ Mrs, has been delivered a baby happily on your kindness. Oh father! For this today I offered few flowers- leaves-fruits in your name. Oh father you should kindly keep the baby and mother along with the family members happy. Accept my offering and bowing down father god *Bwrai-Bathou; Dohai* (salute).

ii. The Blessing ceremony:

It is said that the blessing ceremony is second moral preaching of the Bodos. It is also called *Dwi Sarnai*. It is arranged by the family after complete overcoming from the birth related problems. It is generally a feasting in the name of newly born baby for the *Oza*, elderly women, relatives and the elderly persons of the village. In the feast along with meat like - pork, mutton, chicken, fishes, etc. rice-beer is given abundantly. After feasting, the owner offers to the *Oza* and the elders something as possible as a respect. The *Oza* and the elders also blessed the newly born baby for his or her longevity and the success is his or her future life.

iii. Ceremony relating to Feeding to New Born Child:

“At the time of giving rice to the child for the first time at the age between five and seven months the Bodo parents follow some customary procedures. After the preparation of rice the parents first offer to their domestic-gods and goddess, *Bathou Bwrai* and *Bathou Buri or Mainao*. This function is performed by a *Douri* or *Oza*. At the time of offering rice the *Douri* or the *Oza* recites some mantras before *Bathou* and *Mainao* praying for the welfare of the child. Then the mother of the child, with the advice of the *Douri* or the *Oza* feeds the child in the presence of relatives and friends”.²⁹

The followers of the Brahma Dharma feed the child after performance of a *Jyogyahati*. They pray to the god through *Jyogyahati* for the welfare of the child and then the mother of the child feeds her child with the guidance of the *Purahit*.

iv. Hair cutting Ceremony:

This ceremony is performed for the male child only. Generally in case of the first-born male child the hair is allowed to grow long for a period of one or two years.

Then the hair is ceremonially cut by maternal uncle of the child in presence of the relatives and the villagers. On this occasion a feast is arranged.

vii. Marriage

The marriage is the first accepted prerogative in the modern civilized society to form family, neighbor, etc. The people say the society becomes good if the family shows that. "Marriage is the institutionalized and legitimate form of man and women relationship based on sexes. It related with procreation of children, their upbringing descent and inhabitation".³⁰ It is considered to be as sacred. In Bodo marriage is called *Haba*. In Bodo *Ha* means soil or earth and *Ba* means to bear something on the back in English. So *Haba* means bearing a heavy burden or responsibility like bearing soil on back. The main form of marriage in the Bodo society is monogamy with some exceptional cases of polygamy; polyandry is totally absent in the Bodo Society.

a) Types of Bodo Marriage:

The Bodos have the following types of marriage:

i. ***Swngnanwi Lainai Haba*** (Arrange or standard Marriage): In this system of marriage the parents of the bridegroom select the bride and then the marriage is settled by negotiation between the parents of girl and the boy. This marriage is a regular or usual form of marriage. It is solemnized according to the standard custom of the Bodos.

ii) ***Gwrzia Lakhinai Haba*** (Marriage for rendering service to the parent and family of girl): The *Gwrzia Lakhinai Haba* is called a marriage for rendering service by the bridegroom in the house of bride after marriage. It is arranged and irregular marriage. It is solemnized at the house of the bride. This kind of marriage specially takes place when there is no male member in the family of the bride. Sometimes wealthy parents of the girl may arrange such marriage for their daughter(s). This kind of marriage is rare.

iii) ***Kharsonnai Haba*** (Marriage after the girl's runaway to the boy's house): This type of marriage generally takes place between lovers on the refusal of the parent or the parents. In such marriage the girl run away from home and comes to the

boy's house before the marriage with their mutual understanding. The formal marriage takes place after the bride price is settled by discussion between the parents. It is an irregular type of marriage.

iv) *Hinzao Bwnanwi Lainai Haba* (Marriage by capturing the girl): In earlier days a girl or the bride was forcibly taken away from her parent's home or from any other place to the boy's house and the marriage was solemnized. It was almost similar with *Paisasa* marriage of the *Aryans*.

v) *Dwnkhar Langnai Haba* (Marriage by elopement): This is the marriage by elopement of both bride and bridegroom. Although the Bodo Society does not approve this type of marriage, it is still taking place sporadically. This system of marriage is almost similar to the *Gandharva Bibaha* of the *Aryans*. Here both the boy and the girl run away from home to a distant place and live a conjugal life with mutual understanding after marriage in somewhere.

vi) *Dongkha Habnai Haba* (Entry in marriage with widow): If a man lives in the house of a widow after marrying her as per the social customs called *Dhonkha Habnai Haba* and is approved by the Bodo society, it is called the *Dongkha Habnai Haba*. It is a kind of widow re-marriage system. After marriage the man is deprived of his parental property. However he has right to enjoys the property of the widow. Their next generation inherits their property. This type of marriage is very rare among Bodo Society.

A widow can re-marry any person who is not related to her in the Bodo society. If she re-marries again, then she losses the property rights of her deceased husband. 'A widower may re-marry his deceased wife's younger sister, but not the elder, whom he is obliged conveniently to regard in the light of a mother. Similarly, a widow may re-marry her deceased husband's younger brother but she is not allowed to re-marry the elder brother of her deceased husband'.³¹

b) The stage of the Bodo marriage ceremony can be divided into three stages – a. The pre-marriage preparation, b. The marriage proper and c. The post marriage rites.

a. The pre-marriage preparation:

When a boy become marriage worthy or the parents determined to perform marriage to their son, then the parents have consultation with trusted relatives and the friends and start searching for the bride for him. The Bodo parents are very particular about the making the right choice. After making preliminary inquiries about the respective bride, a party consisting of three or five members sets out to approach to the bride's house for the bride. The members of the bridegroom party carry a pair of silver bracelets (*Asan Suri zorase*), a pair of silver coins, a pair of betel nuts and a pair of rice-beer bottles (*thakha gwthang zorase, goizora-phathwi zora, zou bottle zorase*) to the house of the bride. The parents of the bridegroom explain the purpose of the visit indirectly before the parents of the bride:

Zerao thuri nuyw beonw bathi garw.

Zerao zwn nuyw beonw goi khithou garw.

i.e. Pole is thrown where there is field of thatch, waste of areca nut is thrown where there is ditch.

The girl's house does not give word for the first time. The grooms' party left keeping the ring put at the roof which is known as *Asan thepnai* after preliminary discussion. If the bride party does not agree for the marriage then this *Asan* should be returned within a week.

i. The *no-naiani* ceremony:

If both the parties are agreed then the parents of the bride visit the house of the bridegroom. On this occasion the parents of the bridegroom is entertained the guests with feasting with various meats, fishes, rice-beer, rice and betel nuts in abundance. This ceremony is called *no-naiani*. Here the economic, social, etc. conditions of the groom are taken into consideration. If the condition of the bridegroom is not satisfactory then the settlement of the marriage may be cancelled. The final settlement of the marriage depends on the *Nonainai* ceremony.

iii. The *Bibai Khanai* (Agreement of marriage):

After obtaining final consent from the parents of the bride, the parent or guardian and the party of the groom visit to the bride's house for final settlement of the marriage. The parents of the bridegroom arranged a feast with meats, rice-beer and

the rice and entertain the members of the brides' family along with the related persons in previous years. But at present in this ceremony, the feasting is given by the parents of the bride with nominal share by parents of groom. It is known as *Bibai Khanai or swmwndw phirainai* (changing of relationship) or *Sabri Sarnai*. From this day and onward the new relationship between the two families will continue. Here the date of the marriage, type of the marriage to be solemnized and other things like - *Barihaga, phone thakha, Biban Langnai*, sometime the *Nirik Bosonai*, etc. are also settled down.

The one of the mantras of the *Sabri Sarnai* or agreement for marriage is:

Wng-Hring-Khling-Phwd-Se -- 5. Hey Afa Swrzigiri Bwrai Bathou ! Nwngnw Sannigiri sanraza, Okhrangnigiri okhrang raza, Barnigiri bar mwdai, Dwinigiri dwi khungri, Hanigiri Bwswmuthi ha! Hey afa anangossai! Gwsw gwrwbzwng hangkhraidwng Ang afa nwngkhou dinwi, Nwibe gwthar bubliyao, Nazaodw nwngw gwsw khusiywi. He afa swrzigiri Bwrai Bathou! Nwi dinwi nwngni angw fisa Amwkha gamini ---- Amwkha /Amwkhiya arw Amwkha gamini --- Amwkha /Amwkhiya Gaosini fisaphwrkhou Zuli hwnaini radai khananwi, Nwng afakhou sakhi dwnnanwi, Aie-afa, raizw-razakhou sakhi lananwi – Swmwndw phinnw lahar phahar khalamdwn; Hey afa anangossai! Bwr hwdw nwng afa Bisini sannaikhau Gwzwnwi zaphunghwdw. Nazaodw nwng afa Bisini zananwi --- Baonai dainwisw Muwaphwrkhou onnanwi Dohai. Wng-Hring-Khling-Phwd-Se -- 5.³²

i.e.- *Wng-Hring-Khling-Phwd-Se -- 5. Oh father creator Bwrai Bathou! You're the owner of sun, the Sun-king, Owner of the sky, Sky-king, Owner of the air, Air-diety, Owner of the water Water-princesses, Owner of the soil Bwswmuthi soil! Oh father Anangossai! With full heart Today I prayed you father, In this holy moment, Accept it happily. Oh father creator Bwrai Bathou! Look today your own child of the village --- Mr./Smt and Mr./Smt. of the village agreed for the marriage of their children, Keeping you as a witness, Taking the witness of the mother-father, public have arranged for the re-relationship; Oh father Anangossai! Bless them you father, Fulfill their dream happily. Please accept father the few offering materials on behalf of them; Dohai (Help). Wng-Hring-Khling-Phwd-Se -- 5.*

iv. *Hwoa Gwdan Nainai*:

Another pre-marriage ceremony is the *Hwoa Gwdan Nainai* meaning the interview of the bridegroom. After the final settlement, the bridegroom has to visit the house of the bride along with his friend. The parents and the bride herself want to see the bridegroom before the marriage. If the bride abstains from home or presenting the handkerchief, does not appear before the bridegroom during his visit; then it is understood that the bride is not satisfied with the bridegroom. In such circumstances, the settlement of marriage may be cancelled. At present this *Hwoa Gwdan Nainai* is done before the final settlement or *Bibai khanai* of the marriage.

v. Selection of Date for Marriage:

The Bodos of the North Bengal and Goalpara (Former) district of Assam prefer the Assamese month of *Phagun* for the marriage ceremony. Due to emergency though they considered the *Magh* month but never solemnize the marriage ceremony in the month of *chat or chaitra*. They prefer the *Sunday* to be the best day for the marriage ceremony. On *Saturday* and *Tuesday* they never hold the marriage ceremony. Except these two days other days are regarded as medium for the ceremony.³³

vi. *The Hinza Gwdan Lainw Thangnai* (Go to bring the Bride):

The party for *Hinza Gwdan Lainw thangnai* (Go to bring the Bride) consists of *Barlangpha*, two *Bwirathis*, few girls and women and some elderly persons. The two *Biban* consisting of one earthen jar having edible and potable stuffs like - the sugar, milk, biscuits, cigarettes, etc. and *Laokhar Biban* having rice, sugar, etc. in another jar as listed in the final settlement is carried by *Barlangpha*. He is assisted by some young persons of the party. The *Laokhar Biban* is delivered to the cow boy at the village of the bride. The two *Bwirathis* have to distribute the betel nuts to any persons who want from them, even on the way. The party has to offer pair of betel nuts in every rivers and temples, etc. across their way. On reaching the house of the bride the bridegroom's party has to entertain the villagers of the bride's village with the commodities they have carried with them in previous days. The *Bwirathis* have to distribute betel nuts for name sack at present.

The elderly women who are related with the parents of the bride advice the bride before she is taken away by the bridegroom's party. The new dress of the bride is presented by the groom's parents as listed during marriage agreement like the *Dhokhona*, blouse, *sadri*, ornaments, *asansuri* (bracelet), etc. Then the bride is taken away from the house of her parents by the members of the bridegroom's party after saluting the *Bathou* and all the persons gather at that moment which is also joined by the bride's party. While the party starts moving from the house of the bride, few dances are performed.

vi. Welcoming the Bride or the Groom:

As soon as the bride and the parties (both bride and groom) arrives from bride's house are paraded with the tune of band or any musical party and dances, etc. slowly and steadily from the street or nearby house where the bride or groom party rested for fresh. The bride or the groom has one assistant known as *methor* (helper). In case of groom arriving for marriage only groom's party is paraded. The two *Bwirathis* take two *salangi bathis*. The *salangi bathi* is made on two new bamboo *sandri* (sieve) fenced with banana sheaths. It contains one pair lighted earthen lamp, a few *sobai*, *sibing*, paddy and two one rupees coin or note, a pair of betel nuts, vermilion, match box, master oil, etc. on banana leaf, fenced with banana sheaths making two holes in one side. It may be marks 9 or 5 times with the vermilion. The two *salangi bathis* are same, one is thought to mean for bride and another for groom and both are covered from upward with new bamboo fans. Vermillion is not taken in *salangi bathi* meant for groom. Another two girls for sprinkling *dwi santhi*, two girls for sprinkling the rice and flowers are also accompanied with the *Bwirathis*. Along with them lots of friends from the bride and the groom are also accompanied with them at the parade. At that moment the young boys rise slogans like - "Glory, Glory to the new bride or the bridegroom" (*Howa gwdan or Hinzaogwdanni zwi*), the band has to play continuously. When the bride or groom arrives at the entrance or the gate she/he is allowed to tread on the gambary tool. The younger sister or niece of the groom or bride washes the two legs of the bride or groom with fresh water, her/his hair is combed and trimmed and face is creamed, etc. After that one egg, few rice and one pair betel nuts taking in a banana leaf moves from right to left round the head of the bride three times

and then throw towards the south side which is known as *Daodwi Neosinai*. ‘The egg is the symbol of creation of life; the woman is the re-creator of human life. The holy woman who has been welcome would be able to keep this trend of the human being continue and she has been wishing for happiness and longevity’.³⁴ Then the bride or the groom and the party are paraded again and then the bride is introduced into *Nomano* of the groom with the help of the *Bwirathi*. In case of groom he is allowed to introduce in another room not in *Nomano*.

“She is purified with the holy water which is kept ready by the *Douri*. After purification she is asked to step over a burning earthen lamp (*alaribathi*) breaking it with her feet into pieces. It is believed by the Bodos that if the bride can break the earthen lamp into pieces then she will bear children after marriage and if she fails, then it is believed that she will be childless”.³⁵ This custom for the bride is not followed by the Bodos of kokrajhar districts as a regular practice.

After introducing the bride and her party in the *Nomano* the parent or guardian and the party of the bride are allowed to sit in the *affad* of courtyard. The guests of the bride’s village get tremendous care. Any needs of them are immediately fulfilled. Then the introduction of the family members of the groom and others takes place with bowing down and mutual respect to each other.

vii. Pon, Malsa and Barihaga:

After giving refreshment and introductions to each other the formal discussion in the *affadsali* takes place between the bride’s party and the grooms’ party with due permission from bride’s party. In the altar, on the *gambari* tool on a banana leaf a pair of betel nuts, lighted *dhub* or agarbathi, two bowl tea having puffed rice on it and one pair castor fruits, a bundle of five seeds, two one rupee coin or note, one pair white flowers in a *busy* clothe and Rs. 25/- (twenty five rupees) only for *Malsa*, Rs. 5/- (five rupees) only for *Barihaga*, if the father or the guardian of the bride want Rs. 51/- (fifty one rupees) only for *Pon thakha* are offered with one glass holy water with basil branch for sprinkling. The father/guardian of the groom informs all the offering and the purpose of it in the *affad*. It is called *Pon thaka Lanai* (Taking rupees in the name of *Pon*).

“The *Barihaga* (*Bariyao Ha Ganai*- landing in the village of groom) is to be given by the bride’s village for landing in the village of groom. It is given for getting right to complain to new bride in the village of groom for judiciary. The guardian of the bride along with other given stuffs has to accept any one of -- one pair coins or one pair castor fruits or one pair white flowers in the name of the *Pon* from the offering. The money of the *Malsa* is accepted by the Headman of the bride’s village and kept in the village fund. If there is *Mamaimara* or *Phosla bwnai* (taking *phosla*) the castor fruits will be taken by maternal uncle (*bimai*) of the bride”.³⁶ “If the parents of the bride had not paid the *phon thakha* (bride-price) at the time of their marriage or after marriage then the *phon thakha* or the bride-price of the female child would go to her maternal uncle at the time of her marriage. This system is called *Mamai Mara*. In such case the two fruits of castor oil are given to the uncle of the bride from the offering of things along with *phon thakha*”.³⁷ The amount of the *Malsa*, *Barihaga* and *Ponthakha* are seen different rates in different places.

“There is another system of collecting *Malsa* from the parents of the bridegroom. At the time of collecting *Malsa* two classes (groups), *Sibingari* or *gusung hari* and *Sobaiari* or *gwlaio hari* get special consideration from the maternal point of view. If mother of the bride belongs to *Sobaiari* and paid the amount of *Malsa* in the form of *Sobaiari* in her marriage then in the marriage of her daughter the villagers will get the *Malsa* of *Sibingari* (Sesamum). The amount of *Malsa* is different in different villages. The amount of *malsa* of the *Sobaiari* is double to the *Sibingari* bride”.³⁸

viii. The *Nirikh Bosonai* (Tearing of relation):

After formally ending the marriage, the *affad* in the courtyard is re-assembled for *Nirikh Bosonai* works. For this purpose in one altar one pair betel nuts, two pot full teas with puffed rice, lighted incense sticks, two rupees coins or notes and two packet of specially pack potato souse on a banana leaf are offered on a gamari tool. One specially pack potato souse (*Alu khazi*) is given to every members of the bride’s party along with tea and puffed rice. The *Nirikh Bosonai* is the handing over all kinds of care, sorrow and happiness and rights of the bride by the parents

of the bride to her husband or to be husband through the marriage ceremony. Here, father, brother or guardian and the intellectuals of the bride's village give lessons of the newly married or to be married couple regarding the conjugal social life living in the society. For this works the bride and the groom have to stand before the public. A piece of rope of jute and a stick is also offered to the groom by the father or guardian of the bride. It is rare in present time. The giving of rope is for tying their conjugal life in the same knot (*ganthi*) and the stick is symbolized to control the external enemy that may arise in their peace, happy and prosperous conjugal future life. This ceremony may be performed before or after the actual marriage. It is said that if a husband after marriage do not performs this ceremony then the person have no right to accept *Pon thakha* of his daughters' marriage as stated above and the father or the family of the girl will retain right over his/their daughter. After completing these works the bride's party goes back bidding farewell to the bride. This farewell becomes very pathetic from the girl's family as well as girl herself. It creates lots of sorrow and heartfelt emotions too. All those work is known as *Nirik Bosonai*.

