Chapter 3

Social structure
CHAPTER III

Social structure

The clan and family Life

The clan is composed of a number of families, often bearing a common designation. Some clans or groups are identified in the terms of symbols referred to as a totemic, generally in the form of a particular animal, bird, fish, insect, plant, place or even an inanimate objects but the origin of the others may be traced to certain characteristics of their ancestors. There are other clans which are opted from the spouses in accordance to prescribed rules. When a clan is represented as a friendly or related clan, something like the rules of incest which are applicable in the case of the family is thus extended to a larger unit of organization.\(^1\) Thus all kin groups obtain their membership first and foremost on being in the clan. Theoretically the clan is an organized body of kinsmen descended from the same ancestor though actually many clans become so large that their common ancestor is either mythical or forgotten.\(^2\) In the context of Bodo society, a clan or social group is known as ‘ari’ or ‘ary’ (folk) or ‘mahari’. The Bodos had 23 aris or maharis.\(^3\) The ‘ari’ appears to signify some kind of kinship. The clan of Bodo society is primarily a socio-family group based on a male lineage of descent. The clan of the Bodo society generally refers to common ancestry or ties of marriage and
some socio-religious activities. The Bodos believe in a legend in regard to the origin of their clans in the society. According to a legend, in an ancient time there occurred chaos and confusion in the traditional Bodo society concerning the preservation of their social customs and traditions. Knowing the deplorable condition of the Bodo society the first human Being, Mwnsin-sin-Bwrai came down from Heaven to the Earth with the help of a golden ladder and held a convention among the Bodo people. The convention was also attended by a large number of Bodo people both men and women, young and old. In the convention the traditional Bodo society was divided by Mwnsin-sin-Bwrai into several clans or social groups on the basis of the specific works or duties they perform. After that, he went back to Heaven with the help of the golden ladder from the Earth. The convention however, lasted twelve years long.  

Accordingly, a number of clans are prevalent among the Bodos, such as Swargiary, Basumatary, Narzary, Musahary, Goyary, Daimary, Kherkhatary, Mahilary, Lahary, Hajowari, Islary, etc. The Swargiary was originally a priestly clan but not like that of Brahmins of Hindu religion. It seems to have been derived from the Bodo word ‘swrgw’ means heaven. It is identical with the heavenly-folk. Earlier, they became either Douri (priest) or Oja (man oracle) for performing the religious rites and rituals in the society. But in the course of time, they merged with the mass of cultivators and took up cultivation and other professions also. Similarly, the Basumatary clan is said to have been derived from the word ‘Bwisumuti’ meaning mother earth and so, they are the earth-folk. They were the landlords in the Bodo society. In earlier days, when the dead body of a person was to be buried or kept open by the Bodo people in the field there was a tradition to purchase a grave or place for the dead person on the burial ground. That was done symbolically by giving a few coins of rupees to a member of the Basumatary clan who then leaves it on the ground as an offering to it. In the course of time, this practice also became redundant but the system of purchasing a grave for the dead person is still practiced in the Bodo society by offering the coin on the ground by any of the clan member themselves.
The Bodo word 'narzwi' means dry leaf of jute plant and the clan which derived from it is known as Narzary. So, they are identified with jute-folk. Earlier, they belonged to the warrior group. It is believed that in former times, this clan collected dry jute leaves called 'narzwi gwran' in Bodo and supplied it on some rites and rituals, especially on the occasions of burial of a dead body and during the observance of post funeral ceremony. Although its taste is very bitter, narzwi gwran has a very important place in the Bodo society. It has been one of the most favourite dishes in the Bodo cuisine since long past. The practice of chewing a small quantity of narzwi gwran is compulsory for every person attending at the funeral and post funeral ceremony in order to sever finally the relation with the dead. This practice is called 'narzwi orgarnai'. Likewise, the Musahary or Mwsahary clan is connected with the Bodo word 'musa' meaning tiger and so, they belonged to tiger-folk but they are sometimes known in earlier undivided Darrang district as Baglari. Instead of Musahary, there are a considerable number of Bodo people who still use to write the surname of Baglary. The word 'Bag' is not a Bodo word but it is an Assamese word meaning tiger. Thus, it is probable that this clan had been influenced by Assamese speaking people because some Bodo people used to live in close proximity with them. Most of the Bodo people having this title are now found in the districts of Nalbari, Udalguri and Baksa. In the district of Baksa, the Musahary clan is also called by the Bodo villagers as 'musani bahagi' meaning kinsfolk of the tiger. Earlier, they were hunters, but they were not supposed to kill the tiger. It is believed that this group also kept alert for the safety of domestic animals from the attack of tigers. But if this group of people hear or get any information about killing or death of a tiger in the neighbourhood villages then all the members of a family observe a day of mourning for the dead tiger as if it belonged to their family. On this mourning day the floors and walls of each house are wipe-painted by the womenfolk with freshly prepared compost of mud and cow-dung. All articles, like cloths and household utensils made of brass are washed neatly in water and are also sprinkled by sacred water. This practice is still followed in interior Bodo villages.

