CHAPTER-IV

NEO-VAISHNAVISM AND ITS IMPACT ON BODO SOCIAL FOLK CUSTOM

INTRODUCTION

Social folk custom is one of the important branches of folklore that studies the festivals and celebrations. These festivals and celebrations are either religious or secular. There are some customs associated in our life cycle, ceremonies and rites related to birth, marriage and death. In these aspects of folklore, R.M Dorson observed “in between oral literature and material culture lies an area of traditional life facing in both directions. One such area we may call Social folk custom. Here the emphasis is on group interactions rather than on individual skills and performances. English antiquaries lumped under connected with villages, manors, landmarks, households, churches, holidays, and such as rites de passage such as birth initiation, marriage and death. Customs of this sort include “telling the bees of a death in the family by draping the hives in black, or nailing up a horseshoe on the front door to avert witchcraft, or making a wish before tasting the first fruits of the season. These customs are often closely bound up with
deeply held folk beliefs, which in themselves constitute a folklore genre. Some customs may be highly specific and local. Thus this area of folklore study generally covers festivals and ceremonies connected with rite de passage, agricultural activity and calendar. Through songs and other forms of oral literature associated with these rites are discussed under the heading of oral literature. Here are many social customs and ritualistic observances, which are generally studied in under social folk customs. However, these traditional customs are passed from the older generation to the new one and even today; it seems that these are followed in the same way, particularly in the rural area.

1. Rites of passage
   A. Birth and initiation rite
   B. Puberty rite
   C. Marriage rite
   D. Death rite

2. Festival and Public Celebration
   A. Seasonal Festival
   B. Agricultural
   C. Calendaric Festival

III.1. Rites of passage

Life is full of transition in cyclic order. In the language of S. T. Kimbali observes- \textquoteleft Rite of passage means rites of transition. It is the modification of the French term \textquoteleft rites-de-passage\textquoteright. It includes all the rites and ceremonies which lead up an individual into a new way of life or new status in life. The rites and rituals are those which are performed on certain biological crisis of human life as birth, puberty, procreation, old age or death. Because they involve transition from one social role to another. Transition is of three kinds: separation, transition and incorporation\textsuperscript{2}.

According to A.V. Gennep, \textquoteleft rite of passage is defined as the rites which accompany every changes of place, state, social position and age. Such rites exist in all cultures everywhere, ancient and contemporary, primitive, present and urban society. \textquoteleft Rites of separation are prominent in funeral ceremonies, rites of incorporation at marriages. Transition rites may play an important part, for instance, in pregnancy, betrothal and initiation, or they may be reduced to a minimum in adoption, in the delivery of a second child, in remarriage, or in the passage from the second to the third age group.\textquoteright\textsuperscript{3}

K. Brahma observes that \textquoteleft the Bodo life cycle more or less centres round the three most important rites of passage viz. birth, marriage and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{2}Kimbali, S.T., \textit{Rites De Passage}, p-iii,
\item \textsuperscript{3}Ibid, p-viii.
\end{itemize}
death." Though the social folk custom of the Bodos can be studied and observed in these three important rites of passage, the aim of this chapter is to highlight influence of the rites of the neo-vaishnavism on the Bodos of Sonitpur. The influence of the Hinduism, Christianity on the Bodo society is also much. But it can be observed that the influence of the Assamese culture is the dominating culture in the district. The Bodo people are seen performing various non Bodos rituals connected with the different stages. These are discussed in the following:

**III.1.A. Birth Rites**

Among the Bodo community there is a tradition of helping each other at the time of child birth. Generally the experienced elderly women perform duties of midwives. When the child is born the umbilical cord is cut with a sharp edged blade of green bamboo skin. A cotton or muga silk thread is tied around it. In case of male baby the chord is tied five times and female with seven times. The chord is cut by a woman among the attendant whose hand is believed to be bitter, so that the cut wound will dry soon. The cut away chord is buried at the front side of the main house. Then the midwife bathes the baby child with taped water. The mother of the baby is kept under restriction from the hard physical labour for a period of 15 days and also restricted from

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eating khajas (rough diet) as believed to be harmful for both mother and baby.\(^5\)

The period from the birth of a child to five or seven days is considered as polluted by the Bodos. During these days the family members of the newly born baby have to abstain from visiting any household and from eating any food in the villages till the purificatory ritual is performed is called (dwi gwthar sarnay). Accordingly the tradition of sprinkling holy water (doi gwthar sarnay) is observed. Then the baby of the mother bathes the child the baby, she simply starts and then one of the women present bathes the baby. Then the baby is sprinkled with the holy water, mixed with some ‘dub grass’: a few holy basil leaves and a ring of gold. While sprinkling holy water the women folk performs this rite utter:

\[Oi \text{ Gothe? Nongaba godo mamwn, bangal na jungal. Garo na Gangar, Harsha na Mephal mwn? Dimgwinaprai Bodo jabai.}\(^6\)

English rendering: Whoever you were, whether you were a Muslim, a Garo, a Bhutiya or a Non-Bodo (Harsha) or a Nepali, you have become a Bodo from today.

On that day, the family offers a dinner and even the family offers Sarai or gamocha, shirt etc. to the helping womenfolk during the birth

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\(^5\) Informant: Kameswari Boro, F, 56, Nalaniduba, Sonitpur, Assam

of a child. The mother, along with the baby and household is considered as impure till the purificatory ritual is performed on the day on which naval cord falls from the baby. As the informant furnished, sometimes on the request of the family the womenfolk perform nam for the wellbeing of the new born baby. It is seen particularly in the neo-vaishnavite Bodo family. After completing the programme, they drink rice beer and take food with pork, chicken, fish as offered by the family. Some neo-vaishnavite Bodo family prefer goat to pork.\footnote{Informant: Sorala Boro,F.46,Urahiloga,Charduar,Sonitpur}

i. Name Giving

Traditionally there was no such kind of ceremony among the Bodos. In the traditional society, the Bodos name their babies looking the physical appearance, the day on which the baby is born, and the affection of the parents or relatives, e.g. if a newly born baby possesses a big head is called laoudum and if the child possesses a big nose, she is called by the name hongla (big nose). Like that children are given names such as Baokha, Merga, Orga etc.

Now due to impact of other religions this name giving tradition has entered into the Bodo society as an invented tradition. After getting birth of the baby, the parents go to the astrologer looking for a name for the baby. Even the parents give the name of children consulting with the
primary teacher at the time of admitting them into schools. This happened in the early days when the parents were mostly illiterate. The primary school teacher usually gave a new name corresponding to the Bodo name, which he finds difficult to pronounce.

ii. Hair Cutting Ceremony

In this regard, Kameswar Brahma says, "this ceremony is performed by the Bodos only in the case of newly male child. Generally in the case of the first born male child the hair is allowed to grow long for a period of one or two years after which the hair is ceremonially cut. The maternal uncle of the child is invited to cut the hair of his nephew in presence of the relatives and the villagers. On this occasion a feast is arranged, where a large quantities of rice beer (jau or jumai) pork and rice is offered."\(^8\)

As the information goes, hair cutting ceremony was not a religious practice of the Bodos which is one of the rites of Hindu society. Now this tradition is held and seen in the Hindu Bodo society also. Generally, it is observed by the eldest or youngest brother of family particularly in the neo-vaishnavite Bodo society in Sonitpur district during the *Sradha* ceremony. On this auspicious occasion, the family arranges a party and invites many people irrespective of caste, sex,

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\(^8\) Ibid, p-68
religion etc. to take food offered by the family. Even the family doesn’t offer pork due to inviting of many people. So, they offer goat or fish etc.

iii. Annaprasana

There is a tradition of feeding the newly born baby for the first time at the age between five and seven months the Bodo parents follow some customary procedures. This is also one of the customs of the modern Hindu society which has influenced the Bodo society. In this rite the elder brother has to offer food to his younger sister’s son. The family invites all the family members, villagers including fellow members. This rite is being observed under the impact of such rites in the Assamese society also.

iv. Birth Day Celebration

Celebration of birth day was not a custom of Bodo society and even in Indian Society which was observed by British. In modern times it has become one of the important customs of every society in India. The celebration of birth day in the Bodo society is completely new and now the educated Bodo people celebrate it gorgeously.