After returning from the house of the parents of the bridegroom, a feast is arranged at the house of the bride for the villagers.

There is custom of mutual help or co-operation amongst the Bodos. During the marriage ceremony the villagers co-operate with the parents of the bride or bridegroom by supplying rice-beer and vegetables (*zou, mwigong*) for the feast. Thus after enjoying the feast at the house of the bride's parents the villagers go back to their respective home.

ix. The Dress and Ornaments in the Marriage ceremony:

Generally the bride put the *thaosi* or *Bidon* or *Agor Gidir* (big design) *Dokhona*, red colour blouse and good quality homely woven *sadri* or *phasra* (wrapper), *mulari* (a kind of transparent red colour cloth) and a white *busi* cloth. 'The ornaments are *Doula*, *mwthi*, *Asan* in the hands, *nafakhul*, *zinziri* and *lw* is used in marriage'.³⁹ She put ear ornaments made of Gold usually *Zumkha* at present, bracelet of gold, later on two pairs - one pair red and one pair white *Asan Sankha* put before performance of marriage rites, gold made *naphakhul* (a kind of

ornament of nose leaf), gold necklace around the neck, hair net, good quality *sandal (chappal)* or foot wear, finger ring, etc. and trimmed with valuable powder, lipstick, nail polish, etc. However, the ornaments and the dresses depend upon the economic conditions of both the parties. Her friend whom Bodo people address *lengai* or *panthol* put *Dokhona bidon* or *agor gidir* along with good quality blouse and the *sadri*. There is no special dress for the bride's friend during marriage. The *Bwirathis* also put the need and clean dress like *Dokhona bidon* or *Agor gidir*, *sadri*, blouse, ear rings, bracelets, etc. properly. The dress of the groom is generally made with homely woven green colour *Gamsa* put from loins to knee or bellow it. The *Gamsa* may be plain of one colour or interlace of different colour threads. On the body *genji* with or without shirt, *Aronai* on the neck is / are put by the groom and his friend. Sometime the *Dhuti* and the *Punjabi* dresses belonging to their neighbours during the marriage ceremony are also seen putting in the marriage. Finger rings and other ornaments are also used by sound economic condition Bodo family groom. Sometime special crown available in the market are also used by both the bride and the groom during marriage.

b. The marriage proper:

Types or solemnizing Bodo marriage:

a. The *Hathasuni Khurnai*:

It is said that the *Hathasuni* is the most ancient and first marriage system of the Bodos. It is generally performed in the house of the groom.

i. The word *Hathasuni*:

“The *Hathasuni* marriage is wrongly mentioned as *Hathasuni* of *Hathaseni* and it might have been *Hatha + Se = Hathaseni* due to inclusion of feeding the *Hatha* full rice by distributing to all”.⁴⁰ The word *Hathasuni* is derived from *Hatha + Su* (verb) + *ni* (suffixes) = *Hathasuni*. *Hatha* is a bowl like tool having handle made with gamari wood, *Su* means a verb meaning sticking, washing, making, like making flower garland, etc. Here, the *Hathasuni* means sticking or entering into the life of two young mature man-woman for the whole life to lead a conjugal life forever with the help of *Hatha*. Sometime it is called as *Hathakhurnai* or *Hathakhari Khurnai*. *Hathakhurnai* means distribution of cooked rice and curry

with the *Hatha*. It is known that in the *Hathasuni* marriage, the bride offers her special cooked rice and curry meal taking on *Hatha* to the groom for the first time and to the public in the public function. It give all right to each other (bride and groom) forever.

ii. Arrangement for the *Hathasuni* Marriage:

The preparation of the *Hathasuni* marriage begins after settling the *Pon, Malsa, Barihaga* and *Nirikh* with the brides' party after arrival of bride and leaving the brides' party from the groom's house. The guardian or father of the groom arranges the marriage with the advice of the village headman. Mostly marriage day is fixed in the night of the arrival of the bride. It is also seen that sometime depending on the economic condition of the boy or boy's family the marriage may be performed after fixing suitable date in future.

iii. The sacrifice of chicken for the marriage:

For the marriage of the *Hathasuni*, few *prasads*, one cluster banana, a pair of betel nuts, two one rupee coins and lighted *Dhub* sticks are offered on a banana leaf with two lighted *Alari* or earthen lamp in the *Bathou* altar after cleaning it under the supervision of the *Oza* by the *Douri* or the father or guardian of the groom. *Dwi Santi* is taken in *singri Lotha* for sprinkling. The bride and groom are called, kneel down and allowed to bow down in front of the *Bathou* altar and their helper is allowed to stay behind them after sprinkling the holy water. The *Oza* chants mantras relating to their marriage. During the chanting period the *Douri* or the guardian has to sacrifice two chicken one male and one female in one time. Then the *Oza* is allowed to sprinkle holy water to all and ended temporarily the program.

iv. Cooking rice and curry for the marriage:

The meat of sacrificed chicken is prepared with the broken rice or rice powder without applying spices and the turmeric by the bride inside the *Ising* of the *Nomano*. She has to cook rice too. While pounding the rice powder, the person should not kick the *uwal* with the leg, should not talk to anyone and should not touch at head. Extra meals are prepared as require for the program. Along with the meal rice-beer, tea, etc. are also prepared and consumed. When meal is ready, the lunch is arranged at the courtyard of the groom. The public sits in line. The rice

and the curry cooked by the bride are kept in the two different *Hathas*, bring and kept in front of the *Bathou* altar on the banana leaves.

v. Distribution of *Hathakhari*:

After everything is get ready the *Oza* is allowed the bride and the groom to bow down all presents in the marriage ceremony with the help of their assistants. Then bride and the groom are taken to the *Ising* of *Nomano*. The bride has to touch the rice with the left hand inside *Maihendw*. She has to take a vow touching the *Maihendw* to lead a peaceful conjugal life with that boy, will feed to this boy and his family by cooking, will take care her husband and the family, will create peace and happiness in this family for ever in life. This works is done in front of the *Bathou* altar or during the rice giving time to *Lwkhi* inside the *Ising* or during the lesson giving time to bride and the groom by the *Oza* or *Zanaguru*. After that the bride and groom are paraded to the *Bathou* altar as done in introducing the bride or groom in the house compound. Here some slogans are made like -- Glory for the Groom, Glory for the Bride, Glory for the holy wedding, etc and torches of light is made. When the bride and groom reach in front of the *Bathou* altar they are allowed to kneel and bow down in front of the *Bathou* altar after sprinkling holy water. In some places they have to bow down in the altar of *Khamaikhya* and to *Maihendw*, where three altars - *Bathou*, *Khamaikhya* and *Maihendw* altars are arranged for the marriage. Then the *Oza* allowed to put two pair *Sankha Asan* bracelets (one pair red and another pair white) to the bride, marks vermilion in the foreheads of the bride by the groom, puts rings to each other; put flower garlands to each other. Then the bride and the groom kneel and bow down with heartfelt simultaneously to the parent or guardian of the groom and the *Oza* and other intellectuals present at the moment in front of the *Bathou* altar. After sprinkling the holy water the *Oza* chants his *mantras* of *Hathasuni* marriage. At this time the bride and the groom has to stay in folding hands and kneel down position in front of the *Bathou* altar.

One of the mantras during the *Hathasuni Haba* just before the distribution of rice and curry with *Hatha* by bride in front of the *Bathou* altar:

Ahem de sanni giri sanza

Mwdainigiri bwrai Bthou moharaza,
Dainigiria dai Khalamwbla
Nimahani giria nwng.
Zwngni mwzang gazri
Nidan Aphwd, rog biyadiniphrai
Phwthangraya nwngnw.
Nwi dinwi biphaguru
Amwkhaya Amwkhikhou bihamzw labwbai,
Dinwi bininw nwngnw Akhai-laru
Wngkham Wnkhri hwnai zabai,
Nazaodw Apha nwng bipha guru.
Bihamzwni munga amwkh
Sanphrambw Sukhwi Sukh lakhi
Apha nwngnw phaopuza mwnbai thagwn,
Dinwi Hathasunini phao puza hwdwng
Apha nwngthanga mini khusi nazaonanwi
Bwr-Asirbad hwdw.
Dohai apha bipha guru.
Zwnghalai swr dongbaoyw
Nailo zalo nung bipha gurulo
Gole gole khulumw zwng.
 (gugurub khulumw)⁴¹

i.e. Ahemde, the east is the origin of the sun, the origin of the gods and goddesses is the *Bwrai Bathou Maharaza*. If the offender does the offence, you are the authorities of forgiveness, you are the rescuer of us from any danger, disease, O Father Master (*Guru*), so-and-so (name of the father of the bridegroom) has brought so-and-so (name of the bride) as his daughter-in-law on this occasion today you have been offered this pure meal (rice and curry). You will accept this offer, Father Master (*Guru*) the name of the daughter-in-law is so-and-so. Keep her in peace everyday, you will get puja or offers regularly. Today the puja is held on the occasion of the marriage, *Hathasuni Khurnai*. You will accept the puja and

bless her and her husband, please, Father-Master. We have none except you; you are the only rescuer of us. We salute you respectfully again and again.

