CHAPTER V

BODO ORAL-DERIVED VERSE FORMS:
POETRY\textsuperscript{8} AND CULTURE

The Bodos

The Bodos, also known as the Bodo-Kacharis, are one of the earliest inhabitants of the region. They are found spread over the Brahmaputra valley (see figure viii) and cognate groups in parts of the Cachar district of Assam, in North-Bengal, Tripura and parts of southern Nepal. They are known by different names in each of the locales of their habitation. In North-Bengal and the Goalpara district of Assam they are known as Mech and in Cachar they are known as the Dimasas. This fragmentation of the present day Bodo habitats can be traced to the fact that they had once formed one of the most powerful kingdoms of the region “with their capital at Dimapur and then at Maibang and Khaspur”:

Their dominion extended upto Sadia on the East and up to Korotowa river in the west ... the Bodo-Kachari’s kingdom comprised Assam, Sylhet, Mymensing, and the valleys to the east of the Brahmaputra river ... major part of Assam and the North East Bengal formed a great Boro Kingdom (Brahma1960: 07).

\textsuperscript{8} All verses in this chapter, except for those from The Folksongs of the Bodos (1960) by Mohini Mohan Brahma, have been translated by me from the original Bodo with the collaboration of Tulan Mochahary. Where Assamese translations accompanied the Bodo originals, importance were given to the Bodo original. However, while translating verses from The Folksongs of the Bodos, accompanying Assamese and English translations were analysed before reworking them into the versions presented here.
Figure vii. Map showing Bodo inhabited areas.

Figure from the book *A Study of Socio-Religious Beliefs, Practices, and Ceremonies of the Bodos* (1992) by Kameswar Braham
With the subsequent decline of their political power, and the ultimate liquidation of their Kingdom, the Bodo-Kachari population fragmented over the wide expanse of their former kingdom and came to be called different names at different places. The group inhabiting the Brahmaputra valley is usually known as the Bodo-Kacharis and they are concentrated in the western and central districts of Assam. Numerically the largest tribe of Assam, their present population in Assam as per the 1971 census is 6,10,459.

**Bodo Oral-derived Verse Forms**

*Songs of patriotism and valour*

For a nation who had seen great heights in political power, songs associated with martial valour and patriotism are an important part of their oral repertoire. These songs celebrate and record certain important events in the history of the tribe and are an important source of sustaining the historical links with the tribes past. Short lyrics, they are not specific to any certain occasions, but are a part of various community events and festivities. Generalised sentiments of love and patriotism are expressed in the following songs:

(1).
Oh dear motherland, you are
Rich in murmuring streams;
Rows of trees and plants
Give satisfaction to the eyes.
How was it that you were shaped by the almighty creator!
Oh dear motherland!
You do not wake up mother!
You become groggy in deep slumber;
Arise, wake up, rouse the sleeping nation (ibid: 01).
We are the sons of heroes, sons of heroes,
We know no fear, we fear none.
Swords and shields are our playthings.
Should any enemy approach our land,
We shall slay, spear and shoot.
We know no fear, we fear none (ibid: 01).

Songs about legendary heroes like Bachiram, Daoharam, and others are still popular with the Bodo people. These songs are probably fragments of ballads, but complete texts of the ballads are not available for confirmation. The continuous border skirmishes with the bordering Bhutiyas of Bhutan forms much of the content of these songs. In the following song, Bachiram's wife bid him farewell as he leaves to fight the Bhutiyas:

(3).
Mount your horse, Dear Bachiram! Prod him with the stick.
Go forward to the battle of Bhutan.
You shall leave for the battle,
It's not of concern that enemy soldiers may die.
Mount your horse, Dear Bachiram! Prod him with the stick.
Leave, go forward,
Gallop up the hills
Mount your horse, Dear Bachiram! Prod him with the stick (ibid: 03).

Bodo women took a great interest in battles, and their songs were a constant source of encouragement for their men-folk. They also took part in the battles and in the following song they exhort their heroes to lead them to the battlefront:
Come, O sons of the Bodos! Come you all,
Let us go to the battlefront
Shield and sword in hand, courage in the heart,
Let us go to drive away the enemy.
Brother Bachiram, you hero, mount your horse and give chase,
Look, the enemy advances with menacing bravado.
Let the battle be in the hilly caves if so,
Let the enemy soldiers die if so.
For victory shall belong to the Bodos.
Fear not, Bachiram! Fear not.
Born of heroes, victory shall be yours.
Brother Daoharam! Sword in hand,
Mount the elephant and block the enemy’s way (ibid: 02).

Amongst the Bodo women, the most heroic one is Gambari Sikhla, who fought invading Muslim armies:

(5).
Some alien Muslims
Have come to invade our land;
Fear not, fear not, O warriors,
Amongst us is belle Gambari Sikhla,
We shall not be overcome easily (Boro1986: 03).

Another version of this song says that Gambari Sikhla fought against the British.
The tradition of composing oral songs celebrating heroic deeds continues well into contemporary times. The following song recounts the death of two Boro youths, Amlaram Boro and Siboram Boro in police firing in 1974 at a place called Barpeta Road, when they were demanding the Roman script for the Bodo language:
Ayao! The life of Amla and Sibo is lost
To the struggle for the Roman script,
They martyred themselves
To introduce their community to the world (ibid: 04).

Work songs

Work songs reflect best different phases of social activities and are linked up with
the day-to-day functioning of the tribe. They reflect the camaraderie and the
collective effort at workplaces and are moored in references of the familiar and
the common like ploughing, weaving, food gathering, fishing etc. The collective
singing lightens the grind of the hard labour. In the following song the cowherd is
advising his cattle as he grazes them:

The reed has grown.
It has become good grass.
Have your fill,
And grow fat.
Do not eat the tender grass,
You shall die of stomachache.
Grow into bulls and draw the ploughs,
Or else, the whip shall not spare you (Brahma1960: 03).

The next song is sung as the cowherds get ready to drive their cattle home in the
evening:

Cowherds! Cowherds! Chase the cattle,
Look there, the sun sinks in the west.
Separate the cows,
Round up your herd.
Fix the cowsheds’ door properly,
For the tigress lurks around stealthily.
The tiger has died, but the tigress remains,
On the verge of death through much pining.
Do not cry tigress, do not cry,
For we shall look after you in the rainy season.
Go back when the winter comes.
Keep quiet now; do not loiter (ibid: 03-04).

Should it rain while grazing, the cowherd takes refuge under hastily constructed
shelters of leaves and straws and sings the following song:

(9).

Our huts are torn and broken,
Do not come rain, do not come.
Look there, the sunshine approaches, it approaches,
Come sunshine, come, come.
The rain approaches, drop by drop,
Chase it away.
Spread your warmth,
The water will dry up; the path will dry up,
And we shall have a dry way (ibid: 04,).