III.1.B. Puberty Rite

There was no tradition of observing puberty in the Bodo society. Generally it is observed in the neo-vaishnavite Bodo society and even
among the Hindu society when the girl attains the age of puberty, i.e. 12th to 14th age. Regarding puberty in the Bodo society, K. Brahma says, “it is generally that the mother of a girl is the only member of the family who has the information of attaining puberty maintains by the daughter. It also peculiar that the girl who attains puberty secrecy about this important rite of passage.”

Further he says “the Bodo Kacharis of Dibrugarh district, especially those of Namrup area observe a kind of ceremony on puberty. The parents of the girl arrange a feast and a ceremonial marriage of the girl with a banana plant is performed.”

It is needless to say that the Bodos have accepted the culture and tradition of Hinduised Assamese people in Assam. Just after the attainment of puberty, in all Hindu communities, some rites and ceremonies are performed. It is noticeable that only the follower of neo-vaishnavite Bodo people observes such kind of ceremony. This marriage is called Tulani Biya. Generally this ceremony is observed when an adolescent girl is detected for her first menstruation by any female member of her family. She will immediately be accommodated in a corner of the house by covering screens. Thereafter in a ‘don’ a pot of bamboo and cane and full of rice, a bunch of banana, called Akhi, a Sakhi lighted by mustered oil is offered and mustard oil is poured on the

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9. Ibid: p-69
10. Ibid: 70
head of the girl. This process of pouring oil will continue until the girl is brought out from the cover. On the fourth day some elderly ladies will be invited, who will bring out the girl from the cover and bathe her outside and placed again under cover. The household lady offers rice-powder and milk. Then the astrologer will suggest holding the ceremony. Almost all the ladies and girls of the village will be invited on the day of the marriage. This ceremony is considered by them as the marriage ceremony. Hence it is called Saru Biya, (minor marriage), tulani Biya. Puberty is called kanyakal.

After following the traditional rules and regulations, the girl along with will her Sakhi will be bathed under decorated a bei, (a structure made of a banana plants and bamboo), made by male persons. On the same day a sakhi (close girl friend who is pre-arranged from childhood) will be escorted to the girl’s house. On the way she will be escorted by some ladies and girls. Here both girls will get seated under the bei which is decorated by coloured paper flowers. Both of them will be bathed with mah haladhi by the relatives ladies and girls all of who are well-wisher of the girl. At the time of bathing a coin in a bati (made of brass metal) is offered to the girl as the token of well-wish. Thereafter the end of the bathing ceremony both the girls will be dressed with pat silk or muga silk set along with traditional ornaments like madoli,
gamkharu, keru, etc. Even they are given vermilion mark on the forehead like a Hindu-bride. All the invitees will be offered *akhoi*, milk, *pithaguri*, banana etc. The girl will be considered purified since them. The *sakhi* will live with the girl for a few days. The relations of both the girls become more intimate and close. They never address each other calling by name.

The male person avoids the ceremony to the extent possible. Even they have belief that anybody who eats the things of the marriage will have no beard. Hence the entire ceremony is held and enjoyed by the ladies and young children only. The male relatives who did labour in decoration cutting coloured paper flower and constructing the *bei* will be given a separate feast in the end, that is, in the evening. They will drink *jou* and chicken or pork not the *akhoi* or *pithaguri*.

Whatever it may be, this *tulani biya* is an unavoidable auspicious ceremony. Even poor parents, taking loan, perform this ceremony with luxury. A banana tree is planted near the *bei*, after bathe, the girl salutes this. This is considered as the groom of her. After the ceremony this sampling is planted in the garden in a permanent way.

**III.3.C. Marriage System**

Marriage is the second life cycle ceremony among the human beings which constitutes the most important of the transition from one
social category to another. It involves a change of family, clan, village or tribe. According to Lucy Mair, "Marriage has been defined as a union between a man and a woman such that children born to the women are recognized legitimate offspring of both parents. Marriage creates new social relationships and reciprocal rights between the spouses, between each and the kin of the other, and establishes what will be the rights and status of the children when they are born. Every society has recognized procedures for creating such relationships and rights, and for making it known that they have been created."\(^\text{11}\)

In Bodo language the term marriage is called *Haba*, in Assamese it is called *biya* and this is the second life cycle ceremony of every society. '*Haba' means, *ha+ba*, *ha* means soil and *ba* means to bear on the back. Hence, it means bearing the soil of the world.

*Haba* is the second life cycle ceremony of the Bodos. There have been certain traditions related to marriage since long times. Regarding the marriage system of the Bodos, Kameswar Brahma has said as there are a few systems of marriage of the Asuras which are akin to their marriage system. These are the *Asura* marriage, *paisasa* marriage and the Brahma marriage.\(^\text{12}\) Like the traditional Bodos, there are also six kinds of marriage prevalent among the neo-vaishnavite Bodo society in Sonitpur

\(^{11}\) Mair, Lucky: *An Introduction to Social Anthropology*, 1972, pp-90-91

\(^{12}\) Brahma, K. op-citp-75
district. But their marriage system is done with the prescribed form of neo-vaishnavite traditions. This tradition is also seen among the neo-vaishnavite Mising tribe in Sonitpur. In this regard, A.K. Ojha observes—

"The Vaishnavite Mising celebrates their marriage ceremonies according to their prescribed form of the Sankar Sankgha with nam Kirtana and they have given up their customs of Chicken and pig eating and taming." It is interesting to mention here that the marriage in pure neo-vaishnavite Bodo people is done like the Assamese Hindu people. Though some neo-vaishnavite Bodo people observe neo-vaishnavite traditions in their marriage ceremony, they offer pork, goat, chicken and even they offer rice beer. The following types of marriage are prevalent among the Bodos:

i. Swngnanwi Laynay haba or Sudhi ana biya (marriage by standard social custom)

This system of marriage is also called gwla o haba, i.e. long marriage. The neo-vaishnavite Assamese speaking people it is called sudhi ana biya. This marriage is solemnized according to the standard social custom of the Bodos. In this world each and every community has their own social formalities; all social formalities are observed in this marriage. So, it is a formal social marriage.

ii. Gwrjiya lakhinay haba or ghar juway rakha biya (irregular marriage)

This is also another form of the Bodos. This kind of marriage is very rare; but sometimes it happens among the Bodos. If the parents don’t have any boy, then the family plans to arrange and bring the groom to the bride’s house for marriage with a marriageable girl of the family after following discussion, he is known as gwrjiaya and from this word the marriage is called as gwrjiaya haba. In Assamese it is called gharjowai pratha.

iii. Kharsaonnay haba or Juwa (marriage by re-settlement of marriage)

It is a kind of love marriage. If a girl willingly escapes or goes to her beloved young boy for marriage without any prior information to her parents this is known as kharsonnay. Therefore it is known as Kharsaonnay haba in Bodo.

iv. Bwnai haba or Tani ana bya (marriage by abduction)

When a young boy loves a girl, but the girls doesn’t love him, then the bridegroom’s party takes away her forcefully. So it is called Bwnay. After this an assembly is held with the villagers to discuss and
solve the problem and then marriage is held and hence it is a *bwnai haba*. “It is almost similar to *paisasa* marriage of the Aryans.”

v. *Dwnkharlangnay haba* or *Polai juwa biya* (marriage by elopement)

This is just like abduction. Bridegroom party takes away her (the girl) and the keeps several days without any information to her parents until and unless they can convince her for marriage forcefully. If and when the proposal is negotiated by the girl, the process of marriage starts but marriage is solemnized with *hathasuni* (a kind of marriage feast). Kameswar Brahma observes “this type of marriage is akin to the Gandharva system of marriage of the Aryans.”

vi. *Dongkha haba*

This is the system of widow marriage. If a *Balonda houa* (whose wife has dead) is brought for a re-marriage with a widow in her house and solemnized in social manner, then it is known as *dongkha haba* and in Assamese it is known as *dhoka* marriage.

