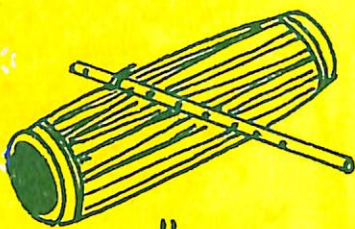


**A  
STUDY IN CULTURAL  
HERITAGE OF THE BOROS**



**DR. KAMESWAR BRAHMA**



"A Study in Cultural Heritage of the Boros" a book on Boro Culture, written by Dr. Kameswar Brahma, Principal of Gossaigaon College, Gossaigaon, Assam and published with the financial assistance of Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes Guwahati-22.

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## PREFACE

The Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Guwahati under the aegis of Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (erstwhile Ministry of Welfare) have been providing grants-in-aid to authors for publication of books written on different aspects of tribals and scheduled castes. The scheme is basically known as 'Grants-in-Aid for Literary Works for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes'. The Scheme receives very good response from different authors. In fact, it is difficult to accommodate all the authors under the scheme. As a part of this popular scheme, the book on "**Cultural Heritage of the Bodos** by **Dr. Kameswar Brahma**" has been sponsored by the Institute for publication. It is expected that the readers will receive the book with pleasure. We look forward for comments and suggestions from the readers.

I am thankful to the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment for providing financial assistance for the scheme. I am also thankful to the Government of Assam, department of WPT & BC for giving financial assistance for the scheme. Finally, I like to thank M/S. Bohniman Printers, Guwahati for their help and co-operation for bringing out the book.

Dated Guwahati  
the 16<sup>th</sup> February, 1999

**R. Zaman**  
Director  
Assam Institute of Research  
for Tribals and Scheduled Castes  
Guwahati-22

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

Various ethnic groups of People with their rich culture live in the North Eastern Region. So, this region is very much fertile for the study of cultural aspects of the ethnic groups of People. The Boros, belonging to the ethnic stock of people still follow their traditional customs, beliefs and practices.

The present work - "A Study in Cultural Heritage of the Boros" is a part of my research Topic - "A Study of Socio-Religious Beliefs practices and ceremonies of the Bodos" However, this work is no doubt an outcome of my extensive Research works in the field of Socio-cultural aspects of the Boros of the State of Assam in Particular and with references to the Boros living in the neighbouring States in general.

This book is divided in to three Parts. In the Part I Food habits, dresses and ornaments, Social structure Social offences, etc. have been broadly discussed. In the Part II Marriage and Family life of the Boros, while in the Part III the Seasonal and Agricultural festivals have been elaborately dwelt on. Shri M.R. Lahary, a great writer in Bodo Literature and a famous Poet has gone through the manuscripts at the cost of his valuable time. I express my humble gratitude to him.

On the otherhand, the Director of the Research Institute of the Tribals of Assam is so kind enough to accept my manuscript for Publication. I am obliged to offer my gratitude to him and to the Research Institute also.

I do regret for any omissions or Commissions left in the book with or without my knowledge. I hope that the readers will surely forgive me in this respect.

**Gossaigaon**  
**25th August, 1998**

**Dr. K. Brahma**

## I N T R O D U C T I O N

Dr. Kameswar Brahma's "A Study in Cultural Heritage of the Boros" is a unique literary work which brings to light almost all the aspects of the cultural life of the Boros. The book is, undoubtedly, a great contribution towards the keeping of the cultural heritage of the Boros ever alive.

The author has divided the book in three parts. In the Part I, he has dwelt elaborately on the various aspects such as language, food-habit, dresses, ornaments, Social structure, occupation, economy, social offences and etc. In the part II, he deals at length with various customs, traditions such as - system of marriage, kinds of marriage, widow-marriage, divorce and belief about the chastity of Boro women-folk. In the part III, he describes and narrates various festivals of the Boros such as - the Kherai, the Garja Puja, the Baisagu, Seasonal and agricultural festivals. In some cases, the author traces back the etemological origin of terms, usages and words to relate to the ancient social system and set-up in which the Boros used to live.

The author, himself a great research-Scholar and authority on the culture and Bathau Dharma, has picked up each and every aspect of the cultural life of the Boros. In doing so, he mentions the legends, gods and and goddesses, tantras-montras and folk -songs which occupy very important places



in the frame-work of Social life of the Boros. The bibliography he has shown bespeaks of his wide range of studies of various authors, journals and indologists. The definitions and conclusions about the terms, usages, words and origins are logical and reasonable.

Dr. Brahma is a prolific writer whose writings are characterised by the lucidity of his expression, straightforwardness and matter of factness. He is an essayist, a biographer, a folklorist and above all, a research-Scholar of repute. He is one of the established Bodo writers and has earned a well-earned place in Bodo literature.

In "A Study in Cultural Heritage of the Boros", Dr. Brahma gives us an entire history of culture, its tradition and heritage of which the Boros even to-day are proud. But gone are the days and gone is the most disciplined, chaste, systemetised well-governed and conservative Society of the Bodos of by-gone days. What remains to-day is only a skeleton portion of the rich culture of the Boros. Boro Society to-day, is most chaotic, most disorderly, disintegrated, confused, loose, leaderless, radarless and indisciplined. At the conclusion of reading of Dr. Brahma's book under reference, one is found to wonder - where is that most disciplined and cultured life of the Boros now ! It is my sincere hope that Dr. Brahma's "A Study in Cultural Heritage of the Boros" will be an antidote to the fast decaying Boros of to-day.

Dated  
the 24th April/97

**M.R. Lahary**  
Kokrajhar

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# **A Study in Cultural Heritage Of The Boros :**

## **1. Introduction : Bodo/Boro/Bara :**

### **The term and nomenclature.**

#### **The Generic Connotation :**

The Bodos or the Boros are a race of the Mongolian people who are described as the inhabitants of a country lying to the north of the Himalayas and in the western belt of China. This country is known as Bod. The word Bod is supposed to mean a homeland. It is also said that there were many parts of the country known as Hor Bod, Kur Bod, etc.

The inhabitants of Bod country are known as the Bodo Phicha or Bodocha or Borosa (Bod means land or country and phicha or cha means son or children, hence, the children of the Bod or country). In course of time they come to be known as simply Bodd-Bodo-Boro.

According to R.M.Nath, when Buddhism spread in to the Bod countries, specially the southern part, inhabited by the Buddhist Lamas, was known as Bsti (Lamas) Bod and later on it transformed into Bsti Bod-Tibod-Tibet. (R. M. Nath : The Background of Assamese culture : 1948, P. 15)

Linguistically the Boros include a large group of people who are the speakers of the Tibeto-Burman



speeches of the North and East Bengal, Assam and Burma. They are the Bodos or Boros of the Brahmaputra Valley, Meches of lower Assam and West Bengal, Rabhas, Garos, Dimasas and Kacharis of Cachar District, Tipras, Lalungs, Sonowals, Hajangs, Mishings, Deuris, Chutias, etc.

Hence, by the term Bodo in general, which is a generic name of the people, it means all the Tibeto-Burman (Bodo) Speaking group of the Sino-Tibeto origin.

### *Specific Connotation :*

(i) The Kacharis : The Eastern Boros of Cachar (or Kachar) District, specially North Cachar, call themselves Kacharis. According to S.K. Chatterjee, this group of Bodos assumed their name from the name of the District of Kachar. The meaning of Kachar is low land or border land and is originated from Sanskrit *Kaksavata-Kachada-Kachar*. (Chatterjee, S.K., Kirata Jana Kriti, 1974, P. 123)

They are simply known as Dimāsā Di = water, ma = big (Dimā = big water, i.e., Brahmaputra, Sa or Cha = Son or children, hence, Dimāsā = sons or children of the big river, the Brahmaputra). The Kacharis are divided into several groups. They are Sonowal Kacharis. (also known as Thengal Kacharis). Dimasa Kacharis, Lalung Kacharis and even the Rabhas.

On the other hand, the Bodos or Boros of the Brahmaputra valley, particularly of some districts like Kamrup, Sonitpur, Mongoldoi, Barpeta and Jalpaiguri of West Bengal are known as Bodo-Kacharis or Boro-Kacharis, although all of them now are popularly known as Boros.

ii. The Mech or Meche : The Boros of the North

Bengal and Jalpaiguri districts of West Bengal and Goalpara District of Assam are known as Mech or Meche, besides they also call themselves as Boro and popularly known to their non-Bodo neighbours as Boro. They call themselves Mech, because they are settled in the banks of the river Mechi .

(Ref. Sanyal, C.C., The Meches and the Totos : The University of North Bengal: 1973.)

2. Language : As Dr. P.C. Bhattacharya has observed the Boro (Bodo) language belongs to the branch of *Barish* section under *Baric* division of the Sino-Tibetan family, as per the classification given by Robert Shafer. the Linguistic Survey of India describes the Boro or the Boro-Kachari as a member of the Bodo (Boro) sub-section under the Assam-Burma group of the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibeto-Chinese speech family.

The Bodo speaking areas of Assam at present are stretching from Dhubri in the West to Sadiya in the East. In Tripura and Nagaland also we have a small number of the Boros or Boro Kacharis. In Jalpaiguri and other adjacent districts of Bengal, the Boros are known as Mech. The Boro language of Assam has at least four clear-cut dialect-areas with a sufficient number of dialectal variations ; these may be called north-eastern, south western, north-central and southern dialect-areas with phonological, morphological and glossarial differences.

The language is said to have no inherited script at present. Bishnu Prasad Rabha, the famous artist of Assam told that in ancient time there were a kind of Deodhai scripts among the Kacharis (Boros and Dimasas). Shri



Rabha gathered a few specimen of Deodhai alphabet from an informant of Dimapur area which was noted for the Kachari reign and remains representing the art and architecture. At present the Boros make use of the Assamese alphabet and the Roman alphabet as modified to suit their need. The Boro Christians only usually write their text books and religious matters in the medium of Roman scripts. Other Boros, forming a clear majority write in the modified Assamese scripts. A section of the Boros has accepted the modified Assamese script for use in their text books and literature, while another section is in favour of DevaNagri script. Since 1963, the Boro language has been introduced as the medium of instruction in the Boro predominant primary schools of Kokrajhar Sub-Division (now District) in the undivided district of Goalpara. This has been extended upto the University level of education throughout the state of Assam.

The Boro literature consists of the vast amount of oral literature including folksongs, folktales, ballads and proverbs and of considerable amount of written and published literature in Assamese and Roman scripts. The published literature comprises of books relating to prayers and songs, poems, stories on the one hand and journals on the other hand. There are unpublished novels and dramas too so far my knowledge goes. Dimasa, the people of the great river has a separate language of the Boro group. It slightly differs from Boro language

#### **Agricultural Practices :**

#### **Selection and Classification of the Plot of Land :**

For the cultivation of the paddy crops the Boros

select the plot of land taking some conditions in to view. The land where the plant called dingdinga grows abundantly is called the Khandina hā, which is regarded as the most temporary land for the paddy cultivation. This type of land is generally not selected by the Boros for cultivation.

The plot of land which is situated by the bank of a river or stream is called hāshrow hā. This type of land is also regarded to be not suitable for the paddy cultivation. The reason is that the plot of land cannot contain water for a long time for the water flows down to the river or the stream. It is believed that if a Bodo family selects such a plot of land for the cultivation of crops, specially paddy cultivation, then the family has to suffer from poverty day by day.

The irrigation facility is regarded as the best criteria for the classification of land. The plot of land where the cultivation of paddy is done with the help of the rain water then the plot of land is called shwrab dāriā hā. This type of land is regarded as medium standard for the paddy cultivation.

The next standard type of land is called the Jāmphāi daria hā. This type of land is selected by the Boros to be suitable for the paddy cultivation. There is the proper irrigation facility with the help of canals which are called jāmphāi by the Boros. The canals are constructed by themselves. They also construct bāndh or embankment to preserve water for use in cultivation and divert the water through the canals to the plots of land where the paddy is planted.

The major part of the cultivated land of the vil-



lage is devoted to growing rice, which is the staple food of both the Boros and non-Boro people of the state of Assam. Even to-day, rice is the chief means of barter in the villages. Rice falls under three main heads, Māisāli, Bāwā and Ashu. The Maisali (or sāli, in Assamese), is transplanted as winter rice, in low lying land. The long bāw or bāwā is the stemmed rice which is sown mainly in marshes with deep water. Ashu or Ahu also is sown in the spring time and is grown in high lands. Among the three varieties of rice the Maisali or sali is preferred more by the Bodo people. The Maisali has many varieties. Out of numerous varieties one large variety and another small variety, which are called māimā and Maisa respectively. These two varieties are equally cultivated by them. The small varieties of paddy are generally meant for the economy purpose. Because, their main economic source is the paddy. A variety of rice called Māibrā mai is most favourite for them, specially it is essential during the festival, Domāsi (Bhogali bihu, in Assamese).

Besides rice growing, the cultivation of jute (pathw), mustard seeds (besar) and various kinds of pulses is done side by side. The jute and mustard seeds also bring economy to them. Another important fruit bearing tree which brings more economy to them is the areca tree (goi biphang). The areca nuts are essential for them in every walk of life. Without areca nuts and betel leaves no social function or ritual can be performed in their society. Besides social necessity, the areca nuts are most important for the economy of the Boros. It is found that every family of a village has possessed areca nuts more or less.

The Endi and Muga rearing is another traditional

culture of the Boros. This culture is closely associated with the Assamese people in general. The Assamese women as well as the Boro women are expert weavers. They produce Endi, Muga and Silk of high standard.

### 3. Food: Habits:

Rice is the staple food, but this is supplemented by a plentiful supply of vegetables, sometimes procured from the neighbouring forests and it is seldom that they do not manage to procure some kinds of animal food, flesh or fish, of which latter they are very fond. When untainted by Hinduism, they were at liberty to eat almost every kind of flesh (eg; pork.) with the one exception of the domestic cow. The most highly prized article of diet is pig, and numbers of these animals may be seen in all Boro villages. The favourite beverage is a kind of rice-beer known as madh or jau prepared by steeping rice in water for two or three days. Another liquor, photika or phitika prepared from madh or jau by distillation, is of a less innocent character. It is perfectly colourless and has a strong pungent taste, redolent of smoke, and something is common with very strong whisky. This, if taken in any quantity affect on the brain very rapidly and injuriously.

There is a myth about the creation of the jau or jumāi (rice-beer) among the Boros. The rice-beer has a great importance in the Boro society. Besides its use in the social functions, it is also offered to the Bathou borāi (the chief god) and other minor gods and goddesses. The jumai or jau is prepared with a traditional system.

Before preparing jumāi, a medicine which is called amāw is essential. The amāw is made of uncooked rice,



twelve pieces of mokhna flowers, (a kind of wild plant); some leaves of kānthāl or jack fruit tree, some leaves of pineapple tree, roots of agarcitha, (a kind of small plant), and the top leaves of the banana tree. All these things are ground together and the dust of the things is mixed with water and then it is transformed into the cake-form. On the cakes (the newly prepared raw amaw) dusts of two old amaw are applied. The two old amaw are called amaw mokhāng in Boro. The amaw mokhāng is essential for making the amaw. After three or four days the raw cakes become full-fledged amaw and ready for the use.

The rice is cooked and placed on a winnowing fan, where the dust of the medicine amaw is placed and mixed with the cooked rice. Then it is stored in an earthen pitcher which is called Māldāng in Boro. After three or four days the cooked rice which is kept in an earthen pot (māldāng) become Jau or Jumai and it can be consumed as rice-beer (jau). The rice-beer (jau) of a maldang or jonga can be used keeping for seven or nine days. After the expiry of this period its taste becomes sour and unbearable. The jumai, prepared from the from the maibra rice (a special variety of rice) or bara cawl, in Assamese can be preserved for two to three months, and the taste is sweet as honey.

The use of rice-beer (jumai) in the Boro society is justified in the following reasons :

1. They welcome their guests offering a full cup of jumai or jau and they become very glad if they can entertain their guests with jumai and porks (Oma bedor). This has become their traditional custom.

2. They are hard working class of peasants. After doing a hard labour at the field they consume rice-beer

(jau) after the hard work and become fresh.

3. The rice-beer is used as medicine also. If they suffer from some disease like disorder of bowells, kholera, etc., they use rice-beer as medicine and get relieved from the disease.

4. During the festivals, ceremonies and pujas they offer jumai to the gods and goddesses. It is essential for the Ojas or the medicine-men of the Boros.

The present Boro society has been found to be using the rice-beer, their traditional drink improperly. Some of them are using this thing as a commodity of profit making business. This has rather broken the traditional custom of the Boros.

The Boros are very fond of meat and fish. They dry the flesh of the deer or pork and preserve for a long period and use it as food when they are busy with their agriculture works. This sort of dried flesh and dried fish are called bedor gorān and nā gorān respectively. They also dry small fishes in the sun light or on the fire, apply some quantity of stems of arum, then grind them together, store it in a bamboo tube (owā hāshung) and cover the mouth of the tube with the leaves of the plantain (thalir bilai). This is called nāphām and it can be preserved for two to three years.

They are accustomed of collecting the wild vegetables from the forests, besides they produce at home. The wild vegetables are of different tastes. Some vegetables are used as medicines also. It is probable that the villagers of the remote places donot use any modern type of medicines as they use the wild vegetables as medicines while they suffer from any disease and get relieved.



Among the favourite wild vegetables, the most common are sibru (a kind of thorny plants used as vegetables), doushrem (a kind of small creeper of sour taste) lāphā saikho (a plant of sour taste), jaglauri (a scented plant) ungkhām gājāng (a creeper of sour taste), nākhi (a plant of bitter taste), buri thokon (a small plant), khungkha (a plant of bitter taste), gān-gā-mālā (a small plant) and raidang (cane). Another favourite wild vegetable is anthāi bājāb (a small plant with scent). This vegetable is used in the fish curry, specially with the kushia fish and flesh of goat. Every member of a Boro family is fond of the andlā khāri, prepared with the dust of rice, the chicken and the shoot of the bamboo (owā mewāi).

Meat is the essential item for the guests in the Boro society. So, to meet the immediate necessity as food when any guest visits one's house and to some extent for the purpose of economy they keep fowls, ducks, pigs and goats at home.

They generally eat the pork or the meat of hogs (oma bedor), meat of ducks (hāngshā bedor), of pigeons (phareo bedor) of goats (barma bedor), of deer (moi bedor) of turtle (khusung bedor); of hare (sesa bedor). They donot eat buffalo's meat (moisha bedor) and beef (mashaubedor), nor do they eat snakes. They have the custom of community hunting and fishing for food.

As their neighboring non-Boro societies like caste Hindus, the Bodo-Kacharis also are very fond of the locally prepared alkali potash which they call Khāroi and in Assamese it is called Khar.

**4. Smoking:** Smokers are not rare among the Boros. There is no restriction specially in the village. The

elders and the youngers smoke together. The elderly women also smoke. In remote villages a sort of earthen or wooden Hangkhā is used. The Hangkhā has two parts; the lower part can be separated when not in use. The top portion is called silim (an earthen small smoking vessel) which can be used either alone or along with the hangkhā. The phuski is popular and constant companion. It is a pipe with wide upper end for the tobacco and narrow end for the mouth. Raw tobacco leaf after curing in shade in open air is cut into small bits and placed on the top receptacle, set fire to it suck the smoke from the narrower side. It is like the cigar used by the Europeans. Now, bidis and cigarettes have nearly replaced the old fashion.

**5. Dress and ornaments:** In their mode of dress the Boro Kacharis do not differ materially from their Hindu neighbours but they show a certain fondness for coloured garments, and are acquainted with the art of dyeing, the materials for preparing the dyeings (usually blue and various shades of red) being supplied generally from the leaves or roots of trees.

The male persons, both young and old put on gamcha, woven at home, which hangs down to the knees from the loin. During winter they use to wrap the body with a wrapper of cotton or Endi spun and woven at home. This wrapper is called jumgrā or madamni gāmcha. They also use a banian, a sort of coat of cotton or Endi. Such dresses of the Boro male persons are now found rare, except the villagers of the interior places, the modern dresses of the present days are used by them.

The women, formerly and even now, tie a cloth round the chest just below the arm that hangs to the toe. It



is called Dokhna. If it is plain, it is called sālā māthā and if ornamented, it is called dokhna thawsī. The latter type of dokhna is essential during the marriage ceremony, when the bride (hinjao godan) and the two boirathis are to wear compulsorily. This ornamented dokhnā is hardly obtainable now. In earlier days the Boro women did not use any other body cover, while except a scarf called ālowān. At present the women wear blouse as other Hindu women do and they use a small border decorated scarf called Chadar or jumgrā. The Bodo women of Kamrup, Darrang and Nowgong districts use 'Mekhela' and 'Sari' also. The Boro women of the West Bengal state use Sari as their common garment equally with their Hindu neighbours. In advanced families the women wear Sari and the body cover, blouse.

The popular designs of the ornamented dokhna are many. Among them the most common are daothu godo (designs of doves neck), phareo megon (designs of pigeons eye, pahar agor (designs of hills scenery), moider āgān (design of elephants foot print) etc. The orange, yellow and the sky colours are their favourite colours. The spinning is done with a spindle called Takuri and the pit loom is called Hi-chān-chāli. The Boro male members of the present society use the common dresses of the general societies. They use the long pant, half pant, shirt, coat, pajama, dhuti, etc.

The women use very few ornaments made of silver and gold. The following ornaments are common:

**1. For the ear:** (i) Khera or Kheru, (ii) japkhiring, (ear-ring) (iii) talinglura or dul, (iv) boula (for the upper ear), (v) puti, (it is a small flower attached to the ear lobe).

**2. For the nose:** (i) Nak-phul, (it is a small flower

or a knob struck to the nostril or to the outer skin of the nose through a hole made earlier), (ii) Bulaki (Nose pendant)

**3. For the Neck:** (i) Chandra hār (it is a heavy necklace of five layers hung on the chest from the neck), (ii) Bisāhār (a necklace), (iii) Thanka-siri (it is a necklace worn round the neck, (iv) jibou-zin-siri (it is a necklace with a silver oval unornamented piece for the back of the neck from which hangs on two sides two snake-like chains biting into two sides of another plain silver oval plate resting at the junction of the chest and the abdomen (jibou-snake).

**4. For the hand:** (i) Muthā, (it is an ornamented bangle about 2½ inch wide.) It is also worn by the Rajbansis of North Bengal. (ii) Āshān Suri, (a small bangle). In Boro any bangle is called āshān.

## 6. Social Structure of the Boros:

The Social structure of the Boros is primarily patriarchal in character. In a patriarchal system father is the sole authority of the family. On the other hand, in a matriarchal system the authority rests with the mother. In the Boro society father is the sole guardian of a family. After his death the eldest son inherits the rights exercised by him. Generally it is observed that the entire property of the family is distributed among the sons only. In the Boro society daughters do not have the right to property when there are sons. It is some times observed that a portion of the property is given to the wife by her husband. After her death the property automatically goes to the possession of her sons.

#### 6. (A) The place of women in the Boro society:

Although the social structure of the Boros is based on the patriarchal system, the place of women in the Boro society is high. If there is no male child in a family then the property is distributed among the daughters. They can enjoy such properties even after their marriage.

The female members are given the rights of Pigs, Fowls etc. They can sell them without prior permission of their guardians. It is also observed that even the father is to pay to his daughters for a pig or a cock owned by them. If there is a single female child in the family where there is no male child, then the entire property is owned by her after the death of the father. In such a case the bridegroom is kept in the house of the bride after marriage. This is an accepted system of marriage in the Boro society and is called Garjiā Lakhināi in Boro. After her death the property is inherited by her sons, and not by daughters.

Although it is made in the context of the Kachari (ie. Boro) society of Darang District, the following observations are applicable in respect of Boro women in general.

The Kacharis women command respect in their community, their position is never regarded inferior to that of a man. However, birth of a daughter is not favoured as much as that of a son. In cases of marital separation the woman is denied of her rights to have a share of the property of her husband, although she is allowed to take her ornaments. During their maidenhood they enjoy the liberty to participate in singing, dancing in festivals. The married women generally are refrained from outdoor exhibi-

tion. The Boro women are exceedingly industrious and they spend much of their time in the fields working side by side with their sunburnt husbands. The Boro women are expert weavers and can weave all their weaving apparels.

#### 6 (B) Belief on the creation of the social groups:

About the creation of the different social groups the Boros have a popular story among them.

In a certain period the Boros lived in an indisciplined and unsystematic state of things. The society was full of undesirable activities and the atmosphere was unhealthy. To preserve the traditional social customs the people of the society realised the necessity of creation of different groups for certain specific works or duties. A great convention of all the Boro people was held to solve the burning problems of the society. To that convention the first human being Monsing-Sing-Borai 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 Boros irrespective of age and sex. The first human being, Monsing-Sing-Borai conducted the proceedings and helped to solve the problems faced by the Boros. It is said that the convention lasted for twelve years. Along with other things the groups called āri or hāri were created by Monsing-Sing-Borai for the Boros. The following are the main groups or aris of the Boros which are based on specific works or duties. The ari seems to signify some kinds of kinship.

