

# FESTIVALS OF THE BODOS: A DISCOURSE IN THE LIGHT OF ACCULTURATION

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## Abstract

With the advancement of human civilization different communities of the world, and hence their cultures, have come nearer to each other. Due to dynamic character of culture, this nearness of cultures has facilitated acculturation of one culture by another. The common phenomenon observed in the field of acculturation is that cultures of the indigenous people are suffered unrestrained changes in their cultures, in many cases, leading them to assimilation with neighbouring superior cultures. In the light of this prevailing trend of assimilation of tribal cultures with adjacent cultures, an attempt has been made to study the alterations accommodated in the indigenous Bodo culture of north east India, particularly in regard to their festivals.

The Bodo culture, due to acculturation, is found to accommodate many alterations, including deviations, in various components of its culture, including their traditional festivals.

Researchers have observed that the traditional religion of the Bodos, called Bathou, has even deviated from its original philosophy towards Hindu philosophy. Due to this turn, many alterations and accommodations have occurred in religious festivals of the Bodos. Besides, the seasonal festivals of the community have acquired a grave trend of losing their traditional characters by succumbing to the acculturative pressure from the neighbouring popular cultures.

Apart from this, popular festivals have interloped among the Bodos and are spreading fast, threatening the traditional festivals to be subsided.

Bodos now face a great challenge in retaining the distinctness of their culture by adopting appropriate measures to preserve the originality of their culture and festivals.

**Index Terms:** Acculturation, Bodos, Bwishagu, Domashi, Festivals, Garza, Kherāi, Seasonal, Traditional

## I. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Festivals and Fairs

Festivals and Fairs constitute an important aspect of cultural life of a community. Since ancient times, festivals have been associated with mankind as an important feature of group life. Social, Educational and Religious characteristics of a community are replicated in the fairs and festivals of that community; cultural heritages of the people of the community are reflected there. The Geographical features of the region where people belonging to a community were living, their rustic sentiments associated with tradition, customs and conventions, all these components formed the basis of the growth of fairs and festivals of that community [1].

A festival is principally an anniversary that is observed with rejoicing. Basically, it refers to an event that is ordinarily celebrated by a community, typically for cultural or religious reasons. Sometimes, it also refers to an organized series of concerts, plays, or films [2]. The festivals were developed with the basic purpose of evolving, promoting and preserving the common culture of the host community, country or society settled in a specific place. A festival delivers a sense of belongingness to a religious, social or geographical group, provide entertainment for the people, and is typically associated with a particular set of traditions. These festivals, besides providing moments of merry-making like singing, dancing, playing and feasting, also provide an opportunity to meet relatives, members of the community, clan, tribe each other. Festivals organized in a larger perspective gather people of different language, culture and religious faiths at one place.

On the other hand, in a general sense, fair describes an event where people gather for various entertainment or commercial activities. However, the term *fair* carries different connotations in different places. These events are not associated with culture and religions, rather, these provide a good market for buying and selling of local and foreign produces. On these occasions local people find opportunity to market their products, such as agricultural implements, grocery items, cosmetics, clothes, ornaments and other household items, and at same time, they can procure foreign goods necessary for their life that are not available in their locality [1].

Primal peoples had various rituals connected with the most important moments in the life of a given tribe and its individual members, such as religious holidays, births, the coming of a new year, electing a new chief or king etc. These rituals were performed through specified functions having similar form of today's festivals. Social scientists believe that the festivals originated from such ritual performed functions [3]. According to Davies [4], the oldest festivals were the events connected with seasonal occasions such as sowing and harvesting. He called these festive events as temporal or seasonal festivals.

The concept of festivals kept on transforming with ages. With the advancement in science and technology the means of communication have developed to a remarkable extent, and in the contemporary world people are able to effectively and comfortably communicate over long distances extremely fast. Further, moving from one part to another part of the world has become very easy. Along with this easy movement of the people, a new kind of industry, called *cultural industry*, has grown up and this has contributed in developing a new economy, called *cultural economy*. Due to these developments, it is now seen that, in many occasions festivals are accompanied by fairs; festivals and fairs are simultaneously held side by side, for which reason, these two terms are often interchangeably used. Now-a-days, festivals are also arranged by different agencies under certain theme.