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14 Brahma, Kameswar, op. cit. p-77
15 Ibid, p-77
Since time immemorial the above mentioned marriage system are prevailing in the Bodo neo-vaishnavite Bodo society too, but at present arranged marriage has become more common and credited practice.

The pre-marriage preparation starts after the preliminary settlement between the parents of bride and bridegroom. The pre-marriage preparation consists of the following occasions.

There is a tradition of the Bodos before or pre-marriage is called Nonaynay. The Assamese speaking Bodo call Ghar Chuwa. Accordingly the parents of the bride have to visit the house of the bridegroom. The bride party observes the bridegroom’s family. If they find the family is good, then the bride is ready to give. In this occasion the parents of the bridegroom entertain the guests with pork, rice beer in abundance. The final settlement of the marriage depends on the nonainay, i.e. home ceremony. After this ceremony next step is taken.

After that the tradition of howa gwdan nainay or dora chuwa which means the interview of the bridegroom is started. Among the Bodo community in marriage ceremony, there is a tradition of cutting areca nut in bride family and also available in the Assamese Hindu society. For the occasion the bridegroom party goes to the bride’s house

16. Informant: Bimal Basumatary, M, 56, Kachari gaon, Tezpur
with required and sufficient quantity of areca nut, betel leaf and rice-beer. There is associated a song-

\textit{oi bwirathi lolia nwngni babangsin}

\textit{gay khaanonaykhou jwnglay jaliya}.

English rendering: \textit{Oh! bwirathi lalia}, You are cutting areca nut unwillingly We will not eat now.

On the occasion of \textit{gankhong hwinai}, the bridegroom’s parents go to the bride house along with a pair of silver bracelets to offer to the bride. \textit{Biban langnai} is one of the customs of the Bodo marriage system. A group of bridegroom party goes to the house of bride along with abundant areca leaf, rice beer. The \textit{group} consists of \textit{Barlampha}, carrier of two rice beer earthen jars, two ladies called \textit{bwirathi} (distributors of areca nut) after a few days of \textit{Biban langanai} ceremony the bridegroom party visit, with a \textit{biban gubai} (main load) consisting a pig which is cut equally into two parts which is shared by both the families.

After \textit{biban langnai} another ceremony is performed by the bridegroom party called \textit{Khabira Langnay}. The guardian of the bridegroom goes to the house of bride with necessary items of articles to get the confirmation of marriage and schedule a date of the proper marriage.

\textit{vi.Hinjao gwdan Lainai (natun buwari aniboloi joawa)}

\footnote{Quoted from \textit{Khonsay Bidang}, B.P.Rabha, in \textit{Bwirathi}, p-24}
This is the last occasion of pre-marriage preparation. The bride and groom party goes to the bride’s house to bring her for marriage. This is called *hinzao gwdan lainai*. The Assamese speaking Bodos call this *natun buwari aniboloj joawa*. The party consists of Barlamfa, carries necessary items like rice, beer, areca nut, betel leaf, tea, sugar etc. The bride is dressed up with new dresses and ornaments. In neo-vaishnavite Bodo society the term *barlangpha* is called *Pangkha*. In course of time the functions of the *Pangkha* in the marriage seems to have something changed, but before ten years ago *pangkha* particularly in the villages was part and parcel of the Bodo community marriage.

The traditional form of marriage is called *Hathasuni Khurnai haba*. In this ceremony bride offer special meal to bridegroom prepared by herself. The main menu consists of a curry prepared with the grinded rice and chicken without adding spices and colouring agents. This is called in Bodo *Ondlakhari*. After eating the food the new couples pray to *Bathou* for granting them peaceful conjugal life. Thereafter the villagers are served food by bride. Then they celebrate the occasion with traditional dance and music.

vii. Athimongla Janai or Athmongala Suwa

There is a tradition among the Bodos to celebrate a post marriage occasion after 8 days which is known as *Athimongla Janai*. Newly
married couples along with bride’s man and bride maid go to the father’s house which is called *Athimongla janai*. For this rite they are to carry a pair of chicken, two bottles of rice-beer. Bride’s parents invite all their relatives to this celebration.

Among the Assamese Hindu society, there is also a tradition of observing a post marriage occasion like the Bodos this is known as *athmongol suwa*. Due to influence of Assamese Hindu society the Bodos of Sonitpur district also call *athimongla* or *athmongol suwa*. No research has been done on this topic. According to some Bodo scholars the term *Athmongala* is derived from the Bodo word *athimongal*.

**Joron**

*Joron* is a pre-marriage ceremony in the Assamese society which is carried one 1 day in advance. The main occasion is that the groom’s mother along with her close relatives or friends visit’s the bride’s house and applies *Sindoor* (Vermilion) to the bride along with showering gifts to her. Gifts would include the main bridal dress i.e. *Mekhela Chadar*, which the bride is supposed to wear on the marriage day along with other items. These may include a make-up kit, earthen pots, fish, sweets, betel nuts and leaves, turmeric etc. Before the groom’s mother leaves the house, it is customer for the groom to touch all this items so that the same can be given to the bride. This is an essential part of the ritual.
There is a tradition of *Joran diya* among the follower of neo-
vaishavite Bodos which is one of the important customs of the neo-
vaishnavite society. This ceremony takes place of bride’s house where
the groom’s mother offers her ornaments, traditional wedding dress i.e.
*mekhela chador* made from *pat* silk or *muga* silk. Besides these she is
also presented with a big fish, a pair of betel nut etc. which are symbols
of prosperous married life. The women folk from the bride’s party
attend the ceremony and sing songs while the formal presentation
function continues.

Besides this there are also some traditions observed by the Bodos
during the time of marriage. These are *pani tola, dora koinak ga
dhuwa, koina sajuwa*,

**Pani Tola**

*Pani tola* is also one of the customs of Assamese Hindu society. The
neo-vaishnavite Bodo women observe this custom. The bride’s with
other women; marriageable girls go to the nearby tank or river to carry
water for the ritual bathing ceremony of the bride. This function takes
place in the morning, the women carrying earthen pots join in the
procession with great enthusiasm and spirit while walking they sing
songs of mythical reference songs that tease make mockery of others.
While filling up the earthen pots the mother offers betel nut to the water gods and prays for his blessing.

**Dora Koinak Ga Dhuwa**

Under a newly planted banana tree the bride/groom is bathed in midst of all the women folk. The *suwag tola* ceremony is a secret ritual performed by the mother of the bride/groom secretly at the *back guard* of a neighbourhood or in the river or pond.

Due to impact of neo-vaishnavism and other religions, there is a tremendous change in the marriage ceremony of the Bodos. Inter-caste marriage in between the Bodo and non Bodo is also going on.