The main social groups or āris are Swargiari, Basumatari, Narzari, or Narziari, Musari or Musahari,



Gayari, Owari, Khankhlari or Khakhlari, Daimari, Lahari, Hajoari, Kherkatari, Sibingari, Sabaiari Bibariari, Bingiari or Bingbingari, Mahilari or Mahalari, Mao Marari or Mou Murari, Ramsiari, or Ramsari, Sangphramari, Phadengari, Islary, Ganjlerari, Bargawari or Bargayari, Thalirari, etc.

**1. Swargiari :** The Boro people of this group claim their position to be the top of all the groups. They also claim to be the direct descendent of the god Bāthou Borāi. The Boro society entrusted the duty of worshipping the god upon this group. In Boro Swarga means heaven. Swarga +ari/Swargiari. They are also known as the Heavenly Folk. Endle also described them as the Heavenly Folk. The Boros selected worshippers called dauries or Ojas from among the Swargiaris.

**2. Baisamatari or Basumatari :** In Boro Baisamata means the 'Mother Earth'. Baisamata+ari = Baisamatari = Basumatari, the folk of the earth or the 'Earthly Folk'. They are related to the cultivation and any matter related to the land. So, they are also known as the landlord class of people. Dr. C. Sanyal describes this group of people as the Mother Earth Sect<sup>3</sup>. The word Basumatary is a sanskritised form of Baisamatari. This group is entrusted with the responsibility of solving the land problems, distribution of land, settlement of any dispute relating to land holding.

In the early period a custom was followed by the Boros in connection with the cremation of the dead body. Before cremating the dead body some coins were to be offered to an elderly person of the Basumatari Group as a revenue of the plot of land where cremation took place. The elderly person of the Basumatari group who received

the coins was not allowed to bring the coins home. But he was to leave them at the cremation ground. In the present Boro Society this custom is followed no more.

**3. Narzari or Narziari :** The meaning of the narzoi is the dry leaves of the jute plant. Dried jute leaves constitute a favourite food of the Boros. Although the taste of narzoi (dry leaves of the jute plant) is bitter, the curry prepared from narzoi is a favourite dish. There is a belief among the Boros that the dry leaves of the jute plants have medicinal properties. Besides, narzoi gorān or the dry leaves of the jute plants possess another great importance. At the time of cremation of a dead body the members of the cremation party have to chew the narzoi goran after having bath at the end of cremation. Again, during the time of Sārādu or Sharadh (a post cremation ceremony) all the persons who attend the ceremony are given small quantities of narzoi goran to be taken as a compulsory item. The Boros believe that by taking narzoi goran they cut off their relation with the dead person. Thus narzoi is an essential commodity for the Boros. From narzoi comes the name of the group Narzari (Narzoi + ari = Narzoiari = Narzari). It is believed that the persons of Narzari or Narziari group were entrusted with the duty to collect and supply Narzoi goran (dry leaves of the jute plant) during the Sārādu. In the present Boro society the people of this group call themselves Narzi or Narzari.

Sanyal describes this group of people as the Warrior group. He classifies them as the second grade of people just like the kshatriyas of the Aryan Hindus<sup>4</sup>.

But so far as the Boro society is concerned, there is no classification of the groups or clans as high or low,



although there is the system of the division of the people into different groups or clans. In the present Boro (Mech) Society of West Bengal the persons of this group use the surname Narzinari.

4. Musari or Musahari : (Musa + ari = Musari = Musahari). In Boro, Musa means tiger. So, this group is related to the tiger. The people of this clan follow some traditional customs relating to the tiger. They are not supposed to kill a tiger. Further, when they get information of the killing of a tiger, they have to remain without food a day and clean the house for purification. It is believed that the real duty of this clan was to ensure the safety of the domestic animals from the danger of the attack by tigers. In early period the tigers created trouble to the villagers. The Mushari folk kept watch at night so that no tiger could kill the domestic animals.

There is a belief among the Bodos that some persons have the power of transforming themselves into tigers and while in the tiger form they kill and devour domestic animals. Such persons are known as Musā Jārou.

Shri Bhaven Narzi describes the duty of this clan or group to be hunting of animals for food<sup>5</sup>.

Some Boro people belonging to the Musahari group of Assam are found using the surname Baglari, instead of Musahari. Endle has described them as Tiger Folk<sup>6</sup>. Bagh is an Assamese word which means the tiger and it is quite probable that the Boro people who lived in close proximity of Assamese speaking people and the use of the term baghlari in place of musahari is the result of influence of the Assamese language in the Boros.

5. Gayāri : In Boro 'gay' means areca nuts. The

Boros are very fond of areca nut. The Gayari clan or group is believed to have been named after gay or areca nut. Hence, gay + ari = Gayari, the group of people who were traditionally associated with areca nuts. According to late Bishnu Rabha, the Gayari clan or group originated from the people who were engaged to collect and distribute areca nuts (gay) in the convention which held under the presidentship of Man-Sing-Sing Borai to settle the case relating to the illicit love affair between Chikri Sengra and Chikri S-ikhla<sup>7</sup>.

6. Owari : The name of the group or clan Owari originated from the word owa which means bamboo. (Owa + ari = Owari). It is said that since during the festivals like Kherai large quantity of bamboos are essential, persons who were engaged in collection of bamboos for such festivals came to be known as Owari. They are believed to have planted bamboos for the first time.

7. Khangkhari or Khakhlari : Khangkhla is a kind of plant which is used in the Kherai festival. The belief is that persons who were engaged to collect the plant Khāngkhālā for kherai came to be known as Khangkhari (Khangkhla + ari = Khangkhari). In the present Boro society the members of this clan use the surname Khakhlari in place of Khangkhari.

8. Daimāri : The word daima in Boro means big river, and the people related to the big river were called Daimari (Daima + ari = Daimari). It is probable that some people who used to live by the bank of the big river got their livelihood by fishing. It is also probable that some groups of people were engaged in the work of floating down logs down the big rivers to the towns or market cen-



tres where the timbers were sold. Anyway, persons who lived on the banks of big rivers either by fishing or by any other means were grouped as Daimari. Shri Bhaven Narzi describes the people of this group as suppliers of fish<sup>8</sup>. Endle also held the same opinion and described the group directly as the Fisherman clan<sup>9</sup>.

9. **Lahari or Laihari** : In Boro Lai means a leaf. In a great festival like Kherai huge quantities of leaves, specially leaves of the banana tree are required. To collect the leaves some persons were engaged during the great festival. So, it is probable that those persons who were engaged or entrusted to collect the leaves (lai, in Boro), were designated as Laiari or Lahari, (Lai + ari = Laiari or Lahari). According to another explanation this Lahari originated from the word Laha which means lac, and the people of this clan or group were associated with the production of lac (Laha). Thus it was believed to be originated as Lāhā + ari = Lāhāri. But this explanation does not seem to be very convincing as there is little evidence of Boro people having been engaged in the collection of or trade in lac.

10. **Hajoāri** : It is probable that the name of the clan or group was derived from their habitat. In Boro hajo means a hill and the people who lived in the hills or foothills might have been called as Hajoari (Hajo + ari = Hajoari) or hill - dwellers.

11. **Kherkātāri** : The people of the Kherkatari clan or group are very few in number. They are not found in the Northern parts of Goalpara and Kokrajhar districts. It is said that the name come from Kherkata, (cutting of thatch) (Kherkata + ari = Kherkatari) However, Kherkata

is not a Boro expression. It means cutting of the straw or thatch in Assamese, (In Boro thatch is called jigab). It is probable that the persons who were engaged to collect thatch (Jigab) during the festivals were called kherkatari. Shri Bhaven Narzi describes the clan or group as jigabnārāri<sup>10</sup>. On the other hand, Endle describes them as the Squirrel Folk. But it is not so clear as to why this clan or group should be associated with the squirrel. The origin of the term might have been influenced by some non-Boro language of a particular area. The people of this clan or group are generally found in the district of Kamrup of Assam.

12. **Sibingāri** : Sesame is called Sibing in Boro. This commodity is essential in the performance of the great religious festival. So, the people who were engaged in collecting or supplying sesame were called Sibingari (Sibing + ari = Sibingari). It is probable that they were the first cultivators of Sesame. Of course, there is no such specific function attached to any groups in the present Boro Society.

13. **Sabaiari** : Like Sibing or Sesame, sabai is also a kind of pulse which is essential during the festivals. Hence, people who were engaged to supply sabai were given the name of the group Sabaiari (Sabai + ari = Sabaiari). It is believed that they were the first producers of the pulse Sabai.

14. **Bibāiāri or Bibāriāri** : Feasts are common during the festivals of the Boros. Some persons were engaged in collecting some essential commodities like rice, fruits, etc. by begging from the same community. In Boro bibai means begging. Hence, the group came to be designated



Bibaiari or Bibariari (Bibari + ari = Bibariari or Bebariari). Endle describes the people of this clan or group as the begging folk<sup>12</sup>. According to him the people of this group lived on begging. But there is no any example to prove that any group of the Boro people had taken begging a profession. It is rather probable that the people who were engaged in collecting commodities for the festivals were regarded as the Bibāiāri or Bibariari group or clan<sup>13</sup>.

**15. Bingiari or Bingbingari :** Bingi is a small one-stringed instrument which is played on during the festivals, specially during the Baisāgu festival. In course of time the persons who made this instrument and played on it during festival came to constitute the group called Bingiari (Bingi + ari = Bingiari or Bingbingari). People of this group are very rare in the present Boro society.

**16. Māhilāri or Mahalāri :** It is believed that the clan or group Mahilari or Mahalari originated from the word mahal or lease. A group of Boro people lived on fishing and they got the fishery tanks on lease from the authorities concerned. Some people were also lessees of timber mahals and were called Mahalari or Mahilari (Mahal + ari = Mahalari or Mahilari). Rev. Endle describes them as the Fishery Lessees (or Mahaldars)<sup>14</sup>. In the present Boro society the people of this clan or group are very rare.

**17. Māo Mārāri or Moā Mārāri :** The name of this clan or group might originate from the name of the place Maomari. Sometimes it is found that the people of a particular place are known by the name of the place. Several places known as Maomari still exist in this state of Assam. Hence, it is probable that the people of the place Maomari were called Maomarari (Maomari + ari

=Maomariari = Maomarari).

**18. Rāmsiāri or Rāmsāri :** It is believed that the clan or group Ramsari or Ramsiari originated from the name of a place called Ramsa (Ramsa + ari = Ramsari = Ramsiari). On the other hand, in Karbi language Rama means Kachari (the Boro-Kachari people). The place known as Ramsa is situated in the district of Kamrup on the Southern bank of the Brahmaputra.

**19. Sangphrāmāri :** It is not clear how this group or clan originated. According to a story available in the district of Jalpaiguri of West Bengal this group originated from the incident where the rice was left half cooked. In Boro sang means to cook or to search something and phram means to leave any work half done (sang + phram + ari = Samphramari.) Thus, Samphramari is a clan or group of people who had left the rice half cooked. There is a story about creation of this clan or group. The story runs as follows.

A group of persons went out searching for the new site for settlement. In a deep forest they selected a place and started felling the trees and clearing the jungle. Some of them were busy with cooking their food under the shade of an Indian fig tree. When the fig tree was also cut down the persons, who were busy in cooking food were compelled to leave the place with the food half-cooked. Hence, it is believed that the people who fled away leaving their food half cooked were called by the name Samphramari. Sanyal remarks that the people who were cooking rice were attacked suddenly by enemy and they fled away leaving the rice half cooked.<sup>15</sup>



**Another story runs as follows:**

Once upon a time both the Limbus and Meches lived together at a certain place. For the troubles created by the Chinese they were compelled to leave the place and went out searching for a new place. The Limbus first left the place after finishing their meals. Leaving the Meches behind, they left signs on the way in the jungles through which they proceeded. The Meches could not follow them from the middle way and they lost the way. In between Darjelling and Nepal the Meches selected the site for themselves by the bank of the Mechi river. Hence, it is probable that as the Meches gave up searching for the Limbus after following them half-way, they were regarded as Sangphramari (Sang = to Search, Phram = to leave half done). Thus, the clan or the group originated. It may be mentioned that the Boro people of this clan or group are found in the Jalpaiguri District of West Bengal.<sup>16</sup>

**20. Phadangari or Phadamari :** Phadang is a tree. It is believed that those people who took shelter under the shade of the Phadang tree came to be called, by the name Phadamgari. But there is no strong ground for the belief that a group of people were known by the tree under which they took shelter. Neither is it possible to live under the shade of the tree for a long time.

On the other hand, there is a story about the origin of the clan in the district of Darrang and Kamrup. According to the people of these districts Phadang bears the meaning of a naked or shameless. The story says that once there was an old man in a village who kissed his daughter-in-law. In the Boro society for this sort of behaviour the old man had to perform penance according to the custom of

the society. The old man had to put off dress in presence of a large crowd and he had to put on a new dress which was to be supplied by another person. At the outset none could gather courage to supply the garment to the old man. Ultimately a man offered him a new garment and for this he was also regarded as shameless or sinful by the villagers. Both the old man and the supplier of the garment were addressed as phadang. And from them originated the clan Phādāngāri (Phādāng + ari = phādāngāri or Phadamari)<sup>17</sup> people of this clan or group are very rare in the present Boro society.

On the basis of another belief it is said that this clan or group originated from the phadang tree. In early period, before the creation of cloth the people used the bark of the Phadang tree as garments. So, the people who collected and supplied the barks of the Phadang tree were called Phadangari.<sup>18</sup>

**21. Islary :** In Boro God is called Isar (cf. Sans. Isvara). It is probable that the people who were engaged in preparation for the worship of God Bathou Borāi and goddess Bathou Buri were called Isarari (Isar + ari) which became Islari in course of time. The Boro people of this group are fairly numerous in West Bengal. In the State of Assam the people belonging to this group are found in the districts of Goalpara, Kokrajhar, Kamrup and Darrang, although not in large number.

**22. Ganjlerari :** This name of the group is believed to have originated from the slug which the Boros call ganjler. It is hated by everybody. There was a custom among the Boros that if a person outraged the modesty of a lady then the guilty person had to perform penance by



eating slug (ganjler). A man who had to eat the ganjler for his hateful behaviour was addressed by the name ganjler (slug) and the group that originated from him is believed to have been designated as ganjlerari (ganjler + ari = ganjlerari).

**23. Bargawari or Bargayari or Bargayari :** In Boro bar means blessing (ef. Assamese Bar = Sans Vara) gab means cry or prayer. In the Kherai or in the Garja Puja the persons who are engaged as the Dauri or Oja (Priest) prays to God Bathou Borai 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 Bargaoari = Bargayari). However, their duties do not appear to be much different from those of Swargiari group, which we have already discussed earlier.

**24. Thalirari or Thaletari :** Thaler or Thalet means banana. It is believed that this group originated from the word Thaler (Thaler + ari = Thalerari or Thalet + ari). The persons who were engaged to supply thaler (banana) during the festivals like Kherari or Garja were probably designated as Thalerari or Thaler + ari. They are also believed to have planted the banana tress for the first time. The people of this group are very rare in the present Boro society.

Besides the groups discussed above the Boros of the state of West Bengal have some more groups. Groups like Sangphathang, Katajari, Bamuda, Laoari, Aeophramari, Khakhloari, etc. are found among them. The Boros of the State of Assam are not familiar with these groups.

It may be mentioned here that the Dimasa-Kacharis possess as many as forty two clans or groups. All these forty two clans or groups, have been preserved by them since their origin.<sup>19</sup>.

All the groups of the Boros are of equal status. In respect of the inter-group marriage there is no bar. After the marriage the girl assumes the surname of her husband. The children also assume the surname of their father. Mention may be made here that the followers of the Brahma Dharma may use the surname Brahma although they belong to different groups or clans. There are Boro people in Assam who have assumed different non tribal Assamese surnames like Chaudhury, Deka, Sarania, Bharali, etc. after conversion into Hinduism.<sup>20</sup> The Boros of Assam and West Bengal have been maintaining their connection with clans or groups through their surnames only. Clans or groups do not have social, economic or cultural significance today.

#### 6 (C) Structure of the typical Boro village :

A typical Boro village is not very big in size, which consists of about 50-60 house holds. The shape of the village is normally long and narrow. Houses are constructed on both sides of a common street. The village land for rice cultivation is kept on one side.

The grazing field is situated generally by the bank of a river or stream. In a corner of the grazing field there is a Gārjā Sali or a common place of worship of gods and goddesses. The Brahma dharma followers have their own Dharma Mandir or temple of worship in the middle of the village. The cremation ground is situated at a solitary place



to the south of the vilage.

The Boro village is controlled by an elderly person called gaobura who is the recognised leader and a petty government officer. All matters relating to the affairs of the villagers are discussed in meetings presided over by the Gaobura. There is a common fund in a village. The fund is operated by the gaobura, who also acts as a treasurer of the village.

The gaobura is selected by the villagers. A prominent, elderly and popular person is selected as gaobura and enjoys the office so long the villagers desire his service. There is no any limited term of office of the gaobura.

A chawkidar known as halmaji is also selected by the villagers. He performs his duties on the advice of the gaobura. The chawkidar or halmaji is to inform the villagers for meeting together for any purpose, besides festivals and ceremonies of the village.

The position of the Oja (medicine-man) of the vilage and the dauri (priest) is very high. They are regarded as very important persons of the society. No religious festival can be performed without their presence.

In a village of the followeres of Brahma religion the purohits (priests) are given a responsible position. They perform all the ritual function of the villagers through Yajnahuti.

For the purpose of medicine or for eradicating evils the Oja is required in the Boro society even to-day.

#### 6. (D) Selection of plot for the construction of a house :

Before constructing a house, much care is taken

about the plot of land to be selected for the purpose. There is a system among the Boros by which they examine whether the plot of land is cleaned with the spade and it is plustered with mud and cowdung. A pair of basil leaves (tulansi bilai), nine grains of rice are placed on a banana leaf (Thalir bilai) and all these things are covered with a bamboo basket (don) and are left for the night. Next morning the things are observed after removing the basket. If the things are found alright, i.e. in the same position in which they were left, then the plot of land is believed to be suitable for building a house, and if the things are found displaced or otherwise disturbed then the plot of land is regarded to be unfit or inauspicious.

There is another system of selecting the plot. The soil is dug out about one yard daep and then it is tested. If the soil is of sweet taste, then it is suitable for the purpose of house construction. If the soil is of solty or bitter taste, then it is regarded as medium. If the soil is of sour taste, then the plot is regarded as unsuitable for the house construction. <sup>21</sup>.

#### 6. (E) Position of the homestead :

Before construction any house the Boros build the granary (Bakri) in the east of the homestead. Another important house is the cowshed (goli). They build the cowshed or 'Goli' in the southeast corner near the cow shed. About the importance of these two houses, viz, the granary (Bakri and the cowshed 'Goli' there is a folk song which runs as follows :

Dāokhā habnāi noawlai,  
Sila habnai noawlai,



Angkhau dabilai apha gosai,  
Mai bakhri nunaiao,  
Mosau Goli nunaiao,  
Angkhau bilaihor apha gosai,  
Angkhau bilaihor apha gosai.<sup>22</sup>

English rendering : "Donot give me in marriage to a house where the crows and the kites have easy access, O my father god (Gosai); give me in marriage to a house where the granary and the cowshed easily visible. O my father god (gosai)".

From the folk song it is clear that the Boros give much importance to the presence of the granary and the cow-shed in the family. They also believe that the crow and the kite enter to the house where Mainao (or Goddess of Wealth) does not reside.

The main house (nomano) is built on the north side, facing to the south. This main house is partitioned into three rooms. The first is known as knopra, the middle room is akhong and the third is known as the ishing. The first room Khopra is used as sleeping room of the unmarried girls of the household, the second room akhong is used as dining room and the third room ishing is used as kitchen. The Boros attach sacredness and sanctity to the main house nomano. The altar of god-in-chief Bāthou Borāi is placed in the ishing. The guest house is built in the form of the homestead and generally it is kept outside the inner compound of the homestead. The Boros call the guest house as chourano or nosuna, which the non-Boro Assamese people call as Chora ghar or Alohigar. The chourano or nosuna was used by the bachelors who sleep there in group, singing, dancing and merrymaking together.

The Boros also have platforms which they call chāngbānglā (Assamese: - Changghar) like the hill tribes and others have.

Formerly the Boros used a part of the main house nomano for cooking, but now they have an extra house to be used as kitchen. The Boros who still strictly adhere to the traditional beliefs and practices use the main house (nomāno) as the kitchen as well as the house of the altar of the god-in-chief Bathou Borai and the goddess-in-chief Bathou Buri or Māinao Buri. The Nomāno or the main house possesses only door and passage inside from one room to another room.

At the north-east corner of the courtyard and in front of the granary house, parallel to the room Ishing of the main house nomano, an altar about a foot high is built. At the altar the Sijau plant (Euphorbia Splenden) is planted. A little to the south of the Sijau tree a basil plant (tulansi) is planted. Around the altar there is a fencing of narrow pieces of bamboo split with nine pairs of small bamboo posts. The narrow pieces of the bamboo splits are twisted five times around the nine pieces of bamboo posts or splits. There is a small passage in front of the altar. The complete altar is known as Bathou, where the god-in-chief Bathou Borai is represented by the Sijau tree while the goddess-in-chief Bathou Buri is represented by the basil tulansi. The members of the family worship the Bathou Borai, and Bathou Buroi regularly everyday in the evening lighting a lamp on the altar.

**6. (F) Belief in the Sacredness of the main house Nomano :** As already mentioned, as to the belief



in the traditional faith of the use of a part of the nomano or the main house as the kitchen, they prepare food in the room called Ishing. As we have discussed that there is the altar of the Bathou Borai and Bathou Buroi in the room called ishing. 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 Boros believe that the creator of all things should be offered first any food before it is taken by themselves.

Just near the altar of the ishing an earthen jar is kept and it is known as maihando. In this earthen jar (maihando) two pieces of round stones are kept. They regard the two stones as the symbols of Bathou Borai and Bathou Buroi or Mainao, the goddess of wealth. The person who is engaged as the cook first salutes to the earthen jar by touching it and then takes out the rice (mairong) for cooking from the earthen jar.<sup>23</sup>

Any person, who is not a member of the household is not allowed to enter into the room ishing. The outsiders, who are not members of the same village or who are non-Boros are also not allowed to enter into the main house, nomano. It is still believed and practised by the believers of the traditional faith that the owner of the house is bound to offer a chicken to the Bathou Borai if any outsider enters into the main house nomano. They believe that if the owner does not offer the chicken and keeps silent, without disclosing the incident and does not pray to Bathou Borai, then there may some calamity occur.

#### 6. (G) Belief about the courtyard (Cisla) :

The Boros have great belief on the sanctity of the courtyard of the house. There are some restrictions in connection with the courtyard and if the restrictions are violated or neglected, then it is feared that it will bring great danger to the family. The following restrictions are very common :

(1) Crossing the courtyard by a man with an axe, a spade or a bamboo on the shoulder, or by a woman with a pitcher full of water is restricted. These are believed to bring great evil.

(2) If a dog moves along by dragging its buttock in the middle of the courtyard, then it is believed that misfortune may come to the family immediately.

(3) If the crow (dāokhā) or a vulture (sigun) leaves a piece of meat or the bone of an animal in the courtyard, then it is believed that some evil may come to the family. On the otherhand, if the vulture vomits in the courtyard then it is believed that the family may become prosperous.

(4) If a fox produces a cry in the courtyard then it is believed that some calamity is sure to appear in the family.

(5) If a person rebukes another person by trampling on the courtyard, it is clear that there is a great enmity between the two persons or families. Such type of enmity or dispute may lead to destruction of both the families.

(6) If a male member of the family walks in the morning through the middle of the courtyard which has not been broomed yet, then it is believed that the life span



of the person concerned may be short.<sup>23</sup> So, it is taken to be a common duty to the female members of the house to clean the courtyard with a broom early in the morning before the male members of the family are up from sleep.

(7) Occupation and Economy : Agricultural practices : *Beliefs and practices connected with agriculture* :

*Selection of site* : As agriculture is the main occupation of the Boros and their chief source of livelihood, there is among them a great number of beliefs and practices centering round agriculture. It is the custom of the Boros that they select a site for setting up a village after getting confirmation that there is a facility for agriculture. So, they select the field for agriculture first then they select the site for the dwelling houses. Along with the suitable site for agriculture, they also desire to have a grazing field for the cattle, a river or a beel for the purpose of fishing and a forest or a jungle nearby for the games and fuel. If they don't have any one of these facilities, they abandon the place and select another new site for their living.

For the successful agriculture the Boros select a field very carefully. They consider only the plain or table-land for the purpose of agriculture. The suitable soil for agriculture is called hāmā-hā (mother of all kinds of soil). They normally do not select the soil called Khāndinā-hā which has only limited suitability for cultivation. Another type of soil is called Hāshrāo-hā and it is not considered suitable for cultivation. Various classes of the land are identified considering the irrigation facility. If the cultivation is possible only by rain-water, then the land is called

Sharab-daria-ha. On the otherhand, the land where cultivation is possible with irrigation, the land is called jamphai-daria-ha. This type of land is regarded as the most suitable for cultivation. The Boros arrange irrigation facilities according to their own traditional idea, the people are especially skilful in the construction of irrigation canals and earth-work embankments for diverting water from river heads into their rice-fields.