## 1.2 The Bodo Community

Bodos are an ethnic and linguistic group of the northeast India. They belong to the great Mongoloid Race. Mainly concentrated in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam, they are spread over other districts of the state too, and are thinly found in the states of Nagaland and Meghalaya and sizeably in West Bengal of India. They are basically a plains tribe and have been accorded the Scheduled Tribe status of the constitution of India.

In the Brahmaputra valley of Assam, they are thickly populated in the foothills of Bhutan. For the safeguard and promotion of culture, economy and language of the Bodos a separate administrative set up, called Bodoland Territorial Council, has been instituted in the Bodo dominated area, called Bodoland Territorial Area Districts, comprising four districts of Assam– Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri, lying in the foothills of Bhutan.

According to the renowned scholar S. K. Chatterjee, Bodos were known as the Kiratas in olden times and their language and culture, during the advent of Aryans entering India, flourished in the entire foothills of the Himalayas in India. In the absence of Aryans, Bodo language could have become the lingua franca of the entire foothills of the Himalayas and north eastern states of India [5]. They have a popular religion called **Bathou** of naturalistic philosophy. Centring this religion various festivals had emerged in their social life.

In course of time, Bathouism has been caused notable changes due to the process of acculturation [6]. These changes have transmuted many things associated with this religion. Consequently, their traditional religious festivals are also seen to accommodate new set of practices carried from other religious festivals. Further, marching with civilisation significant changes are seen to have been accommodated in the ways of observing traditional festivals of the Bodos.

## 1.3 Aim and objective of the study

The study aims at investigating the transmutations in the festivals, both religious and non-religious, of the Bodos due to influence of other culture. Available oral and written literatures on traditional festivals of the Bodos and the first hand experiences of the researcher on socio-religious and cultural transition of the Bodos have been utilised for analysis of the current status of the festivals of the Bodos.

#### 1.4 Methods of the study

Both the descriptive and analytic methods have been adopted for analysis pertaining to the study. The study has been carried forward by the first-hand experiences of the researcher. From the perspective of anthropology, the study happens to be from emic perspective, where the researcher would be studying own culture and society. Thus, the analysis is mainly an insider's perception of socio-cultural reality.

#### 1.5 Study Area

The study has been conducted in the erstwhile Kokrajhar district of Assam, which extends from Sankosh river on the west to the Manas river on the east, constituting present political districts of Kokrajhar and Chirang of Assam. This contiguous area on the foothills of Bhutan Kingdom is dominated by Bodo population and the Bodos of this area were touched by acculturation at the last among the community. Hence, original cultural features of the Bodos could still be observed more distinctly in this area than in the other Bodo habitat areas.

#### 1.6 Review of literatures

As a distinct community, the Bodos have a set of festivals connected to their religion, rituals and seasons. Since the community has their own religion, the Bathouism, and cultivation is their main occupation, most of the major festivals are connected with either religious occasion or agricultural works. Hazoary [7] categorized the festivals of the Bodos into two broad categories- 1) Religious Festivals, and 2) Non- Religious Festivals. He then again subdivided non-religious festivals into two types-

1. Major non-religious festivals, and
2. Minor non-religious festivals.

On the other hand, Narzari [8], another Bodo Scholar, classifies the festivals of the Bodos into following two types-

1. Religious Festivals, and
2. Agricultural Festivals

All seasonal and agricultural festivals along with all other rejoicing occasions of the community are included in agricultural festival.

Both Hazowary and Narzary do not accord a distinct class to the seasonal festivals of the Bodos. Meanwhile, Brahma [9], in his doctoral thesis "A Study of Socio-Religious Beliefs, Practices and Ceremonies of the Bodos [With Special Reference to the Bodos of Kokrajhar District)", classifies the festivals of the Bodos into following three categories-

1. Religious Festivals
2. Seasonal Festivals, and
3. Agricultural Festivals

He further importantly mentions that all the major festivals and ceremonies of the Bodos, including the religious and seasonal festivals are closely connected with agriculture.

