

CHAPTER-2

SOCIAL CEREMONY

2.1 Social Ceremony:

Social ceremony is a formality based on symbolic act or set of works performed collectively with cultural and religious significance to signify important life events as social custom and tradition. These ceremonies as custom and tradition strengthen social bonds, cultural norms, and religious values which have been providing a sense of continuity and belonging. The formalized social ceremony establishes rituals and procedures which are loaded with clear meaning and reflect beliefs and values of a society. Alex Inkeles defines custom as, “*Custom is any standardized and more or less specialized set of actions, which is routinely carried out according to a generally accepted pattern in a group life*”.¹ Social ceremonies are performed by a group for fostering a sense of shared experience and identity. These are frequently marked the transitions in the life of a person, such as birth, marriage, and death and also linked to the events as well as seasonal changes in the significance of community. Social ceremonies help to strengthen and transmit cultural norms, religious values, and traditional beliefs within a particular society. It provides comfort and support to individuals and communities during times of change and loss. It is known that transitions from group to group and from one social situation to the next are looked on as implicit in the very fact of existence, so that a human's life comes to be made up of a succession of different stages with similar beginning and ends: birth; social puberty, marriage, fatherhood, motherhood, advancement to a upper class, occupational specialization, and death. Human life is full of transitions in cyclic order. Everybody involves the events such as rituals, ceremonies where essential purpose is to be enabled the individuals to pass from one determined position to another which is equally well defined. Since the goal is the same, it is needed to follow of necessity that the ways of attaining it should be at least analogous if not identical in detail. Thus, it is observed a

¹ Rawat, H.K., *SOCIOLOGY Basic Concepts*. Reprinted. Prem Rawat, Rawat Publication, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi. 2015. p. 90

general similarity among ceremonies of birth, childhood, social puberty, marriage, pregnancy, fatherhood, motherhood, initiation into religious societies and funerals. Man's life resembles with the nature, from which neither the individual nor the society stands alone. The human activities are governed by usual transition and durations of relative inactivities.

The Bodo life-cycle concentrates around the three most important rituals of passage such as birth, marriage and death. There are a few other ceremonies connected with different stages of life but these are lesser importance in comparison with the birth, marriage and death. Birth is the first crucial transition of the human being. All sorts of rituals, ceremonies, observances, taboos are associated with child-birth. Ceremonies accompanying disclosure of Pregnancy, symptoms of Pregnancy, carefulness and restrictions, precaution and restriction, restriction of food, cutting and fastening umbilical cord, birth purification, name giving, hair cutting and purification ceremony relating to feeding the newly born child, ear perforation for girls, child adoption ceremony are all transition rites. Puberty rite is another important ceremony of the Bodo society. It is a symbolic practice which is observed in case of transition of a female member from childhood to womanhood. Another important transition in the human life and status of the individual is marriage. Rituals and ceremonies in connection with marriage include various observances to protect the new couple from the evil eyes or evil spirits to secure and enhance the safety and prosperity of the newly bounded couple. It is accompanied by different types of rituals and ceremonies. Death is the last but great transition of the human life. Purification from contact with the dead body, purification of his belongings or the houses believed in, must be accomplished after death of a person. There are ceremonies which are performed to put freedom to the dying from sins, to disconnect the living ones from deceased soul, to show the path to the afterworld, to make the journey of departed soul easy and free from danger, to protect the living members from his evil motives. Various rituals are performed relating to death.

2.2 Birth Ceremony:

It is natural that every woman desires to have child after her marriage. In the Bodo society it is generally seen that a Bodo woman prefers to get a male child rather than a female child. It may be owing to the general psychology of the Bodo parents that

to give daughters in marriage is a matter of great burden, while in the case of sons it is not so. Also, the Bodo society being patriarchal sons are the sole inheritors of the parents' property. Hence, sons are more desirable to the Bodo parents than daughters. At the time of child-birth the Bodos of the rural areas follow some old and traditional customs. Since time immemorial the Bodo women have co-operated with each other at the time of child-birth. The elderly women of the Village perform the duties of midwife. When delivery takes place the woman, the expectant mother takes position on her knees supporting herself on a wooden big mortar (*owal* in Bodo). No Separate hut is necessary for the purpose. The Bodos believe in the existence of ghosts and spirits. In order to keep away the evil spirits a piece of iron or a knife or a sickle is kept below the bed.

A little while after the child is born the umbilical cord is cut with a sharp-edged slip of green bamboo skin (*owa themal* in Bodo) placing the cord (*uthumai*, in Bodo) a cotton or muga silk thread is tied around it. If the baby is male, then the cord is tied five times, and if female, it is tied six or seven times. The cord is cut by a woman whose hand is believed to be 'bitter', so that the cut-wound will dry soon. It is also believed that the cord which is cut by a woman whose hand is believed to be 'Sweet' one will not dry soon. No widow or widower is allowed to cut the cord. It is believed that the child may not have a long life if the cord is cut by a widow or widower. The after-birth is usually buried anywhere or at the front of the main house, i.e. *nomano* in Bodo. Then the mother of the baby bathes the child with tepid water, i.e. *doi dungbrud* in Bodo. If the mother is not able to bathe the baby, she simply starts and then one of the women present bathes the baby. Then the baby is sprinkled with holy water, i.e. *doi gothar* in Bodo, mixed with some dub grass, i.e. *dubri hagra* in Bodo, a few holy basil leaves and a ring of gold. While sprinkling holy water the woman who performs this rite utters:

*"Oi gotho? nongba godo mamon, Bangal na Jungal, Garo na Gangar,
Harsha na Mephal mon? Dinoiniphrai Boro jabai".²*

English rendering: "Whoever you were, wheather you were a Muslim, a Garo, a Bhutia or a Non-Bodo, i.e. Harsha or a Nepali, you have become a Bodo from today".

² Sumitra Patgiri. (F. 75). Deulguri, Goalpara.

Usually no oil is smeared in the body of the baby. A mixture of dried earth or ash obtained from burnt straw and the remains of dead spiders, i.e. *bamblema goran* in Bodo is applied on the cut surface as an antiseptic. In earlier days the Bodos did not use any other medicine except this traditional one. Even then, death from child-birth or from navel sepsis was rare. The mother of the baby lies in a clean bed and the baby is placed by her side. No separate bed is kept for the new-born baby. But, the Bodos of Goalpara district who are under the jurisdiction of '*Goalpara Jila Boro Baro Dal*' believe different way. To achieve human life the new born baby has to pass away through different stages of life span which are in the form of different creatures and insects. According to them the human live is the best among all of these. So, purification and hair cutting ceremony is to perform. All these activities have been executed by the purifier. According to their customary law any family who has to perform these ceremonies has to bear cost of expenditure which is not more than Rs. 10/ (Rupees Ten) and not less than Rs. 10/ (Rupees Ten) as a remuneration of the form of rice, sweet, fruits. The purifier cannot demand the same materials.

2.2.1 Puberty in the Bodo society:

As regards puberty of the girls no social observance is seen to be resorted to in the Bodo society, particularly in the Goalpara district area. It is generally observed that the mother of a girl is the only member of the family who has the information of attaining puberty by the daughter. It is also peculiar that the girl who attains puberty maintains secrecy about this important matter. She performs all usual works at home and there is no restriction from the side of her parents. However, the girl who attains puberty is somehow restricted from mixing with the boys freely. She also changes her dress and put on a garment meant for a grown up female, known as *dokhna* in Bodo, which covers her body from the chest to the ankle. No special ceremony or function is held on the occasion of puberty in the Bodo society.³

2.2.2 Discloser of Pregnancy:

After marriage when menstruation discontinues then the expectant mother discloses the real condition before husband and then next to other member of the family, especially before mother-in-law. In the Bodos society expectant grandmother become

³ Lalita Khakhalary. (F. 61). Mejeng Para, Goalpara.

happy when they come to know about the pregnancy of their daughter-in-law, which is completely of psychological. Pregnancy is generally detected when menstruation discontinues. An expectant mother discloses this fact before her mother-in-law or any female member of the house. It is observed that every mother-in-law of a married woman is anxious about the information of the first pregnancy of her daughter-in-law and the husband, of course, is the first person to learn about it. The mother-in-law naturally becomes happy while she comes to learn about the first pregnancy of her daughter-in-law. There are special, rituals or ceremonies connected with pregnancy in the Bodo society.⁴

2.2.3 Precaution and Restriction:

Among the Bodos of Goalpara district, there is prevalent that after pregnancy, a pregnant woman has to follow some folk practices as a means of precaution and restriction. The pregnant woman is not allowed to visit or touch any death body or cremation ground because of they believe that there will be negative effect on unborn baby. According to Lalita Khakhalary, “*She is not allowed to visit any forest, collecting wood, fishing and also to cross the river*”.⁵ The Bodos of Goalpara district, believe that the available evil spirits will harm the unborn child. A pregnant woman has to be very careful for the whole period till the birth of the child. She is not allowed to do any hard work. There is also some restriction on her food. She is not allowed to go to the forest, the cremation ground, or to visit or touch any dead body. Her movements are restricted as a precaution against any danger of accident or for the protection from evil spirits.