**III.1.D. Death Rite**

Death rite is one of the most important customs in the society. The neo-vaishnavite Bodos also maintain some traditional custom of the Bodos during the performance of death ceremony. It is a ritualistic custom observed in *Bathou* religion relating to death. When death takes place in a certain family, the death body is taken out from the house and kept in the courtyard. There after the place where the dead body is to be kept is cleaned with cow dung mixed with water. A *darha* (mat) is covered with bed sheets to lay down the death body and then the body is placed on *sangra* (kind of frame made of a raw bamboo). The death body is then washed with water and a new cloth (*gamocha*) is wrapped on the
body if a death person is male. In case of female a new dokhona (female dress) is tied on the body. After that the hair is anointed with oil and combed. A chicken is killed and a curry is prepared with necessary vegetables. Rice beer and alkali is also offered to the death person. A portion of the prepared food is placed close by his deceased's mouth though no food is put on his lips. The act of feeding is started by the members of the deceased family and after that the kith and kins of the family are also started and the act of feeding like this is repeated for ten to twelve times and ultimately the offered food is thrown away. No one is allowed to consume this food.

The projecting bamboo poles used to carry on shoulders are called bathi. The pole bearers are called Gwthwi bangra. Usually the sangra is carried by either sons or relatives of the family. A funeral procession with death body is taken out toward the cremation ground. Douri or Oja leads it. On the way to the cremation ground the douri leaves back small piece of awa yam. One male person of each family of the village joins the cremation ground.

After the completion of the programme at the cremation ground, they come back to the deceased family and halmazi (peon) of the village takes little water from the river to sprinkle the holy water to the house of the relatives of deceased family. The douri of the village sacrifice a
small hen in the name of deceased soul. After that they can enter into the deceased family touching the *Narzi goran* and a stone kept just in front of the gate.

In the neo-vaishnavite Bodo society the customs relating to dead body observed in Sonitpur district is almost same, but it is not seen offering rice beer and meat during the funeral time. Some of the villagers offer tea instead of rice beer to the dead person.

Generally there are two ways of disposing the dead bodies — 1.Burial and 2.Cremation. Traditionally the Bodo people followed the burial system for the disposal of the dead body. But today due to influence of Hindu religion they follow both the burial and cremation system. The head of the Body is kept facing to the south when it is to be buried.

In the neighbouring Assamese society it is seen that the death bodies of the old man or adult are generally cremated. In some particular cases, of course, like suicide, accidental death, victim of deceases like Cholera, Small pox etc. the dead bodies of the aged men are buried or it is cremated. But the dead bodies of the children are always buried. Now a days it is also seen that the corpse is cremated. On the whole it can be said that no such rigid rules and customs are followed in the disposal of corpse in the Hindu society. Among the Bodo society it is seen that
there is no hard and fast rule about the disposal of corpse. It needs to be noted here that when burial is decided finally the corpse is taken to the banks of a running river or stream by the relatives and other dear and near one. But no female is allowed to attend the funeral party. This procedure is also seen same in the Hindu societies.

At the time of taking the dead body to the cremation or burial ground, if the party faces a small river or irrigation canal, they place a cord from the one bank to the other crossing the stream or river and easily cross it as they would cross a bridge. When the party arrives at a suitable place they throw a small coin on the spot. In this way they think the ground is purchased from the daily to whom the plot of land is supposed to belong. The people of the village dig the grave and put the dead body inside it they make a circular movement around it. In case of male member the dear and near of the ones of the deceased do this for five times and seven times in case of a female one. The dead body is then gently placed in the grave and the nearest relatives fill it with earth. They keep a piece of thatch, extending from the nose of the deceased to somewhat above the natural ground level. The work is done very carefully so that the hallow reed is not displaced and the deceased's soul can easily breathe as he desires.
After the grave is filled with earth four posts are erected in the four corners and threads are passed around then. There is a belief that if this is done no other spirit can interfere or disturb the soul of the deceased. It is also seen that a certain number of coins are also buried with the corpse and even things used in his day to day life before death are also buried with the deceased assuming that the deceased would use all the necessaries during his stay in the present state of existence.

While buried or cremated a thatched shed is erected on the spot of the grave or the cremated ground. It is assumed that shelter is hereby given to the soul of the deceased from the sun. A betel nut tree is also planted and seeds are also thrown at the side of grave or the cremation ground. The cremation is taken to be the most respectable method of disposing the dead bodies. It is prefaced by the formed buying of the plot of ground where the cremation is done. The ground is purchased from the deity mwdai of the locality.¹⁸

Of course there are some difference between the system of cremation of the corpse of a man and woman. In case of a woman seven layers of wood fuels are placed under the dead body and seven above it. On the other hand in case of the corpse of a man five of such layers

¹⁸. Narzee, Bhaben, Boro Kacharir Samaj aru Sanskriti, 1966, p-150
under and other such five layers over the dead body are held sufficient. After the corpse is placed on the funeral pyre, the relatives mainly the members of the same family move around the pyre for five times in the case of a man and seven times in that of a woman. In this regard S.Endle observes, the funeral pile is then set on fire on all four sides at once, and the fire carefully fed until every vestige of the deceased’s body is consumed. The ashes are not carried away, but four space on which the cremation has been carried out; and on the tops of those a cloth is spread, which is held to shelter the spirits of the deceased from sun and rain.19

**III.1.D.i. Pre-Saradu or Death ceremony**

In the neo-vaishnavite Bodo society, after the death of a family member the family stops to eat for three or four days having oily and salty food, meat etc. They eat light food with boiling till the purificatory rite is performed. They start eating after the *Doha*. It is noteworthy that there is no any restriction taking meat and hard food after the death of the individual. But among the neo-vaishnavite Bodo society there is much restriction. The well wishers offer lentil, pulse and fruits to the deceased family. Even they don’t consume any kind of liquor.

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Like other Assamese Society, *Tiloni* is observed after three days. This is only purification. *Doha* is the just one kind of *Sradha* ceremony. Pork and rice beer was the compulsory for drink and food to observe as per their traditional way, tut among the neo-vaishnavite Bodo society, there is no meat, only *nam* is to be performed and the family offer vegetarian food. Hence there is no fixed time for observing *Sradha* of the dead. It includes from one year to five-ten years. It is too costly. *Pindo* is given by Pork and rice beer and matured pig. All the kith and kin of the family are invited.

After the death of the individual, there is a tradition of pre-*Kharjw* or death ceremony is held on between 5th to 10th days of the death among the Bodos is called *daha garnai* means to give up grief. This ceremony is performed by the *douri* or *oja*, who chants the *mantra* in half sitting position facing to the south. Sons of the dead person pray to him kneeling on the ground appealing for acceptance offered by them.20

**ii. The *Kharjw* (the Post Death Ceremony)**

Among the traditional system the *Kharjw* or death ceremony is important social folk-custom. In western sides of Assam the Bodos call this as *Saradu*, it might be derived from the Aryan word *Sradha*. Previously there was no fixed time for the observation of the death

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20. Narzee, Bhaben, op-cit, p-
ceremony after the demise of the individual. The community keeps the provision to observe the ceremony according to the family's capacity and economic sustainability.

Observing the rites performed by the neighbouring communities mainly Hindu religion, the Dularai Bathou religious Union formulated certain rites and rituals in the Bathou religion, among these rites holding death rite is also. Earlier there is no any specific date to observe the death ceremony, now as the union of Bathou religion the family has to hold the Saradu or the death ceremony within the 10th or 12 days from the day of the death of a person. Further the union has introduced to observe the saradu without serving meat and rice beer. The followers of the traditional Bodo faith perform the saradu ceremony with prayer before the altar of the Bathou.