## II. FESTIVALS OF THE BODOS

The society of the Bodos is agricultural one. From the literatures available on the festivals of the Bodos and close observation, conclusion may be made that all religious and non-religious festivals are more or less connected with agriculture. Hence, it would be apposite to classify the festivals of the Bodos into two- i) the religious festivals, and (ii) the seasonal festivals.

### 2.1 Religious festivals of the Bodos

As mentioned earlier, Bodos follow Bathouism and the philosophy of this religion itself has been greatly influenced by the Hindu philosophy; and many Hindu practices have been imitated or adopted by the Bodo people [6]. From this point of view, it is easily perceptible that the festivals of the Bodos are also under the influence of other culture due to the process of acculturation.

Following are the main religious festivals observed by the Bodos of erstwhile Kokrajhar district of Assam- 1) Kherāi, 2) Garza, 3) Salami 4) Gwrlwi Borainai and 5) Dwi Sarnai.

Out of these five religious festivals of the Bodos, the first one, *Kherāi*, is the greatest of all and is arranged at two levels- i) community (village) level and ii) family level. Next to this is the Garza, which is arranged at village level. Others are family arranged occasions praying for well-being of the family.

### 2.1.1 The Kherāi Festival

Based on the place of arrangement of different Kherāi, the Kherāi may be classified into following three-

- i) Songsari Kherāi, arranged at a convenient place of the village for healthy village social life.
- ii) Garza Kherāi, arranged at permanent community worshipping place, which is called Garzasali in Bodo.
- iii) Bathou Kherāi, arranged by individual family for its well-being.

The Kherāi holds the epicentre of the Bodo music and dance. Almost all popular traditional dances of the Bodos have been originated from Kherāi. Every item of worship in the Kherāi is associated with music and dances. The worshipping items of Kherāi are performed by two holy persons, one male called *Douri*, and the other female called *Doudini*, under the guidance of a rector, called *Oja*. During Kherāi, the Chief God *Bwrai Bathou* and His eighteen (18) associates are worshiped by sacrificing chicks and one item of prayer dance. Altogether, sixteen (16) items of dances, namely- 1) Bathou Gidingnai, 2) Badali Gelenai, 3) Bwr Bikhonai, 4) Bwr Ajaonai, 5) Dahal Sibnai, 6) Mwshakaori (Dahal-Thungri Sibnai), 7) Gandoula Bwnnai, 8) Gorai Dabrainai, 9) Khwizwma Phonai, 10) Khamao Barkhwnai, 11) Mainao Bwkhanganay/Borainai, 12) Mwsa Gelenai, 13) Mufur arw Mwisw Gelenai, 14) Nao zaonay, 15) Sagolaw Bwnai and 16) Thungri Sibnai, are performed in the Kherāi [7,10, 11]. Apart from these, some more dances, such as Jaraphagla dance, Mwsakhaori dance etc. are there which are not presented to the deities. The popular dances of the Bodos, such as Bagurumba, Bardwisikhla, Mwsakhaori etc. have all their roots in Kherāi dances.

Like traditional dances, the key traditional musical instruments are also played in the Kherāi. Three musical instruments, viz. Kham (drum), Siphung (a long flute of bamboo) and Jotha (Cimbal), each of one pair, are played in the Kherāi [7, 9]. Without these instruments a Bodo folk song cannot be performed.

All Kherāi devotees and fans from the nearby villages are invited in the Kherāi by the host village. There is a saying among the Bodos that a Kherāi devotee cannot stay away from a Kherāi about which he/she receives information. The Kherāi, starting in the evening, continues for three consecutive nights and days, with some intervals. The devotees and fans, both men and women, young and old, participate with religious fervour in all items of the Kherāi for the whole period of Kherāi. They exploit the privilege to show their skill in playing the musical instruments and dancing in the Kherāi. The festive mood persists to the villagers while the entire village remains rebounded with the music and rejoice of the Kherāishali (performing place of Kherāi) for the whole period of Kherāi.

