

# BODO MARRIAGE SONGS: A STUDY

Bina Basumatary

Research Scholar,

Bodoland University, Kokrajhar.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION:

Human being lives in a society. Community based co-existence gave birth to the present day human civilization. Marriage was one such important institution through which ancient people propagated human civilization. It was also a mode of maintaining friendly co-existence among different groups of people. In *Manu Sanghita*, “Marriage is a social institution for the regulation of proper relations between the two sexes.”<sup>1</sup> Social unity is strengthened through the institution of marriage. According to Bhaben Narzi, “Marriage is an important experience of an individual. Besides pro-creation 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.”<sup>2</sup> Consequently human beings, in collaboration of marriage system, have differentiated themselves from the other animals. Through the institution of marriage, the so called civilized society came into being. Marriage is not only a celebration of mankind but also loneliness life transformed into family.<sup>3</sup> After marriage man becomes conscious of his social responsibilities. This social ceremony of marriage is very important in life cycle of the Bodos. In Bodo the Marriage is called ‘*Haba*’, ‘*Ha*’ means ‘soil’ or ‘earth’ and ‘*Ba*’ means ‘to bear something’ or ‘soil on the back’. In other words ‘*Haba*’ or the ‘Marriage’ imposes the responsibility of carrying the earth or the process of civilization. It is quite interesting that the *Sanskrit* word for marriage “*bibaha*” also has a similar etymological meaning.<sup>4</sup> So the marriage system is one of the best democratic institutions for the progress and propagation of civilized human society.

## 1.1 Aims and Objectives of the Study:

This study is a folkloristic analysis. Folk songs are adorable part of the human life. So, through the folk songs, community and races can maintain and establish their identity. In this paper attempt is made to highlight the socio-cultural aspects reflected in Bodo marriage songs and reflection of folk-life of the society. This study gives the opportunity to know the Bodo Folk Literature. Thus, the Bodos are rich stock in the folk literature and culture. Taking interest to this aspect, a textual analysis has been done here based on the context of marriage songs of the Bodos.

<sup>1</sup> Quted from, Narzaree, Indramalati and Birlang. (2008). *Laisini Bikhayao Indramalati*. Guwahati: N.L. publication. p-33

<sup>2</sup> Quted from, Baro, Bhoumik Ch. (ed). (2015). *Marriage songs of the Bodos: A Brief Discussion* (Research Journal, Deptt. of Bodo). Chirang: Legend Offset & Enterprise. p-1

<sup>3</sup> Narzi, Bhaben. (2014). *Boro Kachari Samaj arw Harimu*. Chirang: Oasis Offset Printers. p-60

<sup>4</sup> Baro, Bhoumik Ch. op.cit. p-1

## 1.2 Methodology:

The topic has been analyzed through folkloristic approach. The analysis has been done based on texts as collected from secondary sources. Required data have been utilized for an extensive discussion.

## 1.3 Discussion:

The followings are the major areas of discussion. There are six marriage systems in Bodo society. This are-

- i) *Haba gwlaol/ swngnanwi lainai haba* (arranged marriage)
- ii) *Gwrzia lakhinai haba* (rendering service through marriage)
- iii) *Kharsonnai haba*
- iv) *Dongkha habnai haba* (marrying a widow and stays in her home)
- v) *Bwnanwi lainai haba* (marriage through stealing a bride)
- vi) *Dwnkhar lainanwi lanai haba* (elopement marriage)

Among this six marriage system only i) and ii) are celebrated with pomp and show, full of joy, singing and dancing. The rest four are not celebrated with full participation.

There are so many marriage songs found among the Bodos. But its use in the Bodo society is seen decreasing today, perhaps due to the influence of modern cultural adaptations. The marriage songs reflect the socio-cultural aspects and the way of living of the Bodo community. The social folk customs of the Bodo marriage system differ among the *Bathou* and the *Brahma* or other religious groups of the Bodo society. Traditionally existing “*Hathasuni haba*” is perhaps one of the oldest and simple marriage forms. In front of the *Bathou* (*bitha*), along with the bride and bridegroom, the *Oza* or *Douri* chants the mantras and blesses them. In this ‘*hathasuni*’ marriage the bride offers the meal to bridegroom and other villages. In the *hathasuni* marriage the bride cooks the curry called “*Ondla Wngkri* (curry)”. This *Ondla* curry is cooked without spice, turmeric and *kharwi* (a kind of soda or ash water). Traditionally “*Ondla*” was cooked by bride alone. However these days other women are seen helping the bride in the preparation of the “*Ondla*” offered in “*hathasuni*”.