The Khakhlary clan is associated with 'Khangkhla', a kind of reed and they are identical with the 'Khangkhla-folk'. In the same way, the Daimary clan is derived from...
the Bodo word 'dwima' which means big river. They were supposed to be fisherman class. It is probable that the Daimary clan once used to live in the bank of the river Brahmaputra and its tributaries. Fishing and boating in the river were the main occupations of their livelihood. The clan Sibingary is said to have originated from sesame, a kind of pulse called 'sibing' in Bodo. They were originally cultivators of sesame. The people of this group were very few in numbers in the Bodo society. In almost the same way, the clan Sobaiari came from the word 'sobai' also, a kind of pulse. According to social position, Ganjlerari or Ganlari was the neglected clan in the Bodo society. They are believed to have originated from the word 'ganjler' means slug or leech. Likewise, the clan Bibaiari was associated with the word 'bibai' meaning begging and so, they are identified with begging-folk. But in the Bodo society there is not a single reference of a beggar from amongst the members of the clan. Thus they were supposed to be the collectors of some materials during the time of Kherai and Garja festivals.

Yet again, a few numbers of clans seem to have been originated from the name of their dwelling places. For instance, the clan Mao-marari or Mou-marari is said to have been originated from the name of a place called Maomari. They were dwellers of this place. Similarly, the Ramchiary clan was associated with the name of a place called Ramsa. They are said to have dwelled in Ramsa located in the southern bank of river Brahmaputra in the Kamrup district. And the clan Hainary or Hayenari seemed to have been derived from the word 'haven' meaning plain area or valley. They were dwellers of plain area in Assam. But the Hajowary clan was the hill-dwellers. The word 'hajow' or 'hajwu' means hills and in the past, the group of Bodo people who once dwelled on the hills, were called as Hajowary. The name of a place still had dominant influence of the Bodo language in the Kamrup district of Assam, and that place was known as 'Hajo' which originally derived from the Bodo word 'hajwu' meaning hillock.

It is believed that the Mahilary clan is connected with the word 'mahal' or 'lease'. Earlier, they were fishery lessees and petty traders. According to social position, the Kherkatary clan was considered to be the low caste people and their main work was cutting the horn of cattle and thatch in the jungle. But they were not like that of Shudra
The Bodos believe that the clan Goyari is said to have derived from the word ‘goi’ meaning areca-nuts and they are called ‘Goyari’ by the Bodos as areca-folk. In the past, they were the cultivators and traders of areca-nuts. Besides, they were also the owner of the betel-nuts. Similarly, the clan Owary was the first planters of the bamboo and thus they are associated with the Bodo word ‘owa’ meaning bamboo. They supplied bamboos in the Kherai festivals. The Lahary clan may be originated from the word ‘lai’ means a kind of leaf, especially banana leaves. They were supposed to be the planters of banana tree and they provided banana leaves to be used as plates during the time of Kherai and Garja festivals. Thus all these clans basically came from their specific occupations.

The Islary clan is derived from the word ‘iswr’ meaning God. It is believed that they were the worshippers of God. In earlier times, members from Islary clan needed to make arrangement for the worship of Almighty God, Bathou Bwrai and Goddess, Bathou Burwi. The members of this clan are found scattered in the different districts of Assam, like Udalguri, Nalbari, Baksa, Kokrajhar, Dhubri, Gaolpara, etc. But they are found very few in numbers. The Bargayary clan is supposed to have been derived from the word ‘bwr gabnai’ meaning praying. In the past, members of this clan were engaged as Douri or Oja and so were much similar to the Swrgiary clan. There are some more clans, such as Bingsary, Samphramary, Thalirary, Dangiary, Chwinary, Phadangary, etc., who are however found very few in numbers in the Bodo society. In addition to these clans some more clans or surnames are found among the Bodos of West Bengal state, such as Laoari, Aeophramari, Sangphathang, Katajari, Narzinary, Bamuda, etc. It may be referred that the clan system is widely prevalent among the Dimasa-Kachari of North-Cachar Hills and Barmans of Barak valley also who belong to the great
Bodo race. They have total eighty two clans of whom forty male clans called 'sengphong' and forty-two female clans called 'zaluk'. Both the clans are exogamous and even the marriage cannot take place between the boys and girls of the same clan however distantly related they might be. Since the clan represents the expansion of the immediate family, tracing its descent in theory from an original pair, its members would at first be prohibited by the incest taboo from intermarrying. In former times, the Bodos were also strictly exogamous and no marriage in the same clan could take place. The member of each clan in the family had surname according to their occupation. But the names of the clan are now used as the surnames or titles. The wife also assumes the surname of her husband after her marriage. It may be mentioned that till the middle part of the twentieth century some mother retained her own title without affecting her generations. Even then, the practice was rare in the Bodo society. The surname of the father is assumed by the children after their name. In the case of widow remarriage, the groom needs to induct himself into the 'ari' or clan of the widow while he forfeits his paternal property and severs all patrilineal relationship.