The other mantra of the *bibar Bathou* worshipers in the *Hathasuni Haba*:

*Wng-Hring-Khling-Phwd-Se 5 Hey afa swrzigiri, Bwrai Bathou! Nengnw sannigiri sanraza, Okhrangnigiri okrangraza, Barnigiri, barmwdai, Dwinigiri, dwikhungri, Hanigiri, Bwsmuthi ha! Hey afa! nwi dinwi zwng, Nwngkhou sakhi dwnnanwi, Aie-afa raizw-razakhou Sakhi lananwi, Nwngninw phisa Amwkha-amwkhhikhou, Hatha khurnanwi--- No hwnai zanwswi, Songnai khurnaini Mwnthai hwnwswi. Hey afa swrzigiri! Nwng biphaya onnanwi --- Orai som biswrkhou Alw-gwzwn raizw Mwnzanaini bwr hwdw; Nazaodw nwngw Nwngni phisani --- Khulumnaikhou dohai.*⁴²

i.e. *Wng-Hring-Khling-Phwd-Se - 5*. Oh father, creator *Bwrai Bathou*! You are the owner of the sun, sunking, Owner of the sky skyking, Owner of the air air-deity, Owner of the water water-princesses, Owner of the soil Basumuthi soil! Oh father! Look today we are keeping you as the witness, taking mother-father all public as the witness child's of yours Mr. and Smt. has been giving distributing with *Hatha* rights for conjugal life and cooking-distribution. Oh father creator! You father kindly bless them for always happy conjugal married life; Accept the bowing down of your child, *dohai* (Help).

vi. Eating of Rice by Groom:

At the end of mantra by the *Oza*, the bride and the groom should bow down the *Bathou* altar simultaneously. Then the bride goes to the *Ising* and offers the rice and the curry to the *Mainao* and *Songraza*. The bride offers the meals to the *Bathou Bwrai*. The bride arranges the banana leaf and other materials which are kept ready for the meal of groom. The groom will sit in the eastern corner and his assistant sit right to him north to the *Bathou* altar for the meal. Then she kneels down the groom and offers him the rice and curry prepared by herself from the *Hatha*. The groom has to mix the rice with the curry and eat one or two times and then stands up. The bride has to distribute the rice and the curry of the *Hatha* at least one time to all the participants. In some place rice should be distributed by the bride and the curry by her in-law (one of the wife of her husband's brother) or her

assistant. At least few rice as well as curry of the both *Hathas* should be remains balance and the balance should be kept first in front of the *Bathou* altar then it should be shifted to the *Ising* in future.

vii. New Lesson to Bride and the Bridegroom:

At the end of chanting of mantras or one time lunch, new lesson to both bride and groom are given inside *Ising* by the *Oza* and local guardians. The bride and bridegroom listen carefully and bow down with heartfelt simultaneously to them. They are given light refreshment in honour of them. The *Oza* and the respectable persons give them blessing for their new married life. After the lesson is over another trip of feeding of meals is started as need. In this time, the bride is not bound to distribute the rice. The new bed for the newly married couple is prepared by the younger sister of the groom or the sister-in-law of the groom. The sharing of new bed for the newly married couple began from that holy night.

viii. Some beliefs through the *Hathasuni*:

The bridegroom should not eat the entire rice first serve by his wife in the *Hathasuni*. It is believed that eating completely is the signed of idle person or their future generation would be disabling to walk. His helper can eat whole the rice-curry up to his capacity. On the other hand, the bride also has to keep balance of the rice and curry at the two *Hatha* while distributing. Otherwise she is considered to be unable to manage the family, thus unlucky. The distribution of one time rice or curry to all is compulsory for the bride in *Hathasuni* marriage. In previous years if there is any guest or guests belonging from the bride's family or villager related to bride he/she or they should be replaced to nearby neighbours from the house of groom before distribution of *Hathakhari* till its ends. He/she or they could come after *Hathakhari khurnai* or one time eating of rice distributed by bride is ended.

b. The Marriage according to the Brahma System:

The Brahma marriage is slightly different from the traditional *Hathasuni* marriage ceremony. The marriage could take place in both the houses of the bride or the groom. Of course, the pre-marriage preparation and the post marriage traditions are almost same. At present, tea has taken place instead of the rice-beer and the use of

pork is not compulsory. The *Bwirathis* have to give sound moving their tongue known by them *Lolinai* and this should be done in time and again. The bride and bridegroom should not eat any food before their marriage. The Brahma marriage is performed in the *Mandap* through *Jyogyahati* (burn offering) which is prepared outside the courtyard. The bride and the bridegroom and their friends are paraded with same process as done in the *Hathasuni* marriage to the *Mandab*. The torches made of jute and the bamboo stick is lighted. The dances are made from all corners in the parade. The bride and the bridegroom along with the friends move the *Mandap* from right to left three times after sprinkling holy water by the *Purohit* and stand in front of the *Mandap* facing towards east. The priest who is called *Purohit* starts the traditions of the wedding. ‘The *Bwirathis* after offering prayer to *Mandab* hand over garland to one each to bride and the bridegroom. Then the bride puts her garland to groom and vice versa. The *Bwirathi* also put another garland to the *methor* or helper of groom’.⁴³ In some places the two flower garland is handed over to priest, then priest is handed over to bride and groom. After that the *Purohit* has to tie the two clothes taken by the bride and the bridegroom very tightly in the back side. It is believed that if the tie is loosening, their conjugal life may not be favorable in future. This tie should not be opened even at any crucial moment till the entire ritual completes. At the outset the father of the bride prays to god standing before the blazing fire of *Jyogyahati* uttering the mantra of the Brahma Gayatri for *Kaynadan* by following the priest as follows:

“*Om aiahi barde devi trayakshare*
Brahma baidni Gayatri Sandasung
Matoh Brahmajani nomohstyute”.⁴⁴

i.e. Oh mother of the Earth, you will come and stay at my heart, you are the Brahma, you are the mother of the Earth, you have created this Universe; I salute you.

The father of the bride repeats the above formula three times. He again has to chant the formula following the priest of *Ahuti*. Chanting the formula, he salutes and offers mixed corns, (rice, pulse, sugar, etc) to the blazing fire of the *Jyogyahati* every time while he finishes the formula. The formula is:

“*Om Varde devi paramajyotih*

Brahmane Svaha,”

“Om charachar Brahmane Svaha”

“Om purna parabrham jyotih Svarupayo Svaha”.⁴⁵

i.e. *“I offer this corn to you, Who is the light of the lights and Who blesses us; To you, who is present Everywhere with both movable And immovable things, Who is the full Brahma And who is visible As the light.”*

The father of the bride prays to God for blessings to the bride and the bridegroom by offering prasads in blazing fire. He hands over the right hand of the bride to the right hand of the groom. It is known as offering *Sampradan* of his daughter to the bridegroom in front of the fire and the public. Then the bride and the bridegroom chant the *“Gayatri mantra”* separately and again jointly, under the guidance of *purohit*. They also offer the mixed corns chanting the above *‘Mantra of Jyogyahati’* and pray the God for blessing in their marriage. The *Asirbad* function is started by the *Purohit* himself after prayer and offering is over. This will followed by the parents of the groom, the parents of bride and then the others. The offering and blessing in the form of presentation of articles, ornaments, or cash, etc. is made. They also pray to God by offering mixed corns called *prasada* to the fire for the peaceful conjugal life of the newly married couple. While the functions of *Asirbad* is over, the *purohit* concludes the main functions of the marriage with a few slogans in the name of the Brahma invoking blessing to the newly married couple.

Then the party is moved round the fire or *Mandab* three to seven times from right to left following *purohit* and the *Bwirathis*. After that they are paraded again to the main house. Inside the main house the *purohit* is opened the clothes tied during *Kaynadan* and the elderly persons advise the bride and the bridegroom for a while. The *purohit* is handed over the list of presentation to the couple after proper counting. The sharing of new same bed is started after leaving the bride’s party at night or next night which is prepared by younger sister or sister-in-law of the groom. If the marriage is held at the house of the bride then the party of the bridegroom along with the bride leave for the house of the bridegroom early in the morning of the next day or just after completion of the marriage. The bridegroom

family and the party is welcome the newly married couple with same process as done during welcoming of groom and party. On that very day, a big feast is arranged at the house of the bridegroom. It is seen that though there is no dowry system in the Bodo society but gift from bride's parents are now seen accepting by the groom's family or the groom. This may be influences from their neighbours.

c. Marriage According to the *Bathou* system:

For this marriage the permanent *Bathou* is newly fenced with one bamboo and decorated with 9 white threads. The *Bathou* altar is cleaned; one pair betel nuts, one or two lighted *Alari* or earthen lamps and prasads are offered to the *Bathou* after pasting two basil leaves. The *Oza* or the *Zanaguru* have to inform *Bathou* about everything before the marriage.