2.2.4 Restriction of Food:

Just after the new born baby, some precaution measures should be adopted by mother. The Bodos of this area are believed that some foods and curry are not good for health of the mother as well as the new born baby. Usually, ‘Narzi Inghri’ which means bitter dry jute curry, ‘Mwitha Inghri’ which means sour jute curry, ‘Jwgwnar Inghri’ which means sweet gourd curry, are not allowed the mother to eat. Pork is also not allowed. The Bodos believe that the usual food is harmful to the mother as well as to the new-born baby. So for the first few days the mother eats dry food, e.g., boiled

⁴ Sumitra Patgiri. (F. 75). Deulguri, Goalpara.

⁵ Op-cit. Lalita Khakhalary. (F. 61). Mejeng Para, Goalpara.

rice pounded with black pepper, finely cut ginger and salt. She takes usual food after a few days. It is observed that this restriction of food sometimes lingers for a period of a month. On the other hand, she is allowed to eat dry food, i.e. fried rice powder with pepper (dhwngra) finely cut ginger, fried salt and roasted garlic. After few days when health becomes normal she is allowed to eat normal as well as usual food.⁶

2.2.5 Cutting and Fastening Umbilical Cord:

After being born of the new baby, the umbilical cord is to tied up with '*Gwthar Aoa Khwndwng*' which means white cotton thread keeping a space of one inch, rounding three or five times. The umbilical cord is to cut off by means of sharp-edged slip of green bamboo skin which is called '*Themal or Khatmola*' in Bodo. In number, the bamboo skin slip must be five in case of male baby and six in case of female baby. The importance attached to it is of completely philosophical which relates their action organs. Because the Bodos consider one or more genital organ belong to female. Fastening and cutting umbilical activities are performed by the women folk. Sometimes if the females are unable to do the activity then male members help the females. No widow or widower is allowed to perform the activity. Because it is believed that life longevity becomes very short.⁷

2.2.6 Birth Purification:

Purification is different on the basis of sex. Male baby purification is to perform on the day of fifth and female baby purification is to perform on the day of sixth. On the day of occasion all the residential houses are to be smeared by the mixture of earth and cow dung, which is called in Bodo as '*No Lirnai*'. After that the appointed purifier performs the act of purification. The '*Gwthari*' which means Purifier, has to perform his duty by fetching the holy water from the neighbour. During the purification some materials are needed. These are '*Bel Bilai*' which means leaf of wood apple, '*Thulunsi Bilai*' which means holy basil leaf, and '*Asitham*' which means ring finger, of the appointed purifier. These materials are inwards in holy water after sprinkling around the houses, well, cowshed, chicken shoop. After the realization of this act, the owner is

⁶ Sumitra Patgiri. (F. 75). Deulguri, Goalpara.

⁷ Op-cit. Lalita Khakhalary. (F. 61). Mejeng Para, Goalpara.

assumed as purified one. The purifier has to cut off slight hair of the male baby by means of sickle. It does not good to hold in case of female baby.⁸

2.2.7 Hair Cutting Ceremony:

The Bodos of the 'Dwikhongkhula' believes that to born as human being has to come across various stages of creatures and insects lives. So, after attaining human life, the baby's original hair has to cut off and then to purify by purifier which means Gwtharari in Bodo, within five to six days. Here by, the baby is recognized as a member of a family. The purifier needs aeglemarmelos leaf commonly known as Bael leaf, holy basil leaf commonly known as Tulsi or Tulasi leaf, and the finger ring which is recognized by the *Goalpara Jila Boro Baro Dal* to perform the hair cutting ceremony. This ceremony is performed by the Bodos only in the case of a male child. Generally in the case of the first born male child the hair is allowed to grow long for a period of one or two years after which the hair is ceremonially cut. A day is fixed for the ceremony. The maternal uncle of the child is invited to cut the hair of his nephew in presence of the relatives and the villagers. On this occasion a feast is arranged, where a large quantities of rice-beer, i.e. *jau* or *jumai* in Bodo, pork, i.e. *oma bedor* in Bodo, and *wngkham*, i.e. rice are offered. Peculiarly in this ceremony father cannot cut off hair of the baby but uncle is allowed. They believe if father perform this activity then life of the baby becomes sorrowful.⁹

2.2.8 Ceremony relating to feeding the newly 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 Goddessess, *Bathou Bwrai*, *Bathou Buri*, and *Mainao*. This function is performed by a *Douri* or *Oja*. At the time of offering rice the *Douri* or *Oja* 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 *Oja* feeds the child in the presence of family members, relatives, and friends.¹⁰

⁸ Sumitra Patgiri. (F. 75). Deulguri, Goalpara.

⁹ Op-cit. Lalita Khakhalary. (F. 61). Mejeng Para, Goalpara.

¹⁰ Sumitra Patgiri. (F. 75). Deulguri, Goalpara.

2.2.9 Ear perforation (for girls):

The Bodo girls are very fond of ornaments. Even the house-wives or the elderly women of the Bodo society use ornaments regularly. A girl may start using ornaments on her ear at her early age. The ornament is called *Engti* a small ring made of brass or gold, which is generally used at a tender age. There is no big ceremony on the occasion of ear-perforation, but nonetheless some importance is attached to the act of ear perforation. Generally, an elderly woman is selected for the purpose. A young girl who possesses the requisite courage may also be allowed to perforate the ears of a girl. Sometimes it is seen that the mother of the girl also perforates the ear without asking for any body's help.¹¹

2.2.10 Temporary transfer of the guardianship of the baby:

The Bodo parents, who lose their children at a young age regularly, have a peculiar system of selling out the newly born baby temporarily to a woman of the same village and of buying it again from her at a very nominal price. The belief involved here is like this: The parents lose their children at the early age due to the ill look of the evil spirits. By the aforesaid transaction, it is believed, the ill look is averted and as such the evil spirits will not attack the baby and as such, parents will not lose their child again. The purchased child is believed to live long. The parents give the child a name which denotes the value at which they had purchased it back from the buyer-woman, for this purpose a ceremony is performed by the presents by offering rice-beer to the villagers those who assemble at the house of the parents.¹²

2.2.11 Child Adoption Ceremony:

Childless couple naturally adopts orphan or the babies of the couple who are unable to maintain the cost of maintaining. The families who adopt a child have to inform the villagers and have to perform certain rites and ritual which are executed by the appointed purifier, i.e. *Gwtharari* in Bodo. After adoption the adopted child becomes an inheritor of the family of his or her foster parents. Naturally every couple desires to have children. The custom of adopting a child by a childless couple is very widespread all over the world. Adoption may sometimes be resorted to even when a

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Sumitra Patgiri. (F. 75). Deulguri, Goalpara.

couple or an individual is not childless. The system of adoption is prevalent among the Bodos. If the couple is childless and has no hope of having the child in the predictable future, then the question of adoption comes. Children who are orphans or whose parents are not able to maintain them are generally adopted either by some related persons or even by absolute strangers. The adopted children are treated as full members of the family. The wealthy persons who have no issue at all adopt the child of others with the purpose of preserving their properties after their death. In a Bodo family where there are both boys and girls, only the male children can inherit the property of the father. The female child is not entitled to inherit the property. But if a female child is adopted by a couple having no child of their own at all, then she can inherit the property of her foster father after his death. On the other hand, in the absence of male heirs in a family a daughter is entitled to inherit the property of her father.¹³

2.4 Marriage:

Relation of male and female is not a marriage. It is a social sanction for the satisfaction of biological, social, and economic needs of the family. There are a few systems of marriage of the Aryans which are akin to the Bodo marriage system. These are the Asura marriage, Paisasa marriage and the Brahma marriage. Marriage has been defined as a union between a man and a woman such that children born to the woman are recognized legitimate offspring of both parents. Marriage creates new social relationships and reciprocal rights between the spouses, between each and the kin of the other, and establishes what will be the rights and status of the children when they are born. Every society has recognized procedures for creating such relationships and rights, and for making it known that they have been created. Marriage validates biological needs of the conjugal life of the bride and the groom. D.N. Majumder and T.N. Madan writes, “*It involves the social sanction, generally in the form of a civil or/ and religious ceremony authorizing two persons of opposite sexes to engage in sexual and the other consequent and correlated socio-economic relation with one another*”.¹⁴

¹³ Op-cit. Lalita Khakhalary. (F. 61). Mejeng Para, Goalpara.