Livestock and agriculture are the foundation of the rural tribal economy. The
following song, accompanied by the flute, has reference to the clearing of
forestland to ready it as cultivable land. This was done by setting fire to the forest
and invoking the help of the deity Baobuli, the god of wind. “The legend is that
once an old man went with a batch of village youths in search of land for opening
a farm. On finding a forest they wanted to clear it by burning the trees. They
invited Baobuli to help spread the fire.”
Hey, emperor Baobuli!
The king of the forests wins,
King Baratna, the lord of fire has lost.
Come O emperor Baobuli!
You come, come and help us (ibid: 04).

In the following song, the farmers are urging the merchants to come and buy their products. They beat upon their drums and play the flute as they entice the merchants:

O merchants, O merchants,
Bring your boat.
Our paddy, jute, and mustard seeds,
Take them all.
Bring O merchant,
Bring your boat.
Dang furda, Bung furda, Brung furda.
Tho ri ri, ri ri ri rit,
Tho ro ro, ri ri rit (ibid: 04).

Weaving is an integral part of tribal life in Assam and the region in general. Each Bodo household has a weaving loom and weaving is the exclusive domain of the women folks. When a village girl sets her loom, other girls come and join her. “They sit down at spinning competitions, commenting in humorous songs on the quality and fineness of the yarn, the design woven and the standard of cloth in process of production” (ibid: 135). In the following song, the importance of learning the art of weaving is being stressed upon:
(12).

Come companions!
Let us learn grandmother’s art of weaving and spinning
And the art of making patterns on the clothes.
Let us make patterns of
Butterflies flying amongst flower sucking nectar,
And the picture of birds flying in the sky,
And show it all (ibid: 05)

The next song is an exchange between a sister-in-law and her woodcutter brother-in-law, as he is about to set off to the forest to cut the Sal (Shorea Robusta) tree:

(13).
O brother-in-law, O brother-in-law,
When you go the forest in the hills
To cut the Sal tree,
Bring for me the spike, the shuttle and the wheel;
Bring, or evil shall befall you.
Okay, I shall bring what you ask for,
Dear, tender, sister-in-law,
Keep ready for me,
The wine of the bora grain,
The dried meat and the dried fish (Narzi1985: 60).

The Bora rice is often used for making rice beer by the Bodos. The spike, shuttle and the wheel are parts of a loom and the wood from the Sal tree is supposed to make excellent wooden objects.

The next song is a brother-in-law’s advice to his sister-in-law as she sets out for the forest in quest for a herb known as sibru. The sibru herb grows during the month of March and April with the advent of the rainy season and Bodo women
accompanied by men goes deep into the forest to pluck the freshly sprouted tender herbs:

(14).
When you go in quest of the *sibru* herb,
You shall come across the wild buffalo and the rhino,
O tender sister-in-law (ibid: 150).

It is interesting to note the choice of animals in the brother-in-laws song. Rhino and wild buffalo could easily have been substituted with tigers and boars or others. However, in the warm months of March and April it is common to encounter the Rhino and the Buffalo in the wet marshy lands where the *sibru* grows.

*Songs associated with childhood activities*

Amongst the important social functions, as already evident, in a social set-up where both the sexes are important contributors to the economic sustenance of the tribe or the community, is the care of the infants and the children. Though the Bodos, unlike the Misings, do not have a strong institutionalised system of babysitters, children's song forms an important genre of their oral-derived verse forms. Lullabies and game songs are important part of the genre. The theme of many lullabies centre around the moon:

(15).
O' moon come, come, come,
O' moon come.
If you choose not to come, give us a banana,
If you don't give one, you might as well give us two.
O’ moon, come, come (Brahma1960: 05).

(16).
Come, moon, come, come.
Let us play with our brother,
And partake of the sweet and sugar (ibid: 05).

(17).
Moon, O’ moon, give us a banana,
We don’t need one, give us two.
The moon’s imagined reply:
There is no banana, what shall I give you!
A whole bunch was devoured by the crows.
Father-in-law came and had nothing to eat,
Mother-in-law too had come in her spotted skirt (ibid: 05).

The following song is supposed to quieten crying children:

(18).
Come, come, let me take you in my back,
Later we shall go to get the crab.
Later you shall suckle.
The crab is being roasted; the meat is being roasted,
Bring, bring, bring.
If you have got meat and fish, bring,
Weeping, the child is weeping bitterly.
There it comes, eat.
You have meat and fish, keep quiet (ibid: 06).

The cat is an object of fear for the children, and this song is sung to a crying child:

(19).
The cat that steals the mashed fish,
Sits with a grave demeanour,
Do not cry my dear, do not cry (ibid: 06).
Fear too is apparently the key in the next song, where harsa, which means a non-tribal, is an object of fear:

(20).
O crane, O crane, your wings are tender.
Seeing the harsa boy you dip into the water (ibid: 07).

The Bodos have nursery rhymes in the form of a series of question and answer:

(21).
O’ ahu, o ahu, why don’ts you sprout?
I want to, but the cow tramples on me.
O’ cow, O’ cow, why do you trample?
I wouldn’t, but the cowherd doesn’t tend me.
O’ cowherd, O’ cowherd, why don’ts you tend the cow?
I would, but I have no stick.
O’ stick, O’ stick, why aren’t you there?
I would, but the umbrella isn’t here.
O’ umbrella, O’ umbrella, why aren’t you here?
I would, but it doesn’t rain.
O’ rain, O’ rain, why don’ts you come?
I would, but the frog doesn’t croak.
O’ frog, O’ frog, why don’ts you croak?
I would, but the snake will bite.
O’ snake, o’ snake, why do you bite?
I wouldn’t, but the king commands.
O’ king, O’ king, why do you command?
I don’t. The snake itself is very short tempered (Boro1986: 08-09).

Ahu is a fast growing variety of paddy grown in comparatively higher elevation by irrigation.
(22).
O’ cowherd, O’ cowherd,
What do you seek?
A piece of needle.
What will you do with a piece of needle?
Sew a sack.
What will you do with the sack?
Put it on a red buffalo.
What will you do with the red buffalo?
Take it to Goalpara and behead it (Brahma 1960: 08).

Goalpara is a town in Assam and Brahma’s informant was from a village near it.
The last line refers to religious sacrifice of the buffaloes.

(23).
O’ full moon, widower,
Where has your father left?
To cut a wooden seat.
What happened to the wooden seat?
The king sat on it.
What happened to the king?
Left to ride a horse.
What happened to the horse?
Gone to graze on the grass.
What happened to the grass?
The fire burnt it.
What happened to the fire?
The water put it off.
What happened to the water?
The crow drank it.
What happened to the crow?
Flew off to the woods (ibid: 08).
Game songs have also been recorded from amongst the Bodos. In the following game song of the cowherds, a boy assumes the role of an old woman, and the others taunt the ‘old woman’ and have fun:

(24).
O’ cunning old woman, O’ cunning old woman!
Where has your bag of bones old man gone?
My old man has gone to carve a boat.
What will you do with the boat?
Cross the Brahmaputra.
Where will you go crossing the Brahmaputra?
To get a daughter-in-law from Goalpara.

Old woman, do you have drinks?
Look! There comes your
Bag of bones old man (Narzi1991: 51).

The ‘old woman’ becomes ‘irritated’ and runs after the scampering cowherds laughing in glee.