In the strait of the *Mainao* in the *Ising*, one bamboo basketful (*don*) of rice is taken. Over the rice one pair betel nuts, two lighted earthen lamps, an egg or two flowers have to be kept. If there are other altars then the *Mainao*, all should be cleaned and offered one pair betel nuts, etc. The free marriage and post marriage traditions are almost same as that of the *Hathasuni* marriage.

This marriage is done in the *Bathou* altar prepared for the purpose nearby house compound like *Mandab* in case of the *Brahma Haba*. It is absolutely same with the *Bathou* altar in courtyard. It is decorated with *On* (Rice powder). Four Small banana siblings in four corners should be planted. "The plantation of four banana siblings perhaps indicates the four stages (Ashrams) of human life. For example - *pitri* (parents), *guru* (teacher), *songsar* (social) and *saiynas* (old) *Ashramas*. Decoration with 9 threads in three sides (excluding the front side) or 5 threads similar to *Bathou* is stitched with the banana plants. The word "*Aham*" is written in three sides with *On* or red colour *Abhir* bellow the *Bathou*".⁴⁶

In front of the *Bathou* altar at the marriage place two leaves of the basil are pasted and then holy water is prepared in a brass pot filled with water mixing with three seeds of rice and milk. The mixture is made pure with the chanting of mantras by the *Oza* by moving it from right to left with a bundle of one basil branch and one *zathrasi* branch and 9 plants of dub grasses tied rounding 9 times with white thread

till the end of chanting. All the materials taken for the marriage is sprinkled with the holy water. The *prasads* use for marriage may be prepared with grapes, apple, orange, ripe banana, coconut, mango, sugar cane, milk, etc. and is offered in banana leaf. Some of the *prasads* may be kept towards north outside the *Bathou* altar in a pot. One cluster of ripe banana fruits with pair in number if it is counted and one pair betel nuts is offered on the banana cluster. Two lighted *Alari* or earthen lamps identified ritually as male is put in south and female in north. The cotton is affixed at the heads of the fencing posts. One pot of vermillion, one match box, two flower garland, *agarbathi* one box, *Dhub dani*, etc. are kept ready for using in the marriage.

Then the *Oza or Zanaguru* leads, ritual of marriage in front of the *Bathou* altar as same as the *Brahma Haba*. He leads *Kyanadan* and prayer mantras or oath taking mantras and offering *prosads* or flowers to the *Bathou* altar which is first followed by the groom, the bride and later on both. When all the prayer ends, the *Oza* puts *tilok* with the oil and the charcoal of the *Alari* or the earthen lamp, lighted inside the *Bathou* altar on the forehead of both bride and the bridegroom. After the presentation and giving slogans the party is moved three or five time around the *Bathou* and then introduce inside the *Nomano* after parading as that of the *Brahma Haba*.

The mantra of the *Kanyadata* in the *Bathou* marriage is:

Akhai Khobzobnanwi---

Aham de, _____

Nwi khwnasong apha

Sannigiri sanza

Bhumnigiri raza

Apha Bwrai Bathou

Nwng biphaya khwnasong.

Dinwi ---

Ang nwng biphakhou sakhi dwnbai.

Hathorkhiala, okhaphwr, olongbar,

Daosri daola, Amphou anal,

Zib ziyadikhou sakhi dwnnanwi

*Raizw raza, aie apha
Bwrai bentho, sengrasikhla
Bida phongbai boykhoubw sakhi dwannanwi*

Angni----

*Onzali phisa/biyadoi/binanao
Thoraina--- (Amwkhikhou) omukh/ gamini
Musri Omukhni phisazla gibi/godai
Onzalu ----- maharizwng
Akhai homnanwi hwnai zanwswi
Biswr sanwini such-gwzwnkhou
Dohai hwnanwi swrzigiri apha
Bwrai Bathouni khjathiyao
Khulumnanwi ang dinwi zuli hwnw
Akhai homnanwi hwnai zabai.
Biswr sanwini nokhor songsar zanaya
Zeblabw zwi-zwi mwi-mwi zathwng.*

(Khulumnanwi akhai homnanwi hwnangou).⁴⁷

i.e. By folding hand --- *Ahamde*, --- Oh listen father the owner of the sun is the east, the owner of the earth is the king, father Bwrai Bathou you father listen. Today I have kept you witness. Keeping as witness the stars, moon, planets, birds, insects, living and non-living, all the public's, father-mothers, olds, young boys and girls, brothers my --- dear child/niece/sister Miss (Name of bride) is handing over to Mr. (Name of groom) the first/last son of Mr. (Name of the father of the groom) of Village (Name of village). Praying in front of the creator *Bwrai Bathou* looking their happiness for the wedding I have handed over to (Her). Let their family life be always prosperous. (Hand over should be done after prayer to the *Bathou*).

The mantras for oath taking of both bride and the bridegroom:

(Khulumnanwi) Ahamde,

Nwi khwnasong khwnasong apha, Sannigiri sanza Bhumnigiri raza Apha Bwrai Bathou Khwnasong.

i.e. (By saluting) *Ahamde*, Oh listen, listen father the owner of the sun is the east the owner of the earth is the king father *Bwrai Bathou* listen.

Dabw --- Thaigir bikhong khongba Siphungni dengkhwa gudungba Bathouyabw bandwba Sizouyabw gorongba Nwngni asarabw phongba Nwngnw Bar, or, dwi, Ha okhwrangao san okhaphwr Zeraobw zenibw akha phakha. Nwngnw zwnwm zuli thwinai Thangnaini giri apha Bwrai Bathou.----- (Continue)

i.e. Up till now --- the indica fruits have five ridges, the Bodo flute has five holes, the Bathou have five knot (philosophies), the sizou plant has five spines and you have five rituals. You are in wind, fire, water, soil, sky, sun, moon and expert in everywhere. You are the possessor of birth, marriage and dead father Bwrai Bathou.

Aham de, ----

Dinwi ----

Nwng biphaya nwng biphani Phisa okhra phisou okhraphwrkhrou Buzainanggwn Azainanggwn Zwng sanwizwng songsar zananyao Naha mwiha thanggwn Hagra bongrayao thanggwn Raza lamayao thabaigwn Be somao zahathe Mwzanggwi swohwinai Mwzanggwi souphwinai khalamw Apha Bwrai sikhraza Bwrai bagraza Bwrai Choudry. Basuboniyakhrou arwi narkhe Horwi narkhe khalamhwnanggwn Buzai azai khalamnergwn Nwngni barbirgwn barbiraphwrkhrou. Bandwba Bathouni gudiayao Akhai khobzobnanwi zwngni Khulumnaikhrou nazaodw apha Bwrai Bathou Maharaza. (Khulumnangou).⁴⁸

i.e. Aham de, ----

Today ----- You must administer your adamant Childs and grand Childs. In our conjugal family lifes when we go for fishing, hunting, go to forest jungles, travel through highways at that moment make us to be able to reach and comeback with good condition father *Bwrai sikhraza Bwrai bagraza Bwrai Choudry*. You must control and pushed there and that way the devils and spirits. Accept our folding hand salute father *Bwrai Bathou Maharaja* siting near the five knot *Bathou*. (*Salute*).

The formal marriage of the *Bathou* system comes to an end after giving new lesson to the newly married couple. The bride and the bridegroom share new bed in the same night or in the next night which is prepared by the younger sister or the sister-in-law of the bridegroom.

d) Feasting in the Marriage:

In earlier days after the first time meal or next day of the *Hathasuni* marriage, the eating of pork, drinking of rice-beer and the dancing and playing of musical instruments in the name of the marriage was continue for many days. The old Bodo says – *Zouni fukhri, bedorni akhai, wngkhamni ali – ma zanw embu khuga* (The ponds of wine, buffed of meat, the *ali* of rice – everything are abundance) along with music of the *Kham*, the *Siphung*, the *Zotha* and the *Serza*. . ‘During the feast men and women, both young and old, dance together while the *Serza*, the *Siphung* and *Gangana* are played on. The marry maker do not sleep during the night. They also perform *Thakhripalla* a competition of dance and song, amongst the participants in the marriage ceremony”.⁴⁹In today also the feasting in the name of traditional *Hathasuni* marriage and all kinds of marriage are not far bellow then earlier periods.

e) The Songs of Marriage:

The Bodos are very rich in marriage related songs. The *Bwirathi* who distributes betel nuts to the guest of the marriage in abundance reflects in the song as:

O’ Bwirathi loliya
Nwngni babangsin goy khaonaikhou
*Zwnglai zaliya.*⁵⁰

i.e. O’ Bwirathi loliya, we are not willing to chew betel nut sliced unwillingly to us.