There are also some Bodo people those who are not initiated flower Bathou are still following the traditional system of holding this rite. In this occasion the villagers and relatives of the dead persons are entertained with rice-beer. Serving of pork is common in the saradu. At the end of entertainment all people present on the occasion offer alms in the form of offering coins to the large gathering of the small children.
This rite is called in Bodo *Dan sarnai*.\(^{21}\) Sometimes a bullock is set free in the name of dead person and it is called in *Bodo Mwsou Saran Hagarnai*, means to set a bullock free.

The responsibility of conducting the whole function rests on the eldest son of the dead person. He performs some traditions, customary rites. He is to carry the unclean leaf-plates left after the guest villagers have eaten food in a *dala songrai* (Bamboo tray) and throw it away in the field or at the public road side. It is called *dala bugarnai* or *sua garnai*, means removing impurity. That way the impurity caused by the death is ceremonially removed and members of the family will run duties after this cleaning.

It is to be noticed here that there is a custom of hair cutting in the neo-vaishnavite Bodo society in Sonitpur district during the *Sradha* ceremony. Serving pork in the *shradha* ceremony is the tradition of Bodos, but no meat is served in the neo-vaishnavite *shradha* ceremony etc.

**IV.2. Festival and Public Celebration**

Festivals and ceremonies are moments of special significance to a group or a community. These are the expression of social behaviours. Most of the societies whether it is primitive or folk or elite or

\(^{21}\) Kameswar Brahma, op-cit. p-
modern, set aside portions of times for celebration. These are many types of festivals: it may be seasonal, it may be a memorial of a national hero or god, it may be calendar festivals, it observance may be confined to a little group etc. Hence festivals and ceremonies are divided into the following ways: (a) Seasonal festival, (b) Calendaric festivals (c) Limited participation festivals and (d) Sacramental festivals. Again the festivals of India may also be classified into the following ways: (a) Festival belonging to a great traditions or the little traditions (b) Family or Community festivals, (c) Voluntary or non Voluntary festivals and (d) Purposive festivals.\textsuperscript{22}

Thus, festival and celebration is one of the important aspects for every society. This is one of the externals expressions of social behavior and performance of a group or particular community i.e. the festival and celebration reflects the minds of society. Festivals is mainly based on the pass time of people when a people had time then they observe it. Folklorist like Jacob Grimm, Max Muller, Andrew Laug, James Fraze and so on made attempt to link beliefs, primitive and magical rituals with modern festivals. If we can assume it is clearly revealed that the tradition of the modern festival emanated from the beliefs and rituals of the ancient community.

\textsuperscript{22} Srivastav, S.C., \textit{Folk Culture and Oral Tradition}, pp-187-188
The Bodo society has its own festival and celebration like the other societies, has been observing and celebrating since immemorial times. The Bodos observe major and minor festivals and ceremonies throughout the year. The festivals and ceremonies can be classified into three-(a) Religious, (b) Seasonal and (c) Agricultural. In fact all the major festivals of the Bodos are closely connected with agriculture. But in course of time some of the other festivals and celebrations specially, due to conversion or acceptance of other religions which are being entered as well as adopted by the Bodos as their now are discussed below:

The Kherai Worship

I have already discussed about the traditional Bathou religion of the Bodos in the chapter I. Generally there are a few kinds of religious worship in the Bodo society. “The Kherai puja is the greatest religious festival of the Bodos. It is a symbol of hope and desire, which has been prevailing among them since immemorial times.” K. Brahma says that the Kherai is one kind of puja like Durga, Kali, Lakhmi etc. From the reasonable data collection it can be said that the term Puja is not a Bodo word it is either Assamese or Hindi and other Aryan words. The illiterate Bodos especially those are closely associated with this festivity.

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23. Brahma, K. op-cit, p-104
24. Ibid, p-174
they are called *Kherai hwnai*, but not *Kherai puja*. So, it is not imperative to say that the *Kherai* is a *puja*.

There are several purposes of observing *Kherai* worship in the Bodo Society. Welfare of the family both private and public lives is the main purpose of the *Kherai* worship. Generally it is performed individually and publicly for the welfare of the life. It is noteworthy to notice here that the Bodos perform the *Kherai* worship collectively for the welfare of the villagers as a whole once or twice in a year.

Kameswar Brahma has classified the *Kherai* worship into four kinds: (i) *Darshan Kherai*, (ii) *Umrao Kherai* (iii) *Phalw Kherai* and (iv) *Naoni Kherai* (family *Kherai*). These *Kherai* seems to have worshipped in different months or different occasion for the welfare of the village.

(i) *Darshan Kherai* is performed during the first week of the Assamese month of *Kati*. This *Kherai* is meant for *mainao*, the goddess of wealth. This is worshipped for the welfare of the winter crop. This *Kherai* is also known as *Sali Kherai*.

(ii) *Umrao Kherai* is performed during the month of *Ashar* at the end of *Amthisua* for the welfare of the villagers as well as of the corps. This *Kherai* is also known as *Ashu Kherai*.

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25. Brahma, K. op-cit, p-175
(iii) Phalw Kherai is also performed during the month of Magh (Assamese calendar) especially on the day of full night of the month of Magh.

(iii) This type of Kherai is held by a family. So, if the Kherai is performed by a family is called Noani Kherai i.e, the family Kherai. The main purpose of holding this Kherai by a family whenever it deems necessary to ward off evil or to ensure welfare. Whenever they face any trouble in the family, they perform this worship.

Apart from the above Kherai worship, there is also worship in the Bodo society is known as Garja worship. This worship is also performed in the month of Jeth, (Assamese month) for the welfare of the villagers.

God and Goddesses worshipped during Kherai puja and the manners of their propitiation: The Bodos have many gods and goddesses who are worshipped during the Kherai Pujas. They possess different positions in the hierarchy of the Bodo pantheon and they are offered different kinds of sacrifices according to their positions. In fact there are lots of god and goddesses such as Bathou Bwrai, Bathou Burwi, Aileng, Agrang, Khoila, Karji, Sang Raja, Alai Khungri, Bulli Buri, Ranchondi, Laokhar Gosai etc. are performed during the Kherai

26 ibid,p-176
worship. Many animals were sacrificed in the name of these the god and goddesses to satisfy them for seeking the welfare of the society.

In course of time the Bodo people converted to different religion in Assam, subsequently, they have given up their language, culture and tradition especially into the follower of Hindu religion.

**IV.2.A. Seasonal Festival: The Bihu**

The *Bihu* is the seasonal as well as agricultural festival of the Bodo and Assamese people of Assam. "The *Bihu* festival may rightly be termed as a festival of acculturation. It is a kind of unique synthesis of the Aryan and the non-Aryan cultures." 27 Generally there are three types of *Bihu* celebrated in Assam viz. *Bohag*, *Kati* and *Magh* are observed in different seasons. The *Bahag Bihu* or *Rangali Bihu* is performed in the spring, i.e. in the month of April, the *Magh Bihu* or *Bhogali Bihu* is performed in the month of January and the *Kati Bihu* or *Kangali Bihu* observed in the month of October.

Among these three festivals the *Bohag Bihu* is the greatest festival in Assam. The festivals and celebrations of Bodo and Assamese are *Bohag Bihu*, ceremonies related to agriculture are the main. Generally the Assamese people observe three kinds of *Bihu-Magh* and *Bohag* and they celebrate with merry making and joyous. Generally, the Bodo

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27. Sarmah, N. *Essay on the Festivals of North Eastern India*, p-61
society observe and entertain two kinds of Bihu viz Bohag and Magh Bihu. But in the neo-vaishnavite Bodo society it is seen that three kinds of Bihu are celebrated with merry making like the Assamese people.