The next song is a game song where the children plays in the rain:

(25)
Aflang bijlang there is a hole on our roof,
Do not fall, rain, do not fall,
Look! There comes sunshine,
O’ sunshine, O’ sunshine!
Rain falls in huge drops,
Shine strongly,
When the rain goes, there will be clear weather,
And dry land to walk (ibid: 49).
**Songs associated with love and courting**

Love songs amongst the tribes of Assam is a prominent genre of oral-derived verse forms and the Bodos are no exception. “Love and bereavement, union and separation, hope and hopelessness are the contours of the heart that are reflected in the spontaneity of these songs. In these songs the use of similes and other figures of speeches are found to be quite common” (Boro 1995: 29). Love songs are classified into two categories; *Hinjaophwuli* are the songs sung by the girls and *Howaphwuli* are the songs sung by the boys. Often, without any apparent and direct references to the state of the mind, the “urges of youths are mirrored in the moods of nature (Brahma1960: 141). The varied hues of nature in the following *Hinjaophwuli* has reference to the emotions of lonely girls as they bathe in the river, collect firewood or weave in their looms:

(26).
Gently the breeze blows,
The flowers like the full moon blooms.
The butterflies between falling and flying suck the nectar.
Come! What a sweet a fragrance issues forth.
The nightingale sits on the tree and sings a song,
The well-modulated and tuneful voice spreads all around.
*Ayao!* What a sweet day (Boro 1995: 29-30).

(27).
The small bird is mourning
Staring at the sky,
Why do you cry shedding tears?
What grief does it suffers from?
Maybe it's a pain infinite.
Flapping the wings,
Staring at the sky,
Why do you cry?
Even if the rain comes, even if the flood submerges,
Why isn’t your life thirst quenched (ibid: 31)?

Ageing is a source of great concern for girls and the fear that their life will be wasted as spinsters are expressed in the next few songs:

(28).
Hey flower! Fully bloomed flower.
You bloomed alone, withered alone.
We too are fully matured (ibid: 31).

(29).
Come friends let us pluck and take the herbs
Mother and father does not marry us off,
And it is not proper to broach the subject with brothers.
The seasons pass, one after the other,
We too grow in years, one after the other (ibid: 32).

Girls going to the woods in search of herbs sing the above song.

(30).
The bird perched in the tree cries in frustration,
O grieving bird, do you suffer from a pain like mine?
The birds are destined for union in birth,
But for me only pain has been pr-destined (Boro1986: 12).

(31).
Don’t keep us without reasons,
The wind blows, the flowers fall,
Keep the one that should be kept.
You looked after our growing years,
Now age catches up with mother and father.
We are not domesticated birds or pigs,
Don't keep us without reasons (Brahmal993: 14).

After the pain of loneliness comes the expectations and joy associated with the first flush of love:

(32).
Aha! What magical power he possess!
I am enamoured when I hear his voice.
I am his shadow. Even when out of sight,
Why does his voice agitate my mind (Brahma1960: 13)?

(33).
The *holo lokha* grass grows on the hill.
You are the only man with whom I shall start a family.
Oh beloved! Buy and keep (hair) oil from the market.
Also buy the bracelets and the brown garlands (ibid: 13).

(34).
You, the one like a Brahmin,
Still radiating in childhood glow, fair and loveable.
Oh! How shall I hope to be yours!
How shall I hope to be yours (Brahma1993: 01)?

(35).
Like the fully-grown croaking toad in the rainy season
Oh brother! Look at your fully endowed waist (ibid: 02).
Yet it is the girls that retain their composure in the face of great temptation. In the next song a girl is trying to dissuade her lover from forcing her to elope by citing worldly responsibilities:

(36).
Dear Maloram! Keep my name.
Do not elope with me
Keep my prestige. If I hesitate to cook,
Mother will scold me.
If I hesitate to draw water,
Father will cane me.
I can't commit such a sacrilege in my parent's home.
It will be unfair, sinful and bring disrepute.
Days pass, words spread. Such an act
Will be etched in the rules of the Bodo community (Brahma1960: 12).

The girls also does not hesitate to set conditions to her lover for a successful marriage:

(37).
The pond's Bengchi fish,
If you want to take me
Get me the yellow-green coloured dakhna
I searched the whole country,
Dear! My eyes fixed only on you (ibid: 13).

(38).
The wild betel leaves in the garden corner.
You may be dark, but loveliness your face wears.
In the maiden's looms are the reeds.
If you want to set home with me
Do not cultivate such habits.
The shrub across the pond
If you want to take me, get a necklace of gold (Boro1995: 36).

At times a girl can invite a man to come and stay at her parents place, as she has not been married. A son-in-law coming and staying at his in-laws place is a social custom that is practised the Bodo society under certain conditions:

(39).
If the mind is at ease, if the mind is at peace,
And if you like me,
Come and stay at my parent’s place, brother, come and stay at my parent’s place.
My parents does not know to seek out,
And it is not in my fate to find anyone.
I do not know to weave flowery patterns,
And you do not know to read and write.
Come and stay at my parent’s place, brother, come and stay at my parent’s place.
Dear brother Sonalu from the southern hamlet,
Even if I don’t know to weave flowery patterns,
I shall weave for you plain clothes.
Oh brother! I don’t know to weave flowery patterns,
You too don’t know to read and write.
If you come, I shall go,
Just let me know (Brahma1993: 17).

Inability to weave properly is a big demerit in a Bodo society and such girls are looked down upon and it is often very difficult to locate grooms for them. In the above song, the girl initially invites the man to come and stay at her place; however, in the last two lines of the song, she makes it clear that if the man desires, she would in fact like to go with him. A man staying in his in-laws place is often looked down upon though socially accepted. A young man from a
prosperous family is often the desired husband for a girl and in the following song
such a hope is being expressed:

(40).
Oh! The fallen leaves of fig,
Into a poor family, do not give me,
O' father, do not give me.

Study the marks of the horses’ hoofs,
Study the marks of the elephants’ footsteps,
And give me, O' father, give me.

Into the house where crows can enter,
Into the house where dogs can enter,
Do not give me, O' father, do not give me.

Study the granary,
Study the cowshed,
And give me, O' father, give me (ibid: 25).

The girls are also not above vitriolic ridicule towards former objects of desire:

(41).
Like the ripe fruits in the garden corner,
Oh brother! Like the ripe fruits in the garden corner,
You examined class and creed,
And married rejecting me.
How come your marriage festers like a ripe wound after one child (ibid: 01)?

(42).
Like the reeds of inferior quality
Brother Nijam! Like the obese reeds of inferior quality,
You rejected me examining class and creed.
How come the female you married sleeps all the time (ibid: 19)?
The themes in the love songs of the boys i.e. the *Howaphwrnis* are more or less the same. In the following songs the lover is lost in the beauty of his beloved:

(43).
Oh dear! Your finely
Contracted waist is but a handful.

The bunch of yarn from the merchant
The bright clothes with the floral patterns in your body.

The shrub in the garden corner is slanted,
Your hair bun like the moon is rounded (ibid: 14).