¹⁴ Majumder, D.N., Madan, T.N..*An Introduction to Social Anthropology*. 30th Reprint, 2016, p. 68

2.3.1 The System of Marriage:

In Bodo marriage is called '*Haba*'. '*Ha*' means earth or soil and '*Ba*' means to bear or shoulder the soil on the back. Its literary meaning is to bear the responsibility of the burden of the family. After marriage a person enters into a life cycle of great responsibility. As with many other societies the marriage ceremony is the most important ceremony in the lifecycle of the Bodos. Marriage is called '*Haba*' by the Bodos. In Bodo *ha* means soil or earth and *ba* means to bear or shoulder something on the back. So, *haba* means to bear the soil or the responsibility of the earth on the back. It is interesting to note that Sanskrit word for marriage *bivaha* also has a similar etymological meaning. Finally, after marriage a person enters into a circle of great responsibility. With the marriage ceremony the Bodos give the newly married couple a new lesson on life which is full of duties and responsibilities.

2.3.2 Types of Marriage:

The '*Goalpara Jila Boro Baro Dal*' has recognized total nine types of marriages. These are:

- (i) *Swngnanwi Lainai Haba* (Marriage by negotiation/ Standard practices)
- (ii) *Swngnanwi Lainai Bibar Loo Haba* (Offering garland negotiation marriage)
- (iii) *Kharsonnai Haba* (Intrusion marriage)
- (iv) *Gorjiya Lakhinai Haba* (Adopted husband marriage)
- (v) *Randi Arw Balonda Haba* (Widow and Widower marriage)
- (vi) *Dhongkha Habnai Haba* (Husband adopted widow marriage)
- (vii) *Registeri Haba* (Registration marriage)
- (viii) *Bwnanwi Labwnai Haba* (Marriage by capture)
- (ix) *Dwnkhar Langnai Haba* (Elopement marriage)

The '*Goalpara Jila Boro Barodol*' recognizes some customs to solemnize the marriages. According to the organization, the minimum age limit of bridegroom is twenty one (21) years of age and bride is eighteen (18) years of age. ¹⁵

¹⁵ Mutilal Basumatary. (M. 78). Bangal Para, Goalpara.

2.3.3 Celebration of different Bodo marriages in Goalpara district:

There are different types of marriage in the Bodo community of the Goalpara district. These are celebrated according to the rituals by the suggestion of the *Goalpara Jila Boro Baro Dal*.

2.3.3.1 *Swngnanwi Lainai Haba* (Marriage by Negotiation/ Standard Practices):

This marriage is solemnised according to the standard social customs. According to this system of marriage the bride is selected by the parents of the bridegroom and then the marriage is settled after negotiation. In earlier days this sort of marriage was solemnised at the house of the bridegroom only. Now-a-days, the marriage is solemnised at the house of the bride also. This type of marriage is regarded as a regular marriage. Bride-price was common in earlier days. In the present Bodo society it is not compulsory. This type of marriage is also called '*Gidid Haba*' means Big and Full marriage. During the settlements of marriage the consent of parents should be required. After settlement of the marriage, the bride party has to offer areca nut feeding ceremony. This ceremony is called as '*Goi khaonai*' means areca nut cutting ceremony. The members of the bride groom party go to the house of the bride with heave of bundles of areca nuts and betel leaves. The relatives and the villagers of the village are entertained with rice-beer in abundance. During the proper day of marriage the party of bride groom has to carry with them mustard oil, vermilion, silver bracelets and '*Agor Dokhna*' means bride wearing dress, particularly the *Dokhona* for new bride.

The entire proceedings of a Bodo marriage can be divided into three stages: (i) The first is the pre-marriage preparations centring round the selection of the bride, (ii) The second is the marriage proper, and (iii) the third one is the post-marriage rituals. When a boy becomes marriage worthy the parents have consultation with trusted relatives and friends and start preparations. The most important part of the pre-marriage preparation is the selection of the bride, the Bodo parents are very particular about making the right choice. After making preliminary inquiries about the prospective brides, a party sets out to the house of the girl with a view to finding out the suitability of both the bride and her house-hold.

In connection with the selection of the bride they are guided by some traditional beliefs about good and bad signs. It is observed the bad signs such as (i) At the time of

consultations about the selection of the bride if the members of the selection party hear the sound of thundering, then the prospects of the mission are believed to be unfavourable. The bride is believed to be of hot temper and it is believed that there is every possibility of quarrel between the husband and wife after the marriage, (ii) if one of the selection group meets with an obstruction while setting out, it is believed that the marriage would be unhappy. (iii) If a mongoose (*Neolai* in Bodo) is seen crossing the road from the right side to the left side of the party, it is believed that there may be a separation between husband and wife. (iv) If a snake runs across the way in front of the selection party from left to right side of the party then also it is believed that there may be separation between the husband and the wife. (v) If the members of the selection party come across a dead body on the way, it is believed that either the husband or the wife may expire untimely. (vi) If the members of the selection party happen to witness the sight of cutting of bamboo or working in the field with a spade just after reaching the house of the bride, it is believed either the husband or the wife may die just after the marriage ceremony. (vii) It is also believed that if any widow or widower takes part in all the activities relating to a marriage, starting from selection of the bride to the end of the marriage ceremony, either the husband or the wife may expire untimely.

Good signs are observed such as (i) if the bride is seen drying or husking paddy at the courtyard at the time the selection party reaches the house of the bride, it is believed that the bride would be a fortunate one. (ii) If the bride is seen by the members of the selection party cleaning or sweeping the courtyard or busy at combing her hair, it is believed that the bride would be of long life. (iii) If the bride is seen entering into the main house (*Nomano* in Bodo) by putting her left foot at the door, it is believed that the bride would be of auspicious nature bringing fortune (*Lokhi* in Bodo) to the family and loyal to her husband.

Assessment of the character of the bride is also important part of this type of marriage. The Bodos believe that by observing the gestures and postures or the physical structure of a girl, her character and manners may be ascertained such as (i) if the bride walks by thrusting out her breast and if she produces noise with her toe while she walks, it is believed that the girl would be of a hot temper. (ii) If the bride possesses large breast and the hips and her waist are equal in girth to the size of her breasts, it is believed that the bride would be fickle-minded.

Physical beauty is also an important consideration in the matter of selection of a bride. The Bodo parents of a prospective bridegroom want to have such a girl as their daughter-in-law whose nose is pointed, eyes are bright, teeth are small, the fingers are well-shaped and the face is bright and who has a dark and thick lock of hair. On the other hand, the parents of the girl also desire to have such a boy as their son-in-law, who has a strong and stout physique, sound health and who possesses a good moral character. The physical attributes of the girl whom the young Bodo boys desire to have as a bride are brought out a folk-song popular among the young boys of the Goalpara, Kokrajhar, and north-west Goalpara districts.

The parents of the proposed bride do not give their opinions at the single approach of the party of the bridegroom. Some times it is seen that the parents and the related persons of the bride refuse to accept the articles offered by the party of the bridegroom. The members of the bridegroom party along with the *Ghatak* or *Gathakdar* means middle-person, try to convince the parents of the bride. If within a week from the date of the first approach of the bridegroom party the parents of the bride return the '*Ashansuri*', i.e., silver bracelets to the house of the bridegroom, then it is understood by the parents of the bridegroom that the other side is not agreeable to the proposal. This is called *ashan phinnai* or returning the bracelets. Then the parents of the bridegroom approach the parents of the bride for the second time and even sometimes for the third time also. In earlier periods, there was the custom among the Bodos to give pressure on the parents of the bride and to compel them to give their consent to offer their daughter. On that day the village elderly persons were invited and the settlement of marriage was made in presence of them. After getting consent of the parents of the bride the related persons of the bridegroom visited the house of the bride at least once in a month till the marriage took place.

After the preliminary settlement the parents of the bride visit the house of the bridegroom. On this occasion the parents of the bridegroom entertain the guests with rice-beer, pork and areca-nuts and betel leaves, i.e. *Jau*, *Oma bedar* and *goi pathoi* in Bodo in abundance. This ceremony is called *nonainai*. In earlier days the Bodo society observed this ceremony as a compulsory pre-marriage ceremony. The final settlement of the marriage depends on this ceremony *nonainai*. If the condition of the family of the bridegroom is not satisfactory then the final settlement of the marriage may be

cancelled. The economic condition of the family of the bride-groom is taken into consideration. Not only the parents of the bride take the landed property of the bridegroom into account before giving their daughter to a person in marriage, the bride also desires to get a bridegroom whose economic condition is sound. This is reflected in the folk-song popular in the Bodo society.