About selection of the plot of land for agricultural purpose there is a popular song among the Boros of the Kokrajhar and Goalpara districts which they sing during the festivals.

Folk-Song :

*Ha ladangman agini khonā  
Masau lā dangman gong mena.  
Jāmphāi daria dariā mai gainaia,  
Dau jalangbai oma jalangbai,  
Makhou jabaono anglai,  
Makhou jabaono anglai,*

English rendering of the above song is as follows:  
*"A pair of the bullock with curved horns was pur-  
chased;*

*Paddy was planted at the plot of jamphaidaria  
land;*

*Birds and pigs have eaten all;  
Nothing has been left for me."*

The plot of land called agnikhona, (Assamese-agnikhona = Sans agnikona) is situated at corner place which is very low land surrounded by jungle and forests and for which birds and animals like pigs get the scope to spoil the crops.



### 7. (A) Beliefs and rites :

Restriction of the womenfolks to visit the paddy field after plantation is over : During the period after plantation and till the harvesting the Boro women are not allowed to visit the paddy field. They have a traditional belief that while the women visit the paddy field they exclaim shouting 'Aiyou' in surprise that the paddy is growing much. As a result they believe that the 'Mainow' (the Lakhimi in Assamese), the goddess of wealth, becomes angry and stops the growing of the paddy crops. Hence, the Boro women are not allowed to visit the paddy field and still they seldom visit the paddy field.

However, there is a legend among the Boros, how the traditional belief of restriction on the women folks to visit the paddy field originated. The legend is as follows :

'As soon as the human being and other creatures have been created, the 'Borai Bathou' or the 'Siva' to feed the human beings and other creatures had shown seeds of paddy at a very lonely and suitable place of the foothills. Knowing that the paddy was growing fast 'Bathou Buroi' or 'Parvati' wanted to visit the paddy field, but she was not allowed by 'Bathou Borai'. While 'Bathou Buroi' (Parvati) went alone secretly to the paddy field and as soon as she reached there she exclaimed shouting 'Aiyou', in surprise, because the paddy was growing beyond expectation, as a result the paddy could not grow more and the output was too poor. In Boro it is called 'Khuga nangnai'. Bathou Borai' rebuked 'Bathou Buroi' and since then the restriction on the women folks to visit the paddy field has been imposed.<sup>24</sup>.

### 7. (B) Beliefs and practices associated with various animals and birds, etc. :

(i) *The Cock and the Boro Society* : Cocks have an important place in the Boro society. As domestic birds cocks are used by the Boros as food as well as sacred object for sacrifice in the name of gods.

When a guest comes to the house of a Boro then a cock is killed for the meat to be offered with other things. The Boros consider it a discredit if they fail to entertain the guest with chicken. So it is customary to rear cock in the house.

For indication of time the Boro villagers follow the crow of the cock at different parts of day and night. The young girls also get up early, even before the dawn, following the crow of the cock for husking paddy. During the rainy season, when the time of paddy cultivation sets in, the Boro young tillers get up very early following the crow of the cock and go to the field with bullocks or buffaloes for tilling the field. The house-wives and other female members of the family also get up very early and prepare food for the tillers and thus the cock serves as the teller of the time.

During the time of worship of a village deity (ganimodai) or of a jungle-deity (hagrani modai) and of a river deity (doini modai), a cock is sacrificed to profanate the deity.

The Jol-khubir (or doini-khubir), a deity of the river or stream, is very fond of a red cock. If a person is attacked by the jol-khubir, a red cock must be sacrificed to the deity for recovery. The Oja chants the mantra holding the cock and in the half sitting position behind the



person who is ill and then the cock is sacrificed at the bank of a river or stream after a few days. The mantra runs as follows : *Zol Khubir, Kālā Khubir, Nol Khubir, Nongsorni phisā akhra dong, phisou akhra dong, nonsor bekhou adai-badai khalam, de nongshore amokhi eba amokhakhou adai-badai khalam nanggon, denang gabla phao phuja hogon ang.*<sup>25</sup>

(Meaning : Zolkhubir (Khubir of water), kalakhubir (black khubir), Nol khubir (khubir of the nols) Boga khubir (white Khubir), if he or she (the person afflicted) had kicked your children by mistake, you will advise him or her, if he or she recovers, I shall sacrifice a red cock to you.")

In order to satisfy Bathou Borai, the chief god of the Boros cocks are sacrificed along with goats, pigs, etc.

During the marriage ceremony of the traditional system of the Boros cocks and hens are essential. The marriage ceremony which is called hathasuni khurnai, cannot be performed without a cock and a hen.

(ii) Dove (Daothu) : If the dove sits on the roof of the main-house (Nomano) then it is believed that some calamity may befall on the family. The owner of the house gives alms (which is called cida and of Assamese Sidha) to the cowherds to avert the dangers.

(iii) Crow (Daokha) : When crow caws sitting on a tree and looking into the kitchen, it is believed that some guests or relatives may suddenly appear at the house. Caws of the crow also indicates omens.

(iv) Vulture (Sigun) : It is believed that a great danger is indicated when a vulture sits on the roof of the main house or enters into the house. It is the duty of the house

to pray to god of the house (noni modai) to avert the danger. The followers of the Brahma dharma arrange an ahuti and pray to god.

(v) Owl (Phesa) : It is believed that the cry of the owl at night indicates a great danger to the family.

### Origin of the tiger worship of the Boros :

The Bodos also worship the tiger-god (Bagh Raja) or the tiger king during the Bihu festival. The children, generally the cowherds, sing the following song and enjoy during the Bihu festival. The song is this :

"*Musā Rajā ornai nonga, saimā-Rangā arnāinongā jangno khinda horbla, mosau damra, bhera jagon, dambria joloi phehergon, laokhar gotho jung, gumgon, beng gon, jungno khinda horbla.*"<sup>26</sup>

English rendering : "The Musā Rajā (Tiger king) and wild dogs would not kill the calves if the owner of the cattle give alms to us (cowherds). The calf would become a strong bullock and the cow would produce offspring. We are cowherds (lao-khar-gotho), we shall take care of the cattle, we shall feed them in the grazing field, if we are given alms with rice."

As we have already seen in this chapter that there is a clan or group known as Mushahari among the Boros which is associated with the tiger.

There is a story about the origin of the 'tiger worship' in the Boro society, which runs as follows :

Once upon a time a couple of old man and woman planted crops in the forest. To protect their crops from the wild beasts they used to sit on a tongi (a high covered platform used for watching crops) and kept a watch on



the wild beasts. One day, a big tiger (man eater) came to that place, and seeing the couple on the platform (Boro-Baisang) for their coming down. The couple became afraid of the tiger and could not come down. By chance there came a cowherd from a distant place advised them to keep a cock and a goat at a little distance to distract the tiger. Then the cowherd arranged on behalf of the couple a cock and a goat and kept them tied at a place nearby. At dawn the cock crowed and the goat also bleated and the attention of the tiger was diverted towards goat and the cock. Then the old couple got the chance to come down and save their lives from the man-eater. The old couple then exclaimed with joy that their lives had been saved from the 'tiger-god'. The cowherds advised them to worship the 'tiger-god' (Musa Raja) regularly with sacrifices of goats and cocks.

Among the Koch-Rajbangshis of the Goalpara District there is a system of tiger-worship.<sup>27</sup> Sona Rai is the tiger god and he is worshipped by the Koch-Rajbangshis with great regards. This tiger-god is very popular in the western part of Assam. In the Assamese month of Puh the village children beg alms from door to door singing the song of the tiger-god.

### 8. Social offences (bad) in the Boro Society :

*The bād system and its practices* : The Boro term for offences of a social nature is bād. If some person does offence in the society particularly concerning moral turpitude, he is treated as a guilty person and is obliged to perform penance udrainai with some strict social customs. The Boro society follows some strict principles of morality.

The following rules about offences are strictly observed by the Boros :

(a) A person is taken as morally guilty (i) If he is engaged in illicit sexual relation with female relatives, such as mother, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, younger sister, elder sister, niece, the wife of the younger brother or any other close female relative, (ii) If he touches the body of the wife of his younger brother or of the elder sister of his wife; (iii) He is involved in bestiality and has sex relation with a bitch, a female pig or a cow.

(b) A man is also considered guilty if he is eating forbidden food, such as food left half-eaten by his own wife (c) Indulging in false accusation with the evil motive is also considered a social offence.

Traditionally the offences are divided into five categories : (1) *Agarbād*, (2) *Phongsloth bād*, (3) *Daokhibād*, (4) *Khawali bād*, and (5) *Khoulobādbād* Differences are grouped in different categories.

(1) *Agarbād* : (a) Incest, i.e. illicit sexual relation between related persons, (b) physical assault on one's own mother, father, grand-mother, or grand father, (c) killing of a cow; and (d) Illicit sexual relation with a person of tribe or community or a person belonging to a different religion, e.g. a person found guilty of any of these offences must perform penance under nine bows method of the society.

(2) *Phongsloth bād* : (a) If somebody touches the body of a young girl of any cast; (b) if some one cuts the tail or leg of a cow then the penance must be performed under the seven bows method.

(3) *Daokhi bād* : (a) This offence takes place if



some body eats the meat left half-eaten by a tiger or a vulture, (b) if somebody receives goats, pigs, cocks and pigeons in exchange of a cow; (c) if somebody eats beef; (d) if some one received money by cutting somebody else's hair; (e) if some one trades in earthen pots, skins of animals or fish; (f) if some one takes food prepared by persons other than of four Hindu castes, the Brahmin, Kalita, Baisya and Sudra. Then the person concerned must perform penance under the five bows methods.

(4) *Khaoali bād* : (a) If some body uses the coins or utensils given with the dead bodies; (b) if some one sells out the bulls or cow after the period of one year from the date of purchasing. The person must perform under the three bows methods.

(5) *Khoulobad bād* : If some one deliberately accuses somebody and puts blames on some others without any reason, he must perform penance in a simple way.

The penance system (*Boro-undraināi*) for any offence of agorbād is very exciting. The two persons, male and female, found guilty of the particular offence, are kept together in a naked condition in a thatched house built by the bank of a river with the door closed. Then the house is set on fire in penance by the villagers. The two guilty persons come out of the house breaking the temporary fencing of the house and jump in the river. Then they are given clothes while they are in the river. With their wet dresses they come up to the bank where an altar of the gods and goddess is prepared by the villagers for the performance of their penance. Bathou Borai and Bathou Buroi and the other gods and goddesses are worshipped with the sacrifice of a chicken in the name of Bura Bathou, before whom

the guilty persons kneel down in their wet dresses and pray for the sanction of forgiveness. Before the prayer in the name of Bura Bathou is made the guilty persons are given to take a little quantity of a mixture of cowdung, human excreta and the droppings of the pig which are kept ready. It is believed that the guilty persons become free from the sin if they are given to take a little of the mixture.

The mantra of the chant recited on the occasion runs as follows :

*"Aham Mahādeo Mahā Phardu are sar dongbāo; Āileng, Āgrang, Khoilā, Khanji, Rājphutur, Rājkhandra, Sang Rāja, Sang Rani, Burli Buri, Āi Mānasu, Ai Dibowli Ishingāo dongo Āi Māināo, Māothānsri dangbao; Khanasang Āiphor Āphāphor, mongthang monha Danilo modāi, nangā, orāi dinni modai, Amakhajong amakhijang dai nangdangman, Dinoi binino udraināi jābāi."*

*Jeroi dāi khālāmdangman bisharna bibadino sasthi hanai jābāi jang' arjang saolai, mansi khi, masoukhi, omakhini doi langhatāi jang bisorkhou, dāini giriā dāi khālāpāi Apha, nimāhāni giriā nongsor. Moiderā gābo odāl gudiāo, mansia gābo Māhādeo Mahāphorbuni Khāthiāo. Nimāhā hodo Āiphor Āphāphor, dinoiniphrāi dai daphor dahomsoi; nāhā moihā thāngblā dāidāngā hoanoi nan rakan maya jananoi sigi sogo dākhālāmsoi, Dohāide Āiphor, Āphāphor; Manni debotā mānāo thānāng gou. Gole gole Khulumo jango. (Gugurub khulumo).<sup>28</sup>*

English rendering : Aham, Mahadeo, or great Lord : Who are these?

Āileng, Āgrang, Khoilā, Khāji, Rājputur, Rāj Khāndra, Sang Raja, Sang Rani here; Bharli Buri Ai



Manah, Āidibaol-i are also there. In the Ishing Mother Goddess Lakshmi (Mainao) is there. Please listern, O mothers and fathers, you are not the gods of to-day only you are the gods of all 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, cowdung and the droppings of the pig. The wrong doers does the wrong and the authority of mercy should give mercy. The elephant crises at the foot of the Odal tree, while the human being cries before Mahadeo, the great Lord. Forgive, please, and from to-day may you not regard them as guilty if they go for fishing or hunting. Do not threaten them in disguise, please, mother and father, the gods of honour should remain in the honourable positions, we pray before you again and again" (All the present kneel down and pray).

After the prayer is over the guilty persons are given pure water (doi gothār) purified with nine pieces of dub grass, a small twig of basil and one gold-ring, with which they are purified. Then the same water is sprinkled on every house of the village and in this way the villagers also become purified. After a few days the vallagers arrange a Garja puja to keep the village safe from any danger in the near future.

Besides the system of penance the guilty persons are made to pay a fine ranging from rupees twenty five to rupees one hundred. The fine is realised equally from each of the couple. This system is applied in the case of agarbād offence only.

The followers of Brahma Dharma perform penances

according to the bād systems. But, so far as the method of performance of the penance is concerned, there is the system of charging penalty among the followers of bows-method. The system of performance is the same as it is done in the nine bows method, and seven bows method of the Brahma Dharma. Instead of performing penances under different methods, they are charged different fines at different rates as penalty for different offences. For offences grouped as phongsloth bād, a guilty person has to pay rupees ten and fifty paise to the village fund. For offences grouped under Daokhibād a penalty of rupees thirteen and fifty paise is charged and for offences grouped as Agarbād, a penalty of rupees twentyfive and fifty paise is charged. Although all Brahma villages have the system of charging penalty for any type of offence, the rate of penalty differs from village to village. Besides the payment of the penalty, a guilty person has to perform ahuti at his house.<sup>29</sup>

#### 9. Stories about the creation of the Bād system in the Boro Society :

*There are stories about how the bād system came into being in the Boro society. One story runs as follows :*

(i) At the earlier stage, just before the creation of the human society, the god Abanglowri, came down to this world along with his five sons. The youngest son was married in this world. Due to some unavoidable reasons all the five sons were sent back to heaven. In this world only the god Abanglowri and His youngest daughter-in-law Mangli were left. The old Abanglawri took advantage of his daughter-in-law with carnal desire. On the other



hand his daughter-in-law regarded her father-in-law, the old Abanglawri as her father and her guardian in the absence of her husband. Mongli could not bear the torture of the old Abanglawri and fled away from the house. The old father-in-law searching for his daughter-in-law, moving through the hills and dales for a period of long twelve years, but could not find her out. In the long run, after receiving an advice from the Almighty, he performed a kherai puja and got back his daughter-in-law, Mangli. The villagers, arranged a meeting to decide the case of the old man, Abanglowri as he was found to be living with his daughter-in-law, Mangli in the same houses for a long time. The case was taken up in the presence of Rang Rasi, Old Man (Brahma), Mansing-sing Borai (Mahadeva) and Mansing-Sing Baroj (Parbati), and it was decided that the guilty (Abanglawri) should perform penance under the fourteen bads method. Thus, the system of bād came into being in the Bodo society. The old Abanglowri arranged a feast with a kherai puja in the village, and then he was once again socially accepted by the villagers. In the meantime his five sons returned home from heaven. They heard the news of their father as soon as they arrived home. Their father, the old Abanglawri, being ashamed of his own conduct left the house as Jārāphāgla and went away dancing the dance of Jaraphagla.<sup>30</sup>

*Another story in relation to the creation of bād system runs as follows :*

(II) The story of chandra Baodia : There was a young and handsome Boro youth known as Chandra Baodia. He was also a great player of the Serja or Serenja (a kind of fiddle). Asagi and Baisagi were two young Boro

girls (sisters) of the same village to which Chandra Baodia belonged.

Chandra Baodia was a good horticulturist and an active cultivator. He possessed a big orchard at his home. Āsagi and Baisāgi used to steal away the fruits from the garden in his absence. To catch the thieves Chandra Baodia placed a trap at the garden of fruits. Āsagi and Baisagi were trapped and could not escape. Thus Chandra Baodia caught them red-handed. However, Āsagi and Baisagi were set free by Chandra Baodia himself. While setting them free from the trap, Chandra Baodia held them by their arms. That incident, however, remains unknown except to the two sisters and Chandra Baodia.

After this crows were heard to be cawing in the village. The Boros believe that the caw of the crow (Dawkha donda) in the village is evil omen. This is an indication of the dissatisfaction of the village deity (Gamini modai) or the occurrence of some illegal activity or illicit love affair between young boys and girls. The elderly persons of the village suspected that some of the young boys and girls were engaged in immoral acts without the knowledge of the villagers. They suggested to the villagers to arrange for a meeting and for taking immediate measures of remedy.

A public meeting was arranged in the village to find out the guilty persons, but nothing could be found out even after a prolong discussions. The procedure of taking the vow (Somai lanai) as prevalent among the Bodo was applied to all the villagers present in the meeting. The procedure was that a person either, boy or girl, has to chew some grains of uncooked rice and then he or she had to



take the vow that he or she was not involved in any illegal activities. While all other villagers did the same, Chandra Baodia and the two sisters could not do so, because of the fact that Chandra Baodia had touched the arms of the two sisters Āsagi and Baisagi while they were set free from the trap. Except touching their arms Chandra Baodia had done nothing more with the two sisters. But the elderly persons of the village could not believe their statements and they were still suspected, (touching of the arms of the unmarried girls was also treated as an offence.)

The meeting lasted for seven days and nights, but no solution could be done. In the long run, Man-Sing-Sing Borai, the oldest and wisest person, was invited from heaven to give them a solution. The Man-Sing-Sing Borai came down from heaven with the help of a golden ladder. The trial of Chandra Baodia and the two sisters under the guidance of Man-Sing-Sing Borai lasted for 12 (twelve) years and a solution could be arrived at. As a result of the prolonged discussion Man-Sing-Sing Borai suggested the introduction of the system of bād for the Boros. Thus the system of five Bāds came into being. These five bads are Agarbād, Phongslōth bād, Daokhibād, Khoulobad bād and Khaoualibad, as the five principles of trial for the Boro Kacharis. So it is said : Sijauni garanga garangba, Bathouni Budoa Bāndobā, Siphunghi gudungā dungbā, Boro Borāini raoa phonbā."

It means that the Siju ( or the uphorbia splenden) has five rinds, the Bathou (altar) has five wraps, the flute has five holes and Boro elderly persons have five principles. This saying also emphasises the importance of number of 5 (five) in the Boro ethos.

The case of Chandra Baodia and the two sisters was solved with the help of the principle of the bād suggested by Man-Sing-Sing Borai. After the trial was over they arranged for a big feast with pork (Boro-oma bedar) and rice-beer (Boro - jumai) which lasted seven days and nights, in honour of the Man-sing-Sing Borai and the villagers. Man-sing-sing Borai then returned to heaven with the help of the golden ladder.

#### 10. Socially recognised offence (Bād) :

There is a traditional belief among the Boros that if a female child is married to her father then the evil spirits or the malevolent gods do not touch her, because marriage between the father and daughter is extremely immoral and sinful. So it is believed that the child who is married to her father becomes so full of sin that even the gods and the evil spirits would not touch her. Thus she is believed to live long free from evils. This function is observed by the Boros if the parents regularly lose their children at a young age. In the case of a male child, he is 'married' to his mother. This traditional custom is still observed by the Boros of the Kokrajhar and Goalpara districts.

With the same purpose and with similar reasoning sometimes the newly born is given the food left over by a gangār or Bhutanese. It is believed that the child who is given such polluted food being left over by a Bhutanese becomes "untouchable" even to the Gods or evil spirits. As a result, the child will not die in the hands of the gods or the evil spirits.

The above beliefs connected with moral and social offences find a curious expression in some Boro cus-



toms and practices followed even today.

### 11. Definition of the Bow-method of penance (Dhanu Parachit) of the Boro Society :

If any person is convicted of charges of five categories as discussed above then he or she must perform penance under the dhanu parāchit (Boro-udrāināi). The guilty person offers a chicken to Bathou Borai. From the body of the sacrificed chicken some pieces of meat are detached and thrown to the sky with the help of a bow and arrow.

It is called three bows method (tin dhanu parachit) if three pieces of meat of chicken are thrown to the sky for three times and thus it is called five-bows method (Pas dhanu parachit), while five pieces of meat of chicken are thrown to the sky five times and seven bows-method (sat dhanu parachit) while seven pieces for seven times and nine bows method (noi dhanu parachit) while nine pieces of meats are thrown for nine times.

It may be referred to here that in the Hindu philosophy there is a system of penance by giving a gift of a cow to the Brahmin priest and it is called Dhanu Parachit (sans. Dhenu means cow.)



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## Part II.

### Marriage and Family Life of The Boros :

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2. The System of Marriage of the Boros.
3. Different Types of Marriage.
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9. Notes and References.



## **Marriage and Family Life of The Boros :**

**1. Introduction :** Marriage is a social system of the human beings. A man becomes social after the marriage. The social ties become strengthened with the help of marriage. Besides procreation and peaceful conjugal lives, the human beings are attached closely with the society. Thus the marriage institution is an important social system for the welfare and discipline of the human society.

### **The System of marriage of the Boros :**

As with all other societies the marriage ceremony is one of the most important ceremonies in the life-cycle of the Boros. Marriage is called Haba<sup>3</sup> by the Boros. In Boros 'ha' means soil or earth and 'ba' means to bear something on the back. So, haba means to bear the 'soil' or the responsibility of the earth on the back. The Boros use to mean by the word 'Haba' to bear a great responsibility on the earth. After the marriage a person enters into a circle of great responsibility. With the marriage ceremony the Boros give the newly married couple a new lesson which is full of duties and responsibilities.

### **Different types of marriage :**

The Boros have as many as six types of marriage. These are (i) *Sangnānoi lainai Hābā* (marriage according to standard practice) (2) *Gorjia lākhināi Hābā*, (3) *Khārsonnāi Hābā*, (4) *Bonānoi lāināi Hābā*, (5) *Donkharlangnai Hābā* and (6) *Dongkha Habnai Hābā*.

(1) **Sangnānoi lāināi Hābā :** This marriage is solemnised according to the standard social customs. According to this system of marriage the bride is selected



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 Boro society it is not compulsory.

(2) **Gorjiā lākhināi Hābā** : This type of marriage is regarded as an irregular marriage. It is solemnised at the house of the bride. 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-Boro Hindu societies. In Assamese it is called **Ghorjiā**. This system of marriage is rare in the present Boro society.

(3) **Kharsonnai Hābā** : In this marriage the bride enters into the house of the bride-groom 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.

(4) **Bonanoi Lāināi Hābā** : According to 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 Boro society. It is almost similar to the paisasa marriage of the Aryans.

(5) **Donkharlangnai Haba** : Although not approved socially, sometimes this type of marriage takes place in the Boro society. This is the marriage by elopement of both

the bride and bridegroom. This type of marriage is akin to the 'Gandharva' system of marriage of the Aryans. The mutual understanding between the bride and bridegroom is enough for this type of marriage. This is also a kind of irregular marriage system.

(6) **Dongkhā Hābnāi** : This system of marriage is approved by the Boro society. In this marriage the bride is a widow. If a man lives in the house of a widow as her husband then they are recognised as the husband and wife by the society. They are to perform their marriage according to the social customs. It is called '**Dongkhā Hābnāi**'<sup>4</sup>. This sort of marriage is very rare in the present Boro society.

#### **The stages of Boro Marriage :**

The entire proceedings of Boro marriage can be divided into three stages. (1) The first is the pre-marriage, or the selection of the bride, (2) the second is the marriage proper and (3) the third one is the post-marriage ceremony.

(1) Beliefs on some good and bad signs in connection with the selection of the bride among the Boros :

(A) **Bad signs** : (i) At the time of 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 party gets obstruction in putting the foot steps on the way, it is believed that the



marriage would be unhappy. (iii) If a mongoose (Neolai; in Boro and 'Neol' in Assamese) 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 the husband and wife. (iv) If the members of the selection party of the bride came across a dead body on the way, it is believed that either the husband or the wife may expire untimely.

(v) 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 that either the husband or the wife may die just after the marriage ceremony.

(vi) If a snake runs across the way in front of the selection party from left to right side of the party, it is believed that there may be separation between the husband and the wife. (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.<sup>5</sup>

#### **(B) Good sings :**

(i) If the bride is seen drying or un-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) by putting her left foot at the door, it is believed that the bride would be of auspicious nature bringing fortune to the family (grihalakshmi) and loyal to her husband.

#### **(C) Assessment of the character of the bride :**

The Boros believe that by observing the gestures and postures or the formation of the limbs of girl, her character and manners may be ascertained.