But often the boys find that their beloved is not within the reach of their materialistic means:

(44).
Like the Bengchi fish of the flooded lake,
You are so expensive.
To take you I need a load of money,
Being poor,
You are beyond my means (Boro1986: 14).

Money is again not the only obstacle. Differences in class and social position often pose an almost insurmountable opposition. In the following song a youth is rationalising his love for a girl outside his social group:

(45).
Perched in the branches,
The dove's heart heaves heavily,
The dove makes sorrowful noise,
There! My dear the sad dove cries
The dove cries sister,
Beloved Seoari from Mainaguri.
Choosing and selecting for class
Choosing and selecting for creed
A husband, my dear, will be a sin,
O’ my beloved Seoari from Mainaguri.

Look! In the rainy water of the Bwisag month
The fish advances looking at clouds above.
In pairs moves the Khursa fish,
The Khursa fish, dear.
O’ my dear Seoari from Mainaguri.

Don’t take me otherwise, beloved.
I too shall not mind.
You belong to none, my dear,
Nor do I belong to anyone.
In a society,
We have to live with the good and the bad, dear.
O’ my beloved Seoari from Mainaguri (Brahma1993: 10):

The next song catches the emotional upheaval of a boy in love:

(46).
Why does the nightingale
wails so mournfully in the dusk?
Why is my heart in turmoil
when I hear the bird’s cry?
Like the simmering heat of the burning husk,
This pain is consigned to the bottom of my heart.
Oh! How I suffer from this burning sensation.
Let the tears of my soul cease to flow (ibid: 11).

The boys may react rudely to a rejection. In the following song a girl is being dismissed as a flirt:
The immature betalnut of Asin,
The immature betalleaves of Asin.
O' my beloved! Shameless, flirtatious, licentious,
You are after a husband young in age and immature.
You buy a ticket in Nalbazarao,
And disembark in Galogondoao,
Oh God (ibid: 09)!

Asin is a month in the Bodo calendar that corresponds to September-October in the Roman calendar. Nalbazarao and Galogondoao are the names of places. The final love song is an expression of a happy couple celebrating their love:

O beloved! My precious, my soul!
Loosen the knot in my phalli.
Dear! Untie the knot in my hair.
O' dear! I shall not untie the knot in your hair.
My love! I shall not untie the knot in your phalli.
Why not, why shall we not untie!
We shall both untie, we shall both enhance our beauty (Brahma1960: 21, 83).

Phalli is a piece of woven cloth that has many uses. It can be used as towel, tied in the head as a sort of turban, or tied across the waist as a kilt or a sarong.

Marriage songs

Marriage songs are an important genre of oral-derived verse forms amongst the tribes of Assam. Marriage as an institution involves both the secular and the ritualistic. The songs that catch the festive and joyous spirit involved in a wedding can be termed as secular whereas verses that are part of the rites to solemnise the
marriage are ritualistic. Songs are associated with traditional mode of weddings. Contemporary times have seen Bodos who have converted to Christianity marrying as per the dictates of their religion, and there are no songs associated with these forms of wedding. The traditional mode of Bodo wedding is a festive occasion and involves much feasting and singing and is a long drawn affair. This can be understood from the following song:

(49)
Marriage is a long drawn road,
Choose a day that is long,
O’ mother, choose a day that is long (Narzi1985: 74).

Bodo weddings are usually solemnised during late February and early March. After the short winter days, the days begin to lengthen during these spring months. It is considered inauspicious to marry after these months. This can be understood well when one considers that with the advent of summer, the monsoons set in. The rains are of great inconvenience; moreover these are the days when agricultural activities are in full swing in the fields, and precious time will be lost in conducting a wedding.

The songs are usually of light-hearted nature aimed to arouse laughter. Many songs have as their referents the wine and food that are served during a wedding. In the following song the abundant food and drink of the past is being mentioned which throws into relief the hard times of the present days:

(50).
Turn to the bamboo comb, and make your hair.
Where has the days of past gone?
The abundant flesh, the pool of wine,
Are no more sister-in-law, are no more, no more (ibid: 80).

"While the marriage is being performed there is an atmosphere of ebullition and levity. The women under the influence of liquor hurl many a joke at the bridegroom" (Brahma1960: 156).

(51).
Give us the oil, give us the oil, the night is drawing near.
Give us the mustard oil, the groom is very dirty,
Bring a broken spade to scrape of the dirt.
   Pour the water to remove the dirt,
   Let the groom's face shine bright (ibid: 23).

It is customary in Assam to use mustard oil as a body lotion and the mention of mustard oil alludes to that.

(52).
The murmuring river flows down the Bhutan hills,
Look, our son-in-law sports a tattered loincloth (ibid: 23).

The women accompanying the groom to retorts in a jocular vein:

(53).
The cockroaches in the house's wall,
The wine you serve is sour, is sour.
The centipede in the house's top,
The wine you serve is tasteless.
In the wine pot is the mud,
In the wine is the water you have mixed,
Hey! Much water you have mixed (ibid: 11).
The wine in your wedding is sour. 
However the pork is of a fattened boar. 
Dance girls dance, and make merry. 
On top of the hill grow the wild leaves, 
Bring, bring the wine of the new-man. 
The new-man serves us pork 
In small measures. 
The smell that a clove of garlic emits 
Is same as that from two. 
Touching one piece of pork 
Is same as touching two (ibid: 25).

It is customary to serve drinks and pork in traditional Bodo weddings. However tasty the pork and wine is, the women will term them to be sour and inadequate which will produce peals of laughter. In the next song, the Barlangpha, the man who dances all the way when the bride is being taken to her husbands place, ridicules the bridesmaid to evoke laughter:

(55).
From your circular face like the round thaigir 
Flashes a smile coy as a lightning, 
With your legs like the bamboo shoots 
You jump tenderly, 
With the rhythmic tremor of your withered waist, 
With the massive bulk of your shaking hair bun, 
Lifting your banana trunk like hands, 
With fingers delicate like the Lily shoots, 
You give us the betel-leaves and nuts. 
O’ Bridesmaid! Do not be shy. 
Do not beckon the clouds near you,
Do not darken your face (ibid: 25).

It is mandatory to distribute betel-leaves and nuts on social interaction of all level in Assam and other North Eastern states of India. *Thaigir* (*Dillenis indica*) is a round sour fruit with layers of overlapping skin. The general atmosphere of mirth and joy is thrown into relief at the moment of the bride’s departure to her in-laws place. This moment is one of great poignancy and songs catch the pain in the moment:

(56).

O'dear, do not cry,
The virgin hen is taken from its coop today
And ready to be taken to the grooms place.
Do not cry.
From this day your parental home will be in disarray,
For you won't be here
To keep it neat and tidy (ibid: 28).

(57).

Why do you cry dear? Why do you cry?
Do not cry dear, do not cry.
For you haven’t been married to a Nepali,
Nor have you been married to a *harchar*,
You have been only asked to set up a family with a Bodo youth (ibid: 28).