After obtaining the final consent of the parents of the bride, the parents of the bridegroom formally enters into a new relationship with those of the bride. For this purpose a ceremony is held at the house of the bride. The parents of the bridegroom arrange a feast with pork, i.e. *Oma bedor* in Bodo, chicken, i.e. *dao bedor* in Bodo, rice-beer, i.e. *jau* in Bodo, and rice, i.e. *Wngkham* in Bodo and entertain the members of the bride family alongwith the related persons. This ceremony is called *samanda phirainai*, which means changing the relationship. The new relationship between the parents of the two families is known as *bibai* and *bijomaijo*. From this day and onward the new relationship between the two families has to be continued.

Another pre-marriage ceremony is the '*houwa godan nainai*' literally meaning, the interview of the bridegroom. After the final settlement, the bridegroom has to visit the house of the bride alongwith some of his friends. This system is still followed by the Bodos. The parents and the bride herself want to see the bridegroom before the marriage is held. There is a system of presentation of handkerchief or scarf by the bride to the bridegroom at the time of his visiting the house of the bride. It is also believed that if the bride abstains from presenting the handkerchief or scarf to the bridegroom then it is understood that the bride is not satisfied with the choice of the bridegroom. Sometimes it also happens that the bride does not appear before the bridegroom during his visit to her house to express her unwillingness to the settlement of the marriage. In such a circumstance, the settlement of marriage may be then cancelled.¹⁶

2.3.3.1.1 Customs of Areca Nut Cutting Ceremony:

This is called pre-marriage ceremony. On the day of marriage settlement, this ceremony is solemnized. This is an important pre-marriage ceremony observed by the Bodos. According to their traditional customs, the bride groom party performs this ceremony at the premises of the bride. For the ceremony, areca nuts, betel leaves,

¹⁶ Dinen Basumatary. (M. 81). Maj Para, Goalpara.

limestone should be available. After the final settlement, the members of the bridegroom's party go to the house of the bride with bundles of areca nuts and betel leaves. This ceremony is known as *goikhaonai*. The villagers of the village of the bride are entertained with areca nuts and rice-beer, i.e. *jau* or *jumai* in Bodo in abundance. In earlier days, the bridegroom's party carried sufficient quantity of rice-beer, i.e. *jau* or *jumai* to the house of the bride and entertained the parents of the bride, relatives and the villagers. The materials for the ceremony should be of two heave of bundles. The 'Barlangpha', i.e. male waiter, and 'aitha', i.e. female waiter should take part in the distribution of areca nuts and betel leaves. This distribution system should be in three phases. These are: (i) at the time if silver bracelets wearing ceremony which is called as '*gangkhan hwnai*' in Bodo, (ii) at the time of putting vermilion ceremony, and (iii) at the time of farewell.

(a) Gangkhan Hwnai (Silver Bracelets Wearing Ceremony): This is also another pre-marriage ceremony next to areca-nuts cutting ceremony. But due to some unavoidable reason if this ceremony could not be solemnized as a pre-marriage ceremony then the said ceremony must be solemnized on the day of marriage. If the guardian avoided then the guardian has to panelized amounting to Rs. 10/, which is imposed due to infringement of custom. That amount is again divided at the ratio of 30:20 in between bride party and bridegroom party.

(b) Custom for Holding Bracelet Luggage: The bracelet luggage should be four in number. In one pair of luggage there is no one single bracelet in each single luggage. In addition to these, areca-nut-20, a bundle of betel nut leaves, a handful of rice, a branch of holy basil should be available which are folded with plantain leaves. But only difference is that in folded luggage there is devoid of silver bracelet.

(c) Custom for Bathing Ceremony: On the day of marriage, before the commencement of marriage, bathing ceremony has to solemnize. Water for bathing should be purchased from the river as well as from well. This activity is performed by the '*bwirathi*'. The payment for water is paid in the name of Goddess '*Ganga*' (the water Goddess). In addition to that one pair areca-nut, a-handful rice is required for the propitiation of Goddess.

After fetching that holy water it is kept side of the main house, at that place there should be posted one banana tree and there get bathed the bride groom. After bathing a young man has to bear the bride groom on the back and carry to the dwelling place of the groom, then the bride groom are dressed for the marriage proper. Similarly the bride are also get bathed at the brides house place. The followings are materials for bathing ceremony-

- (i) One big earthen jar, four small earthen jar (in case of groom).
- (ii) One pair illumination sieves.
- (iii) Five illumination earthen oil pot.
- (iv) Thread garland consisting holy basil.
- (v) Two pair of areca-nut and betel leaves.
- (vi) Big two earthen jar and two pair of small earthen jar.
- (vii) Pure mustard oil.
- (viii) Raw turmeric.

(d) Bride Hair Combing Ceremony: On due time, one young female from bride and one from groom side has to comb the hair of the bride. For this act of performance no widow is allowed. There after the bride has dressed and get putted a spotted vermillion on the forehead. Big size and long spotted vermillion on the forehead is putted by his husband.

(e) Dress and Ornament for the Bride:

- (i) Yellow or red colour '*Agor Dokhna*', i.e. bride wearing flowerful dress
- (ii) White scarf , i.e. '*Fali*' used on neck
- (iii) Red colour scarf , i.e. '*Gwja Fali*' used on body covering
- (iv) Jewelleries, i.e. '*Har, Khera, Nakhaful*' necklace, ear ring, nose ring
- (v) One pair bracelet, i.e '*Ashan*,

(f) Dress for the Bride Groom:

- (i) White colour '*Gamsa*', i.e. bride groom wearing dress

(ii) Yellow or red colour 'Aronai', i.e. a piece of cloth used on neck

(iii) Long full shirt, i.e. 'Akhai Gwlao Goshla'

(iv) 'Indi', i.e. piece of cloth made of cocoon

2.3.3.1.2 Formation of Bathow Alter:

For the marriage purpose, the *Bathou* alter should be placed on the east of the courtyard. Four pole of banana trees are required for the altar. All the posts should be posted at the corner of two sides. These four pole posts should be fastened from three sides ignoring in the west side. This fastening should be five in number.

It represents five elements of Bathouism, i.e. the philosophy of the Sun, Air, Earth, Water, and Sky. The 'Mainao', i.e., the Goddess Lakshmi should be established in the form of alter of small earthen jar. These earthen jars should be full of water fastening with mango leaves, wood apple leaves and holy basil leaves. One-handfull rice should be in warded into the water of jar. Milks, fruits, sugarcane flowers are needed for the propitiation of the lord 'Sibrai', i.e. the Supreme God of the Bodos.

2.3.3.1.3 Bride Price System:

Among the Bodos of the Goalpara district, bride price system is yet prevalent system, but it is nominal only, amounting to Rs. 80/-. This amount is again allotted Rs. 60/- for bride party Rs. 20/- is allowed to the groom party. Out of Rs. 60/- again Rs. 30/- is allowed to the guardian of the bride as a bride price.

2.3.3.1.4 Hand Over of Bride to the Bride Groom Party:

When guardian hand over the bride, he chants:

"Bwio phwinai raijw rajaphwr

Ang dwnwi abonglaorini bwr lananwi

Alari jwngnaikho sakhi dwnnanwi

Be gwthar sanao raijw-rajani gejerao

Swithw gwthar gswjwng angni fisahinjao

Amukhikhwo amokh gamini amokhani

Fisajla umokhanw jule lanw

Gothainanwi hwbai

Amokha nwng khusi rajiywi ajaonanwi ladw

Gosaini bwr lananwi sanwibw sukhwi

Sangsar jananwi thathwng."¹⁷

English rendering: "Oh, all the attendance of the marriage ceremony I Shree..... Illuminating earthen pot and propitiating of almighty God Bathow willingly hand over my daughter as a bride Miss.....to the native dweller of.....village.....son of Shree..... to become a partner of conjugal life. You adopt her as your conjugal partner from today. I bless you for your peace full live."

2.3.3.1.5 Biban langnai (Barlangpha and Bairathi):

This pre-marriage ceremony is performed compulsorily by the bridegroom party. Areca nuts and betel leaves are essential for this ceremony. Two earthen pitchers are carried to the house of the bride. On the body of the two pitchers the signs of the sun and the moon are painted. If the sign is detected to be wrong then the bride party charges a fine from the parents of the bridegroom. The person who carries the two earthen pitchers is called *Barlangpha*. The services of girls or ladies, i.e., not widows are essential during the marriage ceremony, starting from the pre-marriage ceremony *Biban-langnai*. They are called *Bairathi jora*. Their main function is to cut the areca nuts and distribute to the people of the bride's party. The parents of the bride also select the *Bairathi jora*, two girls or women during the marriage ceremony. There are some strict rules for the selection of *Barlangpha* and *Bairathi*. A person to be selected as *Barlangpha* must be young, stout and jolly. If married, he must not be a widower. In selecting the *Bairathis* the same rules are followed. A girl or woman must be healthy strong and handsome. If married she must not be a widow. A widow or a widower is called *Khoro goja* or headless by the Bodos. No widow or widower is allowed to perform any auspicious work during the marriage ceremony.