(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 angry nature. (ii) If the bride possesses large breast, the hips and her waist are equal in girth, the size of her breasts, it is believed that the bride would be fickle-minded.

The parents of a Boro boy are very conscious in the selection of a bride. They want to have such a girl as their daughter-in-law, whose nose is pointed, eyes are bright, teeth are small, the finger is well built and healthy, the face is bright and who has 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.

About the description of the girl whom the young Boro Boys desire to have as a bride, a folk-song is popular among the young boys of the Goalpara and Kokrajhar (North-West Goalpara District) Districts. The folk-song runs as follows :

"Mokhangão naibolã thārāilāi āgoi,  
Gonthangão naibolã narengsoo,  
Khanaião naibolã don Khaorāi,

Hathaião naibolã ákhāi miji,

Ágoi jarou agai phandang .....<sup>6</sup>

*English rendering of the song* : The face looks like the leaf of the wild cardamom (tharailai), the nose looks like the thorn of the acid fruit, the knot of hair looks like a small bamboo basket (Don)<sup>8</sup>, the teeth look like Indian corn, dear loving 'Jarou'.

In earlier days the Boro parents did not allow their children to select their own partners. They believed that the choices or the minds of the young boys and girls were quite temporary as the fire of thatches.<sup>10</sup>

#### **Selection of the bride and settlement of the marriage:**

At the time of selection of the bride the Boros follow some traditional customs. The party must consist either of five or three members only. The members of the bridegroom party carry a pair of silver bracelets (Āsān Shuri Jorase), a pair of silver coins of one rupee, a pair of areca nuts, betel leaves and a pair of rice-beer bottle (thakha gathang jorase, gojjora, pathoi jora aro jorase jau dingri) to the house of the bride at the time of settlement. The members of the bridegroom party leave these things at the house of the bride. The parent of the bridegroom explains the purpose of their visit indirectly before the parents of the bride. Here is an example :

"Jerão jwn nuw beo goi khithou garw,

Jerão thuri nuw beonw bathi garw,

Sānni giri Sānjā,

Bhumni giri Rajā,

Jwnni giri dātā,

Jerão jwn nuw beo goi khithou garw,

Jerão khet nuw beo daothu baw,  
Jerão thuri nuw beonw bathi dwnw.

Jālāi Jālāi phwr jālāi,

Guru thwilai sisya bārāilāi,

Dwima dwia rān lāngw res thālāngw,

Guru thwio sisya bārāiw,

Kālā garu dhāolā dudh,

Boro Borāini khwthāyā ashut-shut,

Janw rwngwi Mwkhrā, undwnw rwngwi bādāmāli,

Sijauanw gorongbā,

Bāthouānw bāndwbā,

Boro borāini rāwābo phongbā,

He bāb bhāiphwr, dinoidi bāhār bāthi

Lānāwi jo jādwnw, "Dāri mubrwi-Darimubāni"<sup>11</sup>

Phisaphor jo jadwnw, bikhounw bijirnanwi

Naidw Āphāphwr"<sup>12</sup>

The English rendering of the above expressions will be something like the following :

"The top portion of areca nuts are dropped where there is the female organ, just like a piece of stick is dropped where there is thatch, the owner of the sun is the East, the owner of the land is the king and the owner of the female organ<sup>13</sup> is the data or parents, while the master dies, the disciple increases, while the main river dries, tributaries are left out, the words of the Boro elderly persons are peculiar, the black cow gives white milk, it is the bat (badamali) who does not know how to sleep, the 'euphorbia' has five ridges, 'Bathou' has five knots and the Boro elderly persons have five words, with this expression the sons of the four to five yards bearded old man



have gathered together with the purpose which should be understood by you (the parents and relatives of the bride)"

The central idea of the above expression is that by describing the things of nature the parent of the bridegroom expresses the purpose of their visit to the house of the bride. The thatches are necessary for building a house. So, the person who searches for the thach drops a bamboo pole or stick at the field where there are thatches. The female organ or the female sex is necessary for the procreation purpose. Hence, the persons who are searching for the female sex drop the areca nuts at the house of the owner or the guardian of the female organ with the view to select the girl of the house to be the bride of a boy. It is the custom of the Boro people to express their purpose of visit to the house of a proposed bride indirectly.

The parents of the proposed bride donot give their opinions at the single approach of the party of the bridegroom. Sometimes 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'<sup>15</sup> try to convince the parents of the bride, after the priliminary discussion with the parents of the bride with the hope of success of their mission. Within a week from the date of the first approach of the bridegroom party the parents of the bride return the silver bracelets (Āshansuri) to the house of the bridegroom. Then it is understood by the parents of the bridegroom that the parents of the bride have no opinion to give their daughter in marriage. This is called 'Āshan phinnāi' or returning the bracelets. Then again the parents of the bridegroom approach the parents of the bride

for the second time and even sometimes they approach for the third time also. In earlier periods, there was the custom among the Boros to give pressure to the parents of the bride and compelled 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 geting 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. <sup>16</sup>

After the priliminary 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 (Jau, Oma bedar arw goi pathoi) in abundance. This ceremony is called 'nonainai'<sup>12</sup> In earlier days the Boro society observed this ceremony as a compulsory relating to the marriage. It is a 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. There is a popular song among the Boros relating to the condition of the bridegroom. Importance of the family condition of the bridegroom is taken into much consideration. The bride also desires to get a bridegroom whose economic condition is sound. The parents of the bride take the landed property of the bridegroom into account before giving their daughter to a person in marriage.

After obtaining the final consent of the parents of the bride, the parents of the bridegroom alter the previous relationship with the family of the bridegroom and assume

the new relationship. For this purpose a ceremony is held at the house of the bride. The parents of the bridegroom arrange a feast with pork (oma bedor) or chicken (dao bedor), (jau) rice-beer and rice and entertain the members of the bride's family along with the related persons. This ceremony is called 'Samanda Phirainai', or changing the relationship. The new relationship between the parents of the two families are known as 'Bibai' and 'Bijomaijo'.<sup>18</sup> From this day and onward the new relationship between the two families will continue.

Another pre-marriage ceremony is the 'Howa godan nainai'<sup>19</sup> or the interview of the bridegroom. After the final settlement, the bridegroom has to visit the house of the bride along with some of his friends. This system is still followed by the Boros. 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. This system is followed by the Boros of the Kamrup district and the Nowgong district. It is also believed that if the bride abstains from presenting the handkerchief or the scarf to the bridegroom then it is understood that the bride has got no 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 marriage. The settlement of marriage may be then cancelled.<sup>20</sup>

'Goi Khaonai' (cutting of areca nuts) :

The pre-marriage ceremonies are observed by the Boros according to their traditional customs. After the final settlement the members of the bridegroom party go to

the house of the bride with the 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 (jau) in abundance. In earlier days, the bridegroom party carry sufficient quantity of rice-beer (jau or Jumai) to the house of the bride and entertained the parents of the bride, relatives and the villagers.

Another important pre-marriage ceremony is called 'Gangkhan honai'. The parents of the bridegroom go to the house of the bride along with the silver bracelets one pair and leave them at the house of the bride. The Boros of Kamrup and Darrang districts take two bottles of rice-beer (jau) and leave them at the house of the bride. This is done to show the desire of the parents of the bridegroom to get the girl of a house as a bride. This ceremony is performed before the pre-marriage ceremony 'Goikhaonai'.

Before the final settlement of marriage is made there is a custom in the Boro society that the girl who is to be given in marriage advises her father not to give her in marriage to a very poor family. There is a folk-song about this custom and the song runs as follow :

"Oi phākri Bilāi chirilāi,  
 Āngkhou Dābilāi Āphā  
 Goshāi,  
 Dāokhā Hābnāi Noō,  
 Shoimā Hābnāi Noō'.

The English rendering of this song is almost like this : 'Oh, the falling leaves of the Indian fig tree, do not give me in marriage to a house, where the crow enters and the dog also enters freely; Oh, father God, "Goshai".'



**Bibān lāngnāi or the ceremony of carrying the bundle of commodities :**

This pre-marriage ceremony is performed compulsorily by the bridegroom party. Areca nuts and betel leaves (Goi aro pathoi) are essential for this ceremony. Two earthen pitchers (Hani thinkli gongnoi) are carried to the house of the bride. On the body of the two pitchers the sign 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'<sup>21</sup> and two girls or ladies (not widows) who are essential during the marriage ceremony, starting from the pre-marriage ceremony 'Bibanlangnai', are called 'Bairathi jora'<sup>22</sup>. 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 Barlangphas and 'Bairathis'. A person to be selected as 'Barlangpha' must be young, stout and jolly. If married, he must not be widower. In selection 'Bairathis' the same rules are followed. A girl or woman must be strong and handsome. If married she must not be a widow. The widow or widower person is called 'Khorō Goja' or headless by the Boros. No widow or widower is allowed to perform any auspicious work during the marriage ceremony.<sup>23</sup>

The 'Bibān' or the bhār (in Assamese) is placed by barlangpha in front of the main house, 'nomano' and other commodities are placed beside the 'Bibān' or the 'bhār'. The 'Biban guboi' consists of the two pitchers and which

is known as 'Ghaibhar' in Assamese. The 'Bibān' or the 'bhar' consists of rice-beer (jau), pork (Omā-bedor), areca nuts (goy) and betel leaves (pathoi). On the occasion of the Bibān a pig is cut equally into two parts, of which one part is given to the parents of the bride and the other is given to the house of the bridegroom. The divided part is called 'Omā-Khoptāng'. This work is performed by the 'Brlangpha'. The two girls or women known as 'Bairathis' cut the areca nuts and distribute them to the people. Along with the areca nuts they also distribute 'Jau' or rice-beer to the people who attend 'Bibān'. There is a system of distribution of the areca nuts. This system varies from place to place. The areca nuts distributed from three times to nine times. The pre-marriage ceremonies like 'goy khaonāi' 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 'Bibān' or 'bhār' 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 porks. After the ceremony is over the barks of the areca nuts are thrown on the roof of the main house 'nomāno'. This is known as the ceremony of 'Gay khithou gārkhonāi'. The barks of the areca nuts are to remain on the roof till the proper marriage ceremony is held.

Folk songs are sung during the pre-marriage ceremonies. The following songs are popular among the Boros of the districts of Kokrajhar and Goalpara.

(i) "Goy dedere, pāthoi sināri,



Dāobo khi sunoi, Dāothu khoro  
Henā dābā;

Khāo regāng khaobāi,  
Ja regāng jābāi."

The English rendering of the above song is almost like this : Areca nuts of the small size, (dedere), Betel leaves of the best quality (pathoi sinari) : White lime, as white as ordure of the heron (Daobo khi); with the knife of the size of Dove's head, the Bairathi have cut the areca nuts in abundance and all have eaten joyfully to the hearts content.

(ii) While the Bairāthis distribute the areca nuts, the members of the bride's party insult them for delaying in distribution and sing the following song :

'Oi Bairathi loliā, khāono

Babangsin goy Khāonāikhou jong jāliā

The English rendering of the above song is like this :

'O lazy Bairathi (selected girls or women for cutting and distributing areca nuts, we shall not eat the arecanuts which have been cut by you unmindfully".

The same two 'Bairathis' and one '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 'Bibān lāngnāi' ceremonies are over another important pre-marriage ceremony 'Khabirā lāngnāi' is performed. The parents of the bridegroom alongwith some villagers (elderly persons) 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. The dimasakacharis call this function as the 'Gulum Gasa Naiba'<sup>24</sup>

The Boros of North Bengal and Goalpara district of Assam prefer the Assamese month of 'Phāgun' for the marriage ceremony. They never solemnise the marriage ceremony in the month of 'Chat' or 'Chaitra'. There is a folk song about the selection of the time for the marriage ceremony. The Boro ladies sing the song and dance together : Haba junglāb, Junglāb. Sānbā golāoni dināo, Aioi Sānbā golāoni dināo". The central idea of the song is that the enjoyable marriage junglāb takes place during the period while the days are long-(During the month of 'Phagun'.)

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.<sup>25</sup>

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'<sup>26</sup> 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 'Bārlāngphā', two Bairathis, few girls and women and some elderly persons. The 'Bibān' or the 'Bhār' is carried by 'Barlānpha' and he was assisted by some



young persons of the party. The 'Bibān'<sup>27</sup> consists of the two jars of rice-beer (jau), 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 bridegroom's party has to entertain the villagers of the bride's village with the commodities they have carried with them. The Bairāthis distribute areca nuts several times. The villagers enjoy very much attending the feast which is full of porks, rice-beer, areca nuts and betel leaves. Besides the young girls the elderly women also dance. 'Barlangpha' and 'Bairathis' take the main roll in the performance of dance before taking away the bride from the house of her parents. The two 'Birathis' are dressed in new traditional dresses (dokhnā thāosi)<sup>28</sup> which are designed beautifully. They also use uniform scarfs (jumgra). In the districts of Kamrup and Darrang the Boros make the marriage ceremonies more festive with the help of the two 'Barlangphas' and four 'Bairathis'. Their main functions are to dance, distribute rice-beer (jau) and areca nuts and betel leaves (goi-pathoi) They are engaged by the parents of the bridegroom. They perform dance at the house of the bride. While they dance, it is the custom of the Boros of Kamrup and Darrang districts, a piece of Soil (turf) is tied with the body of 'Barlangpha'. A cut-off head of the pig is also given to 'Barlangpha' to be tied on his back

while he dances. In the district of Goalpara also there is a custom-among the Boros to tie a piece of soil (turf) with the body of 'Bairathis', while they dance. They believe that by giving the piece of soil to be tied with the body the bridegroom and the bride are given the lesson that they have undertaken a great responsibility of the earth after the marriage. In Boro 'Ha' means soil or earth and 'Ba' means to carry something on the back. So, the word 'Haba' (Ha+ba = Haba) or the marriage bears the meaning of carrying the soil on the back. It signifies that after the marriage a person bears a great social or earthly responsibility. Next, they also believe that if soil is given to 'Bairathis' to be carried then the bride bears the child after marriage.

While the bride is about to be taken away from the house of her parents, the old women and related persons console the bride with the folk-songs. The following are the popular folk-songs of the Boros :

1. "Dāgābcoi ayoi dāgābcoi, dāgābcoi,  
Omā gidira Boro Khurmāni,  
Phicā hinjāoā mālāini;  
Dāgābcoi āyoi dāgābcoi,  
Gābhla khublālo noma nomphakhou  
Manliā,  
'Mephal', 'Gongar'<sup>29</sup> no horākhoi,  
Boroni acar, Boroni bicarzung  
Boro hārino hordong, hordong  
Rāizo zanoco;  
Gābnāi khunāikhou nagārnānoi,  
Ānān gocay Binān gocaykhou  
Cibinānoi, athing gazol, ākhāy  
Nārzob khālāmnānoi rongza bāzā



Māoi dangoico rayzo zādo<sup>30</sup>

The English rendering of the song is likely as follows : "Donot weep, dear donot weep, the petted pig is for kith and kin, a grown up girl like-wise, is for others, no weeping or solicitation, can keep you in your parents home. You have not been given to a Nepali or Bhutiya, but to a Boro youth, to live in Boro customs and ways; forbear from weeping, dear, pray instead to God, and work and live a happy family life".

(ii) "Noi lāngnoshi lāngnoshi,

Dāo gograni dāo-jakhou,

Dāgābshoi ai phicā hinjāo,

Nangkhon buthārno sithārno lāngākhoi,

Lāngdong nongkhon maoui dangoi

Raija jāno".<sup>31</sup>

English rendering of this song is as follows : "The hen of the poultry house (the girl of the parents house) is about to be caught and taken away, donot weep dear daughter do not weep, you are (the bride) not taken to be killed, rather you are taken to lead a conjugal life doing domestic works".

Thus the relatives mainly the related elderly women advise the bride before she is taken away by the bridgroom party. They compare the bride with the young hens of the poultry house.

The elderly women advise her that the earthly life is not so easy to be peaceful. To lead the earthly life peacefully one has to live with the relatives as other creatures also do. Here the following folk-songs are popular among them ;

(III) "Khoijama"<sup>32</sup> thabo khoudijang,

Mansia thayo go giathijang';

Dāgābsoi āiyoi dagabsoi,

Nomā-nomphāyā dāo omābādi

Homna harbai.

Dāgābsoi āiyoi dāgābsoi.<sup>33</sup>

English rendering of the above song is likely as follows : The red ants make their nests with their saliva (Khoudi), the human beings live with relatives; donot weep dear, donot weep, your parents have given you to others catching you like the hen or the pig.

In advising the bride the elderly women cite the example of the creatures like the red ants who are very united and who make their nests with the help of their salivas (khogdoi or khoudoi). They also cite the mereyless activity of the parents who donot dare to give their daughter (bride) to others catching her like the hen (daoja) or the pig (oma) from the house.

Again, advising the bride to lead a peaceful conjugal life, walking carefully, speaking carefully, controlling the tongue and teeth, tolerating others, making no quarrel with others,

They sing the song like this :

(iv) "Āthing gājob, hāthai arjob,

Ākhāini phāowā jāyākhoi,

Āthingni phāwā jāyākhoi,

Rāijo phāthālkhou jāhoida āiyoi

Jāhoido"<sup>34</sup>

English rendering of the above song is likely as follows :

"Place your foot-step carefully, control your teeth (hathai); keeping your footstep in right place, keeping the



movement of your hands properly, lead a happy conjugal life, dear."

Thus the elderly, women, who are related with the parents of the bride advise the bride before she is taken away by the bridegroom's party. The bride is made up with the new dresses, "Dokhnā Agar" (embroidered female dress), 'Sona' (ear-ring), ashan suri (bracelets) which are offered by the bridegroom. Then the bride is taken away from the house of her parents by the members of the bridegroom. While the bridegroom's party starts movement from the house of the bride the appointed persons of the bridegroom's party 'Barlangpha' and the 'Bairathis' are asked to dance. Here is a folk-song, how they are asked to perform dances as follows :

(v) "De āiphor de,  
Eshe āthingni phāo,  
Eshe ākhaini phāo,  
Khintādo de, khintādo de,  
Hāilalāi huilālai moshado de,  
Ishing khonāni dāo jakhlikhou  
Homnānoi lābobai jang.  
De eshe rangjādo de,  
Doshe akhaini, athingni phao khitado de <sup>35</sup>

English rendering of the above folk-song is likely as follows :

"Move your legs, move your hands.  
Show the movement of your  
Bodies dears, dance moving  
Your bodies as freely as possible,  
We have brought the hen (bride)  
From the inner most room (Ishing),

You dance, move your hands and  
Feet, enjoy, dears."

The bridegroom's party as well as the bride's party arrive at the house of the bridegroom along with the bride. As soon as the bride arrives with the party, she is welcomed by the members of the bridegroom's family and the villagers and after washing her feet with the water which is kept ready at the front gate of the house. Then the bride is led to the main house. In some areas of the Kamrup and Darrang districts even in the Goalpara district there is a custom of purifying the bride before she is led into the main house (nomano). She is purified with the holy water which is also kept ready by the 'Douri'<sup>36</sup> After purification she is asked to cross a burning earthen lamp (alaribathi) breaking it with her feet into pieces. It is believed by the Bodo people that if the bride can break the earthen lamp into pieces then she is believed to be a child bearing after marriage and if she fails then she is believed to be childless one. This custom is not followed by the Bodos of the Goalpara and Kokrajhar districts as a regular practice.

At the house of the bridegroom a big feast is arranged on the occasion of the marriage. Among the items porks and rice-beer (jau) are supplied abundantly. A big pig is cut into two pieces equally. Out of these two pieces a piece is given to the bride's parents. The bride's parents and the members of the bride's party leave the house of the bridegroom just after the feast is over. They take along with them the half portion of the pig, two jars of rice-beer, areca nuts and betel leaves.

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 porks to their hearts' content. There is a custom of mutual help or co-operation among the boros. During the marriage ceremony the villagers co-operate with the parents of the bride or bridegroom by supplying rice-beer for the feast. Thus after enjoying the feast at the house of the bride's parents the villagers go back to their respective houses. The feast at the house of the bride's parents after leaving the bride at the house of the bridegroom, is called 'Agan gakhomarnai'<sup>37</sup> or to rule the foot prints.

At the house of the bridegroom there is another premarriage function and it is called 'Bewai bakhannai angkham' or lifting the husband of the younger sister. This is also not so popular practice in the Goalpara and Kokrajhar districts. At this function, the elder sister of the bride jockingly lifts up the bridegroom from the back side. 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.<sup>38</sup>

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 Boros is called 'Hāthāsuni khurnāi'. The Boro believers of the traditional customs and practices perform the marriage according to the system of 'Hāthāsuni Khurnāi'

## Marriage proper :

*The traditional system of marriage, 'Hathasuni Khurnai' :*

The earliest and traditional form of marriage is called 'Hāthāsuni Khurnāi'. 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 rice and curry prepared with the dust of rice (uncooked) and chicken without applying spices and colour. This is called in Boro 'Ondlakhari'. After taking a little portion of the meal 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). She kneels down before the altar of the god and goddess and pray. The meal is placed on the leaf of banana. While the bride prays, a 'Deuri' enchants the 'Montra' (formula), introducing the bride to the god and goddess. The mantra or formula runs as follows :

"Āhemde, shunnigiri shānjā,  
Modāinigiri Bura Bāthou Mahārajā ;  
Dainigiria dai khālamblā,  
Nimāhāni giri nong,  
Jangni mojang gajri,  
Nidān āphāt, rog biādiniphrai,  
Phatanhgraya nongno,  
Noi donoī phiphā guru,  
Amokhya amokhikhou bihamja



Labobai donoi bini nongno  
 Gothāroi ākhai laru angkham angkhri  
 Hanai jabai, najaodo āphā nong phiphā  
 Gurua, bihamjani munga amokhi ...  
 Shāmphrāmba sukhui sukh lakhi,  
 Apha nongno phāo phujā monbāithagan,  
 Donoi hathasunini phāophujā hadong  
 Āphā nongthangā mini khusioi najāonānoi,  
 Bor 'ashirbād' hodo  
 Dohāi apha phiphā guru, Janghalai swar  
 Dongbāo, nāilo jālo nong phiphā gurulo,  
 Gole gole khulumo jong' <sup>39</sup>

English rendering of the above 'mantra' is as follows : "Ahemde, the east is the origin of the sun, the origin of the Gods and goddesses is the "Burah Bathou Maharaha", if the offender does offence, you are the authority of forgiveness, you are the rescuer of us from any danger, diseases, Father, Master, (Guru), Shri ..... (name of the father of the bridegroom) has brought Shrimati ..... (name of the bride) as his daughter in law and for this, today, you have been offered this pure meal (rice and curry), you will accept this offer, Father-Master (Guru); name of the daughter-in-law is Shrimati ....., (name of the bride) keep her in peace every day, you will get puja or offers regularly; to day 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 bride offers the same prayer before the God-

dess in-cheif, 'Ai Kāmākhāya' or the 'Bāthou Burāi' just after the prayer in front of the 'Bāthou Borai' is over. Then the bride has to touch the earthen pitcher or jar where the rice is stored. The earthen-pitcher is called 'Māihando' in Bodo and it is kept in the room 'Ishing'. She has to take promise touching the earthen-pitcher to lead a peaceful conjugal life with her husband. The elderly persons and the deuris advise the bride as well as the bridegroom to do their respective responsibilities towards the family. <sup>40</sup>

At the end, after adivises are given to the bride and bridegroom, the meal, which is prepared in the name of the 'Hāthāsuni Khurnāi' the traditional marriage, is served to the villagers present at the marriage. Before serving the villagers the bride serves the bridgroom first and then she distributes the meal to the villagers present at least one time. Then the main function of the marriage 'Hāthasuni Khurnāi' comes to an end.

The feast of the marriage continues at least for three days. During these three days, rice-beer and porks are supplied in abundance. In earlier days, the feast is reported to be continued for five to seven days. During the feast men and women, both young and old dance together while 'Serja' (a kind of four stringed violin), 'Siphung' (Flute) and 'Gangana' (jew's herb) are played on. They donot sleep during the night. They also perform 'Thakripalla' a competition of dance and song amongst the participants in the marriage ceremony.

Importance of 'Jau' (rice-beer) and 'Oma bedor' (porks) was very great in the earlier period's marriage ceremony of the Boros. A large quantity of 'jau' or rice-beer is prepared and stored well a head of the ceremony. A num-

ber of earthen-pitchers of big size which the Boro people call 'Dābkhā' or 'Māldāngā' are used for storage of rice-beer.

During the marriage ceremony two healthy persons were engaged for mixing up the rice-beer, to make it ready for use. These two persons are called 'jau sirgra' or the persons who mix up rice-beer with water. Before mixing the rice-beer is taken out from the 'Dabkha' (Earthen-pitcher) and is kept in a 'Doongshu' (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 'jāntha'. Then the 'filtered jau' is distributed by the persons called 'jaurangra' 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'<sup>41</sup>

The marriage ceremony of the Boros is very festive one. It is, however, clearly understood from the following folk song that the marriage of the earlier days was more festive than of to day. This popular song brings out the splendour and abundance of the marriage ceremony of earlier days and also sadness at their disappearance to day :

"Godoni dinā bojong thangko?  
Angkhāmnī āli, bedorni ākhāi,  
Jauni phakhriā goiliāloi bājoi,

Gailiā, Gailiā .....<sup>42</sup>

English rendering of this song is likely as follows: Where those days have gone, when there were ridges of cooked rice, abundant meat, just like the fried paddy, abundant rice-beer just like tankful water, all these things are no more, elder sister-in-law, no more to-day." "The Boro youngsters sing this folk song during the marriage ceremony, Musical instruments like 'Serja' (a kind of violin), Siphung (flute) and Jotha (cymbal), are played on during the marriage ceremony.