Here the following chants made by *Oza* or *Douri* to introduce bride to the god and goddesses are given as follows-

*ehem de sannii giri sanja*

*mwdainigiri bwrai bathou maharaja,*

*dainigiriya dai khalamwbla*

*nimahani giri nwnng.*

*jwngni mwjang gajri*

*nidan-aphwd, rog-biyadinifrai*

*phwthangraya nwnwnw.*

*nwi dinwi bipha guru,*

*amwkhaya amwkhikhou bihamjw labwbai,*

*dinwi bininw nwnwnw akhai-laru*

*wngkham-wngkhri hwnai jabai,*

*najaodw apha nwnw bipha guru.*

*bihamjwni muga amwkhi*

*sanphrwmbw sukh bai sukh lakhi*

*apha nwnwnw phao-phuja mwnbai thagwn,*

*dinwi hathasunini phao-phuja hwdwnw*

*apha nwnwthaga mini-khusi najaonanwi*

*bwr-asirbad hwdw.*

*dohai apha bipha guru!*

*jwnghalai swr dongbaow*

*nailo jalo nwnw bipha gurulo*

*gole gole khulumw jwnw. (gugurub khulumw)<sup>5</sup>*

In English rendering,

oh Lord of the sun

lord of gods *Bwrai Bathou*

if trespassers do trespass

you are the forgiver

virtue and vices of ours

fate and misfortunes and ailments

you are the saviour

<sup>5</sup> Narzi, Bhaben. op.cit. p-77

oh today our lord

so and so has brought daughter-in-law

today for this offer you *akhai-laru*

rice and curry is offered

accept this father and our lord

name of daughter-in-law is.....

always keep them in happiness

father you will always be worshipped

today worship of *hathasuni* is offered

accept it happily

shower your blessing s

oh! Lord our father

we have none but you

the only god our father

again and again we worship you.



After worshipping the gods and goddesses, the *Oza* or *Douri* advises the bride and the bridegroom about the responsibilities of caring their family and the society in their everyday life. After this the bride offers the food to all the villagers present there. The food offering ceremony starts with the offering of food first to the bridegroom. Then the food is offered to the other people.

Thus, the Bodos celebrate the marriage ceremony by singing, dancing along with the musical instruments like, *Kham* (drum), *Siphung* (flute), *Jotha* (cymbal), *Gongwna*, *Khaoang* (another kind of cymbal) etc. Bhaben Narzi has discussed about the marriage songs of the Bodos in his book “Boro-Kacharis Geet-Mat”. In this book the Bodo marriage songs is divided in some branches such as, season of marriage, merry-making, advices norms and good looking.<sup>6</sup> There are such songs of marriage that can be divided as follows-

Since the time immemorial, the Bodos have been philosophically, accepting the autumn season as the best and the most suitable time for marriage. They basically organize the marriage ceremony at the time of autumn season. Such songs are-

<sup>6</sup> Narzi, Bhaben. (1983). Boro-kacharir Geet-Mat. Guwahati: Choudhury Enterprise. p-43

*haba jenglab jenglab*

*o' aawi jenglab*

*sanba gwlaoni dinao*

*o' aawi dinao.*<sup>7</sup>

In English,

wedding jenglab jenglab

o' mother, jenglab

on the long day

o' mother.

The Bodos prepares or arranges the marriage ceremony for better execution in the month of 'Phagun'. Because they considers the month of *phagun* is as longest day and the better. So, the Bodos organises the marriage in the month of *phagun*.

Bodo marriages are like festivals. The customs or traditions followed in the oldest *Bathou* religion is the best represented marriage customs of the Bodos. Bodo marriage involves full of entertaining, drinking and eating meat, singing heartily and dancing etc. According to the Bodo tradition marriages lasted for seven days and seven nights, eating and drinking, singing and dancing formally. During merry-making, enjoying, the past memories are reiterated and commemorated. This song is one such example,

*ouani khanjong khanai khakhw*

*gwdwni dina bwjwng thangkhw?*

*bedorni akhai jouni phukhriya*

*gwilialwi bajwi gwilia.*<sup>8</sup>

In English,

lock with bamboo comb

where are the old days

abundance of meat and rice-beer

no more sister-in-law.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p-43

<sup>8</sup> Narzi, Bhaben. op.cit. p-73

These folk songs reflect the old cherished traditions and human conditions of the days gone by. Folk songs are the result of day to day encounter of the people down the ages.