The *Biban* is placed by the *Barlangpha* in front of the main house and other commodities are placed beside the *Biban*. On the occasion of the *biban* a pig is cut

¹⁷ Boro Baro Dal, Goalpara District. *BORONI BISAR KHANTHI*. Goalpara District Boro Baro Dal, 2005, p. 73

equally into two parts, of which one part is given to the parents of the bride and the other is kept in the house of the bridegroom. The two *Bairathis* cut the areca nuts and distribute them among the assembled people. Alongwith the areca nuts they also distribute *jau* or rice-beer to the people who are attended. The areca nuts are distributed from three times to nine times, the custom varying from area to area. The pre-marriage ceremonies like *Goy khaonai* and *Biban langnai* are repeatedly held at the house of the bride for several times till the proper marriage ceremony takes place. To carry the *Biban* or *Bhar* of the commodities to the house of the bride is the essential duty of the parents of the bridegroom.

On the day of making the final settlement of the marriage the party of the bridegroom has to entertain the villagers of the bride's village with areca nuts, betel leaves and pork. After the ceremony is over the skins of the areca nuts are thrown on the roof of the main house the *Nomano*. This is known as the ceremony of *Goy-khithou garkhonai*. The skins of the areca nuts are to remain on the roof till the proper marriage ceremony is held. This practice is believed to bring good fortune. The same two *Bairathis* and two *Barlangpha* who start the functions of the pre-marriage ceremonies have to perform all the functions till the end of the proper marriage. While the *Biban langnai* ceremonies are over another important pre-marriage ceremony *Khabira langnai* is performed. The parents of the bridegroom alongwith some elderly person villagers go to the house of the bride with areca nuts, betel leaves and rice-beer to get the confirmation of the marriage and fix a suitable date of the proper marriage mutually. In fixing the date the consent of the parents of the bride is essential. As they select the month so also the days are also selected for the marriage ceremony. 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.

After fixation of the date between the two parties of the bride and bridegroom the proper marriage takes place. The parents of the bridegroom with the help of their villagers and relatives go to the house of the bride to bring her for marriage. This is known as *Hinjao godan laino thangnai* or to go to bring the new bride. If the house of the bride's parents is situated at a distant place, then the bridegroom party has to start to that place one day earlier of the particular date of marriage. The bridegroom party

consists of *Barlangpha*, two *Bairathis*, few girls and women and some elderly persons. The *Biban* or the *Bhar* is carried by Barlanpha and he was assisted by some young persons of the party. The *Biban* consists of the two jars of rice-beer, one pig, areca nuts and betel leaves in abundance. The two *Bairathis* have to distribute the areca nuts to any person who wants from them, even on the way. Sometimes, the villagers obstruct on the way then the bridegroom party has to solve the problems by distributing areca nuts and betel leaves. In early days, it also happened that the villagers on the way obstructed the bride-groom's party and demanded money from the bridegroom's party. On reaching the house of the bride the bride-groom's party has to entertain the villagers of the bride's village with the commodities they have carried with them.

After returning to the house the parents of the bride arrange a feast for the villagers. The feast consists of porks, rice-beer and rice. The villagers consume rice-beer and pork to their hearts' content. There is a custom of mutual help or co-operation among the Bodos. During the marriage ceremony the villagers co-operate with the parents of the bride or bridegroom by supplying rice-beer and vegetables for the feast. Thus after enjoying the feast at the house of the bride's parents the villagers go back to their respective home. The significance of this function is believed to be that the bridegroom is given awakening of his duty towards his new conjugal life, so that he may become aware of his responsibility. On the very day of arrival of the bride at the house of the bridegroom the proper marriage ceremony is held. The traditional marriage system of the Bodos is called *Hathasuni khurnai*. The Bodo believers of the traditional customs and practices perform the marriage according to the system of *Hathasuni khurnai*.¹⁸

2.3.3.1.6 *Hathasuni Khurnai* or *Hathasuni Dangnai*:

'*Hatha*' means big wooden dice and '*Khurnai*' or '*Dangnai*' means touching. It is post marriage ceremony. At the end of the marriage, the meal which is prepared in the name of '*Hathasuni Dangnai*' is a feast. The bride serves the villagers present at the marriage. Before serving the attendants the bride serves the bride groom and then distributes to the others. The traditional system of marriage, *Hathasuni Khurnai* is basically related with the *Swngnanwi Lainai Haba*. The earliest and traditional form of

¹⁸ Matilal Basumatary. (M. 78). Bangal Para, Goalpara.

marriage is called *Hathasuni Khurnai*. This form of marriage is very simple. At this marriage ceremony the bride offers meal to the bridegroom at a function. The meal consists of the rice and curry prepared with the broken rice and chicken without applying spices and colouring agents like turmeric. This is called in Bodo *ondlakhari*. After taking a little portion of the food the bridegroom rises from the seat. Then they pray to god *Bathou Borai* to grant them a peaceful conjugal life.

Before offering the meal to the bridegroom the bride offers a little portion of the meal to the god and goddess of the *Ishing* the innermost room of the main house, *Nomano* the frontmost room of the main house. She kneels down before the altar of the deities and pray. The meal is placed on a banana leaf. While the bride prays a *deuri* chants the *Mantra* formula, introducing the bride to the god and goddess. At the end, after the advices have been given to the bride and bridegroom, the meal, which is prepared in the name of the *Hathasuni Khurnai*, is served to the villagers present. Before serving the villagers the bride serves the bridegroom first and then she serves each item of the meal to the villagers present at least once. Then the main function of the marriage *Hathasuni Khurnai* comes to end.

The feast of the marriage *Hathasuni* continues at least for three days. During these three days, rice-beer and pork are supplied in abundance. In earlier days, the feast is said to have continued for five to seven days. During the feast men and women, both young and old, dance together while the *Serja* i.e., a kind of four-stringed fiddle or violin, the *Siphung* i.e., the flute, and *Gangana* i.e., the jew's harp are played on. The merry-maker donot sleep during the night. They also perform *Thakrifalla* a competition of dance and song, amongst the participants in the marriage ceremony. Importance of *jau* i.e., the rice-beer, and *Oma bedor* i.e., the pork was very great in the earlier period's marriage ceremony of the Bodos. A large quantity of *jau* or rice-beer is prepared and stored well ahead of the ceremony. A number of earthenpitchers of big size which the Bodo people called *Dabkha* or *Maldanga* or *Jongga* are used for storage of rice-beer.

During the marriage ceremony two healthy persons were engaged for mixing the rice-beer, to make it ready for use. These two persons are called *jau sirgra* or the persons who mix up the rice-beer with water. Before mixing the rice-beer is taken out from the *Dabkha*, i.e., earthen-pitcher, and is kept in a *Doongshu*, i.e., a wooden pot with three stands. For the purpose of mixing up the *jau* with water a bamboo stick which

is called *Khadou* is essential. After mixing properly the *jau* is filtered with the help of a special strainer made of bamboo which is called *Jantha*. Then the filtered *jau* is distributed by the persons called *jau rangra* among the consumers with the help of *Laothai* an instrument made of bamboo stump with a handle. The juice of *Jau* is taken in a pot, called *Thona* which is made of the bark of the banana tree. At the time of taking meals during the ceremony they do not use dishes of high value, but they use the leaves of wild plants known as the *Laihulai*.¹⁹

2.3.3.2 Swngnanwi Lainay Bibar Loo Hwnai Haba (Negotiation Marriage by Offering Garland):

In this type of marriage all the pre-marriage and post marriage ceremonies are managed by the guardian of the bridegroom bearing penalty dues and bride price penalty dues Rs.-180/-, Rs. 30/- is allotted as bride price to the bride's party.

2.3.3.3 Kharsonnai Haba (Intrusion Marriage):

In this type of marriage, the bride enters herself in the house of the groom without consentment or before the settlement of the marriage. It is possible if there is mutual understanding between the bridegroom and the bride. The consent of the parents of the bride is not taken into consideration much. This is also an irregular marriage. In this type of marriage the formalities of the regular marriage are not required. It is a simple marriage and is mostly held among the poor families.

2.3.3.4 Bijamadwi Langnai Haba (Son-in-Law Adopted Marriage):

In this type of marriage, marriage is held at the place of bride and groom and the bride and groom begin to stay with the bride by abandoning his native house. It may be called a marriage by service, because the bridegroom has to give his service at the house of the bride before the marriage. This system is in vogue among the non Bodos. This type of marriage is regarded as an irregular marriage. This system of marriage is rare in the present Bodo society. In this type of marriage the guardian of the bride has to pay Rs.-40/- as a bride price. Including bride price Rs.-40/- the total amount Rs.-190/- has to be paid by the guardian of the bride.