In the process of assimilation with mainstream Assamese Hindu, a considerable number of Bodo people after converting to Hinduism assumed the different surnames, such as Thakuria, Deka, Sarania, Choudhury, Bharali, etc. Likewise, a section of Bodo people after adopting the Brahma faith used to write the title 'Brahma' although they came from different groups or clans of the Bodo society in former times. Later some Bodo people also adopted other titles or surnames not conforming to their traditional customs, such as Boro, Bodosa, Dewri, Mahalia, Barmahalia, etc. In the Bodo society each clan has an equal position and status. In their day to day life there is no feeling of high or low status. The office of the Douri (priest) is also not hereditary. Any elderly person in a village having a good knowledge about the religious rites and rituals is selected as Douri for a period of two to three years. In case of Brahma dharma also, it appears the same as that purohit (priest) is selected from any social group.

Thus in the recent past, the clan system of the Bodos started losing its significance in the social life of the Bodos. Earlier, the clan system of the Bodos indicated their social
hierarchy in accordance with the allotted works in the society, but in the course of time it lost its originality. Despite this, they are still rarely found in practice with exception to a few clans in some interior areas of Bodo villages. Unlike that of the Munda tribe of Chotanagpur, the clans of the Bodos did not have any political significance in the Bodo society.

Family life

The family is usually a part of the larger networks of people defined as relatives or kinfolk. It is based on the integrative bond of kinship. The family life of a Bodo is very simple. A family is called 'Nokhor' in Bodo. In a Bodo 'Nokhor' or family, there are about two to ten members usually comprising of father, his wife, sons and daughters and also brothers and sisters. The head of a Nokhor is father (apha or aba) who shoulders the responsibility of his family. There is cooperation and cordial relation among the family members. Each member of a family shares the work with their small income for smooth running of the family life.

In the traditional Bodo society, much care is taken by the Bodo family about the selection of a plot of land before constructing a house. In accordance to their traditional beliefs and practices they at first examine a plot of land. In earlier times, the Bodo family never built a house by filling the earth at the place where there were ditches or ponds. The fact is that if a plot of land for a house was not good or suitably plain enough then it is believed that the family would never have peace in life.

A typical Bodo family usually keeps a number of houses according to necessity. But they have three main houses. These three houses are Nomano (main house), bakhri (granary) and goli (cowshed). The altar of the house called 'noni bitha' in Bodo is generally filled up to a height of two to two-half feet with the earth dug from a place within the homestead. This ditch or a small pond from which the earth for filling is dug to about some three or four feet in depth is used as a fishery later on. Most of the Bodo houses of the past were small and kutcha, but built strongly with indigenous materials. Thatch called 'thuri' in Bodo, collected from the forest was largely used for roofing.
walls of the house are made of 'engkhwr' (reeds) and bamboos tightly fastened by the ropes made of either barks of odal tree or tharai, a kind of plant and after that, they are plastered with admixture of cow dung and mud. The pillars of their house were mostly consisted of bamboo posts in earlier days but the rich people used wooden posts.

"Daokha habnai noaolai
sila habnai noaolai
angkhou dabila apha gosai
mai bakhri nunαιao
mwsou goli nunαιao
angkhou bilai hor apha gosai".21

English translation: “Godly father! Do not marry me away to a house where a crow enters, where a kite enters. Marry me away in a family where you see a granary and where you see a cowshed, Godly father!”

It is evident from the Bodo folksong cited above that a bakhri and a mwsou goli of the family are very much important in the traditional Bodo society. The main house called 'Nomano' a little bigger than other houses is built to the north of the homestead. It has three rooms and one door. There is also a side corridor inside the house to enter from one room to another. They do not have any window. But there is one verandah in the front of the main house. The Nomano, main house is also called 'gwthar noma' meaning sacred big house where it is forbidden to enter with sleepers, shoes, etc., put on their feet. Besides, any non-Bodo or any married person other than family member is restricted to enter into the Nomano. It is observed that sometimes in emergencies and special occasions this restriction is relaxed although with exception to Ishing (kitchen). The fact is that a small altar of supreme God, Bathou Bwrai and Bathou Burwi is seated inside the ishing of the Nomano which is very sacred to them. But a section of the Bodo people after adopting of Brahma faith and other Hindu cults did not give much importance on keeping the Nomano as sacred. Consequently, the use of Nomano as sacred house
gradually got eroded among the Bodos and instead an extra kitchen was built for the purpose. Thus, it could be observed that from that point of time the traditional housing pattern of the Bodos gradually changed noticeably.

The Bodo women play a very significant role in nurturing the family in the society. The individual family manages the education of their family members and production of the foods. The main property of the Bodo family consists of agricultural lands, livestock, houses, foodstuffs, etc. The ornaments, clothing and cash are generally owned by individuals separately in a family. The family debts, if any, are discharged from the income of the family. According to the tradition, if any of the sons wants or wills as is his right, can form a nuclear family in special cases even before the death of his parents. The society is rife with nuclear family since the last few decades. But the joint family system in the Bodo society is still prevalent to some extent.

The Bodo society is primarily patriarchal. The father is the head of the family. He has absolute control over his family members. The distribution and giving a share of his property to his sons and even to his daughters, as the case may be, is vested with the father in his life time. In the Bodo patriarchy the line of descent is traced through the male members only and this partilineal member is called ‘bahagi’ in Bodo. The same surnames or titles are retained by them. There is a tradition in the Bodo society that a family congregation called ‘bahagi sanmilan’ is held to bring unity and good relations among themselves. It is generally arranged once in three or five years. At this congregation, the zou or zumai (rice beer), sereh (distilled alcoholic spirit), pork and other meat are common and supplied in abundance.

