



KHERAI FESTIVAL OF THE BODOS

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ABSTRACT:

Among the religious festivals of the Bodos, Kherai festival occupied the most important place in Bodo society. This festival is celebrated once or twice in a year with the objective of more agricultural production and for the welfare of the villagers. The Kherai festival is a kind of worship as well as festival performed for good agriculture product. The main purpose of Kherai festival is to take blessing from the Bwrai Bathou i.e. Supreme God and Mainao Buri (goddess of wealth) for the welfare of the villagers as well as the prosperity of agriculture. So, for the good harvest of crops, after the cultivation the Bodos perform Kherai festival.

Keywords: Kherai, Bwrai Bathou, Supreme God, Mainao Buri.

OBJECTIVE:

The objective of the study is to highlight and study the traditional *Kherai* festival of the Bodos. Among the religious festivals of the Bodos, *Kherai* festival occupied the most important place in Bodo society. The main purpose of *Kherai* festival is to take blessing from the *Bwrai Bathou* i.e. Supreme God and *Mainao Buri* (goddess of wealth) for the welfare of the villagers as well as the prosperity of agriculture. With the sole objective of understanding the transition of traditional dresses has been developed in this paper.

METHODOLOGY:

The methodology adopted in this paper is inter-disciplinary approach which included consulting number of written sources as well as interview method. The people who have knowledge of traditional *Kherai* festival of the Bodos and various associated with information. The technique of anthropological data collection, participants, interview method are adopted. The collection of data has been analyzed both quantitatively and the qualitatively wherever necessary.

INDRODUCTION:

Kherai festival occupied the most important place among the religious festivals of the Bodos, in Bodo society. Dr. K. Brahma (Brahma, 2009: p. 5.) and Dr. A. K. Boro (Boro, 2010: p. 13.) stated that there are four kinds of *Kherai* namely i) *Darchan Kherai*, ii) *Umrao Kherai*, iii) *Phalo Kherai* and iv) *Noaoni Kherai*. But, Bhaben Narzi mentioned only three kind of *Kherai* *Hwnai-*

i) *Asu Kherai*, ii) *Sali Kherai* and iii) *Noaoni Kherai*. (Narzi, 2006: p. 160.) On the other hand, Binoy Kumar Brahma and Birendra Giri Basumatary mentioned five kinds of *Kherai* which are *Asu Kherai*, *Maisali Kherai*, *Palw Kherai*, *Noni Kherai*, *Daoha Kherai*. (Basumatary, 1993: p. 37.) So, we find that the scholars are not united their opinion about the number of the *Kherai* as a result of which it need to further research and study.

ANALYSIS:

For the performance of *Kherai Hwnai*, there is no fixed day. It is generally celebrated at the end of harvesting. However, *Noaoni Kherai* is performed by the household when the concern family has to ward off jungle gods and goddesses at any time. In the *Kherai Hwnai*, *Oja*, *Doudini* and *Dwori* are the very important persons. (Basumatary, 1993: p. 37.) In absence of them the *Kherai Hwnai* cannot be carried out. It is the duty of the *Oja* to recite the mantras, *Doudini* to dance for the propitiations of deities and *Dwori* to sacrifice various livestock for gods and goddesses. (Nath, 2011: p. 180.) *Doudini* used to dance with music without singing any song.

Before starting the actual ritual of *Kherai Hwnai*, *Doudini* sprinkles holy water around the *Bathou* altar and the present members of the place three times with the help of melodious tune of *Kham* (Drum), *Siphung* (flute) and *Jotha* (cymbal) for the purpose of the purification. After that, the *Doudini* used to seat on a piece of *Gambari Khamphlai*⁴⁰ (A pin less low tool made of *Gambari* wood) in front of the *Bathou* altar. While *Doudini* seats on the *Kamphlai*, the *Oja* recites the following mantras to welcome gods and goddesses and to make *Doudini* hypnotized. (Brahma, 2009: p. 190.)

With the completion of the mantras recited by the *Oja*, the *Doudini* became in the state of unconsciousness which is known as *Alongikhangnai*. (Ibid. p. 179.) in Bodo. When the *Doudini* converted into the spiritual being, she began to say the tales of the gods and goddesses. She makes round the *Bathou* altar with sprinkling holy water. She is dancing with the sound of the musical instruments like *Kham* (drum), *Siphung* (flute) and *Jotha* (cymbal). (Informant: Jatindra Brahma, Age- 59, Occupation- Teacher, Vill.- Ouguri, Dist. Chirang, BTC, Assam on 23/05/2016.) In *Kherai Hwnai* different kinds of dance are performed to please *Bathou Bwrai* and other traditional god and goddesses of the Bodo. (Basurnatary, 2007: p. 87.)