¹⁹ Op-cit. Matilal Basumatary. (M. 78). Bangal Para, Goalpara.

2.3.3.5 *Randi and Balanda Haba* (Widow and Widower Marriage):

Among the Bodos of the Goalpara district widow and widower can remarry, which is socially recognised as widow remarriage. A widow can remarry any person who is not related to her. If she marries for the second time then she loses the authority on the property of her deceased husband. The male child is always entitled to get the property of his father. Sometimes, it is seen that the widow is allowed to take the female child of her deceased husband along with her to her new husband. Although the widow remarriage is allowed in the Bodo society, there are some restrictions which are followed strictly. A widower may remarry his deceased wife's younger sister, but not the elder, whom he is obliged conventionally to regard in the light of a mother. Similarly, a widow may remarry her deceased husband's younger brother, but she is not allowed to remarry the elder brother of her deceased husband. This type of marriage is imposed fine according to the laws of '*Thakha Gwthang Haba*', i.e., Simple marriage, where all the penalty and bride price are to be paid Rs.-180/-.

2.3.3.6 *Dongkha Habnai Haba* (Son-in-Law Adopted Marriage):

This type of marriage is very rare in the present Bodo society. In the Bodo societies if the husband dies untimely she is permitted to get re-married with another person to look after the children of her deceased husband. This system of marriage is approved by the Bodo society. In this marriage the bride is a widow. The husband come and stay with his newly wife house. He assumes the relation of the deceased husband of his bride. If a man lives in the house of a widow as her husband then they are recognised as husband and wife by the society. After his death his parents and relative has no legal right to claim the property owned by him after marriage. In this marriage the bride groom price is equal to Rs.-190/-. However, they have to regularise their marriage according to the social customs called '*Dongkha Habnai*'. This type of marriage is very rare in the Bodo society.

2.3.3.7 *Register Haba* (Register Marriage):

The '*Goalpara Jila Boro Baro Dal*' recognizes this type of marriage, after registration in the court, the newly married couple has to get remarried in front of the '*Bathou*' alter in front of the villagers simply offering garland to each other's neck in

standing position. The bride price is same as of negotiation marriage by garland offering, (Rs.-180/-).

2.3.3.8 *Bwnanwi Lainai Haba* (Capturing Marriage):

In this system of marriage the bride is forcefully taken away from the house of the bride to the house of the bridegroom and then the marriage is solemnised. This system of marriage was prevalent in the earlier days. It is not a socially approved system of marriage in the present Bodo society. The '*Bwnanwi Lainai Haba*', i.e., Capturing Marriage is not seen now-a-day. If, it happens then the bride groom party has to bear Rs.-1000/- as a penalty fine.

Rs.-500/- (bride price)

Rs.-300/- (Penalty fine for Bride party)

Rs.-200/- (Penalty fine for Groom party)

Total Rs.-1000/-

2.3.3.9 *Dwnkhar Langnai Haba* (Elopement Marriage):

If the bride and bride groom run away from their houses due to non agreement of parents, their marriage is performed after their return to the house of the bride groom. After the payment of the penalty imposed and a social trial in the village, the marriage is performed in a simple way. Socially, it is not approved by *Goalpara Jila Boro Baro Dal*, sometimes this type of marriage takes place in the Bodo society. This is the marriage by elopement of both bride and bridegroom. The mutual understanding between the bride and bridegroom is enough for this type of marriage. This is also a kind of irregular marriage system.

2.4 Death Ceremony:

Predeath Ceremony: The Bodo society performs death ceremony as a last passage of human life. It involves in celebrating some social rites. When death occurs in a family then the occurrence should be informed in their society which is called '*Giathi*' (a group of family under the headship of village head '*Hadwnggra*'). At least one member of a family should be present physically in the said family. The corpse is taken out from the house and placed at the corner courtyard in the west, near the main

house which is called in Bodo as '*Noma No*'. Among the Bodos the death body is treated as holy one.

Before carried away the corpse, the courtyard should be clean washed by the water mixed with cow dung. There after a banana tree should be cut down and a portion of it should be made in three pieces of slice. One slice of it should be placed under the head, one slice of it should be place under twist and another one under legs. Head of the corpse is placed towards north. Placement of corpse's head is related with the significance of the flow of water. The Bodos of the district of Goalpara believe that as the flows of water falls in sea, likewise, the soul and spirit hunts to assimilate in the God. The corpse's head is placed as the same as the flow of water of the springs or rivers. This type of practice is reverse among the Bodos of the northern bank of Brahmaputra because it is due to the course of natural flow of water of the river.

2.4.1 Practice of feeding food to the Corpse:

Before disposal of corpse either by burial and cremation, the corpse is finely washed by the kid and or by the nearest relatives, the head is anointed with coconut oil and the hair is combed. A fowl is killed and curry is made from it with vegetables. Food prepared is kept near by the deceased's head and the act of feeding him is carried out up to a certain point, but no food is actually put on his/ her mouth. This act of feeding ceremony is done firstly by their relatives and then by the villagers. What remains of the curry or food etc. is then thrown away thereby no one being allowed to consume it. There after the death body is clothed by the garments owned by the deceased's one during his life time used. To carry the corpse to the disposal place a trolley is made of a bamboo which is called by the Bodos as '*Sanggra*'. The projecting portion i.e. bamboo poles which rest on the shoulder of the trolley are called '*Bathi*' in Bodo. A grove of bamboo from which '*Bathi*' is cut down for the purpose that stock of bamboo cannot be used for any activities thereafter. It is considered as impure which is called in Bodo as '*Sua*'. Among the Bodos there is a custom for felling of a banana to examine the life longevity of the deceased. If the budded emerges longs enough then it is considered deceased one have had a long life and if not then considered life longevity is short enough to death.²⁰

²⁰ Dinen Basumatary. (M. 81). Maj Para, Goalpara.

2.4.2 Carrying of the Corpse to the Disposal Place:

The corpse is to put on the 'Sanggra'. The 'Sanggra' is to made of a bamboo. To tie up the 'Sanggra', another bamboo is needed, by means of rope made from bamboo which is called in Bodo 'Owa Themal' the corpse is fastened with trolley. The bamboo horizontal beams of the trolley is five in number when the corpse is of male and six in number when it is of female. It means that five action organs and five sense organs of human being. The Bodos under the jurisdiction of the 'Goalpara Jila Boro Baro Dal' believe that the female has extra one rare action organ by the name of ovary canal. There after the corpse is laid down on the trolley. The sons and relatives as well as the villagers bear the trolley on shoulders holding the projecting bamboo poles. Before leaving the courtyard of the deceased there is a system that the trolley holders pass round the courtyard five times in case of male and six in case of female.²¹

2.4.3 The Village Headman (Hadwngwra)/ Purifier (Gwthari) chants some Mantras:

"Nwi amkha/ amkhi, nwnng dinwinifrai rungsari jalangbay/ Nakhorni Boikhwubw nagarlangnwgwnangjabay/ Ma khalamnwhanwjwng/ Nwngkhwu, nwnngni nokhorni mansifuranw nwnngni dukhudaha, bemar-ajarnifrai fakhabnw (mwjangkhalamnw) thakhay gwbang rang kharsa khalamnanoi muli-dangkhablabw mwjangni lamayao labwfinnw hayaswi/ nwnngni jiomakhao jahate gosaia swrgwao langw bikhownw jwng gwsw gwrwbjwng gosainao araj gabbay/ nwnng dinwinifrai be nakhorni mansifwrkhow dukhu-daha, khwifwd-afwd, siginai ambranay dakhalamsoi/ dinwinifrai nwnngni mothe nwnngsoi, jwngni mothe jwngsoi/ nwi nwnngni mwnbathouni dehakhao giasthi-raijwa hiramoni gathwnao safaynw langnw ongkharbay/"

English rendering- "Hello, the deceased one, from today you have turned into a spirit, you have to your family, kids and kinds and the neighbours. What have we done for you? Your family members have tried to cure by expensing money procuring medicine but could not cure. We only pray so that your spirit may reside in the heaven peacefully. From today it is our appeal that you cannot harm and afraid of us. From

²¹ Op-cit. Basumatary, Dinen. (M. 81). Maj Para, Goalpara.

today it is your part that you should follow and it is our part that we should follow in day to day daily life. Your corpse is going to be carried into the '*Hiramoni Gathwn*'.