During the marriage ceremony the party of the bride sometimes sings to reveal the tasteless food in a teasing manner. Like-

*ukhum besani silimala,*

*o' awi! silimala*

*wi, houa mwjang*

*nwngni habani joulai*

*melema, melema*

*o' awi melema.<sup>9</sup>*

In English rendering,

centipede insect of the top roof

o' mother! Centipede

oi' handsome bridegroom

rice-beer of your wedding

tasteless, tasteless

o' tasteless.

From this folk song it is revealed that the rice-beer is commonly used traditional drink among the Bodos. Rice-beer is used commonly during marriage ceremony, *Bwisagu, Magw/Domasi, Saori-badali* etc. If sometimes during marriage ceremony the rice-beer becomes insufficient, sour and watery. Then the bride's party sings-

*injur mukhani gwmwthing,*

*nwngni joulai khwithing thing,*

*khwithing thing.*

*ukhum mudani silimala,*

*nwngni joulai melema.*

*dabkha khibuni habru,*

<sup>9</sup> Narzi, Bhaben. op.cit. p-44

*nwngni joualai dwibru bru.*<sup>10</sup>

In English rendering,

cricket(insect) of wall's edge

your rice-beer is sour, sour

centipede of the thatch roof

your rice-beer is tasteless

mud of the rice-beer pitcher

your rice-beer is watery, watery.

Likewise, there is another song sang during marriage ceremony when the pork becomes insufficient. The bride's party sings teasing the groom's party through the following song-

*se selekha dokha,*

*houa gwdanni oma bainaya jokha,*

*jokha aiwi jokha.*

*dorse jablabw sambram*

*dornwi jablabw sambram*

*sambram aiwi sambram.*<sup>11</sup>

In English rendering,

se selekha dokha

bridegroom's bought pork

is limited o' mother limited.

one piece but a onion

two piece only onion

only onion.

Therefore, in Bodo social system along with *Barlangpha*, a *Bwirathi* (a woman attendant) of bride and bridegroom in a marriage plays very important role. Without *bwirathi* a Bodo wedding becomes meaningless. All the marriage related issues in Bodo society is borne by a *Barlangpha* and *Bwirathi*. In the

<sup>10</sup> Brahma, Mahini Mohan. (2011). *Boroni khuga methai*. Kokrajhar: N.L. Publication. p-33

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p-35

Bodo society four *Bwirathi* serves in a marriage ceremony. Two of them are married women and the other two are unmarried girl. The married *Bwirathi* are called “gor” and the unmarried two are called “aitha” (literary virgin). If the *Bwirathi*’s become late in distributing betel nut and betel leaf, then the bride’s party sings the following song-

*wi bwirathi lolia*

*khaonw babangsin goi khaonaikhuo*

*jwnglai jalia.*<sup>12</sup>

In English rendering,

oh *bwirathi* lolia

reluctantly cutting the betel

we won’t eat.

The betel nut and betel leaf are used to show great honour and respect to the guests in Bodo society. It is used in marriage ceremony, worship, *saori-badali* etc. Betel nut and betel leaf is used as a symbol of great honour and respect. In special occasions like wedding ceremony or any meeting a pair of betel nut and betel leaf is offered in front of the gathered community to show great honour and respect. If the betel nut and betel leaf is not offered to the bride’s party in due time then they sings thus-

*goi bira bira phathwi bira bira hwabwla*

*nwi hinjao gwdankhuo langfinnswi langfinnswi.*<sup>13</sup>

In English rendering,

if a chunk of betel nut and betel leaf is not offered

we are gonna take back our bride.

Thus, when the *bwirathi*’s distribution of betel nut and betel leaf satisfies the bride’s party, they sing-

*wi jeth-asarni reo-reoa*

*o’ aiwi reo-reoa*

*jaowisw lagwni goi-phathwikhuo*

*jawi jawinw*

*hathaiasw meolai langbai.*<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Narzi, Bhaben. op.cit. p-66

<sup>13</sup> Boro, Madhu Ram. (1995). Boro Loko-Sahitya (geet-pot). Hajo: Priyadani Printing Press. p-60

In English rendering,

oh, *jeth-asarni* (assamese calendar's month) sicada of  
 o' mother sicada  
 son-in-law's betel leaf and betel nut  
 eating tine and again.