After the worshipping session of the Kherāi is concluded, a grand feast is arranged in a place of the village, preferably in the courtyards of the *Douri*, where all the participants, fans and organizers join. There, a discussion is held in regard to different aspects of Kherāi- its significance, preservation, revision and continuation. Then the participants of the feast again engage in singing and dancing with the rhythm of the traditional musical instruments- *serja*, *gonggwna*, *thorka*, in addition to *kham*, *sifung*, *jota*, that are played in performing Kherāi items. After that they take the feast where their popular items *zou* (rice bear), *omabedor khazi* (pork stew), *daobedor khazi* (chicken stew), *ondlakari*, *sobaikari* etc. are served. After the feast the participants leave by paying respect and blessings to each other.

### 2.1.2 The Garza Festival

The *Garza* may be called festival of evicting evils. There are two purposes of Garza - i) to evict evil thoughts from the mind of the villagers, and ii) to expel the evil powers. It is a belief of the Bodos that the if a human involves in some socially or morally forbidden activity then along with him or her the entire village becomes impure; this impurity can be purified through confession before god by observing some religious procedure. On the other hand, the evil powers cause diseases; these evil powers may be driven away from the village and its periphery with the help of their native gods.

The place where Garza is performed is called *Garzashali*, which is usually prepared at the fixed worshipping place of the village, located on the periphery of the village. A new place may also be selected and prepared as *Garzashali* for performing Garza. The festival involves two steps- first, purification of all people and family of the village, and second, worshipping of Gods and Goddesses who are responsible for protecting villagers from misfortunes, such as calamities and diseases. The first stage, called *salami*, is the necessary condition for performing the second. The Bodos believe that in addition to their traditional deities there are some more local gods and goddesses who play active role in guarding the village and conducting day to day works of the villagers; and for their such services these deities are also to be worshipped. That is why only top grade traditional deities are worshipped during the Garza, while a number of bottom grade deities, among whom majority are local deities including the deities of river, rivulets, hills, forests etc. of the locality, acquire a place in Garza. Even the non-Bodo deities, which the Bodos call *Harsha Mwdai*, are also given places in Garza recognizing their role in protecting them from snags and difficulties when they go out of their village. The key difference between Kherāi and Garza is that the latter is performed without a *Doudini*. Thus, this festival is smaller to Kherāi in nature. The villagers perform each item of Garza with relish and a festive mood prevails in the *Garzashali*. Like in Kherāi, a feast with popular dishes is arranged at a convenient place to mark the enjoyment of the villagers due to successful performance of Garza.

Other religious festivals are family oriented, and as such, limited people gather in such festivals. These festivals are much smaller in nature than Kherāi and Garza.

## 2.2 Seasonal Festivals of the Bodos

Bodos celebrate three seasonal festivals- 1. Bwishagu, 2. Amtishuwa, and 3. Domashi.

### 2.2.1 The Bwishagu Festival

Among the seasonal festivals, the Bwishagu is the most prominent one, in fact, it is the most popular festival of the Bodos, which grazes the heart of all people of the community irrespective of their religion, and is thus considered to be a national festival. This festival is held at the advent of spring in their region when their new calendar year starts (which is same as the Assamese and Bengali calendar year). During that time their nature takes a new greenery look with the plants and trees having new buds and leaves in their branches as the monsoon arrives, which the Bodos call the arrival of Bardwiskhla, the goddess of wetness, after they were withered during the autumn.

Bwishagu is celebrated for seven days starting from the last day of the old calendar year. During the festival period they do no home or public work. All members of the family gather at the home, the non-resident family members come from their workplace to meet other members, they stay together for the festival period and take the joy of life, festivity descends in a family, consequently in the entire village. It is celebrated in the following three phases.

**1st Phase:** Bodo is an agricultural community and their agricultural works are performed by the help of cow, their house building walls and floors are layered with cow dung. Without cow, they cannot lead their life. Besides, a little milk is always to be poured into water to prepare pure water for worshipping purpose. As such, cow is an integral part of their life. Taking the association of cow with their life the first day of their greatest festival Bwishagu (which is the last day of the outgoing year) is dedicated to cow. On that day cows are smeared with oil, mixed with turmeric, charcoal powder and rice powder and are then taken to the nearest stream and bathed. On the way to river the cowherd and family members sing different songs relating to their cows. After bath, cows are left free for the day. The ropes by which they are tied during day in the grass fields and at night in the cow shed are replaced by new ones. Right in the morning the door fronts of the family houses and entrances are decorated by different flowers and greenery branches of some forest plants, such as mwkhna, katree, raidwng, burithokon etc.