According to Sekhar Brahma, there are eighteen different types of shamanistic *Kherai* dance. Some of the important *Kherai* dances of the Bodos are *Bathou Gidingnai*, *Mwsaglandnai*, *Khwijwma Phonai*, *Gandwola Bwnai*, *Muphur Gelenai*, *Kamao Barkwnai*, *Thungriao Gakwnai*, *Dao Thwi Lwngnai*, *Maoji Membrang Gelenai*, *Mwsakaori Mwsanai*, *Kophri Sihnai*, *Jarapagla Mwsanai*, *Thentamali Mwsanai*, *Nao Jaonai Mwsanai* etc. (Brahma, 2006: p. 14.)

Bathou Gidingnai: *Doudini* dances around the altar of the *Kherai* for god *Ai Bima*. She dances slowly with the melodious tune of *Kham* (drum), *Siphung* (flute) and *Jotha* (cymbal).

Khwijwma Phonai: *Doudini* dances with sword and display the tactics of god *Abla Khungur* how to kill the enemies in the battle field. This dance is related to the god *Abla Khungur*.

Sagwla Bwnai: This dance is related to the god Khaji. *Doudini* show the tactics of god *Khaji* how he throw out the enemies by catching on the waist.

Dhahal Sibnai: *Doudini* dances with a shield. This dance is related to the *Bwrai Aileng*, the bodyguard of the *Bwrai Bathou*. *Doudini* illustrates the tactics of *Bwrai Aileng* how a person can save himself from the enemies in the battle field.

Thungri Gongnwi Sibnai: *Doudini* dances with two swords around the *Bathou* altar of *Kherai Puja* and highlights the war dance how to overcome the enemies in the battle field. This dance is related to the god *Agrang*.

Gandhaua Bwnnai: *Doudini* demonstrates with rope how to bind and destroy the enemies in the battle field. This dance is related to the god *Khwila*.

Dhahal Thungri Sibnai: This dance is related to the god *Rajputra*. *Doudini* dances with a shield and sword demonstrating how to attack and how to save from the enemies in the battle field.

Khamao Barkhwnai: *Doudini* dances and climbs up on the drum (Kham). This is related to the *Rajkhandra* god.

Badali Birnai: *Doudini* presents how to attack on the neck of enemies by flying like bat. This dance is related to the *Ali Bwrai*.

Mwisw Gelenai: This is performed by the *Doudini* in the nature of Buffalo. *Doudini* demonstrates how buffalo attack enemy with sharp horn. This dance is related to the *Ai Dibaoli* deity.

Nao Basainai: This dance is related to the god *Munasu*. *Doudini* demonstrates with her dance the expulsion of evil gods from the village with boat.

Mufur Gelenai: *Doudini* dances showing the tactics how *Bulri Buri* attacks enemies in the battle like bear.

Mwsa Gelenai: The *Doudini* dances *Bagh Raja* (king of tiger) has also important place in *Kherai Hwnai*. *Doudini* demonstrates the tactics of *Bag Raja* how he attacks enemies in the battle field.

Gorai Dabrainai: In the form of *Gorai Dabrainai* dance, the *Doudini* show how the god *Basumati* rides the horse and attack enemies.

Nao Jaonai: In the dance of *Nao Jaonai*, *Doudini* dance in the way of god *Chowdhury* showing how the god attacks the enemies with boat.

Mainao Borainai: It is the welcoming of goddess *Mainao* in which the *Doudini* used to seat in front of the *Bathou* altar of *Kherai Puja* where the *Oja* recites the holy hymns to hypnotize *Doudini*. When reciting the holy hymns by the *Oja*, *Kham* (drum), *Siphung* (flute) and *Jotha* (cymbal) are also played with melodious tune. When the *Doudini* is converted into the spiritual being of the goddess *Mainao*, she speaks the following words in the voice of goddess *Mainao*. (Brahma, 2009: p. 185.)

CONCLUSION:

In the *Kherai* dance, the *Doudini* demonstrates different forms of dances of the gods and goddesses of Bodos. The villagers also joint in the dance with great joy. During the dance the villagers are made request to the *Doudini* to foretell or predict their futures of the year. After the dance, she tells the fortune of the people, good or bad years of villagers, success or failure of their crops production and for their safeguard from any danger etc. (Informant: Dharani Kanta Narzary, Age- 67, Occupation- Priest, VillLaokriguri, P.O.- Serfanguri, Dist- Kokrajhar, BTC) Then, the *Doudini* holds the two bamboo post at the front of the Bathou altar of *Kherai Hwnai* and shakes her head and kneel down at the *Bathou* altar. The *Oja* sprinkles holy water on her to bring in the real sense or normal condition. After a few minutes, *Doudini* regains her real sense and *Kherai Hwnai* comes to an end.

Thus, the *Kherai* festival is regarded as one of the most important religious festivals of the Bodos. In earlier time, it was celebrated for seven consecutive days. But nowadays, it is organized mostly for a day or night only.

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