In ancient times *barlangpha* played an important role in Bodo marriage ceremonies. It was mandatory on the part of bridegroom's party to take *barlangpha* while they went to get bride along with them. *Barlangpha*, symbolically was a pathfinder or a leader of the bridegroom. *Barlangpha* had to carry all the required materials of the bridegroom's party to the bride's house. Besides distributing betel nut and betel leaves to the honoured guests present there. He usually had to entertain the bride's guest through his humour, playful jokes, songs and witticism, thereby explaining the main purpose of marriage knot. In ancient day's *barlangpha* used to carry the head of a pig or 'ha' (a piece of soil/earth) on his back, symbolic representation of social and conjugal responsibilities. He sings "look children, just as I have carried the 'ha' (soil/earth) on my back, so shall you carry the world". Therefore, you bride and bridegroom have to unanimously agree to participate in pro-creation of human civilization, upholding and propagation of humanity.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, on their way back womenfolk made *barlangpha* dance and sing. They also dance along with him. Like as-

*oma ogorong phen phen*  
*zaha chamaya(zamaya) zokhai thaisekhuonw zen then*  
*ada! Phwia(lw) phwia*  
*mwkhang saikho kho.*<sup>16</sup>

In English rendering,

a pigsty with plenty of piglets  
 our son-in-law is unable to finish  
 just a pitcher of rice-beer  
 brother (*barlangpha*) is not helping to finish  
 bridegroom's countenance fell.

<sup>14</sup> Narzi, Bhaben op.cit. p-66

<sup>15</sup> Narzaree, Indramalati & Birlang. op.cit. p-36

<sup>16</sup> Narzi, Bhaben. op.cit. p-45

This song reveals the tradition of the Bodo Kacharis during marriage celebrations. Mother-in-law out of love offers a full pitcher of rice-beer to her son-in-law. Son-in-law is expected to drink it up alone whole. But he is unable to drink it up alone and his countenance fell out of shyness. He seeks the help of *Barlangpha*, he does not help him. According to the Bodo Kachari traditional custom if a full pitcher of rice-beer is offered to son-in-law, he has to drink it up until its taste fades.<sup>17</sup>

In the same way *Bwirathi* and *Barlangpha* distributes the betel-nut and betel-leaves among the people present in the wedding. Besides they also entertain the people by dancing and singing the following song,

*nwngni thaigir phithai baidi lathim luthim mwkhanga*

*okhamwflamnai baidi khonse*

*flam mwflamnanwi minikhwire khalamnanwi,*

*nwngni meoa khithabadi adwia*

*laswi barod burod phwinanwi*

*nwngni mwzlai zanzi badi zanzia*

*loler loler swmaonanwi,*

*donkhaorai khanaikhuo zangkhri zangkhri*

*nwngni thalir phoslabadi akhanthia*

*sibdo sibdo sibnanwi,*

*nwngni thoblo denthabadi asijwng*

*goia randw agwi bwirathi lolia,*

*da laji da laji*

*mwkhanga khwmsi daja,*

*jwmwikhuo khathiao da labw.<sup>18</sup>*

In English rendering,

your face like a chalita fruit

like a lightening

a flash of smile you give

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p-46

<sup>18</sup> Brahma, Mohini Mohan op.cit. pp-35-36

like a bamboo shoot your calves are

slowly coming hopping

your waist is like that of an ant

shaking rythmatically

distribute the betel sister *Bwirathi*

don't be shy

don't pale your face

don't bring the cloud.

Looks of the face or the relationships are being sung in the Bodo folk songs. Like the older women of the bride sings praising the relatives of the bride. Like-

*daoboni gang daokhani gang*

*lang jaoai lang*

*angni phisaya jwlwi mwjang.*<sup>19</sup>

In English rendering,

wings of crane and wings of crow

take son-in-law

my daughter is of good origine.

In the same way the elder women of the bridegroom's party sings praising the bridegroom's family. Like-

*singphring khalai mwsalai*

*jaha adaya delai lai.*<sup>20</sup>

In English rendering,

Dancing along plucking *singphring* fruits

our brother is handsome.

Thus after the singing and dancing and concluding the ceremonial rites the bridegroom's party brings home the bride. When the bride is reluctant to leave on the thought of leaving behind her parents and brothers and sisters then the women of bridegroom's party sings the following-

<sup>19</sup> Narzi, Bhaben. op.cit. p-47

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p-47

*h aio! h ehe aio hom!*

*swrni habamwn? h aio hom*

*jaha agwini jaha sonani*

*haba hai*

*h ehe aio h aio hom.*<sup>21</sup>

In English rendering,

h.. oh! h oh to hold

whose marriage? h oh to hold

our young sister's, our dearest's marriage

h eh oh h oh to hold.