*harchar* is the Bodo word that means an outsider or a non-Bodo. In versions of older songs like the one above, the traditional Bodo antagonist, the *Bhutiya*, or the people of Bhutan substituted Nepali or *harchar*. The word ‘Nepali’ is a pointer to the gradual demographic change in the population pattern of Assam. The
Nepalese migrated to interior and remote tribal areas of Assam and bought land and became agriculturists. Hence the traditional Bhutiya has given way to the Nepali or in the present moment, to the miyan. The miyan is the Muslim immigrant from erstwhile East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, who like the Hindu Nepalese is gradually evolving to land owning farmers from initially being agricultural labourers.

The old women sing the following song of consolation to the bride:

(58)

Do not cry, dear, do not cry, do not cry!
A fattened boar is meant for kith and kin,
A grown up girl is meant for others.
Your tears and grief wont get you your parents.
You haven’t been married to a Nepali,
You haven’t been married to a Bhutiya,
You have been given as per Bodo custom and norms
To a youth from a Bodo clan to set up a family.
Do not cry. Pray to the Lord
Toil and work to lead a contended and peaceful family life (ibid: 29).

At the same time songs reminding the groom of his marital vows is also important:

(59)
The bride has been handed over to your custody
Accept her thinking over your vows and duties.
Should you break her limbs, it’s your wife.
Breaking your vows will be your loss.
Other might value her as soil, but for her mother
She is a lode of gold.
Entrusted unto you, she is your duty and responsibility.
Sans devotion, sans knowledge, sans the ability to weave.
Yet you accepted her thinking over it properly (ibid: 37).

And finally the groom’s party is jubilant and the following song is sung “at the feast on the day the bride is brought to her husband’s place. The males play on the Serja (stringed instrument) and the female dance in gay abandon” (ibid: 166). The men sing this song exclusively.

(60).
Come on dear girls,
Display a little motion of your hands and feet.
Dance dear ones, sway and swing.
We have captured the virgin hen
From within her house.
Rejoice in this festival,
Enjoy (ibid: 31).

**Songs of festivities**

*Domasi* and *Baisagu* are two most important festivals of the Bodos and they are occasions of gaiety and joy for the community. *Domasi* is celebrated in the month of January and varieties of eatables are prepared for the occasion. It celebrates a successful harvest and is a time of great feasting for the community. Hay from the harvested fields are used to prepare a structure known as *Belagur* inside which the Bodo youths spend the night of *Domasi* singing songs and making merry and feasting just before dawn. This feast literally means ‘feast to mark the end of the duties of a cowherd’. Bodo youths from poor families serve rich landlords for remuneration by tending their cattle for a specific period. It is very important that
the cattle do not stray into the paddy fields. Since Domasi marks the culmination of the agrarian cycle, it also marks the end of the contract with the landlords. At dawn, the youths take a dip in a nearby river or pond and set ablaze the Belagur and warms away the winter chill before the fire and sings the following song:

(61).
Blessed, blessed, blessed,
Blessed be our village.
Let the sickness and ailment of the south
Go to the south,
Let the sickness and ailment of the west
Go to the west.
Let the sickness and ailment of the north
Go to the north,
Let the sickness and ailment of the east
Go to the east.
In wealth and grain let our village
Be blessed and overflow.
Let the cows of our village
Like the young ones of the rhinos and the elephants
Be fat and plump, big and tall
And grow as strong.
Let those who blamed our cows
For eating paddy they never did,
For thrashing and abusing us
Be condemned to a lifetime of
Sadness and misery (Narzi1991: 04).

After Domasi comes Baisagu, the seven-day festival of song and dance. Baisagu is divided into two parts; the first part is dedicated to the cows, and the second part, which runs for six days, is dedicated to human. Celebrated in mid-April,
Baisagu starts on the last day of the Bodo month of Chwilhw, the final day of the calendar, and usually carries on for the next six days of the month of Bwisag, the first month of the Bodo calendar. Baisagu is a combination of both the ritualistic and the secular; it starts of with propitiation for the well being and increase in the numbers of cows and is followed by rituals that pay obeisance to the forefathers and the different deities of the Bodo pantheon. This is followed by communal celebration of dance and songs that are largely secular in nature.

Baisagu is initiated by elaborate and ritual morning bathing of the cows. The cows are fed with grains from the fields and their horns and hoofs anointed with mustard oil. The soot from the underside of cooking vessels is mixed with mustard oil and the bodies of the cows are marked with the soot by using a bamboo cylinder or a tree branch. The cows are garlanded with pieces of aubergines and gourds and led to the waterfront after the owners had paid respects to their respective cattle. The following songs are sung as the cows are led away by the cowherds:

(62).

Eat the gourds, eat the aubergines,
Grow by the herds year after year.
Avenge your mother, avenge your father,
And grow into big plough bearers.
Do not be short like your mother;
Be like father bull.
The toad in the woods' corner,
Grow big and tall like him (ibid: 08).
The *long leaved* plant is medicine for the cows
The cows will yield more.
The stems of the *long leaved* trees with the thick knots,
Our cows will grow into big bulls
They won't be short and small,
And will be the sharpest amongst the herd (ibid: 08).

The *long leaved* plant mentioned in the above verse refers to a plant known as *Digilithi* in Bodo (known botanically as *Litsoca salicifolia*) and is basically a shrub with long leaves. The above verse can be understood when one considers the fact that the cows are taken to the waterfront by gently stroking the animals with this plant as this is considered to be auspicious. This song accompanies the stroking.

The most important aspect of *Baisagu* following the first day is the celebration that takes place from the third day. Traditionally the second day is kept aside for obeisance and thanksgiving to the Gods and the ancestors after purifying both the self and the household. Finally, the past year is bade farewell ritualistically and the celebration thrown open for all. This celebration starts on the third day. Both the girls and the boys in their traditional finery and their musical accompaniments fan out in groups to indulge in songs and dance. In the following song the new year is being welcomed by the revellers:

(64).
*Baisagu comes, baisagu,*
*Baisagu baisagu.*
The old year has left,
The new year has come.
Baisagu comes, baisagu.
The new air of the new year
Makes the river-rivulet, trees-creepers, birds-insects,
Dance with joy.
Come, come all today,
The old, the youth and the maiden,
The girls and the boys,
Come, let us all get together
And experience the joy.
Baisagu comes, baisagu, baisagu (Brahma1960: 44).

The youths and the maidens goes around the village visiting and collecting donations from families and this, like in the Assamese Bihu and the Mising Ali-ai-ligang, is an integral part of the celebrations. In the songs below the singers are mocking the apparently reluctant members of the household they have visited:

(65).
Where has the household gone?
The birds draw the plough!
Reluctant to part with the donation,
They peep through the partings that they make in the wall.
_Hurai hurai awi hurai lanore_,
_Hwrwrwt hwrwrwt hwrwi_ (ibid: 41).

(66).
_Hwrwrwt hwrwrwt hwrwrwt awi_
_Awi aha awi huray huray lingirl
_Hwi hwi hwi a...
Where has this household gone that the birds draw the plough,
Reluctant to part with the donations they peep through the partings they make in the wall,
_Oi! They peep through the parting they make in the wall._
They will give, they will give, why should they refuse
Their minds are unfettered now and they will part with a quarter or a half of a rupee,
Oi! They will part with a quarter or a half of a rupee.