The womenfolk of the bride’s side sing in order to console the bride for her happy marriage life at the time of farewell:

Athing gazob hathai orzob
Akhaini phaoa zayakhwi
Athingni phaoa zayakhwi
Raizw phathalikhou---
Zahwidw aywi! Zahwidw.
*O Aywi! Zahwidw.*⁵¹

i.e. Keep your feet steady and keep your teeth well covered. The pose of the hand and feet has not been proper, go and partake in the social life dear. Go and partake daughter! Partake. O' daughter! Partake.

Human being lives happily in society. The red ant also does the same. This knowledge is given to the bride in the song:

Khwezema thwbw khudwizwng

Mansia thayw go giathizwng

Dagabswi aywi ! dagabswi.

O' aywi ! dagabswi.

Nwma nwmphaya dao omabadi

Homna horbai--

Laothi gongse phaga dwngse gothaikhabai.

Dagabswi aywi ! dagabswi.

*Harsa hwoanw horakhwi horakhwi.*⁵²

i.e. The *Khwezema* (red ant) build its nest with its spittle human being live together with kith and kin. Weep not my daughter! Weep not. O' daughter! Weep not. Your parents have given you out like pigs and fowl, already a string of rope and a stick has given. Weep not my daughter! Weep not. You are married not to an out caste.

It is said and found that Bodos were very rich in their marriage related folk songs. But today only a handful of songs are seen singing in the marriage ceremony of the Bodos.

d. The Christian Bodos are solemnized marriage ceremony as per their religious system. They donot follow the traditional system of Bodos.

c. The Post marriage Rites:

i. *The Bisna Sara and Athmongla:*

After one week of the marriage, the bride and the bridegroom go to the house of the bride's parents after informing. Two girl and two boy friends including their assistant during their marriage also accompanied with them. They have to take two chickens (one cock and one hen), few items of edible and potable stuffs like -

tea, biscuits, puffed rice, fruits, sugar, two bottles of distilled and two non distilled rice beer (*gwrán* and *bidwi*), etc. to entertain the friends of the bride in her village. At the same day at dusk the *Bisna Sara* is performed. The main objective of *Bisna Sara* is a get together to formally bid goodbye forever to bride's native village friends after marriage by the bride. Through this program the friends and the relatives of the bride give her farewell and blessing for her new peace, happy and prosperous conjugal family life. Here some entertainment, drinking, feasting, joking to each other is made. Specially joking is made to boys and girls of the grooms' party by the boys and girls of bride's party. The groom's party has to fulfill everything but nominal demands of the brides' party. In the next day of the *Bisna Sara* the *Athmongla* is performed according to economic condition of the family. The *Athmongla* is hosted for giving feast to the relatives and kindsmen of the bride's family, friends and others. It is like the marriage in the parent's house of the bride. Large gathering with lots of invitees for varieties of feasting have become the normal phenomenon at present in economically well established Bodo families. In this period the party should not hold more than two nights at the house of the bride's parents. This is also called *Newtha siphainai* (breaking of relations) in the Bodo.

ii. **The *Bibai Darson*:**

The *Bibai Darson* is also one of the remarkable ceremonies in present Bodo society. After *Bisna Sara* and the *Athmongla* is over, the parents and relatives of the bride is to be invited by the groom's family for feasting. The parents and relatives of the groom also involved there. The main objective of this feasting is to get together and to identify the relatives of both the parties. After that the another such kinds of get together is arranged at the house of the bride by the parents of the bride. It is said that after these two get together, there is no restriction on visiting and holding of nights for any members of both the parties.

iii. **The *Kholar Gothainai*:**

It is one of the post marriage ceremonies. In Bodo there is a system of returning the bride to her parents at the sudden and untimely death of her husband. If the husband expires just after marriage, the bride returns to her parent's house and the

amount of *Malsa* is given back to the parents of the deceased husband by the parents of the bride. This is known as *Kholar Gothainai* in Bodo. After this ceremony there may not have any relation between the two families. Generally it is done when the married lady is accepted that kind of arrangement.

iv. The Divorce:

The formal divorce is allowed in the Bodo society. If both husband and wife desire divorce mutually then it is performed by tearing a betel leaf. This is called *phathwi-lai-bisinai* in Bodo. If the husband divorces his wife without any reasonable ground then he is to bear the responsibility of her livelihood for a certain period. Sometimes it is observed that the question of divorce is put up in a big gathering of the public which is called *Somaj* for the solution of the divorce case. It is also seen that the amount of fine for the divorce is fixed by judging the nature of crime.

The Death Rite:

Social customs of the Bodos relating to Death:

The fourth moral preaching of the Bodos is death rite. Just after the confirmation of the death, the information of his or her dead is given to the family members, relatives and all the villagers for the disposal of dead body. In the performance of some major and minor rites in connection with the dead body the role of a *Douri* or *Oza* is important. For the purpose, a place is cleaned with soil mixing with water in south north direction. One banana is cut in breathe and divided it into five (i.e. for male and seven for female) and placed on it. A *serene* (a kind of trellis having frame for carrying dead body) having two poles is made with a raw bamboo and is placed over the banana sheaths. The two poles are called *bathi*. It is known as *Gwthwi* (Dead body) *bwisang* (trellis). The trellis is given new mat. The dead body is taken out from the house and then placed on trellis facing its head south. The dead body is then washed with water and a new cloth *Gamsa* or *Dokhona* is tied on the body. The hair is combed after applying his or her favourite hair oil. One chicken is killed and its meat is prepared in an earthen utensil without giving any spicecs and colouring agent outside the house. Some rice is also prepared. The near and dear one offers rice, meats, curry, water, etc. to the dead body after washing

his or her mouth. The wife of the dead person if available has to erase the marks of the vermillion from her forehead with the legs of the death person. The water should be given with the leaf of the Indian fig tree. After giving food and giving water, some pieces of red threads are kept in the lips of the dead body and the dead body is covered with white clothes. The *Oza* chants his mantra for lifting dead body and then is paraded to disposal place.

The chanting of *mantras* for the blessing for the dead: *Nwi amwkha/amwkhi (swmwndw)! Nwng dinwi nokhorni gasibw angw, Soi-somphathi raizw-razakhou Nagarnanwi munus mayani zekhou Swosinanwi, zaikharlangbai. Nwngni nokhora nwnghou--- Phahamnw nazadwngmwn, Nathai bephwr pheleng zazwbbai/nainw mwnakhiswi. De amwkha/amwkhi (Swmwndw). Nwng gwswao zebw Mwnsa dalalangswi! Dinwiniphrai nwngha nwnghwi, Zwngba zwngswi! Nwng da ma zahwiyw, Zwng raobw mithila; Mansi zaphwiphinw na, Daosen-daola zahwiyw, Be nwnghni boradswi! Dohai amwkha/amwkhi (Swmwndw)! Naha mwiha thangnaiyao, Nwng nwnghni raokhoubw Sigi-sogo khalamnw Mwnnai nonga. Nwng zeblabw nwnghni Nokhorkhou bar mohor Lananwi alw-alw, Raizw zanw Nwzwr hornangwn. De amwkha/amwkhi (Swmwndw)! Thangdw de, khulumbai Zwng nwnghkou boibw.(gongna khulumnanwi) Dohai apha swrzigiri Anangossai Bwrai Bathou! Alw-alw zaiga Hwdw nwnghw nwnghni Angw phisakhou, Dohai.*⁵³

i.e. Hello Mr. /Smt (relation)! Today you have left all your own family members, property, and people overcoming the mystery of human life. Treatment from your family was made for you but that entire treatments have failed/ could not treat. Yes (de) Mr/Smt. (relation)! You should not worry about! From today you have become you only, we have become we! No one of us know what you would be now, whether you would be human again or birds it is your fate! Dohai (help) Mr./Smt. (relation)! You should not be able to treat your own during fishing and hunting. You should always take care of your family for happy and prosperous social life in the form of air. Yes Mr./Smt. (relation)! Then go, we have bow down everybody. (Have to bow down). Dohai (help) father creator *Anangossai Bwrai Bathou!* Give peaceful place for your own child, dohai (help).

After bowing down to the dead body, the body is lifted by four people known as *Gwthwi bangra* (carrier on shoulder), first they have to move from right to left three or five or seven times before lifting to shoulder. Generally the sons and the relatives are carrying the dead body. Then the funeral procession led by the *Douri* or the *Oza* with the dead body takes place towards the cremation ground. Before funeral procession is started the white yarn should be sorounded at least three times to each house of the dead person keeping its entrance gap. On the way, from the house of the dead person to the cremation ground the *Douri* or the *Oza* leaves white pieces of yarn. It is believed that the soul of the dead can go to the cremation ground from the house following the yarn. At least one male member of each family of the village goes to the cremation ground with the body. The women and the children are not allowed to participate in the procession.