**2nd phase:** In the first day of the new calendar year, first they conduct prayer to the God at their Ishing (interior compartment of the north house) and Bathou and then perform ritual of offering various food

and wearing items to the souls of the departed family members, which they used to love when they were alive, at the courtyard. After that the actual joy making activities get started.

Touched by the chanting nature, nothing malicious remain in the hearts of the people during Bwishagu, but joy and ecstasy. The pleasant new season glide them to forget the sorrows, troubles, losses, failures, hatred, mistakes and unfulfilled aspirations of the outgone year and make themselves ready for conquering the odds of new year. They make commitment own self to proceed in his/her life with a new strength and mission with a lesson from the experiences of the past. In this regard, a heart touching song is sung by the Bodos-

Bwshwr gwjama thanglaibai  
 Bwthwr gwdana soufwilaibai  
 Thangnai bwshwrni daha-hangmafwrkou baogarnanwi  
 De rongja habab de mwcha  
 Gwdan bwshwrkou borainanwi  
 Agwma jiu mwsekhau  
 Alw-gwjwnwi dwidenlangnw hwnna  
 Gwswao gwdan thangka lananwi

(The old year has departed  
 New season has arrived  
 Forgetting all the odds and sorrows of the gone year  
 Let us enjoy by singing and dancing  
 Greeting the new year  
 With a new commitment in mind  
 To happily lead our adored life)

It is a belief of the Bodos that on the auspicious days of hatred free mind of people during Bwishagu, if the people bless somebody for a particular purpose, then it works without fail. Hence those who are aspiring something in accordance with the natural law and natural way of leading life, such as to have a baby in their conjugal life, to get a suitable partner for marriage, to accomplish an academic mission in scholastic life, to acquire a suitable job to lead his/her life etc. supplicate blessings from the elders during Bwishagu in front of their Bathou, the altar of worshipping their supreme God lying in the north east corner of their courtyard. Whence the elders are enthused by the new nature to prepare themselves ready for the challenges of the incoming year, the young ones are flooded by romanticism; following their seniors, children are also fluttered and thus everyone is flown away by joy.

Agricultural economy constitutes the base of the Bodo economy. The Bodo New Year starts at the arrival of monsoon in the Northeast India. As the monsoon arrives, it is time for the peasants, the common Bodo people, for preparing themselves ready for the summer agricultural works, plantation of paddy which is their staple food. Hence, prior to their engagement in the summer work they enjoy with deep fervour during Bwishagu.

The romanticism of young boys and girls are soared during the Bwishagu. Both boys and girls sing love songs directing opposite sex counterpart and convey his/her love to the other. The girls use to offer *Fali Gamsa* (a small piece of decoratively woven cloth) to her beloved. The couples in love make firm their love through Bwishagu. It happens to be an occasion where boys and girls can openly express their love to their opposite counterpart.

The Bwishagu enjoyers move group wise, the group being formed based on their age and social category, from one family to other family of the village by singing and dancing all the way. The visiting members and visited family members exchange their love, respect and blessings. The families offer *jou* (rice beer) to the visiting members and contribute something in the form of money, rice, egg etc. The Bwishagu enjoyers do not enjoy Bwishagu only in their village, but visit neighbouring villages too. When two groups from different villages meet each other, there takes place a competition of Bwishagu song and dance between them. The Bwishagu lasts for about a week. At last a feast is arranged by the group with the accumulating amount of contributions obtained from the visited families, and with this the 2nd phase of Bwishagu is concluded.

**3rd phase:** In the third phase of Bwishagu, members of a family visit their relatives living in different villages. Such visits are sometimes happened to be pre-scheduled so as to enable other relatives from other villages too to visit the family on the same day and meet together. The relatives discuss about different issues associated with the members of the relative families. Assembled relative members together then join a feast where their Bwishagu traditional cuisine is served, of which, dao kazi, oma kazi, jou are integral items. When the guest leaves the host's home, he/she is presented a Gamsa or a dokhna (traditional man and woman wearing cloth respectively) by the host family, according as the guest is male or female.