In Assam, there are lots of tribes or castes who observe Bihus in different times with different names. It is very difficult to ascertain the source from where the word Bihu is originated. Different scholars and writers are of different opinion as regards the origin of the word Bihu. The Bahag Bihu is known as Bwisagw or Bwisagu among the Bodo Kachari. According to Kamini Narzari, Bwisagu is a Bodo word which has origin the word baisa, means year or age and agu means start. Hence, Bwisw+agu =bwisagu which means the starting of the year or age. Many scholars say about the origin of Bihu differently. According to Dhuparam Basumatary “the term Bihu is derived from the Bodo word, bi and hw.” Here bi means beg and hw means give. Hence, the term Bihu means begging and giving. If you want something then someone gives you. According to P. Goswami, “the term Bihu is derived from Sanskriti visuvat and its use is not confined to Assam.” About the bwisagu celebration among the Bodos, S. Endle observes “among the Kacharis this festival lasts for seven days, during which little or no work

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28. Quoted from Brahma, K.: op. cit.-104
30. Goswami, P: The Bihu Songs of Assam, 1995, p-10
is done, the whole period being given up to merrymaking, dancing, feasting etc. As is the among their Hindu neighbours, on the opening day all cattle are taken to the nearest river or tank, and there formally bathed, and after words sprinkled with a preparation compounded of rice-beer, tomatoes (brinjal), and turmeric. The horns are smeared with oil, ashes and pounded rice-flour are applied in patches to the bodies of the cattle. This duty discharged, the people abandon themselves to sheer merriment, the younger folk especially giving themselves up to dancing and singing etc. The verses sung at these festivals seem for the most part to be little better than mere meaningless jingle-jangle rhymes, made up on the spur of the moment, though occasionally some of them give an insight into the peculiar humour of the Kachari character and temperament."

31

Eat your gourd eat your brinjal,

Grow up year to year,

To spite your mother and your father

You will be large bullocks;

Don’t be short-statured like your mother,

Be large like your bull father,

Like the frog in the corner of the garden

31 Endle, S.: op-cit, pp. 50-51
May you be sleek and long?

According to P. Goswami, the ritual of striking cattle with green springs seems to be magical in intent. It is also seen among Kacharis."Like the Bodos the Assamese people, generally children, prepares pieces of bottle gourd, brinjal, turmeric, and bitter-gourd and keep fixed on the three-pronged bamboo sticks. They paste of *mati kalai* and turmeric on the foreheads and horns of cattle. They also rub mustard oil on the horns and what remains of it thy rub on their own bodies. The cattle are then taken to a neighbouring pond or river for a wash. On the way the pieces of gourd,brinjal etc are thrown on the cattle. The boys also strike the animals with sprigs of *dighalati* and *makhiyati* plants and recite:

Eat gourd, eat brinjal,
Grow from year to year,
Your mother is small; your father is small,
May you be a large one.  

According to some scholars this tradition of worshipping cow at *Bwisagu* festival was derived from the Hindus and said this tradition was nothing but later addition by the Bodos. But some Bodo scholars don't agree with it. They worship cow as the sacred and most important

32 Goswami,P.Festival of Assam,1995,p-13
domestic animal. Each of the agriculturist society has to depend completely on cow. As the agriculturists society the Bodos also had been ploughing in Assam since immemorial times and still has been using.

Whatever it may be, after the ceremonial bathing of cow is over, the old ropes are caste away through the legs of the cattle. The cows are then let loose in the field. The boys return home after their bathe, carrying back some of the pieces of gourd and brinjal. The grown-ups too rub a paste of turmeric and mati-kalai pulse on their bodies and take their bath. Then they all pray to god in their private chapels or at some nearby communal namghar, offer respects to their elders, and have a meal of Chira, curd , cakes etc. No rice is cooked for the midday meal on this day as well as on the following day. At first day of the Bihu, they offer Sarai at Namghar and perform Nam Kirton.

In the evening new ropes are given for the cattle. Red threads are tied on them and they are sanctified by being sprinkling with tulasi leaves. When the cattle return in the evening their feet are washed, given chira and pithas to eat and then tied up in the cattle shed.”

P. Goswami says “Before they are brought back in the evening a smudge of paddy chaff and certain kinds of strong –smelling leaves is

33 .ibid,p-13
lighted at the gate of the compound and near the gate of the cattle shed. The custom is meant to drive away mosquitoes and other pests. Fans can be used only after they have been utilized to waft the acrid smoke of smudge. Next morning the ash is mixed with oil and smeared on the neck of bullocks either as medicine or as preventive of the sore caused by pulling the plough. The plough and harrow are also washed in the morning of the Garu Bihu day and given cakes as an offering. This morning it is customary for the people to take a little of green and jute leaves mixed with mustard and salt. Eating of tender mango on the New Year Day was an old Indian custom known as Navamkhadika. 34

The Bahag Bihu, the biggest festival starts on the last day of Chot, but it begins a sort of cattle worships. The Bodos also observe the Bihu like the Assamese Hindu people do. There is not much difference between Assamese and Bodo way Bihu celebration. Whatever it may be, the first day is mwsou, meant for the cattle; the second day is mansi, meant for men, but starting with worship of their gods; the third day is Swima, meant for dogs; the four day is Oma, meant for swine; the fifth day is for dogs, swine and fowl the sixth day is for ducks and other birds; and the seventh day is for receiving relatives and friends. But in the Assamese society, the first day is called Garu Bihu or the day for

34 ibid, p-13
cattle, the second is *Manuh Bihu* or the day for men, the third day is for *Gasain Bihu* or the day for God. Another important aspect of *Bihu* is the *Huchari* carol singing and this starts from the *Manuh Bihu* day. From this it is clear that The *Bihus* of Bodos and the Assamese Hindu people do not have much difference.

They are also maintaining traditional folklore materials like eating bitter, sour etc. along with Pork, chicken etc. during the time of *Bihu*. Even they move singing *husuri* house to house and drink rice beer. The neo-vaishnavite Bodos villages use the Assamese *Dhol, pepa, tal* and perform Bihu song and dance during the *Bihu* festival. This occurred due to the contact and initiation of neo-vaishnavism. By the process of acculturation some section of the neo-vaishnavite Bodos have accepted the Assamese way of celebrating the *Bihu*.

There is a tradition among the Bodos of Sonitpur offering traditional *gamocha* to the elders since earliest times during the man day of *Bwisagu* festival. They beg love, affection, good wish from the elders; on the other hand they give what they want. In the neo-vaishnavite society also it is seen that the younger one offers white Assamese *gamocha* or *bihuwan*, a sort of handkerchief, towel combined, a *dhoti* or *chador* to the grand fathers and mothers and father and mothers and others relatives as a token of love, affection and integration.
It is very interesting to notice here that the new generation of some villagers who are newly converted to Bathouism use the traditional Bodo musical instruments in any social functions and celebrations and the older followers of neo-vaishnavism are using the Assamese musical instruments in any entertainment or ceremony in the villages.

Tarju Narzari, a retired teacher and social worker in Ghoramari area of Sonitpur, informed regarding the celebration of the Stage Bihu in Sonitpur district. According to him stage bihu was organized in Ghoramari playground in 1948 under the guidance of Omeo Kumar Das, Education Minister, Assam. The distinguished persons like tribal Minister Rupnath Brahma were present in the Bihu festival. Now, the Bodo people of Sonitpur started celebrating Bwisagu festival in the community pandel under one is the clear influence of Assamese society. It needs to notice here that the neo-vaishnavite Bodo people also participate in the Bihu celebration and even they organize Bihu dance competition in Uubari and Tezpur Uppar Kachari gaon.