Basket, basket, basket, the fishing basket,
If you don't give us our quarter or half, we will make your courtyard white,
Oi! We will make your courtyard white.

The leaf and the stem of the *Athia* plantain, the seedling of the *Mwnia* plantain,
We roved around villages hoping to be taken in as son-in-laws.
Fish from one pond moves to another.
In-between they are met and eaten by the otter.
The betel-leaves taste astringent, the betel-nut taste astringent,
From the betel tree hangs the nest of the *Raisilikha* bird,
Oi! Hangs the nest of the *Raisilikha* bird.

They wind the ropes, the three stranded ropes
Someone has taken note of something with their fingers.
They ground the rice and call them sweet balls,
While examining them tinkles the bangles,
Oi! Tinkles the bangles (ibid: 41-42).

The above song has no apparent linkages between the different parts and come across as fragmented. However, it is important to note that this is a fun song and has as its referents objects of everyday reality and elements of humour that is best understood by the participants. *Athia* and *Mwnia* are local varieties of bananas and the *Raisilikha* is a bird of the Swallow family.

Many a *Baisagu* songs are centred around the themes of dance and good-hearted fun cracked by the men-folk on the women. The next two songs give evidence of both:

(67).

O my sisters-in-law, *Bibari – Mwnbari*,

* Athia and *Mwnia* are local varieties of bananas and the *Raisilikha* is a bird of the Swallow family.
Come let us dance row after row.
O sister-in-law if you choose not to come, should I not get anything,
I shall not shoot the peacock, nor shall I shoot the deer,
But I shall shoot the hen that belongs to you both.
O my precious! Mwnbari-Bibari,
Come let us dance row after row.
This is the season of joy, the new year,
Come let us dance row after row.
Should you choose not to come, should you not give me anything,
I shall not ask of you, nor shall I ask of her,
But I shall kill your pig and carry it away (ibid: 42)

(68).
Hey Gaudang! In your house are rows of Betel trees;
But you fickle maiden,
Your father has sold you like a calf to me for cash.
But it’s me who has refused to accept the deal.
O dear sister Gaudang from Belguri (ibid: 43).

Rice beer or jou is an article in great demand during those seven days and many a
song has got allusions to it. Failure to serve jou is taken as an affront and the
following song is sung ridiculing a woman in a village known as Ouwabari who
had failed to honour her guests:

(69).
Siu siu, Sewari,
You wild one from the nook of the wastes dump.
O dear Rangamati,
Life is apparently sweet.
The woman who serves liquor to her kith and kin,
Hey you woman from Ouwabari (ibid: 43).
In the next song a son-in-law is asking his mother-in-law for some jou, to which she replies that the jou is finished. Songs on such exchanges are common in Baisagu celebration. It is a delicate matter for a son-in-law to ask for jou directly of his mother-in-law; so he takes recourse to addressing an insect known as Boorboolia:

(70).
Boorboolia; boorboolia
In the season of Baisagu
Your son-in-law comes,
Do you have jou or not.
Do you have jou or not (Narzi1991: 25).

The mother-in-law replies:

(71).
The jou in the attic of the granary
Has just been had,
If you had been a little early, you too could have had your share (ibid: 26).

Dance competitions are common in Baisagu. In the following song, the dancers of a village are being encouraged to give of their best:

(72).
The birds of the thatch field,
Hey the birds of the thatch field!
The dancers of our village
Do not fall behind in your dance and songs,
Do not fall behind.
Dance, sing, and enjoy to your hearts content,
Sway and swing as you dance (Brahma1960: 44).
Baisagu is a time of great freedom and pleasure. In the next song the girls sing this song as they dance:

(73).
The maoa fish of the Holong river,
Hey! The maoa fish.
We too have wandered for these seven days
Footloose and fancy-free,
Hey! Footloose and fancy-free (ibid: 44).

Love songs are an important part of Baisagu celebration. Girls express their desire to be with the man they love during such a festive time. Sentiments can be both generalised and personal. Personal emotions are at times cloaked under the garb of celebrations. In the following song a girl is requesting her lover to take her away:

(74).
Take me away
Take me away
Brother, Sayaram Mandarbibar
If you don’t take me, there will be sadness and sighs brother,
There will be a Bodo hand length of sadness and sighs remaining,
There will be even a harsa hand length of sadness and sighs remaining.
There will be upheaval in the heart,
Brother Sayaram Mandarbibar.
In today’s Baisagu
Break through this sadness and sighs
And take me away brother!
Sayaram Mandarbibar,
Sayaram is the name of the person loved by the girl and amongst the Bodos and the Assamese it is not uncommon to find suitors or lovers being called brothers before marriage. Mandarbibar is the name of a flower, and according to the information given by Tulan Mochahary, seems to be a euphemism used by the girl to signify her emotions for her beloved. A hand length is a unit of measurement used by the Bodos and is the length from the tip of the middle finger to the centre of the chest. A non-Bodo (harsa) hand length will be different. It is interesting to note the application of concrete measurement to abstract concepts like grief or pain. The sigh is often taken to be an indicator of sadness. The monsoons and flood follow Baisagu, and the youths and the maidens will go to the fields to work. The prospect of meeting the person of ones own choice in the field is exciting and hence the following song:

(75).

In the month of June
Comes the rain and the flood
Come, beloved!
In the season of rain
Let us too meet (ibid: 16).

**Songs of rituals and ceremonies**

Amongst the rituals and ceremonies of the Bodos, prayers are directed to various deities of the Bodo pantheon and also to the ancestors and forefathers. One of the important Bodo ritualistic ceremonies is the Garja. This is a ceremony where the whole village takes part. Donations are collected from each household of the village and there is a designated place in the village where the ceremony takes
place. This place is usually a thick vegetative grove. *Garja* is a ceremony that is held after annual festivities like *Baisagu,* where people indulge in dances, socialising etc. and in the course of general social intercourse comes in contact with impure elements. This can happen by coming in contact with polluted place or persons or by committing knowingly or unknowingly moral transgressions. *Garja* is also held to ward of evil that befalls a village. It is interesting to note that in the *Garja* ceremony, along with deities of the Bodo pantheon, Hindu gods and goddesses and Muslim holy figures are also prayed (Narzi1985: 175). The principal Bodo deity is *Bathoubwrai* and is also known as *Khwriabwrai,* *Sibrai,* etc. After the deities are assigned designated places, the priests accomplish their respective duties and the ceremony starts with a person that knows the holy chant initiating the ceremony and the audience joining in after him in the chanting.

Given below are excerpts from a *garja* chant:

(76).

*Aham guru!*

*Pogla thakur,* mother *Bormali*

*His companions and Ganesh Thakur*  
*Please tell —mothers and fathers!*

*Who all lie on the other side,*  
*Asu Mainao,*  
*Bwrai raja, Jwmwn Jwla,*  

...  

*O’- mothers and fathers! You are not recent gods. You are eternal deities.*  

...  