During the marriage ceremony the rice-beer (jau) is supplied abundantly. The elderly persons, generally the elderly women try to find out the wrong at the service of the bridegroom and his persons who serve the people during the ceremony. If they find the rice-beer not to be sufficient they insult the bridegroom through songs. Here, the following popular folk-songs are sung by the elderly women during the marriage ceremony :

(i) "Ukhum beshani shilimālā,  
O aiyoshilimālā,  
Oi howā majāng,  
Nangni hābāni jauālai melemā, melemā,  
O aiyoi, melema"<sup>43</sup>

English rendering of the song is likely as follows :

"The cockroach of the roof,  
O Mother cockroach,  
O good bridegroom,  
Rice-beer of your marriage is not  
sufficient, O Mother, not sufficient"

If the rice-beer is of sour taste then also the elderly women insult the bridegroom. They sing the follow-



ing folk-song:

(ii) "Enjur Khonani gamathing,

O aiyoi gamathing,

Oi howa majang, nangni habani

Jaualai Khoithing thing." <sup>44</sup>

English rendering of the song is likely as follows :

"An insect (gamathing) of the corner of the wall, O mother, an insect (gamathing), O good bridegroom, the rice-beer of your marriage is of sour taste, o mother, sour taste".

Thus, the elderly women of the village, where the marriage ceremony is held, sing the folk songs insulting the bridegroom for some defects and deficiencies found during the feast of a marriage.

During the marriage, 'Hāthasuni khurnāi' the bride and bridegroom have to address separately the God-in-chief, Bathou Borai and other gods and goddesses. Here the following mantra or formula is used by the bridegroom at the time of prayer : (i) "He, Āiphor Āphāphor, khanasong, Khanasong, donoi ang amuk gamini manao gidir amukni phisaja gidir amukshi khiou haba lanai jabai ang, bini thakhai apha Bāthou raja nangthangkhon sakhī dannanoi ai bima Lakshikhon sakhī dannanoi bima saraswatikhon sakshi dananoi aro sarini modaiphor nangthang mankhon sakshi dannanoi Bathou makhangao jananoi, thaiso thangsa raija jano thakhai juri labai ang. Jadi hābā lananoiba be lakshi hinjaokhon nagarnanoi malaikhon hasthaibaoblā ba borainanoi jobaobla jera hana hagon, jobrā janthā, khuria-buthia khalaina hagan. Bini khaina ang be hinjao jangna thoisā thangsa raija jagan. Saithi saithi tini saithi, sat balate pranane marat. Samai labai ang; khuluma aiphor āphāphor."<sup>45</sup>

English rendering of the above mantra is likely as follows : " O, mothers and fathers, you will hear please hear, to-day I have married Shrimati ..... (name of the bride), daughter of Shri ..... (name of the father of the bride) of the village ..... (name of the village of the bride). For this purpose, keeping your, 'Bāthou Rāja' bimā lakshmi, bimā Saraswati, and all other gods and goddesses as witness, sitting in front of the altar of the 'Bathou', I have accepted her as my wife to lead a conjugal life till death; if I accept another girl as a wife neglecting her (lakshmi wife) then you will be able to charge me, curse me to be attacked by diseases like leprosy. So, I promise before you all that I will lead a peaceful conjugal life till the death. "I bow and salute you mothers and fathers." Like the bridegroom, the bride also has to pray before the gods and goddesses enchanting the mantra or formula as follows :

(ii) He, āphāphor āiphor khanāsong khanāsong khanāsong danai āng (amuk) gāmini manao geder (amukhni) phisajla gider ba gibi manao geder (amuk) khon ang haba lanai; bini thākhai āphā Bāthou rājā nang Biphāyā sākhi thāda; ai bimā lakshmi, ai bimā saraswatia sakhi danbāi. danai nangthang mankhauha aro munusu maya, thangphang laiphang, pakhi phodom phar khouba sakhi dannanoi Bāthou Makhangāo jananoi Somai layo ang. Saithi Sathi tini Saithi sat balate pranated marat, samai labai ang, ang judi be hauajang haba jananoiba malai hawakhon baraibaobla angkhon jobrā janthā khalamno hagou, khuriā buthiā khalāmno hāgou, ang thoisā thangsa be bawajangna raija jagan āng, khuluma, āiphor āphāphor"<sup>46</sup>



## Marriage according to the Brahma Dharma (Brahma Religion) :

The Boros of the Brahma Dharma (Brahma religion) perform the wedding ceremony in a reformed way. Their systems slightly differ from the traditional system of marriage. Of course, they have not given up all the traditional customs of marriage. Almost all the traditional customs of the premarriage ceremonies are followed by them. They have discouraged the use of rice-beer (jau) and pork (oma bedor) during the ceremony. At present, tea has taken place of rice-beer (jau) and the use of pork (Oma bedor) is not compulsory.

Now a days, during the marriage procession the modern "Band Party" is preferred to the traditional musical instruments like "Serja" (four stringed instrument). Siphung (a long bamboo flute) and jotha (cymbal). The use of 'Dhula' or 'Duhula' Dhulia in Assamese during the marriage ceremony is very rare at present. They welcome the bridegroom party with the bandparty when the bridegroom approaches the house of the bride for the wedding. The bridegroom is welcomed ceremonially at the gate of the house. His feet are washed with water and sometimes he is bathed and after applying scented hair oil by the younger sister of the bride, combs his hair and let him put on a new garment. Then he is blessed by the mother of the bride by applying a 'tilak' on his forehead. During this brief ceremony a wooden sitting tool called "Gambari Khamplai", made of the 'gambari wood' is used. Then the bride groom is led to the main house (nomano) along with his party. Till the time of the marriage the members of the

bridegroom's party have to sit together at the court-yard specially arranged for them. The sitting accommodation prepared for them is called 'Affat'. At first they are served with the tea and the Indian corn (muri). Sometimes it is seen that the members of the bridegroom's party are given dinner before the marriage takes place. The bride and bridegroom are not given the food before their marriage.

The bride and bridegroom are taken to the altar of the 'Yajna' which is called 'Mandap'. While they are led to the 'Mandap' or the altar of the 'Yajnahuti', the young boys raise slogans like, "glory glory to the new bride and groom" (jai hinjaw godan, howa godanni jai), The bands are played on, they also light torches made of jute and a bamboo stick. Both the bride and bridegroom are given seats in front of the fire of the 'Yajna' facing towards the east. The priest who is called 'Purohit' starts the function of the wedding. At the outset the father of the bride prays to the God standing before the blazing fire of 'Yajnahuti' (homage) enchanting the mantra of the 'Brahma Gayatri'. The mantra or formula of welcome of the 'Brahma Gayatri' is as follows :

"Om aiahi barde devi trayakshare  
Brahma badini Gayatri Sandasung  
Matoh Brahmajani nomohastute"<sup>47</sup>

English rendering of the above mantra is likely as follows : "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. The purohit or the priest starts the formula first then he is followed by the father of the bride. En-



chanting the formula he salutes the blazing fire of the Yajna every time while he finishes the formula. After enchanting the formula of addressing the God, the father of the bride offers the mixed corns to the fire. While he offers the mixed corns to the fire he has to enchant the formula of 'Ahuti'. The formula of Ahuti is as follows :

"Om barde devi paramjyotih  
Brahmane Suaha".

"Om Sarasar Brahmane Suaha,

"Om purna parombrahma jyoti Svarupayo  
Suaha".<sup>48</sup>

English rendering of this formula is likely as follows :

"I offer this corn to you,  
Who is the light of lights and  
Who blesses us;  
To you, who is present  
every where with both movable  
and immovable thing,  
Who is the full Brahma,  
and who is visible  
as the light".

Thus, after offering the corns to the fire the father of the bride prays to the God for blessings to the bride and bride-groom. He declares before all that he has offered (sampradan) his daughter to the bridegroom keeping the fire as witness.

Then the bride and bridegroom enchant the 'Gayatri mantra' separately and again jointly, under the guidance of the 'Purohit'. They also offer the mixed corns enchanting the above mentioned 'mantra of Ahuti'. Then

they pray for the blessing of the God.

After the prayer of both the bride and bridegroom is over, there is a function which is called 'Ashirbād' (blessings). While the relatives and friends of both the bride and bridegroom offer blessings in the form of presentations of articles, ornaments, coins and rupees. At the very outset, the parents of the bride offer blessings, while they are followed by others. They also pray to God by offering mixed corns called 'Prasada' to the fire for the peaceful conjugal lives of the newly married couple. During the function 'ashirbad' (or blessings) the band is played on in a mild tune. The persons who are the seniors to the bride or bridegroom wave the 'Chalangi bathi' over the heads of the bride and bridegroom. While the function of 'Ashirbād' is over, the purohit concludes the main function of the marriage of the followers of Brahma Dharma, with a few slogans in the name of the 'Brahma' and the newly married couple.

The bride and bridegroom along with their friends, two 'Bairathis' who carry the 'chalangibathi' walk round the fire three to seven times from right to left and they are led by the 'Purohit' (the priest) till they enter into the main house (nomano). Inside the main house (nomano) the 'Purohit' and other elderly persons advise the newly married couple on their responsibilities. As this time, just after the advice given, all the present are entertained with tea. The bride is asked to serve the present by distributing tea. The young sisters joke the bride and make merry. After taking tea, the 'Purohit' the bridegroom and the bride also take the dinner. All other persons who attend the marriage ceremony are also entertained with the dinner.



The system of realisation of the phon thakha<sup>50</sup> (bride price) is another important custom of the Boro society. This system is almost no more in the present society. In earlier days the realisation of the phon thakha was common in the Boro society. The rate of the phon thakha also was unlimited. It was said to have been more than rupees one thousand. Later, the rate has been fixed at rupees one hundred and five only. Gradually, the phonthaka (bride price) has been discouraged and in the present Boro Society it has become a nominal one. There is no dowry system among the Boros as it is common among the non-Boro Hindus of other parts of India.

The system of offering the nominal phonthakha is still prevalent among the followers of Brahma Dharma. While the 'Affat' (or sitting together) is going on, just before the marriage, the parent of the bridegroom offers the father of the bride a pair of areca nuts and betel leaves and two coins of rupee one (Goijora, pathoijora aro jorase thakha gohang) on a leaf of the banana, after saluting him. The father of the bride accepts areca nuts, betel leaves only and returns the two coins of rupee one. It means that he has not accepted the phonthakha.

There is another system of collection of 'Malsa' from the parents of the bridegroom. The rate of 'Malsa' differs from area to area. In some villages 'Malsa' is realised to the tune of Rs. 2.50 (Rupees two and fifty paise) and in some villages it is realised at Rs. 5.00 (Rupees five). At the time of collection of 'Malsa', two clans or Gatrass like 'Sibingari' and 'Sobaiari' are taken into consideration. If the bride belongs to 'Sibingari' (Sesame), the amount of 'Malsa' would be less, and if she belongs to 'Sobaiari', the

amount would be double of the amount of 'Sibingari'

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. The members of the house of the bridegroom get ready to welcome the bride and the bridegroom.

Before entering the main gate of the house the bride and bridegroom are welcomed by the persons of the bridegroom with the bandparty and the two 'Bairathi' with the 'chalangi bathis' in their hands, while the youngsters dance and raise slogan like "jai, Jai hinjao godan, howagodanni Jai", (glory, glory, of the new bride and bridegroom). Then the feet of the bride as well as of the bridegroom are washed by the younger sisters of the bridegroom and they are led to the main house (nomano). On the very day, the bride and bridegroom arrive after marriage, a big feast is arranged at the house of the bridegroom. All the relatives and friends of the bridegroom are invited to attend the feast. There is a provision of meat or fish in the feast, although it is not compulsory.<sup>51</sup> such a feast is held on the day of marriage also if the marriage is held at the house of the bridegroom,

So, it is clear to understand that the Boros of the Brahma Dharma perform the marriage ceremonies either at the house of the bride or the bridegroom. It is generally seen that the marriage is performed at the house of the bride if the economic condition of the parents of the bride is sound. However, it is said that the Boros who are the followers of Brahma Dharma desire the marriage ceremony to be held at the house of the bridegroom. In earlier days, the Boros performed the regular marriages at



the house of the bridegroom.<sup>52</sup>

The important after-marriage ceremony of the Boros is athmangal.<sup>53</sup> It is performed on the eight-day of the marriage ceremony at the house of the bride's parents. It is a very brief ceremony, and not a big feast is arranged on the occasion. Only a few selected persons generally related are invited to the ceremony. After the ceremony the bride and bridegroom come back to the house of the bridegroom along with the articles of presentation which they receive from their friends and relatives on the occasion of their marriage ceremony along with the articles presented by the parents of the bride.

Some irregular marriages, which are socially recognised among the Bodos, may be discussed here. 'Kharsonnai and Donkharlangnai' both are irregular marriages. Another irregular marriage, which is no more prevalent in the present Boro society, is the 'Dongkha habnai' or Dhoka system of marriage.

(i) Kharsonnai hābā : If the bride enters herself into the house of the bridegroom with or without the consent of her parents, the marriage is held very briefly at the house of the bridegroom. This type of marriage is called Kharsonnāi hābā. The formalities of the regular marriage are not required in such a marriage. If the bridegroom belongs to the traditional beliefs or religion then the marriage is performed according to the traditional system of marriage 'hathasuni khurnai' and if he belongs to the 'Brahma Dharma' then it is performed according to the system of 'Brahma Dharma'. In this type of marriage also the consent of the parents of the bride is obtained before the marriage. This type of marriage is generally held among

the poor and illiterate families.

(ii) Donkharlangnai : or the marriage by elopement :

If the bride and bridegroom run away from their houses without the notice of their guardians, their marriage is performed after their return to the house of the bridegroom. This type of marriage is not encouraged by the Boro Society. It is called Donkharlangnai or marriage by elopement. To perform this kind of marriage both the parties of the bride and bridegroom have to pay penalties to their respective village societies. Because, run away or elopement of the unmarried boys and girls is always treated as illegal and unsocial by the Boro society. After the payment of the penalty and a social trial in the village, the marriage is performed in a very simple way.

(iii) Donkhā hābnāi or Dhoka system of marriage :

Although the Boro society recognises the Dongkhā hābnāi or 'Dhoka' system of marriage, it is very rare in the present Boro society.

If the husband of a woman dies untimely or prematurely, she is allowed to get re-married with another person to look after the children of her deceased husband. The newly married husband must come and stay with her. This system of marriage is called Dongkha habnai. Under this system of marriage the bridegroom has to give up the paternal relation and the right of the paternal property. He assumes the relation of the deceased husband of his bride. So, after his death his parents or relatives cannot claim the property owned by him after marriage.

Widow re-marriage : A widow can re-marry any person who is not related to her. If she marries for the sec-



ond 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 re-marriage is allowed in the Boro society, there are some restrictions which are followed strictly. A widower may re-marry 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 re-marry her deceased husband's younger brother, but she is not allowed to re-marry the elder brother of her deceased husband.

**Divorce :** Divorce<sup>55</sup> is allowed in the Boro society. If both husband and wife desire divorce mutually then it is performed by tearing a betel leaf. This is called pathoi-lai bisinai in Boro. 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 'Samaj' for the solution of the divorce case.

Here, some formalities of the divorce as described by Endle may be mentioned. There are some formalities of divorce in the Bodo society. Divorce may take place by mutual consent of husband and wife. Both the man and wife appear before the elders of the village who gather together at the house of the village old man (gaoburah) to perform the divorce. In presence of the village elders a 'pan-leaf' (Betel leaf) is torn in two pieces, which is called in Boro 'Pathoi lai bisinai' or pan-cirā in Assamese. It is a

symbolic act which indicates that the torn leaf can never reunite, so their married life is severed for ever. If the husband divorces his wife for some inadequate reasons and which are not satisfactory to the elders of the village, he forfeits all claims to re-imbusement of his marriage expenses, and even when his divorce is approved by village panchayat, he must pay certain amount (Rs. 5/- to Rs.10/-) for his freedom, the amount being divided between the village panchayat or Gamini Samaj, in Boro, and the divorced woman, on the other hand, if the woman is divorced for same just and sufficient reasons, e.g. for unfaithfulness to her marriage obligations, the injured husband is entitled to recover the entire amount spent during his marriage, a sum of Rs. 140/- or Rs. 200/- from the parents of the woman. As soon as the amount is paid to the man, the woman is at liberty to live with a new husband.<sup>56</sup>

The system of divorce of the Boro society is also followed by the Rabha society almost in the same manner. The Rabhas also follow the 'pancahira' or tearing of betel leaf system while divorce takes place mutually between the husband and wife<sup>57</sup>

The Boros have some important post-marriage customs. The 'Kholar gothainai' and the 'Mamai Mara' are still observed by them.

(i) **Kholar gothainai :** 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 parents 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'.



(ii) **Mamai mara** : If the bridegroom or the parents of the bridegroom had not paid the 'phon thakha' (bride price) at the time of marriage and if the bride expires leaving a female child behind, then the 'phon thakha' or the bride-price of the female child would go to her uncle at the time of her marriage. This system is known as Mamai Mara.<sup>58</sup>

### **Belief about female chastity in the Boro Society :**

As a rule the young people of the Boro society specially in the villages, lead pure lives before the marriage. In cases where there are several girls in a family who are unmarried and one of them is suspected of having broken the law of chastity, the following plan for detecting the offender is sometimes adopted.

The whole family gathers in the evening around the sacred 'Sijitra' (Euphorbia splendens) which is often to be seen growing in the court-yard, surrounding by a fence of split bamboo. At the foot of this revered tree a quantity of rice (uncooked), called 'Mairang' is solemnly buried and allowed to remain there over night. Early next morning this rice is carefully disinterred, and a certain quantity given to each grown-up girl (sikhla) to be masticated. The offender, under the pressure of the fear of imminent detection, is unable to masticate her portion of rice, the faculty of secreting saliva failing her in her terror of discovery and disgrace.

She is then made to disclose the name of her paramour, whom the public opinion compells to marry his victim forthwith, the bride price (pan) being in this case considerably enhanced as some slight compensation to the girl's parents for the injury done to the honour of the

family. A similar procedure is sometimes resorted to in the cases of suspected theft or other like misdemeanours in the family circle.

In some cases where the parents are unwilling to part with their daughter to a prospective son-in-law of some what objectionable character, the matter is referred for decision to the village elders, who impose a fine of Rs. 20.00 to Rs. 25.00 on the offender. But whenever pregnancy follows offences against the law of chastity, marriage become absolutely compulsory, and the reducer is made to feel that he has brought disgrace upon the village. In this way a wholesome respect for chastity is maintained.

In addition to the above, it is also seen in the Boro society that the seducers are made subject to some physical punishment at the time of the trial which generally takes place at the house of the village old man (gaonburah).

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### References:

1. Narzi, Bhaben, Boro-Kacharir Samaj Aru Sanskriti, 1971 pp. 86-87.
2. Altekar, Dr. A.S.; The position of women in Hindu civilization, Matilal Banarasidass Banaras, 1956, pp. 36-47.
3. Haba-Biya or Bibah in Assamese.
4. The Word 'Dongkha' in Boro is known as 'Dhoka' in Assamese.
5. Narzi, Bhaben, "Boro Kacharir Samaj Aru Sanskriti, 1971p.89
6. Narzi, Bhaben, "Boro Kacharir Samaj Aru Sanskriti, 1971pp. 89-90.



7. 'Tharailai = Taraban, in Assamese.
8. Don, A small bamboo basket holding ten kathas of grain, used by both the Boro and non-Bodo people of Assam. The same word 'Don' is used by the Assamese Hindus.
9. 'Jarou' : an affectionate name given by the parents to their loving daughter; the lovers also address their beloved with this name' it bears the meaning of the reddish bright colour.
10. Narzi, Bhaben, "Boro Kacharir Samaj Aru Sanskriti", 1971. p. 90.
11. "Dari mubroi-Dari muba : With this name the first human being 'Manising-sing Borai is probably referred to.
12. Informant : Basumatary, Baburam age-60 years. Village-Maktaigaon (Gossaigaon).
13. "Female organ" It is an expression of the girl who is to be the bride.
14. "Data" means donor; It is an Assamese word; the parent of the bride is referred to here, Who donates her daughter to the bridegroom through marriage.
15. "Ghatak" - is the middleman whose service is required at the time of settlement of marriage. It is also seen that the non Boro Hindu Assamese society engage 'Ghatak' at the time of settlement of marriage.
16. Ramshiari, Shri Bali Charan, "Bathou kherai puja Aru Borojati". Kasimpur, (Kamrup), 177.p. 51.
17. 'No nainai' - The parents of the bride observe the house of the bridegroom after the preliminary settlement of the marriage.
18. 'Bibai' and Bijomaijo : The terms or relationship of the Boro parents after the marriage of their children and these terms are called as Bioi and Bioini in Assamese.

19. 'Howa godan nainai : The bridegroom appears before the members of the brides family before the marriage. This system is followed by the non-Boro Hindu societies also.
20. Narzi, Bhaben, Boro-Kacharir Samaj Aru Sanskriti, 1971. p. 92.
21. In some areas of the Kamrup district two persons are engaged as 'Barlangphas' while in the Goalpara district only one person is engaged to carry the bundle of two earthen-pitchers.
22. Four girls or women are selected as 'Bairathis' who are called 'Barjus' also in Kamrup and Darrang districts, while only two 'Bairathis' are required in the Goalpara district.
23. Narzi, Bhaben, Boro-Kacharir Samaj Aru Sanskriti, Gauhati, 1971. p. 94.
24. Hagjer, Nirupama, "Dimasa" Asom sahitya Sabha, 1974. p. 52.
25. Narzi, Bhaben, Boro Kacharir Samaj Aru Sanskriti, Gauhati, 1971, p. 99.
26. In early days, it was the custom of the Boros to solemnise the marriage at the house of the bridegroom after bringing the bride from her parents house.
27. Another Biban is called 'Laokhar Biban' consisting of fish, rice, sugar etc.
28. The traditional female garment is called 'Dokhna' and the 'Dokhna thaosi is specially made to be used in the ceremonies and functions only.
29. Nepal, Gongar : The Boros call the Nepal as Mephal and the Bhutanis as 'Gongar'.
30. Brahma, M.M. (collected) Folk-songs of the Bodos, G.U., 1960.
31. Owari, Nabin, Boroni Khuga Methai 'Abir' November



- issue, 1980.
32. 'Khoijama' is a kind of red ants, which make their nests on the tree, gathering the leaves into one bundle with their salivas. In Assamese it is called 'Rangaparua.'
  33. Narzi, Bhaben, Boro Kacharir Samaj Aru Sanskriti' 1971. p. 108.
  34. Narzi, Bhaben, Boro Kacharir Samaj Aru Sanskriti' 1971. p. 108.
  35. Owari, N. 'Boroni Khuga Methai 'Abir', November issue, 1980.
  36. Ramsiari, Balicharan, 'Bathou Kherai puja Aro Boro Jati'; Kashimpur, Kamrup. 1977; p. 52.
  37. Narzi, Bhaben, Boro Kacharir Samaj Aru Sanskriti' 1971. p. 111.
  38. Basumatary, Binen; (informant), age-65, Suganhara (Gossaigaon)
  39. Narzi, Bhaben, Boro Kacharir Samaj Aru Sanskriti' 1971. p. 112 - 113.
  40. Shri Biraj Mahan Basumatary, (informant), age - 62; Aflagaon, Kokrajhar.
  41. Brahma, Haliram, age - 72 (informant) village elderly person, Malaguri village (Gossaigaon)
  42. Narzi, Bhaben, Boro Kacharir Samaj Aru Sanskriti' 1971. p. 107.
  43. Narzi, Bhaben, 'Boro Kacharir Geet-mat' Asom Prakasan Parished. 1983; p. 44.
  44. Narzi, Bhaben, 'Boro Kacharir Geet-mat' Asom Prakasan Parished. 1983; p. 45.
  45. Basumatary, Jaynarayan; Boroni Bathou Dharam Bijab', Naigaon, (Kokrajhar, 1385, Bengali, p. 56.
  46. Basumatary, Jaynarayan; Boroni Bathou Dharam Bijab', Naigaon, p.57
  47. Chattapadhyay, Mahinimahan; 'Sarnitya Kriya', Calcutta

- (W.B.) 1382 (Bengali) (Collection of advices of Shrimat Paramhansa Sibnarayan Swami), p. 89.
48. Chattapadhyay, Mahinimahan, Sarnitya Kriya, Calcutta. (W.B) 1382 (Bengali)
  49. In Goalpara District the system of using the earthen lamp placed in a cage covered by the barks of the banana, is prevalent among the non-Boro Hindu people and it is called in the Goalpara dialect 'Chailan bati'.
  50. 'Phon thakha', is called 'Pan' - in West Goalpara dialect, which means bride price; in Bengal 'Pan' means dowry to be given the bridegroom's family from the bride's family. While the bride price is the common practice among all tribal groups in N.E. India, even among the non-Boro or non-Tribal also there is 'Gadhan' which is also a bride-price.
  51. In earlier days, the items of meats (pork) and rice-beer were common and compulsory, while in the present Boro society such items have become voluntary.
  52. Shri Binendra Basumatary, (informant), a Purohit of Brahma Dharma, village Suganhara (Gossaigaon)
  53. A similar ceremony 'Athmangla' is observed by the non-Boro Hindu societies of Assam.
  54. Narzi, Bhaben; 'Boro-Kacharir Samaj Aru Sanskriti' Guwahati, 1971, p. 28.
  55. Endle. S. ; 'The Kachari' cosmo publication, Delhi, 1911, p. 31.
  56. Das, Dr. B.M. , 'Rava' article, 'Asomar Janajati' Ed. by S. Barkataki, Director, National Book Trust, India, New Delhi, 1972.
  57. Narzi, Bhaben; 'Boro-Kacharir Samaj Aru Sanskriti' Guwahati, 1971, p. 28.
  58. Endle. S. ; 'The Kachari' cosmo publication, Delhi, 1911, p. 30-31.