It is seen that after lifting up the dead body from the courtyard the guardian of the dead person tied with *Nw* (a kind of thread use in weaving) to all family members. It is believed that the living persons are united and unable to disturb by the evil spirits. It is also seen that the place where from the dead body is lifted for the cremation is cleaned mixing with water and soil and is covered with bamboo basket (*don*). When the cremation party returns the place is enquired. It is believed that the foot prints of the insect or any living things can be seen, where the soul of the dead person transformed into.

i. Disposal of the death body by burial:

Before digging the ditch for burial of dead body, few coins are thrown away saying --“*Nwi* (name of the death person) *nwngni mungwi bitha bainai zabai*” meaning “Hi (name of the death person) land has been purchased for your name” in the graveyard. This means that the place of burial is purchased in the name of dead person. All the person presents in the burial ground offer the dead body a little water with the help of the leaves of the Indian fig tree (*Phakhri bilai*) and utter like this: *No lwngdw amwkha/ amwkhi, dinwiniphrai nwngba nwng zwngba zwngswi* (“O, you take this water (Name of dead person), from today you will remains as yourself, and we shall remain as ourselves”). By doing this the mourners mean that they have separated their relationship with the dead person. After offering water, a

piece of red thread is placed on the lips again. The Bodos believe that placing a piece of red thread on the lips of the dead person carries red lips when the re-birth will take place. The water with Indian fig tree leaves could halt thirsty and long time refresh. At the time of burial the dead body is covered with a white sheet of cloth and slowly lowered into the grave with head to the south. A few coins and *cowrie* (shells) are also buried or kept along with the dead body for paying boat fare while crossing the river or for purchasing the food on the journey of the soul of the dead person. A small hole is kept in the earth over the nose of the dead body leading upto the outside air for breathing of soul. Specially this is done keeping one thatch from the nose of the dead body to the upper ground.

ii. The Disposal of Death Body by Burning:

While the dead Body is to be burnt the pyre is arranged as the non-Bodo Hindus do it. After giving water and putting red thread in lips the dead body is placed on the pyre. Other rituals are same as above. There is the system of placing five or seven stacks of woods while the pyre is arranged. A torch is then lighted and the relatives and the friends of the deceased pass round the funeral pile in procession, for the men five times, for the woman seven times, after which the torch is applied to the pyre. The four posts are usually placed on the ground enclosing the oblong space on which the cremation has been carried out.

It is also one of the customs of the Bodos that in case of the cremation of the dead body a small piece of the lungs of the dead body should be cut out from the blazing dead body and it should be kept inside the deep water or stream. It is believed that when the re-birth takes place he or she will have peace, happy and cool heart.

iii. Some rites in the graveyard in disposing the dead Body:

There are some same rites in both burial and funeral pyre for disposal of the dead body. After burial and burning the dead body a pitcherfull of fresh water is kept near the disposal place of dead body. A little rice is also cooked on the spot and left for the dead. It is belived that the soul of the dead may start its journey after taking rice. One chicken is set free saying the name of the dead person. One of the poles is made the way to heaven by placing it 45 degree angle facing north to

south. On the pole if the dead is male five times and seven if the dead is female threads is fenced on the pole and it is cut with the finger by the guardian of the dead person saying - “*Dinwiniphrai nwngha nwnghwi zwngha zwnghwi*” (from today you will remain as yourself and we shall remain as ourselves”). The same work is done on the left finger uttering the same words. This is known as the *Khundung Aowa Ersonai* (cutting away of the yarn). The last part of the raw bamboo (*Owa Bizou*) with the leaves of the pole has to be piled near the disposal place and a piece of red flag is tied on the branch of it. It is called *zatha* (a kind of flag) symbolising disposal of death body.

The *mantras* chanted during disposal of the dead body in the bank of river or stream at graveyard or cremation ground:

*‘Nwi, phirigathamni Mwdai sirini gwthar siphwr! Nwi dinwi nwnghsininw Agwma.... Amwkha/amwkhiya, Nwnghsini raizwao Agan surbai. Onsaidwde Aiephwr-aphaphwr! Nwnghswr, nwnghsini hwnnanwi Bikhou, dohai’.*⁵⁴

i.e. Hello, the line deities of holy souls of the third preaching’s ! Hello, today your dear Mr./Smt has tour to your place. Take care of him/her father-mother! Take him/her as of your own, (salute).

After the disposal is over, members of the funeral party take bath in the river or stream. Just after bath every members of the funeral party chew a little quantity of *narzi gwrn* which are taking by a *Gwthwi Bamwn* (death *Bamwn*). By doing so the Bodos believe that from that moment the relation between the dead person and the members of the disposal party is over. After that the members of the disposal party has to take bath again and then to touch on a stone, fire and then to chew a few rice and basil leaves which are ready in the altar of the *Gwthang Bamwn* (living *Bamwn*). This means they are re-joined with the living person. These two *Bamwn* should be ready before returning of the disposal party near the bank of river or stream who are not accompanied with the disposal party. After that the funeral party members has to go to their respective houses.

The guardian lady of every house has to sprinkle with holy water, allowed to chew *Narzi* and rice when the member of the disposal party arrives to their respective

houses. Then they enter to their respective houses after bowing down at the altar of the *Bathou* and taking bath with homely fresh water.

When all the funeral party members come back to their respective houses the traditional Bodos sacrifices a chicken in the entrance of the death person. This is done with the supervision of the *Oza* or the *Douri*. This means that the death person has been discarded in the family by sacrificing with the chicken. The headman, secretary, and others of the village gather together at the house of the dead person after the disposal of the dead body for discussion about the forthcoming *Saradu* ceremony of the dead person. There are mutual co-operations for the *saradu* ceremony also in Bodo society.

iv. The *Saradu* or *Srado* Ceremony:

This is the fifth moral preaching of the Bodos. “On the thirteenth or the eleventh day from the day of the death of a person the *Saradu* or *Srado* ceremony is held. The *Shraddha* the mind-rite of orthodox Hindus, known as the *Shraddha* (Sanskrit, Srut, faith, trust, belief) is a mere highly developed form of the primitive funeral feast”.⁵⁵ It is said that this ceremony is celebrated in different days in different villages. Some village performs this ceremony after three days or somewhere in 8 days or somewhere 10 days from the death day. This ceremony is performing in two parts. The first part is known as *Daha Garnai* (giving away the grief or sorrow) and the second part is *Dan Sarnai* (throwing donation).

a. The *Daha Garnai*:

One day ahead of the *Saradu* ceremony or in the same day morning *pre-Saradu* ceremony is performed by the Bodos. This ceremony is called *Daha-Garnai* (to give up the grief). *Daha* in Bodo means grief or sorrow in English.

The *Daha Garnai* also known as *Dosa garnai* ceremony. It is performed simply by offering some favorite edible and potable things like - pork, chicken, fishes, curries, etc, varieties of rice cakes like - *pitha*, *laru*, *sithao* or *anthab*, sweets, varieties of fruits, wine, etc, including the clothes and the garments mean for the dead person. For the purpose one altar is set towards the southern part facing towards the south in the courtyard of the dead person by the family members under

the supervision of the *Oza* and the *Douri*. All the offering is placed one by one on a banana leaf on the *Gambari* tool. One pair betel nuts, *dhup*, *saldhuna*, etc. are offered. After offering everything as think right by the family of the dead person, all the family members come together and kneel down in front of the altar under the supervision of the *Oza* and the *Douri*, *dwi santhi* is sprinkled to everyone. The *Oza* chant his *mantra* in half sitting position calling the dead person and takes all things which is offered to him/her and fulfilled his or her unfulfilled desire to eat or take during his/her life time and free the aggrieve family members from any mishap in their day today life and help them from the heaven during their need. It is called *Gwthwinw Baonai* (offering to dead). After few while edible and potable offering should be thrown lifting from the altar to the southern side by the elder son taking it on the head. The clothes and the garments are given to poor persons who are not related to the dead person. This is known as the *Gwthwinw Baonai* or the *Sua Garnai*.

One *mantra* of throwing of sorrow (*Daha Baonai*) is:

Nwi amwkh/amwkhi ... (swmwndw)! Nwngw nwngni nokhorni gaswi Angwphwrkhou nagarnanwi, Mayani songsarkhou sousinanwi, Zwngni gezerniphrai anzrailangbai. Da nwng ma zananwi donghwiyw, Zwng raobw mithila. Nwi dinwi nwngni nokhora, Nwngni namwi-zi-zwm, Nwng zagra-lwngra Dongnaimani muwakhou buthumnanwi Gwsw gwrwbwzwng nwngnw baodwng. Azaophwidw, zaphwidw, Amwkha/amwkhi (Swmwndw)! Nwng gwsawo zebw Mwnsa lanw nanglia. Nwngni borad nwngswi, Zwngni borad zwngswi; Daosen – daola zananwi, Bar mohor lananwi, Nwng nwngni nokhorkhou Nwzwr hordw... (Swmwndw)! Nazaodw nwngw zwngni Khulumnai arw baonaikhou Dohai.... (Swmwndw), Dohai! (Khulumnagou)⁵⁶

i.e. Hello Mr./Smt. (Relationship) You have left amongst us leaving all your family, leaving all dears; overcoming the mystery of society. No one of us knows in which form you are now. Today your family has collected all the eatable food as you like and clothes and offer you with heartfelt. Come accept eat all these things, Mr./Smt. (relation). You should not worry in mind. You have reach to your fate, we are in our fate; take care of your family in the form of birds, in the form air (relation)! Accept our offering and respect (relation) (*salute*).