The Bodos of Sonitpur celebrate this festival in a grand way in the month of Magh from the last day of Push month and the first day of the Magh. This festival is observed for the period of three days only. This post harvest festival is on occasion for feasting, merry making and

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35. Informant: Tarju Narzari, 70, DhekidoI, Ghoaramari, Sonitpur
entertaining guests and relatives with fish and meat and all the traditional items of food and cakes.

On the occasion, the cowherds gather together at a hut built temporally just outside the village on the last day of Push month in the evening. They make a feast there and make merry. The Bodos of Sonitpur consider this evening as gurkhiya joma in the name of gwrkhiya (cowherds).

There is a tradition among the Bodos is called Belagur saonay, i.e. ritual of burning down a tower like structure made of straw and bamboo. The neo-vaishnavite Bodo people of Sonipur call it bhelaghar or Bihughar. But now a day’s it is seen that this ritual is performed by all the members of the community both young and old. There is tradition of performing kirton path and nam kirtan inside the bihughar at Dhunaguri village and even they offer mah prasad on the occasion. After that programme, the villagers take bhoj together with pork, chicken, fish etc. Even they drink homemade rice beer in the premises. Before burning the belagur the people has to take bath and after that the bihughar is burnt up by cowherds before sunrise. They also celebrate camp fire by burning down their temporary hut.

During this ritual Bodo women get up much early in the morning. They fry some pulses and sesame rice and mix them together and this is
thrown over the cowherds. This practice is done in view to prevent diseases, to cut the curses of the evil mouthed persons and pray for increasing the number of cattle. In some areas of Sonitpur such kind of sprinkling pulses are not seen now.

A ritual called *gwbwr san* is performed after the *sobay sarnay*. Among the neo-vaishnavite Bodo society this tradition is not in vogue due to impact of *Sankari* tradition. It is a ritual of putting a round black mark of cow dung on the wall of *nomano* (the main house). This is performed by the female member of the family. This black marking on the wall signifies a knot which binds and tie up the *Lakhsmi*, so that the family does not fall shortage of food.

The next day early in the morning after *Gwbwr sarnai*, *Phithas* (cake) are backed with the rice powder. The first baked *phitha* is offered to the *mwdai* (spirit of the deceased), in the east-west, north-south direction by throwing small pieces of it before being eaten by members of the family. If this rite is not performed, then the *phithas* to be baked will not be proper in shape as well as in taste, it is believed. This old belief is still alive today among the Bodos.

*Kati Gasa* is another agricultural festival of the Bodos. On this occasion; they offer prayer to goddess *Lakhsmi* to save the crops from natural calamities and diseases or other harm. The *thaigir bikhong* is
used to light the lamp on the *thaigir bikhong*. The Bodos believe that the paddy is their *mainao*, the Goddess Lakshmi. They keep the symbol of *mainào* in the *Ishing*, kitchen room of the main house *nomano* and it is worshipped regularly in morning and evening. As a tradition the households offer a small portion of the every item of each main meal. Besides this two types of worships, like *Ishing Kherai* (means *Ishing Kherai* for paddy crops) and *Ashu Kherai* or *Ashu Kherai* for *Ashu* paddy crops are offered. In addition to *Kherai* festivals the villagers observe *Kherai* worship in their own *Kherai Thansali* (altar) on regional basis once in a year. Through this worship prayer is made for favourable blessings upon their crops and wealth. In the end of the worship, *mainao* is brought into the *xshingno* of the *douri*.

Another popular seasonal festival is called *Moho hwnai*.”“This festival is celebrated at the latter part of November or early part of December.”36But in the Sonitpur district, this festival is observed in the full moon of *Aghon*. The main aim of observing this festival is to drive out the mosquitoes from the village. This festival is observed by the young boys of the village. They drive the mosquitoes 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. But among the neo-

36 Brahma, K. op-cit, p-114
vaishavite and Christian Bodo societies this tradition is not seen in the district.

IV.2.B. Agricultural Ceremonies

Besides the major festivals like Bihu or Bwisagu, the Bodos of Sonitpur observe some minor ceremonies relating to agriculture. It needs mention here that the Bodos are agriculturist society and they cultivate paddy of different varieties with great care. During the period of paddy cultivation it is seen that several kinds of ceremonies, rite and practices are observed. They perform rites related to first day of ploughing and planting of paddy crops.

i. Mainao lainay or Bringing Mainao

There is a tradition of bringing paddy just before the cutting of paddy from the paddy field in the Bodo community. This is called aglainai or bringing lakhmi. "When the paddy becomes ripe and suitable for reaping the guardian of the family brings a small quantity of paddy reaping with a sickle early in the morning preferably before the sun rise and after sprinkling holy water on it the small bundle of paddy is kept inside the bakhri or the store house of the paddy. This is called mainao lainay or ag lainay in Assamese. It is also observed by dancing and playing on the musical instruments like serja, siphung and jotha, while
mainao is welcomed to the house. Among the neo-vaishnavite Bodo society they also observe the same customs while bringing lakhi from the paddy field. And even they offer mah prasad on the occasion and an earthen lamp is lighted in front of the gate.

ii. Wnkham Gwdan Janay (Eating New Rice)

Another agricultural related ceremony of the Bodo community is wngkham gwdan janay which means new rice eating ceremony. In Assamese it is called na khuwa. A feast is arranged on the occasion. In some neo-vaishnavite Bodo society of Sonitpur, a community feast and nam is arranged in the village namghar. All the villagers take part in the ceremony and celebrate na khuwa ceremony collectively.

IV.2.C. Calendaric Festival

No calendaric festival was observed in the Bodo society. In the other societies it is found that some festivals like Durga puja utsav, Lakshmi, Kali puja utsav Ras, Mohatsav etc. are observed by the people according to their religion. In Assam particularly among the neo-vaishnavite society, some festivals are observed according to the prescribed form of their religion. The calendaric festivals of the neo-vaishnavite community of Assam are Doljatra, Ras.

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37 Brahma, K.op-cit.p115
Mohatsav, Janmastami. The neo-vaishnavite Bodos of Sonitpur also celebrate this festival.

**i. Dol Jatra**

Among the festivals the *Dol Jatra* is one of the most important festivals of the neo-vaishnavite Assamese society. This *jatra* is held in the month of *Fagun* and *Chait* i.e March and April and it is observed in the day of full moon of the month that is why some people want to say it as a spring festival.

Generally this *jatra* is a mock marriage function of Lord-Krishna with *Ghuncha* i.e. Lord Krishna’s consort. As this festival is associated with the event of life of Krishna, so the function is held with much respect. In this festival, the people play with different colours, touch and smear the colours with each other and respect with each other as well. So to speak, it is seen that the cultural field is also enriched with congregational meets, staging of dramas, singing of *holigit*. It has a great social significant in the vaishnava circle. It needs mention here that the story of the *jatra* festival has been incorporated in the holy *Kirtana*.

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38 ibid, p-
ii. Rasa Yatra Festival

This is also one of the very common and important vaishnavite festivals of Assam. This festival is observed almost Sattras of Assam on the full moon day of the month of Kartika (Oct.-November). Actually, this Yatra is held in honour of Kṛṣṇa. According to S.N Sarmah—“it is held in honour of Kṛṣṇa’s amorous dalliance with milk-maids in the autumnal season. The dual worship of Radha and Kṛṣṇa as is usually done in Rasa-puja is not prevalent in satras. It is observed strictly in conformity with the narration of the Bhagavata purana where Radha is conspicuous by her absence. Devotional services performed on this occasion are usually related to the Rasakrida episode.