### Part III

## **The Seasonal and Agricultural Festivals of the Boros :**

### **Introduction :**

*The festivals and ceremonies of the Boros can be classified as follows :*

(a) Religious (b) Seasonal and (c) Agricultural. Both the religious and seasonal festivals are closely connected with agriculture.

Among the religious festivals the 'Kherai Puja festival and the 'Garja Puja' festival are the most important traditional and religious festivals of the Boros. The purpose of both the festivals have got link with agriculture. Because, the Boros are primarily agriculturists and as such, almost all the festivals of them are related with agriculture cycle. They observe several major and minor festivals through out the whole year.

Agriculture is the main livelihood of the Boros. It is the custom of the Boros that they select a site for their living after getting confirmation that there is a facility for agriculture. So, they select the field for agriculture first then they select the site for the house construction. They consider the plain or table-land for the purpose of agriculture. The most suitable land for the agriculture is called Hamaha (mother of all kinds of the soil).

Along with the suitable site for agriculture they also desire to have a grazing field for the cattle, rivers or streams for the purpose of fishing and for hunting, a for-



est or a jungle nearby, where they establish their living place. If they do not have any one of these facilities, they abandon the place and select another new site for their living.

For a successful agriculture the Boros select a field very carefully. They never select the soil called Khāndināhā which is very temporary for the cultivation. Another type of soil is called Hāshrāohā and which is not suitable for cultivation. Considering the irrigation facility the class of the land is identified. If the cultivation is possible only by rain water, then the land is called Sharab-dariaha; on the other hand the land where cultivation is possible with the irrigation system the land is called jāmphāi-dāriāhā. This type of land is regarded as the most suitable for cultivation. The Boros arrange irrigation facilities according to their own ideas.

About selection of the plot of land for agriculture purpose there is a popular song among the Boros, which they sing during the festivals : Folk Song :

'Hā Ladangman Āgini Khona,  
Masau lā dangman gong menā,  
Jamphoi dāriā dāriā māi gāi  
nāiā dāo jālāngbāi omā  
jālāngbāi; mākhon jābaono  
ānglāi.'

The English rendering of the above song is likely as follows : A pair of bullock with curbed horns was purchased, paddy was planted at the plot of jāmphāi dāriā land; birds and pigs have eaten all, nothing has been left for me.

The plot of land called Agnikhona is situated at a

corner place which is very low and surrounded by jungle and forests. As the plot of land is covered by jungle and forest the birds and the animals like pigs get the scope to spoil the crops.

Hence, the Boros, as the other non-Boro Assamese neighbours, are closely associated with the seasonal agricultural activities. They have a number of festivals and ceremonies relating to the agricultural activities. They have also legends which tell about the origin of the agricultural crops among them.

#### (a) Religious Festival, Kherāi :

Kherai Puja is believed to be the greatest religious festival of the Boros. They perform this puja on some specific occasions. The Kherai Puja is of four kinds, (i) the *Darshan Kherāi*, (ii) the *Umrāo Kherāi*, (iii) the *Phālo Kherāi* and (iv) the *Nowāoni Kherāi* (*Domestic Kherāi*).

(i) **The Darshan Kherāi** : The Darshan Kherāi is performed during the first week of the month of 'Kati' or 'Kārtik' (Assamese and Bengali month). This kherāi puja is meant for 'Mainao' or Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, and welfare. So it is also called as the 'Lakshmi Kherai'. It is also known as the 'Sali Kherāi', since it is connected with the 'Sali' or winter crop.

(ii) **Umrāo Kherāi** : It is held during the month of 'Ashara' at the end of the 'Āmthi Sua' (the unclean period) for the welfare of the villagers as well as of the crops. This Kherāi is also known as the 'Ashu Kherāi', (Asu, a kind of paddy of rainy season).

(iii) **The Phalo Kherāi** : During the month of Magha (Assamese month), specially on the day of 'Māgi



Purnimā' or the full moon of the month of 'Magha', the 'Phālo Kherāi' is performed. This kherai is also known as the 'Dānshrāng Kherai', as it is performed during the full moon of the month of Māgha (danshrang, a bright night of the full moon.)

(iv) **Nowāoni Kherāi : (Domestic or the family Kherāi) :**

This kind of Kherāi is performed by the family when it deems necessary. The Boro people who believe in the traditional practices depend on the 'Kherāi Pujā' and the 'Gārjā puja' for their welfare at all times. So, whenever they face any trouble, they perform the 'Kherāi Pujā'. The 'Nowāoni Kherāi' is performed by a single family and for *which it is called* as the 'Nowāoni Kherāi' or the Kherai of a family.

It is difficult to ascertain the source from which the word 'Kherāi' originated. Different scholars and writers are of different opinions as regards the origin of the word 'Kherāi'. According to Dr. S.K. Chatterjee, there is similarity between the 'Ker Pujā' of the Tripuris and the 'Kherāi Pujā' of the Boros.

The Bāthou Borāi, chief of the gods of the Boro is also known as 'Kherāi Borāi', or 'Khuria Borai', which means the 'latent old man'. He is believed to be endowed with all the qualities. The Boros call him as 'Kharia', the latent entity with all qualities. So, some believe that as the Kherāi Pujā is performed in his name, the Kharia Borai, the word Kherai' has its origin from the word 'kharia Borai, 'Khubrāi = Khurāi = Kherāi.

There is another explanation about the origin of the term 'Kherāi'. Sacrifice of animals and birds is essen-

tial for the 'Kherāi Pujā'. The sound 'Khe' is produced when a goat or a pig is sacrificed before the 'Bāthou', by cutting the neck of the sacrificed animal with a particular 'dao' at a stroke. The worshippers of the 'Bāthou' use to believe that the 'Kherai' word originates from the sound 'Khe' and it is added with the word 'Rāi', which means enchanting formula before the chief god 'Bāthou' (Kherāi Borāi). So, it is also believed that the word 'Kherāi' is derived from a combination like khe+rai : Kherai'.

There is similarity between the 'Kherai Puja' of the Boros and the 'Ker Pujā' of Tripura, the 'Khernāng' of North Cachar and the 'Kherāimā' of Nepal. <sup>4</sup>

#### **Preparation of the Kherāi Pujā :**

The Boros have no temple or a fixed shrine of worship. They select any suitable place when they have to worship their gods and goddesses. An altar is prepared by the intending worshippers. The altar is long one and divided into three parts. It starts from the south and ends in the northern end. Generally the grazing field is selected for making an altar for the 'Kherāi Pujā'. In the first part of the altar a piece of cloth is hung up above the ground. It indicates the formless (Nirākār) existence of the 'Obang laoree' (the God). In the middle part the Bathou is symbolised by a planted 'Siju' tree (Euphorbia splendens). The 'Siju' tree is surrounded by a round fence of the small bamboo strips folded with five fastenings symbolising the religious and spiritual principles grouped in five. Under the 'Siju' tree an 'Ālāri bātti' (a sacred earthen lamp) is lighted. Five shares of areca nuts and betel leaves, green bananas and other sacred things are put on the plaintain



leaflets placed under the 'Siju tree'. A pot filled with pure water is also installed there and top branches of 'jatrasī' or 'tulsi' (basil) plants are kept in the pot for sprinkling the holy water from within the pot on the altar. As a symbol of creation an egg and as a symbol of truth a piece of stone are kept in front of the 'Bāthou'. From the middle part of the altar to the northern section some rows of 'khāngkhā' (a kind of sacred plant) are planted leading to the northern end where 'Māināo', the goddess of wealth or of crops is installed. The northern part of the altar symbolises the beautiful and prosperous 'Mother Earth'. Two holy persons, a 'dāuri' and a 'doudini', remain as the holy custodians of puja under the guidance of the 'Ojā' (a medicine man) and they perform all the religious rites. The surroundings of the entire altar are kept pure by burning aromatic articles like 'dhub sticks', 'Dhunā' and 'chandan'. The Pujā continues for three days and nights. In earlier days the pujā lasted for seven days and nights.

#### Role of 'Doudini' during the 'Kherāi Pujā :

Throughout these three days and nights 'Kherāi' dances are performed to please the holy 'Bāthou Borāi' and other gods and goddesses. The Doudini is the key dancer during the 'Kherai Puja'.

All the items of the 'Kherai puja' are performed by 'Doudini', while she is helped by the 'Douri' the 'Ojā' and a 'githal'. Besides, two drum (Khām) beaters, two players of the bamboo flutes (Siphung) and two players of 'Jothā' (Cymbals are also essential to help the 'Doudini' perform the 'Kherai Puja'. The first role of the 'Doudini' is called 'Doudini anshrānāi' or 'Alongikhāngnāi'.

From the starting of the Pujā 'Daoudini' is found to demonstrate three stages of activities. First, she is charmed by the formula of the 'Ojā'. This stage of the 'Doudini' is called 'Alongikhāngnāi'. In the second stage she falls into a trance and in the third stage she converts into the spiritual being. In this stage she can tell the tales of the gods and goddesses in their voices. She moves round the 'Bathou' and sprinkles holy water from a pot and dances while the drums (Khams), flutes and cymbals are played on. The worshippers also may join in the circle of dancing with 'Doudini'. While 'Doudini' dances, she imitates the nature of gods and goddesses. She demonstrates as many as eighteen kinds of different dances. By this time also she changes her nature into three stages. First, she changes her mood, secondly, she assimilates her with gods and thirdly, she imitates the nature of different gods and goddesses. 'Doudini' holds a long sword (thungri) and a 'Dāhāl' or a shield (which were used by the Boros in the battle field in earlier days), while she dances. After the dancing is over, she tells the fortune of the people the good and bad days of the villagers, success and failure of cultivation and regarding the duties and responsibilities of the villagers for their safeguard from any danger in near future.

#### Description of dances of the 'Doudini' :

During the Kherai Puja 'Doudini' demonstrates different dances to propitiate the gods and goddesses. The following are the dances of 'Doudini' relating to different gods.

- (i) *Bāthou Gidingnai* : Doudini moves round the



altar of the 'Bathou' for several times dancing slowly in the tune of the flutes (Siphung), associated by the 'Khām' (drum) and 'Jothā' (cymbals).

(ii) Chatrali : Doudini dances holding a sword by her right hand and a shield by her left hand and moves dancing round the altar of the Bāthou. She is believed to be demonstrating the war dance in the name of the goddess of war, Ranchandi or Ranphagli.

(iii) Khapri Chipnāi : It is believed that the 'Doudini' demonstrates tactics how a person can save him from the attack of the enemies in the battle field. This dance is related with the 'Bura Ailong', the bodyguard of the 'Bāthou Māhārājā'. While she dances, she holds a sword and a shield by her hands.

(iv) Khoijamā Phonāi : With this dance the Doudini demonstrates the tactics how to destroy the enemies in the battle field.

(v) Gandoula bannāi : This dance is related with the 'Mānāsu' or the 'Mānās god'. Here also the tactics of subjugating the enemies are shown by the 'Doudini' through her dance.

(vi) Chagalāw banāi : Through this dance 'Doudini' demonstrates the preparation of the battle. This is related with the god, 'Abla Khungur', a very powerful god. Some persons compare this dance with the 'Samudra Manthan' of the Mahābhārata, although there is no any strong ground to believe this comparison.

(vii) Muphur gelenāi : This dance is performed by the Doudini in the nature of bear (Muphur). The god is believed to have a nature of a bear, or 'Muphur'.

(viii) Nāo bonāi : Lāokhār Gosāi is regarded as

the deity of the cowherds (laokhār) and who is identified as the 'lord Krishna'. This 'Nāo Bonāi' dance is demonstrated by 'Doudini showing the greatness of the god.

(ix) Khāmāo Barkhonāi : 'Rājkhāndrā' is the god who is related with dance. He is the grand son of 'Burā Bāthou Māhārājā'. At the time of propitiating this god 'Doudini' performs this dance which is called 'Khamāo Barkhonai'. She climbs up the drum (Khām) and dances on it.

(x) Dāo thoi longnāi : While a chicken is sacrificed in the name of god, 'Doudini' takes the blood of the sacrificed in a cup (khuroi) and dances in the tune of the flute and later, standing before the altar she drinks the blood from the cup.

(xi) Mashakhaori māshānāi : This dance related with the god 'Khoila', the messenger of the 'Bathou Borai'.

(xii) Māoji mengbrāng gelenāi : (the spotted cat dance) : This dance is exhibited by the Doudini when the Kherāi Pujā is performed by a family for the recovery of a patient of the family.

Besides the above dances, other dances like the 'Jārāphāglā', 'Thenthamali', 'Saranisla', etc. are also demonstrated by the Doudini at the 'Kherāi Pujā'.

The gods and goddesses who are offered seats at the Kherai puja are many. The number of the gods and goddesses differs from place to place. However, besides the god-in-chief, 'Bura Bathou', mention may be made of some common gods like 'Agrang', 'Khoilā', 'Khārji', 'Rajkhāndrā', 'Rajputhur', 'Burā Ali', 'Ali Bura', 'Jamon Borāi', 'Jaman Buroi', 'Āsu Māināo', 'Sāli Māināo', 'Bāgh



Rājā, Ali Dibāwli, 'Manasu', Bulli Buri, Basumuthi, Chaudri, 'Ranchandri', Bhāndāri, 'Kumāri', or 'Jakhini', 'Āblā Khungur', 'Lāokhārgosāi', 'Nabab Badshā', etc.

### Significance of the Altār of the Kherāi Pujā :

The whole lengthwise altar of the 'Kherāi Pujā' has its significance. It is believed that the Altar symbolises a holy road from the Heaven down to the earth, or from the earth to the Heaven. The ideal of the philosophy here indicates a holy link between the God of the Heaven and the human beings of the earth.

A piece of cotton yarn which is tied on the post of bamboo with green leaves is believed to signify the unending principle or the law of creation of the creator. Thus the whole preparation of the altar of the 'Kherāi Pujā' bears significance.

**Sacrifice in the Kherāi Pujā :** The Bodo worshippers sacrifice birds and animals in the name of gods and goddesses during the 'Kherāi Pujā'. Cocks, the goats and the pigs are generally selected for sacrifice to the god-in-chief, 'Burā Bāthou' and other gods and goddesses during the Kherai Puja. Along with the sacrifice the worshippers also offer 'Jau' (rice-beer) to the gods and goddesses. The worshippers believe that the god-in-chief 'Burā Bāthou' and other gods remain satisfied while they are offered 'jau' (rice-beer) during the puja. Pigeons are also essential to be sacrificed during the Kherāi Pujā'.

It is observed that the Chief god of the Boros, 'Bura Bathou' is identified as the Aryan god 'Siva' or 'Mahadeva'. Later on, the Aryan worshippers also use to worship 'Siva', the chief god of the Boros with animal sacrifice.

### Materials which are essential for the Kherāi Pujā :

- In order to perform 'Kherai Puja' some essential materials must be collected by the villagers and without which no Kherāi Pujā can be performed. The materials are, (1) one 'Sijau' tree, (Euphorbia splendens), (2) one 'tulasi' plant, (holy basil), (3) three pieces of the 'bijuli bamboo' (4) the dust of rice; (5) eighteen pairs of 'Kush' or 'Khungkhla' plant (a kind of sacred plant); (6) 'Makhna' or 'Lakhna' trees (eighteen pairs); (7) four pieces of 'jati bamboo'; (8) nine pieces of 'duburi plants (a kind of sacred grass); (9) a ring of gold; (10) Plaintain leaves; (11) Banana fruits; (12) Areca nuts; (13) betel leaves; (14) 'Sindur' (vermilion); (15) Dhub sticks (aromatic stick); (16) Dhuna (a kind of resin); (17) 'Guphur aowa khundung' (white rayon); (18) mustard oil; (19) earthen lamps (jewari); (20) rice (mairong); (21) rice-beer (jau); (22) a pair of 'lotha' or ghati (a small water vessel made of brass); (23) one cup, made of brass or metal (Khuroi); (24) some quantity of cotton (khun); (25) one stick of cane; (26) a piece of 'gāmāri khāmplāi' (a low tool made of gamari wood) etc.

*The following musical instruments are also essential during the 'Kherāi Pujā' :*

- (1) Khām (drum) .....one pair,
- (2) Jothā (cymbal) ..one pair,
- (3) Siphung (a long flute of bamboo) ..one pair.
- (4) Thungri (sword) ... one or one pair and
- (5) Dāhāl or dhāl (shield) ..one or one pair.

The Kherāi Pujā is regarded as a national festival of the Boros. It is a symbol of hope and desire which has been prevalent among them since the time of their



ancestors. The Boro Kings also were believed to have been depending on the 'Kherāi Pujā' for the success at the battle. There is an instance that the powerful Koch King Naranarayana also had to perform the 'Kherāi Pujā' to satisfy 'Mahadeva' (Bāthou Borāi), with the Boro dancers before starting the battles against the Ahoms. (vide. Darrang Raj Vamsavali).

The Boros do not worship 'Siva' separately except at the 'Kherāi Pujā'. The 'Siva' is known by the Boros as Gila Dambra', 'Kherāi Borāi', 'Sri Borāi', or 'Sibrai' Bathou Brai', etc. His consort 'Parvati' also is known to the Boros as 'Māināo Buroi', Bulli Buroi, 'Sri Buroi', or 'Si-Buroi', 'Bāthou Buroi', 'Kherāi Buroi', 'Āi-Khāmaikhā', etc.

#### **The Role of the Ojā or the medicine man during the Kherāi Pujā :**

The role of 'Ojā' is of great importance during the 'Kherāi Pujā'. Like 'Doudini', he plays a great role during the Kherāi Pujā. He instructs the worshippers and other coworkers of the 'Kherāi Pujā' like 'Doudini' or Githal' to help 'Doudini' in performing the 'Kherāi Pujā' smoothly. The villagers are obliged to follow his advices when they arrange a 'Kherāi Pujā' or 'Garjā Pujā'. He is the person to enchant the 'mantras' or 'formulas' at the time of pujas. It is believed that the 'Ojā' is able to understand the motives of gods at the time of the pujās. He enchants the 'mantras' or formulas' in such a way that the gods and goddesses become pleased easily. For an instance, the 'Ojā' enchants the 'formula' or 'mantra' of welcome to the gods and goddesses as mentioned here below :

*The formula : (in Boro) :*

"Oi piphāguru, ānāngacay bināngocay, nong ondo nongni ogian Boro phicaphorkhou ondo nongo; Oi corzigiri nongo, nongno phothango, nongno loy zahoyo, nongnikhuroi dersin laocin raobo goilia, oi, thaigirni khongā khongbā, sijauni sirā sirbā, siphungni gudungā dungbā, Bāthouni bandoā bandobā, Boro Borāini rāwā phongbā, Bimā piphā guru binikhāini Bāthou pāthinanoi, Sijau gainanoi, gācā gāinānoi, khām, zothā, Siphung lānānoi nong piphākhrou oncāyo, ondo āphā piphāguru ondo; ondor cingāo gogloicananoi thānāi Boro phicāphorkhou ondo nong, oi piphāguru, khomsiniphrāy bokhonānoi crāngāo lāngdo zongkhrou, corgoniphrāy bor carcrinānoi hordo nongo zong phicāphorno".

English rendering of the above formula is likely as follows : "O God, our father, protect your ignorant children, you are the Creator, preserver and destroyer, all in one you are peerless; that the 'ou fruit (dillenis inidica) has five rinds, the 'Sijau' tree (Euphorbia splendens) has five ridges, the Siphung (a long bamboo flute has five holes; the Bāthou has five knots, (of bamboo strips) and the Boro Borāi (the Boro elderly persons) have five moral preachings; we plant the Sijau on the altar and light the flame of oil and worship you, whilst drums, flutes and cymbals play; oh father be merciful, have mercy on your Boro sons, steeped in darkness of ignorance, light us father, from darkness, lift us to light, from Heaven father, shower on us."

During the 'Kherāi Pujā' prayer is offered by the 'Ojā' to the gods and goddesses through 'Doudini'. Here in the above mentioned formula it is found that the prayer is offered by the Ojā to the gods and goddesses through the



'Doudini'.

At the time of enchanting the formula the 'Ojã' is found at a half-sitting position without using any tool or mate, while the 'Douris' also follow his position. This half-sitting position is called 'jaslång jonã' in Boro.

**Rescuing of the 'Mãinão' : the goddess of Wealth from the earth; (Mãinão bãkhångnã) :**

At the conclusion of the 'Kherã Pujã' the Boro worshippers rescue the 'Mãinão'. the goddess of Wealth from the earth through 'Doudini'.

The 'Doudini' sits on the ground in front of the altar of the 'Bthou Borai' without any movement. The worshippers with the help of the 'Oja' try to ascertain the reason of sitting of the 'Doudini' in such a position. The 'Ojã' then declares that the 'Doudini' has possessed the 'Mainao' (the goddess of wealth). So, to satisfy the goddess a pig is sacrificed to the goddess of wealth. The body, head and the blood of the pig are placed together before the altar of the 'Mainao', while the flute, (Siphung), the drums (kham) and the cymbals (jathã) are played on and produce melodious tune. The 'Ojã' enchants the formula to propitiate the 'Mãinão'.

The 'Doudini', who has possessed the 'Mãinão' addresses the worshippers in the voice of the 'Mãinão' in the following words : 'He Boro-Phisãphor, nangsor angkhou mabeo langno ? Nangsor angkhou dano langgon gabanna daiao phanse, orao phanse khãlãmnanoi jãgon; onagari khalamnanoi jagan; ãng thãngnãinonga; nãngsar je lãmãjãng phoidong, bejang thangphin.

The rendering of the above address is likely as

follows :

'O Boro children, where you will take me ? You take me if to-day, you will spread me some quantity at water, some at fire you will neglect me; you will go back with the same way, with which you have come here.' Again the 'Oja' on behalf of the worshippers requests the 'mainao' praying as follows:

'Nang phoinanggan, Mainao' ãi, nang nangabla jang barai thangnanoi thana; nãngnã jãdang jãngni jiw : nangni annaiawna jeba jirat thangnanai dang, ãi, nang nangabla dandiseba thangna haya ãi; nang phoitharnanggan ; nangabla phap nanggan, jangni kharani thai manlanggan; dahai ãi, nang phoitharnanggan.'

English rendering of the above address is likely as follows : "You must come, Mother Mãinão', without you how we will survive, you are the soul (jiw) of us; on your mercy every thing is lasting; we cannot live alive for a little while in your absence; if you do not come to our houses you will be sinner; you will have to drink the blood of our heads; O Mother you must come with us."

At the request of the worshippers the 'Mainao' (the goddess of wealth) becomes satisfied and agree to stay at the houses of the worshippers. She expresses her willingness to go with them on conditions. She says :

"Thau phisãphor, ãngkhau nangsar jathanoi lãkhi; ãngna samphramba phão phujã ha; nangsini dahan daulatya dinoi eshe gãban eshe barailanggan; ãngkhau nangsar majangoi samphramba khulum".

English rendering of the above address is likely as follows: 'Let us go my dear children, you will keep me with great care, I will stay at your houses; you will wor-



ship me every day, your wealth will increase day by day.

After expressing her willingness to go the 'Dodini' stands up from her seat and starts to dance. The worshippers become very joyful for the reason that they have become successful in convincing the 'Māināo' to stay at their houses. They also start to dance along with the 'Doudini'. Their dance continues for a while. At a moment the 'Doudini' holds the two bamboo posts at the front of the altar of the Bathou Borai and suddenly she loses her sense. Then the 'Ojā' and all the worshippers raise a slogan in the name of the 'Bāthou Borāi'; while the 'Doudini'; to enable her regaining sense sprinkles holy water (doi sānti) on the head of the 'Doudini', as a result she regains her sense and the 'Kherāi Pujā' also comes to an end.

#### Gods and goddesses :

The Boros have many gods and goddesses who are worshipped during the 'Kherāi' and 'Garjā Pujā'. They possess different positions and they are offered sacrifices according to their positions.