The followers of the *Brahma Dharma* perform *Ahuti* (Burn offering) during the *Saradu* ceremony. The *Ahuti* is performed by the *purohit* (Priest). After the *Ahuti* is over, all the people presents are entertained with a common meal. The meal is generally vegetarian.

b. The *Dan Sarnai*:

The Bodos has a custom of giving *Dan* (donation) in the form of money or materials in the name of the dead person setting in an altar. The altar is set at south of the *Bathou* altar facing east and the portrait of the dead person is hung on the chair or tool facing towards west. One full bamboo basket (*Don*) rice, one pair betel nuts, two pieces of one rupee coins, *Dhup*, *Bidi* or Tobacco, one lighted earthen lamp, etc. are offered in the altar. Few flowers, the burned *Dhub dhani*, holy water, etc. are kept near the *Don*.

The chanting of *mantras* in the altar of donation acceptance in the *Sradya*:

Nwi amwkha/amwkh .. (*swmwndw*)! *Dinwi nwngni nokhora, Raizw-razakhou lananwi... Nwngni bandrakhou khungbai. Nwi.... Swmwndw! Nwng dinwi bobao Ma zananwi dong! Na, daosen-daola Zananwi dongo, Na, buhuth zana dongo? Nwngni borad nwnngswi, Zwngni borad zwngswi. Dinwiniphrai nwngzwn-gzwngzwn Zebw swmwndw thanai nongla. Dohai... (swmwndw)! Nwng zebw mwnsa damwnswi, Nwngni nokhorni raokhoubw Sigi-sogo khalamnanga. Nwi dinwi nwngni zeoni Phwnni thakhai Zwng boibw rang khenda Dan hwdwng, Azaophwidw nwnng Amwkha/amwkh... (Swmwndw)! Nazaodw nwngw, Zwngni baonai Arw khulumnaikhou, Dohai! (khulumnangou).⁵⁷*

i.e. Hello Mr/Smt ... (relation)! Today your family has observed your *Sradya* taking all all the public. Hello... relation! Where are you in what form today? Or in the form of birds? You're in your fate, we are in our fate. There will not be any relation between you and us from today. Help ... (relation)! Don not worry about; do not make any threat to your family members. Today we all are giving donation for your life's blessing (phwn), come and accept it Mr./smt. ... (relation)! Accept our offering and respect, help! (Bow down).

It is made for final respect to the dead person by the participants along with donation. The materials donated to the altar are kept in village fund. Serving of

common meal with meats, fishes, etc. are common in the *Saradu* ceremony. The donation and materials are counted and declared among the people. At the end of the occasion, the *Oza* chants mantras in front of the altar in presence of all the family members of the dead person with public regarding the conclusion of the *Saradu* ceremony, etc. condolence is observed and the donated money are thrown in the air at the gathering following all direction by the eldest son of the dead person before properly cleaning the place with broom after meal. This ceremony of the Bodos is called the *Dan Sarnai*. Sometimes a bullock is set free (*Mwsou Sarwn Hogarnai*) in the name of the dead person. The responsibility of conducting the whole function is rested on the eldest son of the dead person. Just after coming from the disposal of the dead body the eldest son of the family is restricted for normal food, sitting in the high stool, sleeping on the high bed, etc. The family has to take vegetarian food. After throwing the donated coins he has to carry waste due to meal in a basket on his head and throw them away in the field or the public road side towards the southern side of the house under the supervision of the *Oza or Douri*. It is called in the Bodo as *Sua-Garnai* (removing of impurity). In this way the impurity caused by death is ceremonially removed and the members of the family can perform all normal activities after the ceremonial cleaning. The *Daha Garnai* is done by Brahma religious Bodos in same way.

2.4. The Culture:

Culture means art, literature music and other intellectual expression of a particular society or time.⁵⁸ Culture is a complex system of human behavior, values, beliefs, traditions and work of arts, which is transmitted through generations. It is learned pattern of behavior. It is way in which a person lives his life in the society. It is an integral part of every society and creates a feeling of belonging and togetherness among the people of that society. It is said that culture includes various aspects of communication, attitude, manners, beliefs, values, customs, norms, food, art, jewelry, clothing styles, etc. In a broader meaning it incorporates behavioral patterns of the people, including the spiritual beliefs and the idealism that defines their actions. Every society has a different culture, which gives it an identity and distinctiveness.

2.5. The Bodo Culture:

‘The Boro culture is rich and multi-faceted. It is a part and parcel of the Indo-Mongoloid or Kirata culture. The Historians of culture and scholars have almost established this view that the Mongoloid Boro culture has influenced the Aryan culture to a great extent especially in the north east and vice-versa’.⁵⁹ In his Monograph in Ao Naga Tribes W. C. Smith demarcated thirteen outstanding features of Mongoloid culture. “Of these, the Boros shares in common with the Nagas or other Mongoloid tribes fives characteristics of their culture viz.—(i) the habit of betel chewing, (ii) the aversion of milk as article of food, (ii) the use of simple loom for weaving cloth, (iv) the habit of using large type of shield in the war fare and (v) change of residence in isolated regions with a crude (primitive) form of agriculture’.⁶⁰ Some of these cultural traits have been extinct today, but none can deny the fact that the most primitive and unrefined and illiterate amongst them have been sharing these traits from the time immemorial. The Bodos follow certain traditional ways of culture in their various social functions. The culture of the Bodo is the way of living of the Bodos. The culture of the Bodos constitutes not merely physical or material culture; it also comprises mental, social and spiritual culture. The Bodos have enrich their cultural heritage which is completed and from past surroundings.

‘The influence of the tribal’s in the development of the Assamese culture has been many sided and significant. Assamese vocabulary has been enriched by interactions from tribal dialects. Assam’s music has borrowed many elements from tribal singing and dancing. Spectators and listeners who have seen and heard Manipuri, Bodo, Lushai, Miri, Khasi and Rabha dances and songs in the variety performance of the present day have been impressed by their exquisite rhythm and melody’.⁶¹ The Bodos live in the bank of the river, so most of the river name come from Bodo e.g.,-- *Bwrsi*, *Donsiri*, *Dihong*, *Dibang*, etc. in the entire Assam and abroad. In Bodo culture bamboo plays vary important role. Different types of bamboo tools -- weapons like - bows and arrows, fishing tools like—*zekhai*, *khobai*, *pholo* (a kind of fish catching basket), etc., household tools like- *songrai*, *sandri* (sieve), *khada* (basket), *sandangga* (big size sieve), *gisib* (fan), etc., loom tools like— *khuntha*, *gonsa*, *sewari*, *phuthul*, *gorai*, etc., musical instruments like

— *siphung* (flute), *thorkha*, *bingi*, etc., are prevalent among Bodos even today. They have the habit of eating meat and fishes. They are accustomed to the habit of consuming green vegetables like *lapha*, *dingkhia*, *daophenda*, etc. The habit of preparing “*zou*” (rice beer) and drink it in various occasions, ceremonies and festivals are an integral part of their cultural life. They often use *goi* (areca nut) and *phathwi* (betel leaf) in every sphere of life. The palatable dishes like *ondla* (rice powder), *napham*, *meoya* (bamboo shoot), *narzi* (dried leaves of jute), *oma bedor* (pork), are the finest delicacies of the Bodos. The culture of silk worm (eri) and weaving of eri cloth and various designed garments like -- *Dokhna*, *Aronai*, *Sadri*, *Gamsa*, etc. are the integral parts of the Bodo women and the society. They celebrate their most favourite the *Bwisagu* festival with their heart and soul. They worship their traditional *Bathou Religion*. They celebrate their traditional religious festivals. They also worship various religions like *Brahma Dharma*, *Sai Bhba*, *Vaishnav*, *Joy Guru*, *Cristianity*, etc. They have the habit of rearing various domestic animals and birds for their income. About them Endle rightly said---“A Kachari village usually abounds in domestic live-stock of various kinds, e.g., ducks, fowls, goats, pigs, cattle, etc.; and it can hardly be doubted that the fence and ditch above spoken of are largely intended to prevent the cattle, pigs, etc., from getting into the rice-fields at night, and so doing serious damage to the paddy and other crops”.⁶² The socio-religious, economics and cultural reform movement launched by Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma in the first half of 20th century brought about an immense changes in the social, religious and cultural life of the Bodos. The changes are eminent. The welcoming of the changing trends in different ways of living in favour of a new one in lieu of the past traditional way of living is a continuous and acceptable process for the development of better future.

Conclusion:

The Bodo society is patriarchal society but their society gift special privileges to women also. The Bodo *ari* or *mahari* (clan) is not division of labour like their Hindu neighbours, it is the division of works in their various social works. The *Bathou* is their traditional religion. The rice is their stable food. It is also supplemented by various vegetables, meats like -- pork, mutton, chicken, etc. and almost all kinds of fishes. There are various rites and rituals, custom, etc. perform

from birth to dead in the Bodo society. The Bodo culture is a beautiful and multi-faceted.

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