Such festival visits are usually non-omissible for newly married couples. Since Bodo society is patriarchal one, wife lives in the husband's family. So, during the Bwishagu festival, new couples visit wife's family and meet family members and relatives. Villagers having intimacy with the married girl pay courtesy call to the couple and invite them to their home.

Apart from these, Bwishagu visit is a part of the people who stay away from the village due to their works. Such people visit their own home as well as relatives during Bwishagu. They enjoy Bwishagu with their near and there at their home.

### 2.2.2 The Amthisuwa Festival

The Amtishuwa is a seasonal festival that is celebrated on the eve of starting the final work of planting paddy in the field. Just like bringing the gear of a car to neutral position in order to change it to a higher one for acceleration, Bodo peasants also take a break for a week before their final round of paddy plantation work. During that period, they suspend their works, they do not plough in the field, don't cut trees. They believe that if plants are cut during this period then they do not know to give buds again. This period starts on the first day of Assamese Calendar month of Ashar (around 15 June). By that time the summer seasonal fruits start to ripe. The home surroundings are then full with different fruits such as, jack, mango, jam, lerkho, jolfi etc. People move from one family to other in small groups and enjoy eating different fruits. That is why this festival is sometimes called the festival of fruits.

During the festival, the villagers engage themselves in different traditional games and sports activities. Competitions in games and sports are conducted in the village where different groups are formed based on some social criterion, such as age, sex, marital status etc. Some of such popular competitions are football match between married and unmarried groups of the village, Hwigudu match between married and unmarried women teams of the village etc. Departed family members are remembered and offered seasonal fruits of their home through a religious function called *Baunai*. A Kherāi, called Umrao Kherāi, is performed at the end of the festival period with two objectives-

- i) to thank their Chief God Bwrai Bathou for providing plenty of fruits during the season and make the same in the next year too, and
- ii) to beg blessings for smooth completion of their ensuing agricultural works.

### 2.2.3 The Domashi Festival

The third seasonal festival of the Bodos is the *Domashi*. This festival is held during the latter part of their harvesting period, the beginning of the Bodo calendar month of Magh (around January 15). The farmers are overjoyed at harvesting their crops, for which they had worked hard during whole the summer season. The food grains are then available in the families. They prepare different traditional snacks from the harvested food grains and enjoy by sharing these with other members of the village. For this reason, this festival is called the festival of food too. The villagers visit family to family in group and enjoy by singing their folk songs connected to the festival. They are offered different festival snacks, together with jou (rice beer).

Apart from the enjoyment of partaking snacks the villagers perform some rituals connected to their beliefs on tree and castles. They believe that during the Domashi, the souls of the fruit trees wish to visit their counterparts of other families, and during this course it may happen that the tree soul forget to come back to its body. In case that happens, the fruits of such tree lose their tastes and turns tasteless. Therefore, in order to make the souls unable to leave, the trees are tied round by the ropes prepared by twisting straws. Further, since they are able to reach the stage of harvesting the crops only because of the labour of the bullocks in

ploughing the agricultural fields, they attribute the entire passage to the cow. Alike in Bwishagu, a mixture of oil, turmeric and charcoal powder is prepared and this is smeared on the cow with the help of cylindrical bamboo. Different grains such as rice, sesame, pulse, lentils are fried and their mixture is chucked in the cowshed in presence of the cows. They refrain from home works that involve cows.

Thus, Bodos have Religious and seasonal festivals that are connected with their beliefs and different seasons. Their seasonal festivals are closely connected with their agricultural works, and therefore, they may also be termed as agricultural festivals. Agricultural festivals of the Bodos, thus, have both religious and seasonal components.

### III. DISCUSSION

Bodos live in plains but forest fringe areas. Although, in ancient times, they remained isolated from other people, in new times, many people from other language and culture have settled in their periphery as well as amidst them. Thus, their culture has been in direct contact with other cultures. Further, Bodos have indirectly come into contact with other cultures through wide dissemination of the features of different cultures through the fast growing electronic media. As a consequence of this, Bodo culture, and thus their festivals, have acculturated other cultures in the discourse of acculturation.