It may be mentioned that after the death of his father, the eldest son enjoys the authority and takes over the responsibility of the family earlier functioned by his expired father excepting only the authority to divide the property among his brothers. The father’s property is equally distributed among the sons by the village council after the death of the father as per the Bodo customary law of inheritance. If the father dies without any male issue his property is inherited by his daughters and if both the husband and wife die without child the property automatically goes under the control of his brothers even
though they do not reside jointly or in a joint family. The married daughters have no right to share the parental property while there are sons in a family. But if a daughter is unmarried or if there is no possibility and age to be married then a share of the property is given to her till her death. In former times, there were a few exceptional cases that some of the rich parents who had available lands, offered a portion of their land to their daughters and even to their married daughters, although they had sons. Thus, a few elements of matriarchal characteristics seem to be prevalent in the traditional Bodo society. There is a cordial relation among the family members, and even in time of socio-religious and any other works they co-operate with each other. The clan system of the Bodos thus did not break the cohesion of the nuclear family rather it facilitated for a stronger and more composite family system.

Traditional administrative System

The Bodos have maintained the traditional social customs and laws to regulate the Bodo society since long past. For the smooth regulation of customary laws and the maintenance of social order in their society they have some administrative units. So, the Bodo society is organized into different forms of organization for the sake of smooth administrative convenience.

The village council

The village council is the earliest and the smallest administrative unit in the traditional Bodo society. The village is called 'gami' in Bodo. The village council was gradually developed by the Bodos in each village. The village council which is called 'gami affad' in Bodo is the most powerful social body of a village. The village is governed by the village council. The village council is formed by all the elder members of the village. In the past, this body consisted of a Hadungwra (representative of a locality), a Gamibwrai (Gaonburah), halmaji or khara (messenger), a gahai Douri (head priest), a leng-i Douri (assistant priest) and other village elders. In the post-colonial period, the village council consisted of the secretary and the president, halmaji and some male members of the village. But there was no system of hereditary chief in the Bodo
society. Each council has a ‘raijwni no’ (house of village council) with a big courtyard where discussion on matters concerning the village are held under the head of the village.

The meeting of the village council is presided over by the village headmen and discussions are held on various problems, development and welfare measures of the village community. The village council takes any important social decisions of the village community and settles the disputes of social importance. The judgment is given by the village court and the offenders are punished in accordance with the customary laws of the Bodos. There is also a system of imposing fine on committing of a certain crime in accordance with social customs and laws. Thus the village council is the most important center of solving any disputes of the Bodo community. The meeting of the village council may be called in by any person on any day according to his or her needs for settling the matter.

It may be mentioned that the Bodo people continue to honour their social code of law which regulates the society. If a person does work or raises the voice against the social judgment of the village court there is a provision to boycott him or her socially from the village. This type of social boycott is one type of severest punishment in the Bodo social code of law. But the case of social boycott is found very rare in the Bodo society. For the members of the Bodo village the village court is considered as the highest court of law. Thus the village council is an important organization for bringing about the social integration and consolidation of the communities at the village level. But the introduction of Panchayats under Assam Panchayati Raj Act in 1959 CE made a great impact on the traditional village council. It made easier the entry of the political parties into village politics, particularly in panchayat elections and the solidarity of traditional village had been affected to some extent. The Panchayati Raj system was imposed in the Bodo society and it came into direct confrontation with the functioning of the village councils as most of the authority vested with the Panchayati body overlapped with that of the later. In this way the socio-religious activities in the Bodo society got affected adversely to a large extent since the new system does not stand any position in the composite socio-cultural and administrative sphere other than for the administrative conveniences.
Hadungwra

There was a head for a cluster of villages called Hadungwra formerly supposed to be a representative of the ruler. Hadungwra was usually selected in the general meeting of the villages. No fixed term was allotted to the office of a hadungwra in the village. He continued to perform his office till he was disliked by the people of his locality. During the time of taking charge over the post of hadungwraship, a feast was arranged by the newly selected hadungwra for the people of his locality. Afterwards, Hadungwra puts on a ring of authority called a 'ciri-astham' in the finger of his right hand in presence of the community. The ciri-astham was specially made from a blend of gold, silver, copper, brass and iron for hadungwra. In the course of time, such system of selection of the Hadungara became obsolete. According to the tradition, in order to purge the wrong doer or sinner called 'badunga' in the village the ciri-astham was dipped into the water in a 'lotha' (metal pot) with the little basil in it for the purpose of purifying it. Hadungwra presided over the meeting of the villages under his locality. He took the decision and settled the disputes within and outside the villages, represented as a diplomat in the meeting. It is said that in earlier times, the hadungwra was a small intermediary of the kings of the Bodos. He was the chief administrator of the villages of the locality and responsible to the king. He governed the villages of his locality in accordance with the social customs and laws of the Bodos.