Likewise when the bride is handed over to the family of bridegroom, the bride cries unable to leave behind her home, parents and brothers and sisters. Then the elders of the village advices her and sings-

*dagabswi awi dagabswi, dagabswi,*

*oma gidira baro khurmani,*

*phisa hinjaoa malaini*

*dagabswi awi dagabswi*

*gabbla khublabw nwma-nwmpkhuhuo mwnliya*

*mephal, gongarnw horakhwi*

*boroni asar, boroni bisarjwng*

*boro harinw hordwng, hordwng raijw janwsw*

*gabnai khunaikhuo nagarnanwi*

*anan gossai binan gossaikhuo*

*athing gajob akhai narjob khalamnanwi*

*rongja-bajawi, maowi-dangwi, raijw jadw.*<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p-48

<sup>22</sup> Brahma, Mohini Mohan. op.cit. p-41

In English rendering,

don't cry child don't cry,

big pig is of others

daughters are of other's family

don't cry child don't cry

even if you cry you won't get your parent's

we haven't given you to Nepalese, Bhutanese

with the *bodo*'s rites and rituals

we have given you to bodos to propagate the family

stop crying

remember god

folding hands and kneeling

be happy, working, lead the life.

This folk song reveals that the Bodos love their culture very much and they don't encourage their sons and daughters to the people of other caste or community. The Bodos have their own social customs and norms, and the love to follow their own existing social norms and lives in complete discipline and promotes these social norms to their next generation.

The song sang during marriage ceremony is very rich in terms of promoting social values. Slip of tongue and slip of legs brings fate to one's life. This message is being taught to the young generation through some social songs during marriage celebrations. The bride is advised her not to slip her tongue in her mother-in-laws house. She is advised to be humble and mild to promote peace and harmony in her mother-in-laws house. This song being sang by the elders is very relevant-

*athing gajwb, hathai orjwb*

*akhaini phaoa jayakhwi*

*athingni phaoa jayakhwi*

*baijw phathalkhuo jahwidw aiwi jahwidw.*<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Narzi, Bhaben. op.cit. p-73

In English rendering,

firm legs and firm teeth

the gester of your hand

rythm/gester of your leg is not ok

live there happily daughter.

This song warms the bride to be careful, because conjugal life is not that easy to thread on. To live happily in married life one needs to be firm, teeth implies to control one's tongue and behaviour. She is advised not to pick quarrel with anybody or break peace of her neighbours. So, another song says-

*khwijwma thwbw khudwijwng*

*mansia thayw gogiyathijwng*

*dagabswi aiwi! dagabswi*

*o' aiwi! dagabswi*

*nwma nwmphaya dao-oma badi*

*homna horbai-*

*laothi gongse phaga dwnge gothai khabai*

*dagabswi aiwi! dagabswi*

*harsa hwuanw horakhwi horakhwi.<sup>24</sup>*

In English rendering,

ants built nest with spittle

men lives with kids and kin

don't cry daughter

o', daughter don't cry

parents married you off

married you off

a rope and a stick is offered

don't cry daughter

<sup>24</sup> Narzi, Bhaben. op.cit. p-52

you are not married to other caste.

This song reveals that a man cannot live alone. He lives in a society, this is nature's law. Parents have already entrusted the responsibility of managing family and protecting them. Thus singing the song of such encouraging and value based message, the elders of the society calms the bride.

#### 1.4 Conclusion:

A lot has been discussed above about the marriage songs of the Bodos. Marriage is unavoidable social set-up that everyone has to undergo and thus partake in the act of procreation and propagation of human civilization. The marriage songs of the Bodos reveal the social picture of the Bodo people. Mention may be made here that the folk songs of the Bodos reveals the matrimonial rites of the community, where, although it's a patriarchal society, the major importance is given to the womenfolk in this practices. Bodo marriage songs are important part of the Bodo literature and these songs are built upon a deep folk philosophy. These songs are really melodious and meaningful. Other than songs discussed here, there are many other marriage songs found among the Bodos. Occasional and eventful marriage songs sang during fetching water for bathing the bride, during bathing, song sang during make-up etc. exist among Bodos. These songs bathing bride and bridegroom are generally found in the districts of Barpeta, Baksa, Kamrup, Goalpara and Udalguri Districts. However, the usage of marriage songs during marriage ceremonies of the Bodo people is on the decline. Mentioned may be made here of the followers of recent modified "*Bibar Bathou*" worshippers, who use prayer hymns during marriage ceremonies and marriage rites among the Bodos.

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