*The stork has not become dark,*
The crow has not become white,
The god of truth will always remain on the path of truth,
The god of respect will always elicit respect.
Beware! Beware!! Beware!!!
O’ mothers and fathers!
The ailments of the north
Disperse to the north.
The ailments of the east
Disperse to the east.
The ailment of the west
Disperse to the west.
Mercy! Mercy!! Mercy!!!
Mothers and fathers!
Obstruct all evil--
In any way you can
... (ibid: 178-179).

In the chant above, words like *Pogla thakur* or *Ganesh thakur* are not original Bodo words, but later intrusions due to Hindu influence. The chanting starts by paying obeisance to the principal deity and his various companions and also the non-Bodo deities to placate and satisfy them. Then each individual deity is summoned and offered the ceremonial offering after which forgiveness and mercy is beseeched of them for the offending members of the community.

Another important Bodo ceremony is the *Kherai* ceremony. This ceremony can be performed for three main reasons and at different time of the year: One ceremony is performed in a dark night in the months of June or July to pray for protection for the summer crops. Another is performed in a dark night in mid-October or early- September to pray for the protection of the winter crops. If any member of
a family is suffering from a long drawn illness, which the priest or the shaman has failed to cure, the *Kherai* ceremony is conducted for the recovery of that individual. While the first two ceremonies are a community affair, the concerned family conducts the third one. The sanctum sanctorum for the first two is constructed in an open field. For the third one, it is constructed within the precincts of the ailing individuals home. The principal deity is *Bathoubwrai*, and the chant of invocation is rendered to the accompaniment of the drum and the flute, and is known as ‘awakening song of *Bathou’*. Given below are excerpts from the invocation:

(77).
O’ mother come, O’ father come.
Come and remove all that is unwanted from our head.
The *sjyu* plant has got five veins,
*Bathou* too has got five knots,
The *thaigir* too have five layers,
*Mwn sing-sing* too has five manners.
When mother died we cast her off-
When father died we cast him off-
Yet we continue to pray to Lord *Bathou* almighty.

... 
With the sacred soil of the hills and the mountains,
With the sacred water of the streams and rivers,
We shall worship you all

... 
You all come with father *Bura-Bathou*
And gather here.
Accept our prayers
And remove all that is unwanted from our head (ibid: 184-185).
The next verse is also a part of the Kherai ceremony that asks the gods for protection and forgiveness:

(78).

O' Khuriaburi and King Khuriabura

In the heavens above is Dharmadau in the world below is Tulsidau

There are no better devotees, no better deities
O' Father the undisputed king of heaven earth and the world below
It is told Bathou has five knots, the siju five veins,
Similarly man's speech is of five types.
We are the one to sin, you are the one to forgive
O' Father here lies the sacred poa grass row after row
The ancient seer had told that mother earth is the path
Man cannot perceive, cannot understand your world
The elephant cries under oudal tree in the forest,
Man cries at the door of the undisputed king
The crow has not become white, the stork has not become black,
Stones do not float away in the sea,
The Brahmaputra has not yet gone underground
Truth still prevails O' father almighty
Trees die, yet from there sprout the seedlings
The knowledgeable seer tells one-fold, the ignorant two-fold
You have to forgive O' father almighty
If there be peace in manners, there will be peace in justice too
The black cow gives white milk
...

Father and mother has not given us heaven or wealth,
But told us about you,
In festivities and celebration we have been praying to you,
O' the undisputed king of heaven, earth, and the world below
Ailment and cure rest in your hands
Destroy the ailments of heaven in heaven and of the world below
In the world below
The ailment of the east in the east, the ailment of the west in the west,
The ailment of the south in the south, and the ailment of the north in the north
Protect well the crops in the field
Keep in peace and happiness mankind and
See off the days of the cattle well, O’ Father (Bodo1995: 132-133).

The repeated reference to an almighty father in the verses above refers to the
Bodo supreme deity Bathoubwrai who is Lord Shiva or Mahadeva of the Hindu
pantheon. The Bodos are worshipper of Lord Shiva and the Siju tree has got
special reverential reference for the Bodos. Lord Bathou is supposed to reside in
the Siju plant. It is a thorny shrub of the Euphorbia family with pronounced veins
in its leaves. In-both the songs above there is an emphasis on the number five.
Five is a sacred number for the Bodos and this refers back to the number of knots
in head of Lord Shiva or Bathoubwrai, which is supposed to be five. The leaves
of the Siju plant also have five veins and it is believed that the Bodos speaks five
different types of speech. Mwn Sing Sing, who is referred to in the verse of
invocation, is the wise old man of the Bodo creation myth. He along with
Khuriaburi, Khuriabura, and the entire biota were the first to be created in the
Bodo world. Mwn sing sing ascended the heavens when he took birth in the
human world. This world was created by Aham Guru, who is the one without
beginning or end. Hence most Bodo ceremonial chants begin with the invocation
‘Aham Guru’. Bodo creation myth differentiates between pre-creation and post-
creation planes. In the pre-creation plane, the stars, the sun, the moon and the
earth were conspicuous by their absence. Even the supreme creator, Anan Gosain,
was in a nascent state. The desire to manifest itself and create the world produced
the following chant:

(79).
Lauba Lausam
Khauba khausam
Ada gwswn
Dwiao barswm (Narzi1985: 164).

And in a moment the creator assumed ‘Lauba Lausam’ or five knowledges and
‘Khauba Khausam’ or the five senses and as soon as the chant articulated within
the creators soul, a huge persona with five knowledges and five senses emerged
out of the vast-emptiness. Thus the importance of the number five in Bodo
ceremonies. Anan Gosai assumed the feminine principle and became Sibrai.
Along with Sibrai, the whole planetary system and the entire biota were created.
However the beauty of the universe could not satisfy him and he felt lonely. The
desire for male companion resulted in the creation of Siburi, the male principle in
Bodo creation myth, who was created from the body of Sibrai herself (ibid: 163-
164). Sibrai, thus imbibed both the feminine and masculine principles, and is
worshipped as Lord Bathoubwrai.

Songs of creation: the first hymns

Mwn sing sing was sent to the earth as an intermediary of Bathoubwrai to initiate
mankind to the mystery of creation. He asked questions and answered them
before mankind through different priests and the mystery of creation unravelled.
In the following songs, different moments of creation are being dwelled upon. In
the verses below, the power of the wind as a major creative influence is being
dwelled upon:

(80). Power of the Wind

The power of Bathou resides in the power of the wind
The ability to breathe is possessed by all
Wind enables everybody to live
Wind gives life to new sprouting forms.

Wind creates waves in the water
Waves as big as mountains
Wind breaks the rocks in the land
And create new forms.

Wind carries the smoke above
Wind spits out the clouds above
The clouds disperse everywhere
The rain from the clouds gives life to everyone.

Wind carries the clouds
And the collision creates sound
The clash of the clouds
Carries sound and light everywhere.

In the wind are the vapours
Sucked by creation
The wind gives us pleasure when the sun is hot
The limit of its power is infinite.

The world is enveloped by the powerful wind
Without wind creation will be lifeless
The sacred wind gives life to plants and animals
Wind is the food of life (Boro1984: 29-30).