Gamibwrai

In every village there is a headman of the village called Gamibwrai (gaonburah). The word 'Gamibwrai' is derived from the Bodo word 'gami' means village and 'bwrai' means old or wise man and later on it came to be called gaonburah as a result of the great impact of the Assamese language. In Assamese word 'gaon' means village and 'burah' means old man. However, the system of selection of the Gamibwrai was made through the democratic process from amongst the elderly and knowledgeable male persons of the village. But the person should have qualities of wisdom, good oratory skill, honesty and integrity commonly known to the villagers. There is a reference of a family member generally the sons who inherited the post of Gamibwrai after the death of the father.
During the British rule, certain village elder was appointed as *Gamibwrai* or gaonburah consisting of five to seven villages in the area. This technically replaced the post of *Hadungwra* of former times with this appointed elder of the locality. He is entrusted to look after many villages ranging from five to seven villages as per the areas or *lat* in accordance with the government’s allotment. They are called Lat Gaonburahs or Lat *Gamibwrais*. The village elders had been recognized as the village chiefs or heads as the lower units. Later on they were appointed to the honorary posts of *Gamibwrai*. They presided over the meeting of the village council. The Lat *Gamibwrai* continued to keep link with the government officials. The main function of gaonburah was to act as the intermediaries between the administration officials of the government and the general public. The matter of any kind of disputes in the village was brought to the gaonburah for its settlement. The gaonburahs are now entitled to a fixed amount of honorarium from the government and the scope of their duty has been broadened as well. They are also empowered to issue character certificate or any identification certificate of persons of the village within their areas.

**Halmaji**

There is a *holmaj* (messenger) in every Bodo village. He assists *Gamibwrai*. He is selected and appointed in a meeting of the village council for a certain period of two to five years. He is also known as ‘*khara*’ in some Bodo villages and is paid remuneration in the terms of crops and paddy, for his services. In former times, one to two *dons* (a measuring unit of about five kilograms of quantity) of rice crops or paddy annually was given to the *halmaji* by each family. But most of the Bodo villages now pay remuneration in rupees. His main duty is to inform all the members of the village to attend the meeting or for community works of the village. Besides, if there is a penance ceremony for any wrong doer in the village then he informs all the families of concerned village for plastering or cleaning the households one day ahead of the ceremony.
**Douri**

There are two priestly persons in a Bodo village. They are called *gahai Douri* (head priest) and *leng-i Douri* (assistant priest). They are instrumental in performing most of the religious rites and rituals in the village. The office of the *Douri* is not hereditary. The selection of the *Douri* in some Bodo village is made during the celebration of the Kherai festival. At the end of the Kherai celebration the *Doudini* (female oracle) selects the *Douri* by pouring water on the head of the man. But the villages where the Kherai festival are not performed their selection of the village *Douri* is made during the celebration of yearly Garja festival. However this system is absent in some Bodo villages. In such villages the *Douri* is selected in the meeting of the village council for a term of two to five years. There is no reference of the system of paying any remuneration to them but sometimes they are exempted from certain community work in the village. The *Douri* of the Bodo society is not identical with the Brahmins of Hinduism which is hereditary and placed on the top in their caste system.

The youth council

There is also a youth council called *'Sengra affad'* in Bodo to render social services to the village community in the Bodo village. This is one of the most important social institutions of the Bodo village. This council is usually considered as a benevolent youth organization of the village community. The unmarried boys and girls are the members of this social organization. There are some office bears in this youth council consisting of secretary and president as well as some members of the village. In earlier days, a family in the village was helped by youth council in constructing a house, harvesting paddy and conducting a feast in a festive occasion like marriage, *sharadu* (post funeral ceremony) and certain other works of the family on being formally invited to by the head of the family. In such a particular work the *zumai, sereb* and other eatable things were provided by the family abundantly. In the recent past it has been observed that the youth council also undertook some steps for teaching the children in their own village in the time of vacations. Besides, they arrange the games and sports competitions for their villagers.
during the time of festivals, like Bwisagu or Magbw where the villagers of all ages and sexes participate overwhelmingly.

In addition to youth council, the Bodos have a certain area organization which is consisted of several villages of a locality called Mouza. In every Mouza there is a committee called Samaj. This samaj consisted of president and secretary and a few members of the locality. The Samaj settled the disputes among the villages in their locality and also worked for the growth and development of the members of their locality. This organization solved any problems of the concerned locality. The decision of this organization was regarded as final and if any person violated the decision of the organization then he or she was liable to face with heavy punishment of fine or sanctions.

In the northern part of Gaolpara district on the southern part of the river Brahmaputra of the Kamrup district and Nagaon district, the Bodos of the twelve villages selected a hadungwra and a hasungwra for settling the disputes and to purify the wrong doers in the locality. The hadungwra and hasungwra used to lead their locality under the Anchalik Affad or Mouza affad.

From the ancient age the laws of the Bodos have been practiced orally. But in the middle of the 1940 CE the laws of the Bodos were found in manuscripts and hardly printed. The social laws of the Bodos are called Pandulipi. It appears that the Bodo people which had been ruled by the laws of the Bodo affad were divided into seven administrative areas for the sake of smooth regulation of the customary laws and rules of each Bodo area in the society. These are as follows:

1. Area of the North-Gaolpara district.
2. Northern area of the Kamrup district.
3. Darrang district area.
4. Guwahati police station area.
5. Boko area of Kamrup district.
7. Cachar district area inhabited by Dimasa-kachari.