2.4.4 Tearing of Thread into Pieces and Leaving behind It:

According to the belief of the Bodos of that area it is assumed that '*Aoa Khwndwng*', i.e., a kind of pure thread is a symbolic relation in between God and spirit. They believe that every spirit is a small power that originated from the parents power. The power of parents or the almighty God is the composite power of the five natural elements, these are: earth, air, water, fire, and sky. Without these five elements no one can be created in the nature. When death occurs, as a symbolic of separation in between Corpse and spirit, this tearing of thread into pieces and leaving behind it ceremony is done. This ceremony is performed during the carrying of the corpse of the deceased one. This activity is performed by the '*Gwthari*', i.e. the Purifier. According to Kameswar Brahma, "*It is believed that the soul of the dead can go to the cremation ground from the house following the yarn.*"²²

2.4.5 Customs relating to Burial Ceremony:

The place where burial ceremony is to be performed should be paid some coins for the purpose as permission. The boring should be long enough from the north to south, almost 2 feet breadth and 6 feet long. It is reverse among the Bodos in the north bank of the Brahmaputra. That kind of practice is related to the flow of river water. The spring and rivulet waters fall in river Brahmaputra. It is a symbolic of the rivers flow down in search of ocean. Similarly the soul of the deceased one also absorbs by the God. Before digging the earth, the Bodos of that area follow some practices. A clod of soils from head portion, a clod of soil from navel and a clod of soil from foot's portion should be unearthed. The three clods of soil signify that three world, *Swrgw*, *Morto* and *Patal*. Three qualities are *Sat*, *Rajo*, *Tomo*. Three power *Rangsari*, *Mwithahaji*, and *Barigangtham*. After completion of digging, the body is laid on the ground where already a stalk of hallow reeds or a stalk of jungles grass are placed, but before to cover up the corpse with the earth a burial ceremony is performed. The neighbours, friends and relatives make a solemn round procession five times in the case of a deceased man

²² Brahma, Kameswar. *ASPAECTS OF SOCIAL CUSTOMS OF THE BODOS*. First Edition. Shri Chiranjib Brahma. Gossaigaon. Kokerajhar. 1989. p. 9, 10

and six times in the case of women in anti clockwise direction. The three clods are also placed on its earlier position one clods on head portion, one navel portion and another one on foot portion. Before filling the graveyard, a steep of erecting a hollow reed extending from deceased nose to a point somewhere above the natural level of the ground is made in the help of the filling of earth. The belief is so that the deceased's spirit may be able to breathe. After completion of the burial ceremony work, four posts are erected perpendicularly over it, one at each corner and 'Aoa Khwndwng' i.e., threads passed around the posts, five times if the deceased is male and six times if the deceased is female, in order to prevent the spirits of other deceased one from interfering in the rest of the deceased. A certain number of rupees are usually buried with the corpse, so that spirit may use when it is needed as a fare of boat in crossing over the river. Along with that, certain brass and other utensils needed in everyday life are left near the grave, it being supposed that the spirit may require the use of these materials in the state of new existence on which he has recently uses to live. A rough shed of thatch is erected close by the burial place to provide shelter to the deceased's spirit from the sun and rain. In addition to these, some kinds of medicinal and spell bound threads twisted are provided and offered in the name of spirit, it is being supposed that if in the journey of new existence world, some evil doer may be inflicted harm on his life by mean of spells the magic words then to overcome the situation it is required. After being finished the practices, the purifier or 'Hadwnggra', i.e. the village headman chants, "*dinwnifray jwng bwibw nwnghwo hagarlangnsigwn/ dinwnifray nwngni mothe nwnghwi/ nwngh jwngni nonglia jwngbw nwnghni nonglia/ nwnghthadw/ nwnghni ijiumaya swrgwao thangananwi alw gwjwnwi thathwng, bakhwunw hasthainanwi jwng labay*"²³ English rendering, "From today we are going to leave you. You will remain as yourself, we shall remain as ourselves. Reside you here. We all wish you so that you may reside peace and quiet in the heaven".

After being disposed the corpse of the deceased one all the villagers should have got together at the families abode. Before entering in the deceased house, the purifier sprinkles the holy water with basils leaves in front of the gate of the house. The death ceremony or the 'Saradu' is celebrated on seventh day in case of male person and eight day in case of female person. The Bodos under the jurisdiction of 'Goalpara Jila Boro

²³ Boro Baro Dal, Goalpara Zila, *Boroni Asar Bikhanthi*, Pg. 42

Baro Dal' practice vest system of food habit during these period. They think that type of food practice is a solemn respect paid to the deceased one. The family of the deceased one is considered as impure but the villagers until the celebration of the '*Saradu*'.

2.4.5 Customs Relating to Cremation (Funeral):

Followings are the some materials that are required for the cremation;

- (i) Four posts and some firewood or fuel wood.
- (ii) Five bundles of dry bamboo stick is needed if the deceased person is male, and six bundles for female to dispose the dead body.
- (iii) One small pitcher
- (iv) '*Sandua*' (a piece of white cloth)
- (v) Rice, Mustard seed and pulses
- (vi) Coins, five coins in case of male and six coins in case of female
- (vii) A pair of areca-nut and a pair of betel leaf
- (viii) '*Aoa Khwndwng*' (a kind of unused thread)
- (ix) Some brunches of sandal, wood apple and mango
- (x) Fire, water and basil leaf.

The process of practice of carrying out the corpse from the courtyard is similar to the burial system. The cremation ground is generally situated near the bank of rivers or streams. The Cremation place is called as '*Hiramonni Gathwn*' where four pots are to be posted which is called '*Sitha*' which means a pile place. The head side is to be kept on south. Here too, a certain difference is made in disposing of the corpse of man and of a woman respectively, for a man's corpse fire layer, which means stacks of wood under the corpse and five layer above it, the corpse is placed in a downright sleeping position, whilst in dealing with a woman's body six layers under the deceased body and six layers above it, in a upright position. This was because of the philosophy, being supposed six in number. One more component to women's vaginal canal is consider. In between layers a piece of thread, leaves of wood apple, mango, and small branches of sandal tree are to be placed. The four piles is winded with the thread five times in case of man and six times in case of women leaving a gate in the side of South, so that the corpse can be comfortably place on piling place. In addition to it a little of rice and pulses are thrown on the pile and then the fire is set. The fire is carefully fed until every

remains or vestige of the death body is consumed. The ashes are not carried away like the Hinduism. The Bodos of the Goalpara district follow the practice of putting the ashes in crab's hole or any other hole. It is being supposed that the residual of the corpse is mostly required material for the 'Oja' which means a medicinal man or chanter for their vested interest. Before setting the fire some preparations are to be made. The 'Sitha' which means pile is purified by purifier and then the pile is set to fire by the sons. To set the fire five bundle of dry bamboo fire wood is required in case of male while six bundles of dry bamboo firewood for the women. The sons, relative and villagers take part in setting the fire. These activities are performed by only male members. The 'Gwtharari' or the 'Hadwnggra' chants the following mantras:

*"Nwi amokha/ amokhi jwng dinwi giasti rajiw aro nwngni nokhorni khol (pindu) lanay mansia, nwngni mwnba jirat gwhwni dhwrwmkhunthia thorbrwini gejerao bathakhw/ do thakhusithanisayao dwnnanoi, jwngma or mohoroi gosaini khugajwng saonanoi sayhanggar khalamnw ongkhardwng/ nwngni jio hangonaya jahathe dhwrwmrajani bisarao mwkhthi munnuhayu, binithakhay jung dinui surjigirinan bangosaikhu futhaithi lananui jungmamohorui orjung sayhanggar khalamgun/ Nung be jungmani guhugunang or jalangdu gosai".*²⁴ English rendering: "Hi he/she! we are along with your family members who is wearing thread of 'Pindu' carrying away your composite body of five elements to the cremation ground to be dispose your corpse with fire mouth of almighty God. Hi! let the fire, a power of almighty God be made the corpse turn into ashes."

After finishing this chanting the attendees left the cremation place uttering the sentence "*Nungni mothe nungsui, jungni mothe jungsui*"²⁵, which means, it is you for yourself, we are for ourselves. By uttering this, the mourners mean that they have abandoned their relationship in the spirit of the dead person. On the burial or cremation place, the Bodos of this area perform the banana, areca-nut planting, moreover, the materials that he or she used during life time are also left aside on the spot.

After the burial or cremation, the funeral party takes bathing in the water of river or stream before returning to the deceased's house. After bathing every member of the

²⁴ Op-cit. Dinen Basumatary. (M. 81). Maj Para, Goalpara.

²⁵ Ibid.

funeral group chew a little quantity of dry jute leaves which is called '*Narjoi Guran*' in Bodo language. By doing this activity they believe that they have separated from the deceased one. After returning from the river or stream the persons are purified by the *Gutharari*, i.e., the purifier by means of gold ring, some leaves of the basil plant and of the sacred '*Dubri*' which means the bent grass plant. This holy water is kept ready by the purifier to purify them in front of the main gate of the deceased's house. Then they enter to the respective house of the deceased. They are entertained with tea and rice beer.