#### 3.1 Effect of acculturation on religious festivals of the Bodos

Due to its contact with other religion for long time, there can be seen a great impact of philosophy of other religion, mainly the Hindu philosophy, on the religion of the Bodos [6]. As a consequence of this impact, apart from their original religious festivals, they are seen to arrange as well as actively take part in the religious festivals of other religions, mostly of Hindus.

With regard to religious festival, the term 'puja' of the Hindus, meaning worshipping God or Goddess, has been incorporated in the Bodo vocabulary in connection with worship. This term is now not only used to mean worshipping Hindu God or Goddess, but their original God and Goddess also. The term 'sibinai' meaning worshipping God or Goddess in Bodo, is almost completely replaced by the term 'puja'. Bodo terms used to mean functions relating to worshipping God or Goddess are now being suffixed by the term 'puja', such as Kherāi puja, Garza puja etc. (which, in earlier times, were called Kherainai, Garza hwnai).

A notable change is seen to have occurred nowadays in the traditional festival site of Kherāi, a fair in the site being a new addition to the festival. In many cases the fair attached to the festival has nothing to do with the festival, it may not bear the traditional character, where traditional goods and articles and food items are only available. It continues as general fair, which is, in most cases, arranged as a financial source to meet the expenditure of arranging the festival.

#### 3.2 Emerging religious festivals among the Bodos

A large section of the Bodos now consider Durga Puja, Kali Puja, Sarasvati Puja, Lakshmi Puja, Doljatra, Shivratri etc. as their own festival and whole heartedly join there.

Sarasvati Puja has become a sacred festival arranged both in home as well as educational institutions. Majority of the Bodos now consider Sarasvati as the goddess of knowledge. In educational institutions, Bodos now arrange Sarasvati Puja in a gorgeous way. This has turned to be the greatest festival of the students. Similarly, the Hindu Goddess Lakshmi is now considered to be the goddess of wealth; festivals are arranged, both at home and at local level, during the worshipping day of the Goddess.

The Doljatra festival of the Hindus has now widespread among the Bodos. The new generation consider it to be one of their own community's festivals and observe it. Similarly, the Shivaratri festival of the same religion also has now become a popular festival of the Bodos.

Apart from these festivals, some more festivals connected to the Sect of greater Hindu religion, such as birth anniversary of religious icons, annual religious festivals of the Sect etc. are also celebrated.

Besides Hindu religion, influence of Christian religion may also be observed in the festivals of the Bodos. Bodo Christians celebrate Christmas in a gorgeous way.



However, except these two religions, Hindu and Christian, no impact of other religions may be observed on the festivals of the Bodos.

### 3.3 Effect of acculturation on seasonal festivals of the Bodos

Although much impact of acculturation is not seen on the religious festivals of the Bodos, the seasonal festivals of the Bodos are found to be effected by acculturation in many ways. The basic features of their festivals are found to be altering in course of time.

During the greatest and the most emotionally attached festival Bwishagu of the Bodos, a same kind of festival, called Rongali Bihu, is also celebrated by neighbouring community. Although Bwishagu and Bihu are of the same nature, the former has some distinctive features from the later. Firstly, Bihu is celebrated at a fixed place of the village, called Bihutoli, which is selected and prepared for the purpose; on the other hand, Bwishagu has no fixed venue, the entire village and its surroundings is the celebration place of Bwishagu, it may be some one's home, village streets, roads connecting two villages, agricultural or grazing field, whatsoever. No arrangement or preparation is required for enjoying Bwishagu. Secondly, Bihu is formalized in character, whereas Bwishagu is an open festival. Due to its formalized character, Bihu has, more or less, been transformed into a stage performing festival since long time.

In relation to Bwishagu festival, it can be observed that it is also following the transformation path of the Rongali Bihu festival. New towns have now developed in the vicinity of Bodo villages and many of them have settled there. Since the town dwellers do not get the village environment for celebrating the festival, they have accepted the way of celebrating the festival on stage, as a consequence of this, the festival is now proceeding towards its formalization.

Apart from towns and cities, same trend of transformation can be observed in the Bodo villages also. Festival functions are organized in the village during the festival. Although cultural enjoyment happens to be the main focus of such function, discussion on social, economic and educational issues are also included there. Through these functions, discussions are made regarding the conditions of the village in these fields and the ways and means for their improvement and development. Besides their natural enjoyment of the festival they use to perform cultural items, relating to the festival, in the stage. This type of function is leading the nature drenched festival towards an artificial stage cultural performing occasion.