Each administrative area had its own separate social code of law, Pandulipi. However, the inclusion of Dimasa Kachari in the administration areas of the Bodos indicates that once the Dimasa Kachari was also a greater race of the Bodo community in historical periods.

It may be mentioned that the 'Barodol' affad of the sub-division of south-Gaolpara was reconstituted in the name and style of the 'Boro Barodol' of Gaolpara district. But later on this Barodol reviewed the 'Boroni Ayen Bijab' (Law book of the Bodos) for the fifth time and further published it with the name as 'Boroni Asar Khanthi' in 1990 CE.

**Bad khanthi**

The 'bad khanthi' or institution of 'bad' had occupied an important place in regulating the Bodo society since ages. The 'bad' or 'baad' is a Bodo word derived from the word 'baduwa' meaning a wrong doer or culprit in the traditional Bodo society. Any person, who is found guilty or committed wrong against the social customs and laws of the Bodo society, is termed as 'baduwa' or 'badunga'. He or she is bound to be purified through a ritualistic performance and is liable to pay penalty to the village council. This institution is called 'bad or baad khanthi' in Bodo. The cases of wrong doing are brought under the jurisdiction of this institution. There is a legend regarding the emergence of the bad system in the Bodo society. Accordingly, when the cases of the three persons namely, Akhasi, Bwisagi and Chandw Bawdiya were not given proper trial in the village court Mwnsin-sin Bwrai, the progenitor of the Bodos was invited from the heaven. Mwnsin-sin Bwrai came down from heaven with the help of a golden ladder and then tried at least twelve years day and night in presence of the villagers to give proper trial to them. The trial was given to them in accordance with the bad system. It was in this way that the bad system is said to have originated among the Bodos under the guidance of Mwnsin-sin Bwrai for the regulation of the Bodo society, and the cases of the three persons, viz., Akhasi and Bwisagi and Chandw Bawdiya were tried. The proper trial however was given to them at last. Mwnsin-sin Bwrai went back to heaven after
entrusting the bad khanthi to the Bodos for regulation of their society. Afterwards, all the crimes of sin or misdeed in the society were brought under the jurisdiction of bad khanthi.

There are five categories of bad khanthi or bad institution under which the wrong doer in the society is expiated in accordance to the gravity of the misdeeds. These may be described below:

1. **Ogorbad**

The Ogorbad is one of the largest of the five bads. The word ‘ogor’ is believed to have originated from the word ‘ogrong’ meaning a small shed, especially built for pig, goat, fowls, etc. Some of the social offences or misdeeds committed by any member of the Bodo society are brought and dealt under the jurisdiction of Ogorbad. These social offences may be listed here without exhaustion:

- When a sexual intercourse takes place between the male and female member with close blood relation.
- When anybody makes physical assault or kills his parents or his grandparents.
- When anybody harms fatally or kills a cow or an ox. However, the owner of the cow could not claim any compensation for the cow and no fine is imposed for this crime.
- When a sexual intercourse takes place between any Bodo person with other person belonging to different religious sects, especially Christianity and Islam.

The performance of penance by Ogorbad institution is usually held outside the premises of the village. According to the penance system of Ogorbad, a pair of wrong doers or badunga are taken away to the banks of the rivers, ponds or lakes of nearby village where an ogrong or a small shed is built keeping its door towards the rivers,
ponds, lakes or any water body. Normally, a small shed is usually built of thatches or dry banana leaves. The convicted wrong doers are stripped naked of their cloths and put inside the shed and after that, its door is shut closed from the outside. Then it is set afire from the four corners of the shed. When the shed is burning the wrong doers are supposed to come out after breaking through the wall of the shed and jump into the river directly. Earlier, there was a tradition to prickle the wrong doers by spear after they had jumped into the river or pond. This type of the physical torture on wrong doers has been discarded long back from the Bodo society. This practice was also prevalent in the Karbi society.

Before coming to the bank of the river the wrong doers are given a pair of new cloths, especially gamsa and dokhana. Afterwards, both of them come out of the river with wet dress to the bank of the river where oblation for the gods and goddesses is kept ready. Here, some rice, basil and a pair of betel-nuts are offered to each deities who are seated to the left side of Bathou Bwrai on the banana leaves called ‘laijoulai’ in Bodo. An alaribathi (earthen lamp) is lighted and then incense sticks are also burnt. Traditionally, a chicken was sacrificed for Bathou Bwari and the meat of this sacrificed chicken was cooked and then offered to other gods and goddesses. Before chanting mantras to invoke Bathou Bwrai and other deities, the wrong doers are offered to drink a little quantity of water mixed with, faeces of dog, pig and cow which is kept ready. This mixed solution is prepared by taking three broomsticks of length of about four to six inches long and holding these together, it is dug into the faeces of dogs, pigs and cows and dipped into a bowl of mixture water. In earlier times, an old man from the Narzary clan used to prepare this mixture. After this mixture is drunk, they again take bath and kneel down in front of the main altar of deities while the village Douri or an old man of the village starts chanting the mantras. At this moment, nine pieces of meat of the sacrificed chicken kept separately is pricked to each of nine arrows which are then shot by nine bows towards the sky. This practice is known as ‘gu-bwrla-ni-udrainai’ meaning the penance of nine bows. Afterwards, the wrong doers are given to drink the sacred water, called ‘dwi gwthar’ in Bodo, which is prepared by the Douri or village old man by putting a little amount of rice into the water of a lotha. Before they are offered to drinking the sacred water, it is
sprinkled on them by the Douri with a bunch made of a nine pieces of dubri grass, a shoot of basil and a gold ring all tied together with a thread. In earlier days, any old man of the village having Narzary title used to put his finger ring in this sacred water and it was sprinkled around the households and cowsheds of the concerned village going from house to house. This is called ‘gami tharnai’ meaning purification of the village. But the practice by burning the ‘ogrong’, a small shed became redundant in the society except in a few Bodo villages in interior areas. It may be mentioned that the burning of a small shed in the penance is carried out only in the cases of crime of a sexual intercourse taking place between the male and female member with close blood relation. But all other offences of the Ogorbad are purified accordingly without resorting to the burning of the ogrong.