(1) **Bāthou Borāi or Khariā Borāi** : He is the God in chief of the Bodos. He is given the highest position among the gods. Along with areca nuts and betel leaves a pig is sacrificed in his name. The head of the pig and a little quantity of the blood of the sacrificed pig are placed together on the altar.

(2) **Āileng** : He is the Body-guard of 'Bāthou Borāi'. A cock is sacrificed to him.

(3) **Āgrang** : He is the general of god-in-chief., a cock is sacrificed to him.

(4) **Khoilā** : He is the messenger of the god-in-chief, a

cock is sacrificed to him.

(5) **Kārji** : He is the follower of the 'Burā Bāthou', a goat is sacrificed to him.

(6) **Rajkhāndrā** : He is also a follower of 'Burā Bāthou', a pig is given to him.

(7) **Sang Rājā** : He is the owner of the wild animals and a follower of the 'Burā Bāthou'. The hunters propitiate him before entering into the jungle for hunting. He is given a red cock. His consort is 'Sang Rāni'.

(8) **Ālai Khungri** : A princess goddess and she is a follower of the 'Bāthou Buri' or 'Khariā Buri'. She is given a pig.

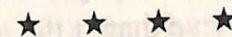
(9) **Bhāndāri** : She is the owner of the store of the food stuffs. She is given a cock.

(10) **Ranchandri or Ran Phāgli** : She is known as the goddess of war. Before starting for the battle field she is believed to be propitiated with a sacrifice of the cocks.

(11) **Bulli Buri** : She is regarded as the owner of the fish. She must be propitiated before starting for fishing. She is also regarded as the goddess of medicine and 'mantras'. She is given a pig as sacrifice.

(12) **Laokhār Gosāi** : He is the god of the cowherds. He is also known as 'Garakhiā Gosāi'. This god is identified as the 'Lord Krishna'. A pair of pigeons are set free in the name of this god.

(13) **Nowāb Bādshā** : (Muslim god) This god of the Muslims is also given a seat during the pujās. A cock is sacrificed in the name of this god. Some times the 'Peer Saheb' is also given a seat during the pujās.





## **(B) The Garjā Pujā :**

The Garjā Pujā is another important religious ceremony of the Boros. The real or proper meaning of the word 'Garjā' is not yet found clearly. Some like to give the meaning of the word 'Garjā' as 'God'. But, the gods are called in Boro 'Modai'. Again some Boro scholars define the meaning of the word as a way of making ones free from danger. In the words of Bhaben Narzi a Boro scholar; 'Garjā' means 'niskriti', in Assamese. This explanation of the word is also not clear to bear the actual meaning of the word 'Garjā'. It may be probable that the 'Garjā' word itself bears the meaning of expulsion; (Garja' or garjanai' or garnai' means expulsion or discharging anything in Boro) and during the 'Garjā' Pujā some evil gods are expelled or discharged from the area of a village. This system of Garjā pujā', where the evil gods are expelled is called 'bhasani' or bhasainai, (floating away in the river or a stream). The Boro word 'Bhasani' means to float away in the river or stream. It is also to be noted that all the gods and goddesses are not expelled publicly. Generally the harmful gods and goddesses who create diseases are expelled from a certain village or area by performing the 'Garja puja'. It may be mentioned that among the non Bodo neighbouring Hindu people a similar puja is performed and it is called by them the 'Dinga Puja'.

### **Why the Boros perform the Gārjā Pujā :**

The Boros perform the 'Gārjā Pujā' to purify themselves and the village after any seasonal festival like 'Baisagu', etc. They believe that at the annual festivals the

participants of the village become impure due to free mixing with each other, merry-making, walking, drinking rice-beer from one's house to another's house. So, in order to purify themselves they perform the 'Gārjā Pujā' at the village. This belief is found not only among the Boros, but also among the non-Boro societies, who perform similar pujas occasionally. Such belief of the Boros helps them in maintaining sacredness and purity among them.

If some epidemic appears in a family or in the village then the villagers perform the 'Gārjā Pujā' to protect themselves from the evils. In case of wrong activity of some persons in the village, which they believe traditionally, the villagers compel the wrong doers to arrange the 'Gārjā Pujā' to satisfy the gods and goddesses as well as to purify themselves.

The Boro villagers use to examine the village whether it is alright or not. There is a procedure to examine the village as well as the villagers. The procedure is very easy. One night ahead of the proposed Gārjā Pujā in the evening the altar of the Gārjā Pujā is made clean after washing it with holy water. A piece of the plaintain leaf is placed on the altar and on it a pair of holy basil leaves, nine grains of rice are placed together and then covers the articles with a bamboo basket (don). Next day, early in the morning the articles are examined. If the articles are found alright, it is believed that the village or the villagers are alright and free from danger. But, if the articles are found scattered or some of them are missing, then it is believed that the village and the villagers are not alright. The villagers suspect some persons to be involved in some illegal or immoral activities. The guilty persons are com-



pelled to apologise before the gods of the 'Gārjā Pujā'.

The Boros believe that the flood also carries diseases from one place to another. So, in order to keep the village free from diseases they perform 'Gārjā Pujā' and let the diseases or the evils floating away from the village.

**Kinds of the Gārjā :** There are many Gārjā gods and goddesses who are regularly propitiated by the Boros. Among them the important are 'Lakhi Garja', 'Āsu Garjā', 'Sew Gārjā', 'Tulsing Musling Gārjā', 'Durā Gārjā', 'Dawang Gārjā', 'Sindur Gārjā', 'Thong-Thongali Gārjā', 'Thia Gārjā', 'Bātho Gārjā', 'Gu-Gārjā', 'Ihew Gārjā', 'Phew Gārjā', 'Maya Gārjā', 'Shaya Gārjā', 'Dhan Khubir Gārjā', 'Bārāi Rāja Gārjā', 'Dano Gārjā', 'Gāla kata Gārjā', and 'Othoro Shanti Gārjā'.

Although it is not possible to identify all of the Gārjās', the following are generally regarded as the benevolent Gārjā gods. They are, (i) **Lakhi Gārjā :** For the welfare of the village as well as the villagers and for the successful crops the Boros propitiate the goddess of wealth 'Mainao', who is also called as 'Lakhi' Or 'Lakshmi' (ii) **Āsu Gārjā :** The Boros cultivate two types of paddy crops in a year, the 'Sāli' or 'Maisali' and Āsu 'Mai'. In Boro 'Mai' means paddy. For the success of the Āsu crop they perform the Āsu Gārjā before harvesting the crop. (iii) **Dhan or Dahan Kubir Gārjā :** The Dhan Kubir Gārjā is the god of wealth, But this god is regarded as a malevolent god. Hence, the Boros propitiate this god to keep them safe. (iv) **Borāi Rajā Garjā :** The Bāthou Borāi is also known as 'Borāi Rajā'. For the general welfare of the village or of the family they propitiate the 'Borāi Rajā', the

god - in chief, occasionally.

### **Descendants of the Borāi Rajā :**

The Borāi Rajā has many descendants who are also addressed during the time of Gārjā Pujā. They are Borāi Chaudri, 'Nisan Dhara', 'Phanka Dhara', 'Mech-Mechani', 'Koch-Kochani', 'Rabha-Rabhani', 'Hira-Hirani', 'Gongar-Gongarni', etc. (the Boros call the people of Bhutan and Sikim states as 'Gongar-Gongarni').

There are goddesses who are also addressed by the 'Ojā' at the 'Gārjā Pujā' and they are regarded as 'Kungris' or princess. They are 'Ālai Khungri', 'Bilai Khungri', 'Ish Khungri', 'Bish Khungri', 'Maya Khungri', 'Shaya Khungri', 'Daisa Khungri', etc (Khungri, Assamese Kumari).

The following Khubir gods also get places at the Garja Puja. Ish Khubir, Bish Khubir, Akhla Khubir, 'Batana Khubir' 'Kal Khubir', 'Shaya Khubir', 'Makhana Khubir', 'Langthia Khubir' and 'Patal Khubir'.

### **Hārsā Gārjā Gods : (Non-Boro Gārjā gods) :**

Side by side along with the Boro gods, some non-Boro Gārjā gods are given seats at the time of Gārjā Pujā. 'Mahādeo' or 'Mahadeva' is the chief non-Boro Gārjā god. His followers are 'Silā Rāi', 'Rupā Rāi', 'Berā Bhangā', 'Santha Mārā', 'Dhamkā Mārā', etc.

The followers of the 'Bishahari' are 'Kāli', 'Māyā Kāli', 'Shaya Kali', 'Āi Barmani', etc.

The followers of the 'Garakhia Gosāi' or the 'Lāokhār Gosāi' are 'Mādhāb Gosāi', 'Gādāb Gosāi', 'Baro Gopal', 'Baro Gapini', 'Lāngthiā Gosāi', etc.

The followers of the Chikna Rājā are Nau Rājā



'Dighla Rājā', 'Shai Rājā', 'Bai Rājā', etc. The followers of the 'Āi Thakurani' goddess are 'Āi Sati', 'Ai Parvati', 'Āi Durga', 'Shong Kāli', 'Bishong Kāli', 'Dhaola Kāli', etc. The followers of the Ganesh Thakur are 'Moider Akhanda', 'Moider Makhla', 'Moider Makhli', etc.

The river gods and goddesses are also equally addressed during the Gārjā Pujā. All the rivers, both big and small, even the streams are addressed by the 'Ojā'. Rivers like 'Manāsu', 'Tharang', 'Champur', 'Gaurang', 'Samokha', 'Sarālbhānga', 'Tipkai', 'Gurubhāsā', 'Mālbhog Jānāli', 'Dāināmari', 'Jākhāti', 'Sonkosh', 'Krishnāi', 'Dudhnoi', 'Zinjiram', 'Dhanshri', 'Lumshi', etc. are addressed by the 'Ojā' when the Bodo people of the Goalpara district perform Gārjā Pujā at any grazing field.

The names of the gods and goddesses differ from area to area. But the Major gods and goddesses remain the same. A great difference is found among the river-gods of different area in the same state and its reason is probably due to different names of the rivers.

#### Preparation of the Gārjā Pujā :

**Salami** : The pre-Gārjā arrangement is called 'Salami'. It is performed one day ahead of the Gārjā Pujā. The **Douri** of the Garja puja cuts a chicken and offers it to the 'Burā Bāthou', then he purifies every house of the village sprinkling holy water which is kept ready in a pot or **lotha** (Lota). In the night the villagers have to remain pure and neat for the pujā to be solemnised the next day.

A lonely place of the grazing field which is covered with jungle, is selected for the Gārjā Pujā and the place of the pujā is called 'Garja Sali'. They regard the

bank of the river as the most suitable place for the 'Garja Pujā'.

They clean the plot where the altar of the pujā is to be made. A few small huts, which are called 'Derā' in Boro, are built by the villagers. Juice of rice-beer prepared by the villagers is kept in the camp house of the puja. Some grains of rice, a pair of new 'Dokhnā' (a female garment of the Boros) and ornaments are kept inside the temporary camp at night. It is peculiar that nobody dares to enter in to the camp and steal the materials offered to the gods and goddesses. The camp house is kept unguarded for the night. This is called 'Sālāmi'. The next day morning the villagers clean their houses all the utensils, clothes, etc and get ready for the pujā.

#### Time of the Gārjā Pujā :

Although the Boros have no fixed date for the Gārjā Pujā, they generally perform it two times in a year. The first Gārjā Pujā is performed during the Assamese months of 'Jeth' and 'Ahār'. This Gārjā is known as 'Phojāonāi' or 'Bhāsāni Gārjā'. The non-Boro neighbouring Hindu people call it as 'Bhāsāni', which means to let floating on the river. During this Gārjā Pujā the materials of sacrifice are kept on a 'Bhel' or 'Bhela' made of the plaintain trees and then let it floating. By doing this the worshippers believe that the diseases may leave the village after the evil-gods are being expelled from the village. The second Garja is performed during the month of 'Kāti' and 'Āghana'. (Assamese months), and it is known as 'Māināo doikhangnai' or lifting of the goddess of wealth (Assamese Lakhimi). So, this Gārjā is also known as 'Lakhi' or



'Lakshmi Garja', with the help of the Gārjā Pujā the Boros welcome the goddess of Wealth, 'Māināo' to the village and worship her for their prosperity.

#### Place of gods and goddesses at the Gārjā Pujā :

A special seat is given to the 'Borāi Rājā' at the 'Gārjā Sāli'. The worshippers build a special house, a temporary storied house which is called 'Chang ghar' in Assamese, with small steps to climb up the house. Other minor gods are accommodated in the small houses built for them. Their seats are spread towards the left side of the seat of 'Borāi Rājā'.

For the non-Boro gods (Hārsā modāi), a small house is prepared at a place right side of the seats of the Boro gods (Boro modāi).

For each god small parts of the plaintain leaves with a sign of vermilion on it, areca nuts and betel leaves are placed in side the small huts.

#### Offerings and sacrifices to the gods during the Gārjā Pujā :

For the Borāi Rājā a male pig and a chicken are sacrificed. In the name of 'Māināo' (the goddess of wealth) a female pig is given. To the Tulsing-Mulsing Gārjā one male pig is sacrificed compulsory. A female pig is sacrificed to the 'Jāmān Buri' and a male pig is sacrificed to the 'Jaman Borai'. A chicken is sacrificed to the Patbira' and a white chicken is sacrificed to the 'Sun-god'. To the Maut Borai' and 'Maut Buri' a cock is cut and the head and blood are given. For the Ganesh Thakur a chicken is sacrificed and to the 'Chikhnā Rājā' a goat is sacrificed. To the 'Bimā

Kāli' or 'Āi Kāli' also a goat is compulsory to be sacrificed. For the 'Baro Gopāl' and Baro Gapinis' three pigeons are set free in the air. To the 'Sanyasi Thakur' another non-Boro god a pigeon is given.

Besides sacrifices, for each god and goddess, a pair of areca nuts and betel leaves, a pair of banana fruits are essential.

From starting to the end of the Gārjā pujā all the works performed by the 'Douri', and he is guided by the 'Ojā' (medicine man). The Douris are of two classes. One 'Douri' is for the Boro gods, called 'Boro Douri' and the second 'Douri' is for the Harsa gods or non-Boro, who is called 'Harsa Douri'. Another person is engaged to propitiate the Muslim god, peer saheb or 'Nowab Badsha'.

The 'Ojā' enchants the Mantra or the formula while the sacrifices are made in the name of each god and goddess. The person who is engaged to propitiate the Muslim god 'Peer Sāhaeb' or 'Nowāb Bādshā', pronounces the word 'Bismilla' at the time of sacrificing the cock in the name of the god; the word probably means the address in the name of god. The person engaged is also to keep the back portion of his garment (locally called 'Lengthi') loose at the time of sacrifice.

The following is the mantra or formula which is enchanted by the 'Ojā' during the Gārjā Pujā :

'Ahem Mahādeo Mahā phorbu, Phaglā thākur, Māo Barmāni, Phorjaphor cāināci thākur, Bolche āphāphor Āiphor, Ojong cor dongbaoyo, Budāru Rājā dong, Sali Mainao dong, Asu Mainao dong, Borai Raja dong, Zoman dong, Zākhāi mārā, Kholāi mārā, Gāmbāri, Dhanshri, Manshri dong, he Āiphor Āphāphor, nongsor āji Kālini



devotānongā, orāi dinni devotā, dobaide Āiphor  
 Āphaphor, Gāmini ĀiĀphaphor khou sukhoi sukh  
 Khālāmnānoi phicā phicou mojangoi lakhināggon,  
 hinjāophrā nāhā moigonghā thānggon, bicorkhou nidān  
 āphor khālāmno monnāinonggā, dohāide Āiphor  
 Āphāphor, nongsorno bebā zāgrāno bebā honānoi, dekhra  
 zagrano dekhra honanoi, pharou zagrano pharou honanoi  
 buli zayo; dohai Mahādeo Maha phorbu, Phāglā thākur,  
 Phāglā Rājā, Baramā Rājā, Cināci Mahārājā, Budārāu Rājā,  
 Zomon Zola, Zakhai mara, Āsu Māināo, Kholāi Mārā,  
 Gāmbāri, Dhanshri, Manshri-Unniā bunniakhāu dahal joth,  
 thungri jothē, khobordar, Āphāphor Āiphor, rog biadi  
 dānthedānthē honanggon, dohai Āphāphor Āiphor, dohāi."

English rendering of the above formula is likely  
 as follows : 'Oh Lord God Mahadeo, Oh Phāglā Thakur,  
 Barmā prajapati, Sanyasi thakur, Oh you mother and fa-  
 ther and who are on this side three are Budaru Rājā and  
 Sali Mainao and Āsu Māināo, and Bura Raja also there  
 are zaman zola, Zakhoi mara, khaloi mara and Gambari  
 and Dhanshri, and Māshri, oh you father and mothers you  
 are not god of today only, you are ancient gods of all times,  
 I appeal ye, oh fathers and mothers, to keep our villages  
 is happiness and prosperity, keep children safe, when  
 women go out to fish in water, and collect vegetables in  
 the forest, keep them safe, from all harms and when our  
 menfolk go out to hunt and to collect woods, keep them  
 safe from all dangers, mind ye gods, I have given ye all  
 your chosen offerings, he goats to some of you, and pi-  
 geons to some others, of you, and hens and eggs to re-  
 maining ones; oh you gods, you Maha deo, Phagla Raja,  
 Barma and Sanyasi thakur, Budaru Rājā and all others, cut

to pieces all dangers and diseases with your sword and  
 shield, we are wholly dependent on you".

### Seasonal and Agricultural Festivals :

**Seasonal Festivals :** (1) One of the most popular  
 seasonal festivals of the Boros is 'Baisāgu'. In Assamese it  
 is calls 'Bihu'. According to Mr. Dhuparam Basumatari the  
 word 'Bihu' is of Boro origin 'Bi' means to beg something  
 like alms, and 'Hu' means to give or to donate, hence, Bi +  
 Hu = Bihu or to give the begged one. During the Bihu  
 festivals, specially during the 'Bohāg Bihu' or the April  
 Bihu, which is also called 'Baisagu' by the Boro Kacharis  
 of Kokrajhar and Goalpara districts, the young boys and  
 girls beg alm from door to door singing and dancing in  
 the tune of some musical instruments. It is believed by  
 the Boros that the begging boys and girls should not be  
 refused by any householder. The young boys and girls  
 arrange feasts with the goods they get as alms like rice,  
 eggs, chickens, etc. from the house holders at the end of  
 the Bihu festivals.

It is also generally described that the word 'Bihu'  
 originates from Bisub or the equinox, (Bisub rekha, in  
 Assamese) From Bisub, = Bisub = Bisu or Bihu and in  
 course of time it has come to be popular as 'Bihu'.

The Boros of the districts of Darrang and Kamrup  
 call the April Festival as Bihu as their neighbours non-  
 Boro Assamese Hindus use to call it 'Bihu' or 'Bohāg Bihu'  
 or Rangali Bihu'.

The Boros of Kokrajhar and Goalpara districts call  
 this popular festival as 'Baisāgu', which means the start of



the new year. According to Kamini Narzari, 'Baisāgu' is a Boro word which originated from the word 'Baisa' means year or age and 'Āgu' means 'start or starting'. Hence, Baisa + Āgu = 'Baisāgu' the starting time of the year or age. This Baisagu festival (Bohag Bihu) is observed at the starting part of the first month of the Bengali year (first week of the month of Baisākh or Bohag)

The 'Baisāgu' festival has some characteristics. The characteristics can be classified as follows : (1) 'Gokhā-Gokhoi janai' or eating bitter and sour tasted wild vegetables on the day of 'Sankranti' or the day before the first day of the new year (2) Bathing the cattle (Masou thukhoinai). (3) Worshipping the gods and goddesses. (4) Worshipping the ancestors. (5) Merry making and enjoying at the entrance of the new year.

About the Kachari 'Bihu' or 'Baisāgu' Sidney Endle gives the following description of the festival as observed by him in the Darrang district. Among the Darrang Kacharis, this festival lasts for seven days, during which little or no work is done, the whole period being given up to merry making dancing, feasting, etc. As is the practice among their Hindu neighbours on the opening day all cattle are taken to the nearest river or tank, and ther formally bathed and afterwords sprinkled with a preparation compounded rice-beer, tomatoes (brinjal), and turmeric. The horns are smeared with oil, ashes, and pounded rice-flour are applied in patch to the bodies of the cattle. This duty discharged, the people abandon themselves to sheer merriment, the younger folks especially giving themselves up to dancing and singing, etc. The verses sung at these festivals seem for the most part to the little better than

mere meaningless jingle - jangle rhythm, made up on the spun of the moment, though occasionally some of them give on insight into the peculiar humour of the Kachari character and temperament". The verses recited by the Boros when the cattle are taken to their bathe are similar to those of their Hindu neighbours :

The verse in Boro : Lāojā Phānthāojā,  
Basar basar er hānjā hānjā,  
Bimāni khither, phiphāni khither,  
Nangsar jāgān hāluā gidir,  
Bimā gāide bādi dājā,  
Phiphā balad bādijā :  
Bāri Khānāni embu bangalā,  
Bibadijā gidir jangilā;

*English rendering of the above verse is likely as follows :*

'Eat your gourd eat your brinjal,  
Grow up year to year,  
To spite your mother and your father,  
You will be large bullocks,  
Do not be short-statured like your mother,  
Be large like your bull father,  
Like the frog in the corner of the garden,  
May you be sleek and long.

Baisāgu, as observed by Kacharis indicates the pattern which the festival follows over the several days. The first day is for the 'Makhau' or 'Mashau' meant for cattle; on which day the cows are bathed in the river. The second day is meant for the 'Mānsi'; or for men' but starting with worship of their gods; the third day is for Saima meant for dogs' the fourth day is for 'Oma' meant for swine'



the fifth day is for daoni, or meant for the fowl; the sixth day is meant for the ducks and other birds; the seventh day is meant for receiving relatives and friends. As it seems, their Hinduism allows them to pay respects to dogs, swine and fowl. But now a days, though Bihu lasts for seven days and on the seventh day they can clean the house ceremonially, take a purifying bath and seek apology from their elders for any omissions and commissions that may have been committed during the period, rituals meant for the propitiation of dogs, swine or fowls are seen. House cleaning, cattle rites, workship of Bathou and offering of eatables to their ancestors, putting on of new and washed cloths, receiving and visiting, etc, may be said to constitute the formal part of the festival. Worship of Bathou is done on the second day; among other Hindu people congregational prayer offered to God characterises the third day, but on the second day, prayer is offered at the family shrine.

On the second day of their Bihu, Kacharis offer worship to the Siju plant, that is Bathou or Mahadeva. The next stage is offering of food and drink to their ancestors and recently dead relatives, the food being placed in a corner of the yard. There is also the ceremonial eating of fowl cooked with bitter herb known as 'Khungkha' or other wild vegetables of different tastes, (gakhā-gākhoi janai). They offer it to the visitors also. From next day dance and music become a regular feature, (Rānjānai-bajanai), and while young men play on the 'Siphung' (flute), the drum, the four stringed 'Serjā', and beat out rhythm with a piece of split bamboo (thārkhā), girls dance in bands and play on the jew's harp (gongonā) and small cymbals (jotha).

The young boys and girls sing songs of love. For example, a few songs are as follows :

(a) The boys sing addressing the girls :

"Hāja Khoroni hololokhā;  
Angjang rāija jagonā Nanglokhā".

English rendering of the song is likely as follows :

'Hololokha' of the top hill,  
You are the only lady who will lead a conjugal life with me;

In reply the girls also sing addressing the boys.

(b) "Ādā hāthāi salini thao dingirilo nang  
bāikhā,

Āshan mutha gajang loolo nang dankhā".

English rendering of the song is as follows :

"Brother, you will purchase the oil bottle,  
From the market and keep ready,  
Bracelets and bright garland you will keep ready for me.

(c) Another song runs as follows : the girls sing :

"Āngkhōu lāngphāi, ankhōu langphai

Ādā, jāmphāi serāoni shyaram mandar bibar;

Ādā, shyaram Māndār bibār,

Angkhōu lāngalā hāngmā thāgan,

Ādā, Boro mujang muse hāngmā

Thāgan ādā, Hārsā Mujang muse

Hāngmā thāgon, ādā shyārām

Māndār bibār; dinai baisaguao

Hāngmā hāngsāni naibe phālikhau

Lāngphoida nang ādā, shyārām

Māndār bibār, ādā shyārām



Māndār bibār".

English rendering of the above song is likely as follows : 'You will take me, take me, brother 'Shayaram Mandar flower' of Jāmpāiguri, if you will not take me, I shall have a long grief, measuring with a 'Boro mu' and "Non-Boro mu" (harsamu). You will take me; during the 'Baisagu' or 'Bihu' festival you will receive a 'Phali' or scarf a token of our love, from me, brother 'Shayaram Mandar' flower.

Besides these songs there are other songs which are very popular among the Bodo Boys and Girls.