There is a section in the Kirtana ghosa named composed by Sankardeva and a drama named Keligopal by the same poet. The story in which these Kavyas are written, has been told in the Bhagavata purana and Sankardeva has given Assamese version in the book X of the same purana.

In the satras and namghars of the neo-vaishnavite Bodos areas of Sonitpur, this festival is also observed and the Kirtana of the Kirtonghosa are sung in the assembly of the devotees in the congregational dramas concerning symbols big or small episodes are

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39. ibid, p-134
40. Neog, M. Sankardeva and His times, p-
staged. Both the above festivals (Dol jatra and Ras jatra) have got spiritual, cultural and social values in the neo-vaishnavite Bodo society. It is also seen that the functions are held with the co-operation of all concerned which can strengthen the social harmony as well as unity.

iii. Janmastami

The birth day anniversary of Lord Krshna is celebrated on the eighth lunar dark fortnight in the month of Bhadra (July and August). The Neo-Vaishnavite Bodo people of Sonitpur also celebrate janamstami on the same day of the dark fortnight in the month. Generally this festival starts in the evening illumination in the honour of the Lord’s birth day. A special programme of devotional service befitting the occasion is added to the usual services. After prayers and recitations, a drama dealing with the birth episode of Krshna is performed. It is also seen that image worship is prevalent in Satra, i.e. an image of Krshna is worshipped with Sastric rites and rituals.

On the next day which is known as Nandotsava, illumination takes place as on the previous day and devotional services consisting of prayers, recitation and orchestral music continue throughout the day. A dramatic performance called as Boka Bhaona is performed. The

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41 Quoted from S.N Sarmah's, The Neo-Viashnavite Movement and The Satra Institution of Assam, 1966, p131
42 Ibid
performance depicts joy and amusement of the people of Braja at Krsna’s nativity and ends with the astrological calculation made by sage Garga. It is called *Boka Bhaona* i.e. mud performance, because colour and mud are sprinkled by the actors at each other representing the sentiments of joy owing to Krsna’s birth.\(^{43}\) As an informant furnished, this tradition or this festival is not observed regularly by the neo-vaishnavite Bodo people of Sonitpur. it is observed, only occasionally.\(^{44}\)

**iv. Fasting**

Fasting is one of the mentionable customs among the devotees of neo-Vaishnavism. In this regard S.N. Sarmah observes that “Sankardeva censured a few of his disciples including Madhavadeva for non-observance of fast on the day of *tithis*. Therefore, in practice we find that fasts specially on the eleventh and the last day of every lunar fortnight are observed by all sections of Vaishnavas."\(^{45}\)

Again it is also that fast is observed on *tithi* (death anniversaries) of principal vaishnava reformer.\(^{46}\) The main devotee i.e., the *douri* or *deori,pathek* of the neo-vaishnavite Bodos of Sonitpur also observe all these customs. It is also observed that the farmer doesn’t plough during

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\(^{42}\) Ibid, p-132
\(^{43}\) Ibid, p-137
\(^{44}\) Informant: Tankeswar Boro, M, 56, Kacharigaon, Tezpur
\(^{45}\) Sarmah, S. *The Neo-Vaishnavite Movement and The Satra Institution of Assam*, 1966, p137
\(^{46}\) Ibid, p-137
the time of *Ekadasi*, *Purnima*, *Omboicha* and even in the *tithies* of the *guru*.

**v. Occasional Observance**

Among the neo-vaishnavite Bodo people of Sonitpur, there are some occasional functions observed in various festivals, ceremonies connected with death anniversaries of saints and founders of satras and samhatis and investiture of *Adhikaras*, special devotional and fast etc.

**Amthisua or Sat Sua**

This is also one of the important customs of the Bodos. According to the belief of the Bodos that the earth is supposed to menstruate which occurs once in a year in the month of Ashar, from 7th to 11th of Ashar. This is called *Sua nangnai*. Within the period of a week the Bodos of Sonitpur do not dig the soil, do not plough the land, do not cut the useful tree and do not enter the *bakhri* or granary.47 There is a belief that if anybody digs the soil, then the land will be ulcer. So in this time nobody and plough in the field and dig the land. Each and every family cleans their houses. The followers of traditional religion *Bathou* offer prayer to *Bathou thansali* or *Bathou* altar. Thereafter the households purify their houses by sprinkling holy water.

47. *Brahma, K.: op, cit*-113
As I observed some Bodo speaking village namely Amguri, a pure Bodo speaking village, located in the Borgaon area of Sonitpur district where they worship of Sat Sua in the month of Sayun, (call Amthisua in the Bodo language) in the namghar. Just beside the namghar to the west and north corner side, the villagers worshipped the Bathou and paid tribute to their forefathers with the betel nuts, wine, rice, meat etc. and was performed under the supervision of deuri, on the other hand, in the namghar another deuri called bor deouri performed puja with the help of an assistant inside the manikut. The newly married bride and bridegroom offered a pair of pigeon and set free by reciting mantra by bor deouri for the welfare of the couple. Another interesting is that they worship bathou in the north eastern side and neo-vaishnavism in the southern side inside the manikut.

Among the neo-vaishnavite Bodo people amthi suwa is observed. They observe some purification rite at home and offer Prasad in the namghar. Prasad consists of pulse, banana, sugar cane, apple, orange etc. and even the villagers perform the Nam Kirton in the village namghar. After that they sit together and distribute the prasads among the villagers inside the namghar or some villages do not distribute or take prasads inside the namghar they do outside the Namghar. And it is
also seen offering a separate and separate packet of Prasads to Pani deori, Bar deori, Pathek and Bhakat in the Amguri village.

vi. Some General Observation

It is mentioned above that the Bodos were the worshipper of nature. There was no place for idol worship. But due to impact of Hindu religion they started worshipping Hindu idols. Now they worship the idol of Swaraswati, Siva, Durga Puja without any hesitation.

Some section of the followers of Hindu religion do not worship Hindu idol. Those Bodos who are the follower of neo-vaishnavism under the Sankardev Sangha and Krishnaguru never worship idol.

If the follower of neo-vaishnavism comes or visits the family, the family member bows down to him saying hari hari. Like the follower of neo-vaishnavism, the follower of Krishnaguru, Sri Sri Anukul Thakur are also seen behaving in the similar manner.

Betel nuts are favorite things of the people of Assam. The first refreshment offered to a guest in the house of Bodo family, is betel nut: the other things offer next, is tobacco for smoking, if the guest is accustomed to it. Some of the villages are not clean and they don’t have much knowledge about the religious rites of neo-vaishnavism. Some of them offer the puja with drinking rice beer. It creates an unclean environment in the namghar or manikuta.
One of the informants says that “it is not our culture, we have our own Bodo culture, and it is Assamese culture”. It is really very interesting to note here that why this people are still observing the few rites related to neo-vaishnavism. Even they don’t try to learn about all the rites of neo-vaishnavism. Still the villagers are just maintaining these as a rite. The namghar of the Bodo village is also not kept clean or well decorated like the neo-vaishnavite Assamese villages and no hard and fast rules and regulations are seen.

The Bodos are not only eaters of meat and fish but also they accustom profuse amount of green vegetables. The habit of preparing and taking vodka is part of Bodo culture which is invariably linked up with their cultural and social ceremonies like marriage, birth and death ceremonies and festivals. But now the place of traditional things is not much important.

Even the tradition of hunting in a forest on the occasion of Bihus and other festivals is also not observed by the neo-vaishnavite Bodos.

It is also seen amongst the follower of modified Bathou religion that no meat is taken in the every Tuesday in a week and no meat is served in the death ceremony. It can be said the influence of Hindu religion.

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48. Informant: Chandra Barmahalia, M.63, Amguri, Silikhabari, Sonitpur