The wrong doers under Ogorbad are also charged an amount of money as a penalty to be paid to the village council. But the rate of fine seems to have varied from village to village. In case, the wrong doers do not disclose their misdeeds before the celebration of Garja festival and the Garja festival is held without the performance of penance by wrong doers in the village then they are charged with heavy fine. In some Bodo village the wrong doers need to bear all the expenditures that have been incurred in the Garja festival. The fact is that the Garja festival is not performed by the traditional Bodo society during the time of impurity or uncleanness (khalai in Bodo) in the village. After having performed the penance by the wrong doer in the village the Garja festival is again observed. In accordance with the Hindu philosophy, the neighbouring Hindu people also practice a system of penance and it is called Dhenu parachit. According to this system, a cow is given as a gift to the Brahmin priest.

Thus the Ogorbad is the biggest penance of all the five bads in the traditional Bodo society. The penance of Ogorbad is found still in practice in some interior Bodo villages. However the cases of sexual intercourse among close blood relations are rather very rare in the Bodo society.
2. **Fongslodbad**

The *Fongslodbad* is also another important *bad* institution of the traditional social customs and laws of the Bodo society. The persons found guilty of crime in the society are given trial under the system of *Fongslodbad*. The penance of the wrong doers is also performed in the village. Some social offences which fall under the jurisdiction of *Fongslodbad* are:

- When pre-marital sexual intercourse takes place between persons not of close-blood relation.
- Any villager causing grave injuries to a cow by beating or cutting its tail, ears, legs or other parts of the body by all means.
- When a cow dies along with rope in its neck in the cowshed and other place.
- When someone takes the prohibited items of meat, like beef and other meats of fox, dog, tiger, cat, etc.

These are the social offences which are brought under the jurisdiction of the *Fongslodbad* in the Bodo village. The performance of penance at the institution of *Fongslodbad* is very simple in its manner and it is usually accomplished by shooting the seven arrows into the sky with seven pieces of meat each by the seven bows. It is known as the 'sini bwrla-ni-udrainai' meaning the penance of the seven bows. In *Fongslodbad*, the system of performing penance is done almost in the similar manner as done in the case of *Ogorbad*, but the burning of 'ogrong', a small shed and stripping the convicted wrong doers naked while keeping them inside the shed is absent.

3. **Daokhibad**

The *Daokhibad* is also an important traditional social institution of the Bodos. Literally, the word 'dao' means bird and 'khi' means dung or stool and thus the word
'daokhi' means bird's droppings. The Daokhibad is applied in case of social offences committed by any person in the society. These offences are, if

- a husband sucks his wife's breast.
- anybody takes money for shaving the hair.
- anybody carries business in the earthen wares, fish and animal skins.
- anybody trades his cow for goat or pig and consume it.
- someone is shitted by a vulture or a crow.
- someone's wound is laid eggs by the fly.
- a wife thrashes her husband.
- anybody takes meal in the house of persons belonging to other religions, like Christianity, Islam, etc.
- anybody consumes the leftover meat eaten by vultures, tigers, crows, dogs, foxes, etc.
- the vulture or crow perches on the Sijou tree (euphorbia splendens) of the courtyard or on the roof of 'Nomano', the main house.

The penance of the Daokhibad is carried out at the house of the wrong doers. For this, a portion on the eastern side of the courtyard is cleaned up with water and a banana leaf is placed where some rice, a shoot of basil, a pair of betel-nuts are put and an earthen lamp is lighted. At first the wrong doers are given to drink a mixture of faeces of the cows, dogs and pigs. The Douri chants the mantras invoking Bathou Bwrai and other deities while the wrong doers, after taking the bath, kneel down near the altar prepared for the purpose. Then the five arrows are shot towards the sky. After that, the wrong doers are given to drink the dwi gwthar (sacred water) prepared by the Douri in a lotha. And then they are also sprinkled by the same water. From this day they become free from their offence but they are required to pay a small amount of money as fine to the village.
council. Each household of the concerned village is also sprinkled with the same sacred water in order to make free from the effect of the evil spirits on the village community.