The Kacharis at Darangiri, in the Goalpara district and some sixty miles to the West of Gauhati, seem to possess certain local customs and traditions not found in northern Kamrup. On the cow-Bihu-day Darangiri Kacharis put leaves of the cane and the 'Dighalati' and the flower of 'Keturi' (a shrub similar to the turmeric) in the rafters of the roof on the fencing near the gate and in the well. Further, they sprinkle 'Phaku' or 'Abir' (coloured powder) on a heap of these three things and keep the heap planted up right in a corner of the yard. Next day, 'Bathou' is worshipped in this place. The heap is thrown away after the seventh day of 'Bihu'. On the third 'Bihu' day young girls make ornaments of flowers and leaves and put them on the arms, necks, ears and feet of old women.

The Kacharis of Darrang and Kamrup districts observe the 'Bhātheli' festival, although they use only one bamboo. The 'Bhātheli' festival is called 'Bhāsāni' in the northern Goalpara. The people of Rangia area call the festival 'Bhātheli' that which goes down stream. They make a small hut near the bamboo, offer eatables to all gods and

goddesses, good and evil, also a black pigeon and black goat, and pray to these gods and goddesses to go down stream and not to give their village any mishap or disease. They symbolize the departing of the gods by putting the pigeon and the goat on a raft and casting this loose in the river. The ceremony seems to recall what J.C. Prazer describes as the public expulsion of evils, a general riddance of evil spirits at fixed times usually once a year, in order that the people may make a fresh start in life, freed from all the malignant in differences which have been long accumulating about them. This festival is, of course, more religious than seasonal one. It is held during the period of the 'Baisagu' or in the month of 'Bohag' or 'Baisākh'.

Deoris who dwell chiefly in the North Lakhimpur district start their 'Bihu' (Bisu) on a Wednesday (like Lalungs and Misings) on or just after the 'Sankrānti day'. Informally of course, 'Bihu' dance and music start much earlier. For right from 'Phāgun' young men and women tend together at night in the yard of one of the four village priests (deoris) and enjoy themselves by singing and dancing.

The formal part of 'Bihu' starts on the 'Bihu' eve with sacrifices of fowls and swine offered at their shrines of 'Khundi Mama' or 'Hara-Gauri' (Mahadeva-Parvati)

The Rabhas of Goalpara district observe the 'Baiku festival'. As in the other tribal festivals to core of the occasion is the worship (sacrifices) offered to ancestors, and gods and goddesses. There is of course, ceremonial cattle bathing in the manner of Assamese, putting some leaves of certain plants in the cattle-shed as a preventive of dis-



ease of cattle. They also acquire water purified with 'Tulasi' leaves (basil) on the cattle shed. Men also eat bitter food with dried fish as precaution against disease. The gods and goddesses worshipped are 'Chari' (Laksmi), Baikhu' (Basumati), 'Kancha' (the forest goddess) and 'Darnang' or the 'Old God'. identified with 'Siva' or 'Bathou' of the Kacharis.

Rabhas do not have the 'Hucharis' institution, but on the first evening two priests (Ojā Pali) take watered rice powder and squirt it on the houses of the village. They receive in return beer. Certain games are also played in the 'Baikhu' festival, one of them being tug of war accompanied by dance and music. The festivals last for a week.

On all these festive and ceremonial occasions, whether among the Assamese proper or among the Adivasis, the dance and music is accompanied by various instruments which may have local variations, but are fundamentally the same everywhere. Drums, small cymbals, a piece of bamboo with one part split (taka or Tharka), the horn pipe (pepa), and the jew's harp (gangana) are found among the Assamese. The Kacharis add the long siphung (flute) and the four stringed Serja, while the Rabhas have in their 'Karha-nal', a small but long hollow bamboo their distinctive wind instrument'.

The Boros perform certain rites on the occasion of the Baisagu festival. (a) To destroy the eggs of the snakes they produce a particular tune on the flute 'Siphung', the tune is called 'Satravali'. The snake community is believed by the Bodos to be the foe of the human beings and all other creatures, and annihilation of snakes is considered an act of general welfare (b) perform pujas to the deities,

(c) worship to their ancestors, (d) bid farewell to the old year, (e) Pay respect to the Gurus and elderly persons ; (f) Exchange love and affection, (g) dance and sing songs, (h) worship of god (Burāh Bāthou Mahārājā) with the hope of more and more production and growth of cultivation and (I) on the seventh day bid farewell to 'Baisāgu'.

**Cattle rites during 'Baisāgu' :** The last date of the month of chaitra is called by the Boros as the 'Bihu' for the cows or cattle. On that day not only the Boros, every Assamese people leads the cattle to the tank or the river for bathing. Before taking to the river or tank the cattles are offered paddy and horns and hooves are sneared with mustard oil (thāogathāng). The body of the cow is spotted with black markings with a mixture prepared from black ashes and mustard oil, using the stem of the Eri tree as the marker. The cows are also garlanded with the garlands made of goured and brinjals. Before taking them off the cowshed the owner pays respects to them.

While leading the cows to the river for bathing the cowherds sing the songs beating them lightly with the 'Dighalati' plant.

After taking away the cows from the cowshed the cowedungs are thrown away and the shed is cleaned. The old ropes (phaga) are replaced by new ones.

Cowdung is used by the Boros for some sacred purposes. To purify the house and the place of worship the cowdung is used. The Boro women pluster the houses with cowdung mixed with mud. After bathing in the river or in the tank the cows are led to the grazing field by the cowherds.

Thus the first 'Bihu' which is meant for the cows



ends. The Boros who reside in the forest villages use to go to the deep forest for hunting on the 'Sānkrānti day'. In the evening they use to take some bitter tastes - vegetables collected from the forest. A special curry known as 'Khaji' prepared with meats (porks) and wild vegetables of different tastes which the Boros call 'gakhā-gakhoi maingang.' It signifies that the old year is bid farewell. Taking of rice-beer (Jumai) starts from the day of Sankranti in every family. Both young and old consume rice-beer as much as they can.

The Boros of traditional beliefs throw away their old earthen utensils of cooking on the first day of the new year and replace them with the new ones. The members of the family offer prayers to the family deity 'Burāh-Bathou' Maharaja and 'Āikāmākhyā' at the altar after making the house clean and after taking bath themselves. Welcoming the new year 'Baisāgu', men, women, young boys and girls exchange their mutual love. The juniors offer 'Gāmāsās' to the elders and take blessings from them. They forgive each other's misdeeds and exchange 'Gamasās' also. They pray to god for their wellbeing in the coming new year.

There is a traditional belief among the Bodos that during the 'Baisagu' no quarrel should take place. They believe that those who indulge in quarrels during these days would take birth as cows or dogs in the next life. So, they try to avoid any sort of quarrel during the time of the 'Baisāgu festival.'

The Boros do not sit on the four - legged stool, 'Khāmplāi' or 'Pira' during the 'Bihu' festival, as they believe that to sit on the four - legged stool means to sit on the head of the parents. The traditional belief of the Boros

signifies that the Boros have real respect to the parents or the elderly persons.

The women folks of the Boro family go to the house of the 'Ojā' or the medicine man with 'Jau' (rice-beer) and cooks as the presentation on the first day of the new year. The 'Ojā' replaces the 'Tābij' or 'Kobos' (amulet) of the users for the new year. The married girls also pay respect to their father-in-laws and take blessings and also they visit their own parents to get blessings for the new year.

From the second day of the 'Baisāgu' till the seventh day every family becomes the centre of merry making and all the members of a family forget themselves out of enjoyment. The young boys play on flutes (shiphung), four stringed 'Serjā', 'Tharkā', 'Bingi' (one stringed instrument), while the young and old women folks play on the 'Gongana' or 'Gaganā' (jew's harp), 'Bāthā bingbung' (a kind of instrument made of straw or thatch), 'Jathā' or 'Cymbals, etc. and come out their houses and gather together to dance and sing at the open field or from house to house. The songs sung by the young boys and girls are mostly the songs of love.

### 'Bihu' or 'Baisāgu' among the followers of Brahma Dharma :

The Brahma dharma followers Boro people pray to god on the first day of 'Bahāg' or 'Baisākh' by performing 'Āhuti' jointly at their villages. Before 'Āhuti' none is allowed to take 'Jau' or rice-beer. After 'Āhuti' the village elders sit together and discuss about the affairs of the vil-



lage under the presidentship of 'Gāonburāh' village elderly man. They also discuss about the annual accounts and liabilities of the villagers and solve any problem mutually. In the evening the villagers, both young and old enjoy by dancing and singing. They also consume rice-beer roaming from house to house in the village. It has been observed that some sections of 'Brahma dharma' followers have given up the habits of taking rice-beer on the occasion of the 'Baisāgu festival', as well as on other occasions also. They simply enjoy by singing and dancing together and the young boys and girls collect alms from door to door and arrange feasts with the articles they receive by singing and dancing. The begging of alms is called by the Boros as 'Māirang Māgināi'.

(2) The next popular seasonal festival is the 'Damāshi' or 'Domāhi', the harvest festival. The word 'Domashi' or 'Domahi' means the junction of two months. This festival is also known as 'Bhāgali bihu' in Assamese. The characteristics of this festival are to enjoy with different types of foods, like cakes or 'pithās', to entertain the friends and relatives with foods and drinks, and to enjoy singing and dancing.

The male members of the family tie cords around the fruits-bearing trees of the house. The Boros believe that the fruit-bearing trees would bear more and more fruits if the trees are tied with cords of straw during the 'Domāshi'.

Along with the cakes of different types the women fry different pulses like 'Sobāi', 'Sibing' (sesemum), 'mugu' pulse, etc; eat them and spash them at the cowshed. The

village elderly persons of the traditional beliefs sacrifice fowls to 'Bāthou Borāi' and worship. The Boro followers of Brahma dharma arrange 'Āhuti' on the day of full moon of 'Māgha month' or 'Māghio purnimā', for the welfare in general.

The young boys construct the 'Bilāgur' or 'Bhelāghar', a high temple - like - structure with dried banana leaves and green bamboos. They also arrange a bonfire (argeng) with the big pieces of fuel (generally stolen) and spend sleepless night, singing and dancing.

'Bilāgur' or 'Bhelāghar' construction on the occasion of the Domāshi :

'Bilāgur' is the Boro way of pronouncing 'Bhelāghar' in Assamese, which in turn may be a corruption from 'Bherā-ghar (Meshā-ghar) recalling the ancient practice of 'Meshadāha'.

The Boro-Kacharis consider the construction of 'Bhelāghar' or 'Bilāgur' as they pronounce it, and setting fire to them to be the special function of the 'Lāokhār' (Rakhal) or cowherd boys. The boys burn the 'Bilāgur' or 'Bhelāghar' before dawn, before the crows come out their nests. The chief cowherd, lāokhār gāhāi as he is known while setting fire to the 'Bilāgur' starts a prayer in this manner :

"Jai, Jai Jai,  
Jangni lāgani Jai,  
Khalāhāni rag biādiā khalāhā  
Thathang, sonābhāni rag biadia  
Sanābhā thathang;  
Sāhāni rag biādiā sāhā  
Thathang; sānjāhāni rag biādiā sānjāhā thathang,



Jangni lāgoā māioi  
 Daioi jai jai mai mai jāthang;  
 Jangni lagani masauaganda  
 Phisabadi sakhela bkhelā geder,  
 Balagara jāthang; jāimānsiā  
 Jangni masauamai jayablaba  
 Jadang hannānoi jangkhau  
 Bukhrub Sukhrub khālāmdang man  
 Bi mānsihā nidānai  
 Din thāngthang."

English rendering of the formula is likely as follows : 'Glory, glory, glory glory to our village; diseases of the south should remain in the south, diseases of the west should remain in the west; diseases of the north should remain in the north, diseases of the east should remain in the east, our village may be filled with paddy and riches; our cattle may be large and strong like the rhinoceros and the elephant; that those persons who had beaten us even though the cattle under our charge had not eaten up those persons' paddy, may suffer long and much; glory glory, glory, glory to our village.'

Among the Boro-Kacharis much of the merriment depends on the consumption of rice-beer. Rice-beer is necessary even in their rituals. This reminds one of the observation that the religion of this land is of *kirata* origin. The 'Garo Wangala' festival which seems to continue the merriment usual in a spring festival and the desire for food and drink usual in a harvest festival consumes a large quantity of rice-beer. In this autumnal festival the entire village is cleaned, new cloths are put on, sacrifices of swine and cattle made to the goddess of nature on the first day

of the three-day ceremony, followed by dance and merriment. Rice-beer is sprinkled on the dancers. At the end of the ceremony dance and music go on for some time among the young people. In the rituals as well as the festivities the *Nokma* or chief and his family take leading part.

### (3) *Kātri-gasa* or *Kāti Bihu* :

The '*Kāti Bihu*' is another seasonal festival of Assam. This festival is observed on the last day of the month '*Āhin*'. The Boros call this festival as '*Katrigasa Saonai*'. It is also called '*Kangali Bihu*', which means the *Bihu* of the crisis for the villagers have nothing to eat during this festival. This *Bihu* festival is observed by the Boros very simply, by burning '*Chaki*' or the earthen lamp at the paddy field, at the altar of the '*Bāthou*', at the cowshed, (*goli*) and at the granary, in the evening of the last day of '*Āhin*' or '*Āshina*' (Bengali). The unmarried girls of the Boro families go to the paddy field with a '*Sewari*', a long bamboo stick used in wearing, polished it with mustard oil and touch the paddy plants with the stick (*Sewari*). By doing like this the Boros believe that the paddy plants would bear large scale of paddy. In the Goalpara district, the non-Boro Hindus also observe the '*Kāti Bihu*' in the same manner which the Boros follow in observing the '*Katrigāsā sāonāi*'.

### (4) Ceremonies directly relating to Agriculture :

Besides the major festival like '*Baisāgu*' the spring festival or '*Rangāli Bihu*' (in Assamese) and '*Domāsi*' or the harvest festivals the Boros observe some minor ceremonies relating to agriculture. They cultivate paddy of different varieties with great care. So, during the period



of paddy cultivation they perform several minor ceremonies.

(a) **Khotiã phonai** (Assmese 'Kathiã') or sowing seeds of paddy : After making the field ready by ploughing the owner of the house offer a pair of arecanuts and betel leaves to the goddess 'Māinão' or 'Lakshmi' and salutes towards the east after which he starts sowing the seeds of paddy.

(b) **Khothiã phunãi** (uprooting the seedling) : At the time of uprooting the seedlings for transplantation also the Boros follow some rites. When the seedlings become matured the female elderly member of the family offers a pair of arecanuts and betel leaves (goijarã-pathoi jorã) to the 'Māinão' or 'Lakshmi' and then starts uprooting seedlings.

(c) **Maigainai** (paddy plantation) : Though simple, 'Maigainai' or paddy plantation is performed with some rites. The guardian of the family, generally the elderly female member offers a pair of arecanuts and betel leaves (goijorã-pathoijorã) in the name of 'Māinão' or the goddess of wealth and applying a little mustard oil on a small quantity of seedlings the elderly female member salutes towards the east and then starts plantation. Then other members of the family start plantation all salutting to the east.

(d) **Māinão Lãinãi Or Āglãinãi** : (Bringing Māinão or Lakshmi from the paddy field to the house)

When the paddy becomes ripe and suitable for reaping the guardian generally the male guardian of the family brings a small quantity of paddy with a sickle early

in the morning preferably before the sunrise and after sprinkling holy water on it the small bundle of paddy is kept inside the 'Bãkhri' or the store house (granary) of paddy.

(e) **Engkham godan janai** or new rice-eating ceremony : This ceremony is held within the month of December after harvesting of the major rice crop of the year (mãisãli). On the occasion of the ceremony the new rice is taken inviting the neighbouring persons. Along with the new rice (engkham godan), porks (omã bedor) and rice-beer (jau or jumãi) are also supplied in abundance. Before taking anything the Boro followers of the traditional beliefs offer a little quantity of cooked-rice and curry of porks to the gods and goddesses, mainly to 'Bathou Borai' and 'Māinão' or 'Bãthou Buri'.

The followers of the 'Brahma dharmã' perform a 'Yajnãhuti' on the occasion of the festival and offer a little quantity of cooked new rice to the fire of 'Āhuti' before they take anything. The 'Āhuti' is attended by the neighbouring persons both adults and children. They pray before the 'Āhuti' offering the mixed pulses (prasãda) to the fire in the name of the god for the better crops in the next year. At the end of the 'Āhuti' all present at the ceremony are entertained with the new rice, porks, fish-curry, etc.

(5) **Non-agricultural ceremony :**

(a) **Maha honai** : The Boros of Kamrup and Darrang districts in particular and of the southern Goalpara observe this ceremony. This ceremony is held at the latter part of November or early part of December.



It is generally observed by the young boys of the village. They drive the mosquitos with the burning torces at their hands and walk from door to door singing songs and asking alms from the house owners of the village. They jointly arrange a feast with the articles they have received as alms from the house holders. The Boros of the north-Goalpara and Kokrajhar districts are not well acquainted with this festival.

(b) 'Āmthisua' or 'Āmati' (Ambuvāsi) :

The 'Āmati' or 'Ambuvāsi' is called by the Boros as 'Amtisua'. This period falls by the month of 'Ashara' or 'Āhara'. This festival is not actually for merry making. It is observed as a special occasion of holiness. Because, this period is believed by the Boros to be the period of menstruation of the Mother-Earth. Within the period of a week the Bodos do not dig the soil, do not plough the land, do not cut the useful tree and do not enter the 'bākhri' or the granary (bharalghar). The Boro agriculturists do not work in their field for a week and remain at home. They believe that if any green tree is cut during this period of 'Āmthisuā' (unclean period), it can never grow more.

The young boys and girls observe this period by eating fruits like jack fruits, mango fruits etc. On the seventh day the women folks throw away their old broom sticks and replace them by new ones. They plaster the floor and the wall of their house with mud. Thus the 'Āmthisuā' or 'Ambuvasi' ends on the seventh day.

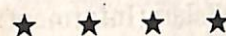
It is observed that similar beliefs are found among the local non-Boro Hindus. They also practise almost similar practices. A great 'Ambuvasi Melā' is held at Kamakhya temple of Guwahati of Assam every year during the same

period. It is believed by the Hindus of this region that the 'Yani' symbol is said to be in a state of menstruation.

(c) Putuli Haba (Doll marriage) :

In some parts of Assam, specially in the district of Kamrup the Boros perform a 'Putuli hābā' (doll marriage) on the seventh day of the 'Baisagu' festival. This festival is performed at the place of worship of the village jointly. They make dolls of straw in the name of 'Diba Borai' and 'Rāoni', who are believed to be deities of wind and rain. So, they worship them with the hope of sufficient rain for cultivation. They believe that if the deities of rain and wind like 'Dibā-Borāi' and 'Dibi-Buroi' become satisfied then there would be sufficient rain in the earth. The Boros also believe that deities send 'Bārdoi Sikhlā', the symbolic girl of the wind and rain to the earth who brings rain with her and turns the earth fertile for cultivation.

There is a belief among the Boros that if the heavenly deities 'Rāonā' and 'Rāoni' become satisfied then the couple who have no child at all will get child in due course after the worship of the deities.



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## Appendix

### Musical Instruments of the Boros :

The Boros have some traditional musical instruments. These are, (1) Khām, (2) Siphung, (3) Serjā, (4) Janjengra, (5) Jothā, (6) Jabsri, (7) Gongonā, (8) Bingi, (9) Thorkha and (10) Khāwāng.

*System of making :* (i) **Khām** : This musical instrument is made of woods like sama, odlā, kanthal (jack) Thajiau (mango) Serfung, Ghugra and Sijau. Either on Saturday or Tuesday the work of making must be started. It takes seven to fifteen days of time to complete the making of a Khām. The wooden frame is covered in two ends by the skin of the goat or the deer. Its strings are made from the skin of the Buffalo. It has a particular size. It is thirty five inches long and three and half broad. One Kham lasts for a period of thirty to forty years of course, it depends on the proper care and use. *Its use* : The khām is used on the occasion of the Kherāi Pujā. Any person who is expert can beat the Khām.

(2) **Siphung** : The Siphung is made of a particular bamboo, called owajlaw. It has five holes for playing and one hole for blowing. It is twenty five to thirty five inches long.

*Its Use* : It is used in the kherāi pujā, at the marriage ceremony and during Baisagu and Domāsi festivals. Along with the siphung, Kām, Jothā and Jābsri are played



during the kherāi pujā. It is prohibited to blow the Siphung at the time of taking meal. It is believed that if the Siphung is blown at the time of taking meal, the teeth of the person who is busy in taking meal may decay very soon. The siphung is blown on the sankrānti of pause or puh (Assamese mohnth) at the very dawn to spoil the eggs of the snake as it is believed by them.

(3) Serja : It is made of the Sijau, Chetawne and Kanthal wood. The skin of the she goat is used in it. Its four strings are made of the muga or endi and its four puthis are made of bamboo or wood. Its Ghora is made of wood. Its handle is made of bamboo and it is stringed with odla. An approximate time of three to seven days are necessary for making it.

**Its use** : This instrument is mainly used in the marriage ceremony. Other instruments like jotha, jabsri and siphung are used along with the serja. During the Baisagu and Domāsi festivals this instrument is used very widely. It lasts for a period of fifty years if it is used with great care.

(4) Jānjengrā : This instrument is made of bamboo splits or thāngā (a kind of small but long wood). It is believed that this instrument was used before the discovery of the Khām.

**Its use** : "It is generally used during the time of festivals, except the Kherāi and Gārjā Pujā.

(5) Jothā : It is made of the metal or brass. This instrument is generally purchased from the market.

**Its use** : It is used in the Kherāi Pujā; during the marriage; festivals 'Baisāgu' and Domāsi. For the Kherāi Pujā it is essential.

(6) Jābsri : It is made of wood and metal plates. It can be made within one day or two-days.

**Its use** : This instrument is used in festivals. It is widely used during the Baisāgu, Domāsi and marriage festivals.

(7) Gongonā : It is made of iron. This instrument is generally used by the female. It is purchased from the market.

**Its use** : During the time of the Baisāgu, Domāsi and marriage festivals this instrument is used by the users.

(8) Bingi : It is made of the coconut. Its cover is made of the skin of the goat and its only string is made of the hair of the horsetail.

**Its use** : It is used during the Baisāgu and Domāsi festivals.

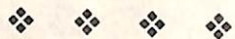
(9) Thorkhā : It is made of bamboo. This instrument is used during the festivals of Baisāgu and Domāsi. Both boys and girls use this instrument.

(10) Khāwāng : This is made of brass. It is the bigger size of Jothā, (The cymbal) It is purchased from the market and is used during the Baisāgu and Domāsi festivals.

Besides the above mentioned musical instruments they are now habituated in using some other instruments



which are also used by the non-Boro neighbours. These instruments are the band, the Harmonium and the Drums (Duhulas). The Bands and the Drams (Duhulas) are used during the marriage festivals of the modern Boro society. The Duhulas (the drums) are believed to have been used by the Boros of earlier periods.



**"STARTING MOTION OF DOUDINI"  
AT KHERAI PUJA FESTIVAL.**

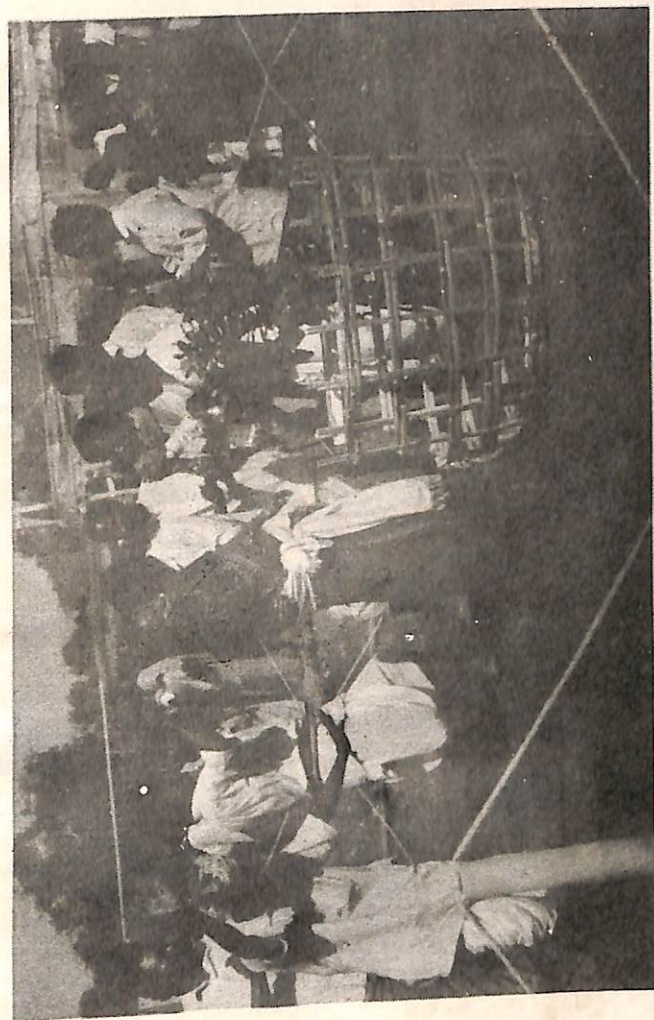




**"BAGURUMBA MWSANAI"**  
(Bagurumba Dance)



**"BWISAGU MWSANAI"**  
(Bwisagu Dance)



**"DOUDINI MWSANAI"**  
(Doudini Dance)