In the next few verses the creation of sky and stars are being dealt with:
(81). Sky and the Stars

Millions of years ago there were no earth or sky
Or what we call nature and land
Only Bathou razed as a big and fierce fire
A blazing light.

Till one day he decided to create out of his blazing light
The bright stars and the sky
Immediately the blazing light fragmented
And dispersed here and there.

Like the fragmented pieces of flattened wetland
Baked hard by the sun
The blazing light dispersed
Into infinite light.

The blazing light split and spread
As it spun around
From the distance, like pieces of burning charcoal
They became the stars.

The distance between the stars makes them look small
Small balls of fire
But the stars are wide and big
Each as big as the sun.

The blazing fire fragmented and dispersed into various shapes and sizes
Resulting into empty spaces
And thus was created, in this space, the blue sky
Filled with various shapes and sizes.

In the sky was created a bright group
A group of gathering stars
And watching their shapes and sizes
They were given individual names (ibid: 45-47).
After the sky was created, clouds formed, from which water originated. The following verses deals with the formation of water:

(82). Water
The clouds cooled around the blue sky
It became dark all around
Everything became dark like spots of charcoal
The sky became dark.

A storm arose with a growling sound
The clouds tumbled around
The clouds touched each other and a streak of light followed
Suddenly, without forewarning.

The clouds clashed and thunder followed
All around were grumbling noises
Earth and sky resounded, everything started to tremble
The stars, the hills, the plains

The clouds came down, cooled and condensed
The storm scattered them around
Flying here and there waves after waves
They hit the mountains.

Colliding with the mountains the clouds broke
Water started streaming down
Of the first drops, each were as big as mountains
Strong and crude.

As each drop fell it shook and trembled
The planets and stars above
The hard layer above cracked into spots
And thus were created new holes.
It rained non-stop for three years. The pieces of clouds dissolved. The spherical surface of the earth was submerged in the flood. Even the mountain peaks were submerged (ibid: 68-70).

Bodo traditional oral verse forms also deal with a legendary flood that submerged the whole world and thus creating great harassment for the inhabitants of Earth. The following verse tells the story of how Sibray managed to lift up the submerged land from underneath the water and thus save all living beings:

(83).
Bless us almighty father
You who own the earth and the sky
Lift us innocents and dispel all darkness
Show us the path of light.

Listen O' people tales of Sibray
Speaks guru Ena
He expresses through one who is close to him
Thena, who is obeyed by people.

Sra first destroys evil
And what does he do then?
Keep in mind, disciple Thena
Details I recount to you.

The plains were submerged by the floodwater
All were destroyed and drowned
All fruits vanished
Only the water that filled up the land remained.
It was seen that the water wouldn’t dry up
The plain was not seen
The land did not dry up, the land that was filled up with water
Three month’s water.

The matter was heard and
Lord Budaru tightened his waist
Took the shape of a fish and
Set out in quest for land.

In the shape of the mud fish
Lord Budaru set out
But failed to find the land in the vast mass of water
The land he searched for was not there.

Having failed in his quest he returned
In shame and
Then Siba further sent
The lord of the mountains.

In the shape of an eel he dove into the water
The lord of the mountains left
He too failed in the quest for land
Land was no where to be found.

Khwila too failed, there was no land under the water
The land Siba asked for
One after another the gods
Failed their duty.

All were defeated as Siba watched
He himself got ready for the quest
Changing his shape to massive proportion
He assumed the form of a boar.

Taking the shape of a boar he dove into the water
He was lost
After a moment the land moved under the water
As if there was an earthquake.

The water over the land was in turmoil
And formed a garland of waves
The whole earth started moving slowly
And everything under the water scattered scared.

After a moment Siba in the shape of a boar
Emerged grovelling the land in his snout
Wide beyond vision, smooth and wide
A land that was marshy and wet (ibid: 162-167).

The above verses are from the anthology Gibi Bithai collected by Bihu Ram Boro, who tried to return the Bodo society to socio-cultural and religious practices grounded in its oral and traditional origin. His attempt, before unknown killers assassinated him, can be viewed as a part of the academic and intellectual ethnic renaissance. This shows the gradual transition of the oral to the oral-derived in order to preserve, understand and propagate the ethnic vision. ‘Gibi Bithau’ can be approximated in English by the appellation ‘first hymns’. Collected from oral sources this anthology is organised in the form of hymns and contains songs of origin of the Bodo people and world. In his introduction, Bihu Ram Boro acknowledges his father, who was a traditional chanter and a shaman, and from whom he had derived most of the verses. The Mongoloid dispersal and the
migration of the Bodo people into the Indian subcontinent also find reference in the anthology.

From southwest of Aasia
Emerged from the Hamalao Mountains
The wide and sacred water; protector of the common people
The yellow man called this river Sindi.

Around the river Sindi were the green valley
Filled with food for sustenance
And various fruits.
There the sacred events of human life took place.

A group of yellow man from north Aasia
Saw the atmosphere of the Sindi valley
And crossed the wide Hamalao,
And reached the beautiful place.

The yellow man of the valley
Made figures of Siba,
And assuming it to be Lord Siba,
Worshipped it from the depth of their soul.

On the other hand was a group of dark skinned people
Some of them left their place one after the other,
And as people grew in numbers,
Some found their way to west Aasia.

From across south western Hamalao
In the wide valley of the river Sindi,
Yellow and dark skinned people gathered together,
Space grew thin.

The loved ones of Brahma,
The fair skinned from *Harwphw* too grew in numbers
Food became scarce
Staying alive became a problem.

The strong amongst them
Left in search for new land
Moving around they reached
The valley of river *Sindi*.

The white, yellow and dark skinned ones
Were strangers to each other
In the land of the plentiful.
No one knew from where they came.

The fair skinned worshipped Brahma
The dark skinned worshipped Vishnu
All of them forgot to worship *Siba*,
The foremost amongst them (ibid: 262-265).

The above hymns clearly point out to three waves of migration to the mythical green valley of river *Sindi*. The first wave of migration of the yellow skinned people clearly points to the arrival of the Mongoloid stock. The second wave of migration points out to a dark skinned race and points out to a post-Mongoloid wave of migration. The final wave of migration points out to the fair-skinned devotees of Brahma, which must be the Aryan migration into the valley.

The oral-derived verse forms of the Bodos encompass the different spheres of their life, and one can draw a comprehensive idea about their social activities, religious beliefs, and attitudes toward life. Their songs, unlike the grave poetic demeanour of a tribe like the Navajo, convey the joy associated with the act of living. The songs of community centred festivities like *Baisagu* are expressions of
unfettered celebration and festivities that reflect a shared vision of life. The work songs cover all aspects of Bodo activities, which reflect the essentially pastoral nature of their socio-economic life. Thus we have songs of the cultivators and the cowherds; the women too sing their songs of weaving and fishing. Like amongst the Misings, love song is an important genre. The rituals and ceremonies reflect their religious belief systems and the functional and the aesthetic ideals inherent in their oral literary expressions. Their communally centred rituals are conceived on the precincts of all persons, animals, and the supernatural having well defined roles and positions. The leads from this and the previous chapter will be taken up in detail in the next chapter.