Another depreciating trend is that the hearty flow of enjoying Bwishagu is moldering. Only a little number of enjoyers are seen to sing and dance in their own; maximum enjoyers, now, instead of traditional musical instruments and their hearty flow songs, use readymade music and song available in the electronic formats for their enjoyment. In this way the charming natural festival is losing its traditional character day by day.

The second seasonal festival Amtishua is seen to continue its journey wanly from one generation to the next. Only a few of the new generation are found to know about this festival. The traditional activities during this festival has now been limited to arranging a worshipping function.

The third seasonal festival, Domashi, has accommodated many alterations along with deviations. The tradition of enjoying around the fire of the Belagur is diminishing fast. In a deviation the Belagur, instead of being prepared at river-rivulet bank, is now, in many cases, prepared at home vicinity or a public place. The practice of visiting families of the village in group has almost disappeared, it is being replaced by paying of visit by a family to another family. The festival snacks are also found to be replaced by modern refreshment items. When one pays a festival visit to some others home, in considerable number of cases, instead of traditional festival snacks, the guest is served non-traditional market canapés.

One worth mentioning addition to the Domashi festival is arranging a picnic in the vicinity of the village during the festival. The picnic continues day and night long; people participating in the picnic play musical instruments, traditional and non-traditional, and then sing and dance at the picnic site.

### 3.4 Emerging non-religious festivals among the Bodos: The English New Year Celebration

Despite of existence of their traditional new year festival, the Bwishagu, considerable number of Bodos now celebrate 1st of January, the English New Year, in a gorgeous way. People great new year warmly and

convey best wishes one another. People from the same circle gather together at a place, either at home compound or at an open place, enjoy by singing and dancing, and then join in a feast arranged in connection with the celebration. In addition, some go for a picnic and celebrate the New Year at picnic site.

#### IV. OBSERVATION

The changes occurred in the festivals of the Bodos may be viewed from the two perspectives- acculturation and imitation. Going through these perspectives it may be observed that the changes in the festivals of the Bodos are mostly blind imitation rather than acculturation. This assertion becomes clear from following points.

In the neighbouring Hindu culture there are some festivals/rituals relating to tightening of relationships between family members. **Raksha Bandhan** and **Karva Chauth** are most mentionable among such festivals. During Raksha Bandhan, which mean **tie of protection**, sisters tie a protective thread around the right wrist of their brothers. Brothers, in turn, present gifts to their sisters and promise to protect them from odds and evils in future [12]. On the other hand, Karva Chauth is a celebration of the sanctity of marriage; a fasting ritual is observed by all married Hindu women seeking the longevity, prosperity and well-being of their husbands [13]. After many years of close living with the Hindus these festivals are not observed by the Bodos; whereas they are found to celebrate many popular Hindu festivals such as Doljatra, Shivaratri, etc. It seems that they are more attracted by merry making festivals than healthier society building cultural units. Whatever they are accepting, in most cases, are being done so unconsciously, in other words, they are not adapting other cultures, rather, they are blindly imitating them.

One more important aspect is the spread of celebration of different festivals to the educational institutions. Celebration of Happy Bwishagu is seen to be organized at colleges and universities. Such celebrations may facilitate growth of secondary Bwishagu, that may be called Institutional Bwishagu.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Suffering from the vicissitudes of cultural behaviour, traditional festivals of the Bodos have undergone many changes. Bodos constitute the largest tribal group of north-east India. As regard to tribal people, the unabated changes in their culture due to different reasons have threatened their survival [14]. One of these reasons of cultural change is obviously the acculturation.

Bodo culture is passing through a challenging phase. Acculturation is an unescapable part of cultural development, but it should be directed towards enriching its original culture, not its erosion. The present trend of changes in Bodo culture is mostly blind imitation rather than acculturation. Bodos have to analyse prose and con of every piece of other culture which they are going to accommodate in their culture. Otherwise, the blind imitation of other's culture will lead their distinct cultural features towards its extinction.

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