The Bodos of the Goalpara district up rooted the posts after finishing the cremation. When they uprooted the pile posts they cautiously perform the activity so that the ashes can not enter into the holes of the posts. They believe that if it happens so then in the next rebirth life the respective person will be sick person. They also believe that the four posts of the pile is a symbolic representation of four divisions of lives. They are- (i) *Birbaygra*, i.e. one that flies, (ii) *Thoblogra*, i.e. who sinks in the water, (iii) *Daobaygra*, i.e. the paddler or reptilian species, and (iv) *Rojogra*, i.e. the plant that grows.

2.4.5.1 Celebration of Vegetarian Food:

Before the death ceremony celebration a prevegetarian food celebration is seen among the Bodos. This performance is different depending on male and female. The followings are the vegetarian food items to be used in the celebration:

- (i) *Khardoi* (a kind of alkali or soda) curry is prohibited
- (ii) Mustard oil uses in many diet system is prohibited. The body anointed with oil is prohibited.
- (iii) If the deceased one is mother then the offspring cannot drink milk
- (iv) If the deceased one is father then the offspring cannot eat banana
- (v) The family member is debarred from any village party
- (vi) The '*Khol*' or '*Pindu*' holder cannot loiter here and there
- (vii) Eating meat and fish is prohibited

The followings materials are allowed to eat. These are:

- (i) Boiled dal (a kind of pulses), potato and vegetables
- (ii) Allowed to eat rice food
- (iii) Allowed to eat fruits
- (iv) Allowed to drink black tea.

2.4.6 *Daha Garnai*:

One day ahead of the Saradu ceremony a pre-saradu ceremony is performed by the Bodos. This ceremony is called *Daha* or *Daha Garnai*, which means to give up grief. In Bodo *Daha* means grief. It may be pointed out here that in Bodo *Daha* means grief or sorrow. Accordingly to some people this word originates from the Sanskrit *dasaha* meaning ten, and it is being held on the tenth day of the death. This is probably a case of folk etymology. This ceremony is performed simply by offering some favourite foods of the dead person. It is called *Gothoino baonai* or offering of foods or other things to the dead person. The whole ceremony is conducted by *Dauri* or *Oja*, i.e., the medicine man of a village, who chants the mantra in the half-sitting position facing to the south. The members of the family specially, sons of a dead person pray to him kneeling down on the ground appealing him to accept the offerings made by them.

2.4.7 The ‘*Saradu* or *Shraddha*’ (Death Ceremony):

The Bodos generally perform the *Saradu* or *Shraddha*, i.e. death ceremony on the day of eleventh day or thirteenth day from the death of a person. According to Kameswar Brahma “*The Sraddha the mind-rite of orthodox Hindu , known as the Shraddha (Sanskrit Srat Faith, trust, belief) is a highly developed from the primitive funeral feast and of the custom of feeding the dead*”.²⁶ But this type of celebration is not seen among the Bodos of the Goalpara district. The Bodos of Goalpara district celebrate the death ceremony on the seventh day in case pf male person and on eight day in case of female person. The family of the deceased person has to offer a party on the day of death ceremony. If the deceased one is minor then the guardian cannot perform death as it was in case of adult one. The minor’s death ceremony is celebrated

²⁶ Op-cit. Brahma, Kameswar. *ASPAECTS OF SOCIAL CUSTOMS OF THE BODOS*. First Edition. Shri Chiranjib Brahma. Gossaigaon. Kokerajhar. 1989. p. 12

according to the '*Khaoali Bad*' i.e. kind of purification system. The feast offered is seen in three categories, (i) a feast with pork and fowl i.e. non vegetable, (ii) a feast without non-vegetable, i.e. vegetable, and the last one is (iii) a feast just simply of a cup of tea or wine. This type of a feast is generally dependent on the ability of the owner.

Death rituals among Bodos reflect beliefs about cleanliness, ancestral spirits, and soul transition. Purification and handling of the dead is done in the way that, after death, washing the body and covering it with new cloth is common, followed by cremation in districts like Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa, Tamulpur, and Udalguri. *Saradu* or *Shraddha* Ceremony is celebrated on the eleventh or thirteenth day after death, a *Saradu* or *Shraddha* rite is performed to release the soul and purify the family's ritual impurity. This involves prayers before the altar and communal feasting. Offerings and Ancestral Respect like food and drink including rice beer in traditional settings are shared with community members as part of commemorating the dead. While the *Saradu* ritual and purification rites are widely practiced across Bodo regions, the presence of Brahma Dharma followers who might prefer vegetarian meals or Ahuti prayers leads to variations in the materials offered and priestly functions. Bodo communities of other districts response such as the scale of feasts, involvement of village members, and secondary rites like offering coins or rice can vary based on local economic conditions and religious orientation. But, in Goalpara district, death rites may reflect stronger mingling with Assamese lower-caste rituals, such as post-cremation feasts that feel more like social gatherings, i.e., *mrityu bhoj*. Local news reports occasionally highlight such feasts. Traditional Bathouist death rites often emphasize cleansing impurity rituals and re-integration into community life after ceremonial rites.

2.5 Findings:

It is observed that the birth ceremony of Bodo community of Goalpara district is different to the birth ceremony of other districts like, Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa, Tamulpur, and Udalguri of Bodo dominated areas. General Bodo customs across Bodo culture, birth rites emphasize purification, naming, and protection of mother and child. Immediate ritual is that after a child's birth, a naming ceremony is performed involving removal of the umbilical connection and rituals with tulsii, grass, and symbolic items to bless the newborn. Purification period is that in many Bodo traditions, mother and child

remain indoors for a period often until purification rites are complete, which can involve washing and symbolic sprinkling of purifying water. In districts like Kokrajhar, Baksa, and Udalguri, traditional Bodo birth rites are generally similar in structure but may vary in the duration of confinement, use of specific herbal rites, and names of minor ceremonies, depending on local clan customs and religious affiliations, e.g., Bathouism and Brahmaism. But, in Goalpara district Bodo communities traditionally combine broader Bodo customs with local folk beliefs and taboos, as documented in region-specific ethnographic work. Rituals include honoring spirit protectors and avoiding impurity in the home.

The Bodo people have a rich culture encompassing rituals and traditional ceremonies related to major life events like birth, marriage, and death. This cultural framework persists across Bodo-inhabited regions including Goalpara and Bodo Territorial Region districts, though local practices and influences vary due to historical, religious, and social interactions. The similarities and differences in birth, marriage, and death ceremonies among Bodo communities in Goalpara district and those in other Bodo-dominated districts of Assam such as Kokrajhar, Baksa, Udalguri, Chirang, and others drawing on ethnographic research and cultural studies. This study covers traditional practices, religious influences, ceremonial rites, and regional variations within the Bodo cultural. While Goalpara district and other Bodo-dominated districts share the foundational cultural framework of Bodo life-cycle ceremonies rooted in Bathouism, clan customs, and indigenous beliefs.

Marriage, i.e. *Haba* or *Juli* in Bodo language is a central social institution in Bodo culture. While core components Bodo marriage rituals are shared, local expressions vary. Exogamy rules are that marrying outside one's own clan remains culturally significant. Negotiation and consent rites are based on families meet, exchange symbolic items, such as betel leaves, rice beer, fix auspicious dates, and shared meals, dances, and blessings are integral. Bodoland Territorial Council's districts like Kokrajhar and Chirang may emphasize classic *Hathasuni Khurnai* i.e. traditional Bodo marriage with elaborate sequences of betel, nuptial cloths, and music. Bathou followers typically perform rites before Bathou altar. *Dongkha habnai haba* i.e. remarriage of widow is accepted in Bodo society, with symbolic rites involving gifts

and specific ceremonial entry into the household. Such practices are recorded across Bodo districts but differ in specific celebratory rites or priestly roles depending on local tradition. But, in Goalpara, Bodo weddings often hold deep ties to traditional Bathouism practices, especially outside urban centers. The marriage may involve prayers before the Bathou altar and animal offerings, reflecting a direct link with ancestral belief systems. Adaptation is also incorporated influences such as the use of *jachai*, i.e., rice beer, and regional food customs in feasts.

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The Bodo community of Goalpara district occupies a unique socio-cultural position in Western Assam. Situated on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra River, it reflects the distinct histories and identities of the region's indigenous populations. The Bodo people a Tibeto-Burman ethnolinguistic tribe native to Assam constitute an important segment of Goalpara's demographic profile, notable for their linguistic

tradition, cultural festivals, and agrarian lifestyle. Bodos in the district are embedded within broader patterns of socio-economic change but have also maintained their indigenous structures of association and cultural expression. Cultural identity for the Bodo in Assam including in Goalpara is deeply grounded in language, traditional beliefs such as Bathouism, folk arts, and social institutions. Bathouism, the traditional folk religion of the Bodo people, reflects their cosmology and ecological worldview centered around five elemental principles.