It has been observed that some social offences dealt in accordance with Daokhibad, such as trading in fish, animal skins, taking money for shaving the hair as well as eating the leftover meat taken by tiger, vulture, cow, etc. gradually cease to be considered as the social offences in the society.

4. Khawalibad

The Khawalibad is the fourth most important bad institution in the Bodo society. Since ages the act of stealing anything has been controlled by the Bodo society through the institution of Khawalibad. As a result, the cases of theft are very rare in the Bodo society. Besides imposing a heavy fine on the person accused of theft, the physical punishment is also inflicted. However, some social offences brought and tried under the jurisdiction of the Khawalibad occur when,

- anybody steals and uses the cloths, utensils, coins etc. offered to the dead person at the burial or cremation ground and other places.
- someone does business in cow.
- any person dies at the family belonging to another village, the owner of that family is also required to perform a penance at his home through the system of Khawalibad.

The performance of the penance at Khawalibad is almost similar to that of Daokhibad in its manner. It is carried out at the house of the wrong doer or the house of the other family where the death occurs. In this penance three arrows are shot into the sky by each of the three bows. The wrong doers are also liable to pay fine to the village council as decided by their own village court. The main purpose of the Khawalibad is to thwart the act of stealing in the society. It may be said that from the last two decades of the twentieth century some Bodo people began to indulge in the trade of cow and escaped
from being punished which apparently showed the growing irrelevance of the implementation of Khawalibad in the society.

5. Khoulwbwrbad

The Khoulwbwrbad is also called lawkharbad. It is believed to have derived from the word ‘khuga’ meaning mouth and ‘lwbr’ meaning loose and thus it means the ‘loose-mouthed’. If anybody tells a lie to someone against any person of the society without authentic proof and puts him or her into trouble in the society then the defamer is tried under the jurisdiction of the Khoulwbwrbad. According to the system of Khoulwbwrbad, a meeting is called in the village when there is a case of harm by defamation and the offence is discussed openly. Either the fine or physical punishment or both is meted out on the wrong doers if it requires, in accordance with the degree of the offences committed, which is impartially decided by the village council. In fact, such activity in the society is considered as unpleasant activity which creates social disorder. In such case, the wrong doer is known to the Bodos as ‘khugalwbwr’ meaning loose-mouthed. He or she is disliked by the village community in the society. The fine is imposed in accordance with the words spoken recklessly by the wrong doer against another person without a valid reason. However the performance of the penance is absent in Khoulwbwrbad. The offender is generally inflicted with a fine or physical punishment, and in some instances non compliance with the verdict attracts social boycott for the accused.

However, the followers of the Brahma cult also continue to practice the bad system in regulating their society, but the rites and rituals of their penance is performed just by burning of ahuti at their home. The Bodos consider the laws of the bad institution much stronger than the laws of the government and so, they dare not to commit any offence in the society. Any social offence committed among the Bodos in their respective villages or areas are settled through the bad khanthi (law of Bad or bad institution)

From the very early period, the Bodos had been able to maintain peace and order in their society through the institution of bad. However, a great deal of local or regional
variation is found in respect of the manner of performance of penance as per the bad institution. The bad institutions are still found in practice, although orally in some interior Bodo villages.

Marriage System

Marriage is an institution which makes a union and legal contract socially and ritually between a man and a woman in the society. By marriage a new social relationship is created and the social network is then widened in the society. Marriage is called ‘haba’ in Bodo (bia or bibah in Assamese). The word ‘haba’ is derived from the combination of two words, i.e., ‘ha’ meaning the earth (soil) and ‘ba’ meaning to carry something on the back. It implies that ‘haba’ means to carry the responsibility of the soil on the back as per traditional belief of the Bodos. In other word, it is clearly understood that ‘haba’ means to shoulder the responsibility of a family in the society. It is a common practice for the boys to marry girls of younger in age. The Bodo parents usually give their daughters in marriage only when they have grown up to a marriageable age called ‘sikhla’. The child marriage is unknown to the Bodo society. Before the marriage the Bodo girls lead life of purity, simplicity and chastity in the village because pre-marital sex is strictly forbidden in the Bodo society. Traditionally, there are six types of marriage in the Bodo society. These are as follows:

1. **Nainanwi lainai haba**

*Nainanwi lainai haba* is an arranged form of marriage. It is socially the most accepted and regular form of marriage in the Bodo society. This marriage is solemnized with the mutual consent and agreement of the parents of both the families. In earlier days, this form of marriage was traditionally solemnized at the house of the groom. It is also called ‘haba gwlaw’ meaning long marriage. The fact is that a long procedure is observed to hold such a marriage. This marriage has been regarded as the standard form of marriage in the Bodo society.
2. **Kharsonnai haba**

*Kharsonnai haba* is an irregular form of marriage. It is like the Gandharva type of marriage of Hindus. The girl flees away voluntarily to the boy’s house with the intention of living with him as his wife. In this case, the boy and girl may have secret understanding or otherwise the parents of the girl have disagreed to their will. Besides, this type of marriage also occurs when the boy wants to ditch the girl after being in love or having sexual intercourse with her. This marriage is held within a very short period of time with simple manner.

3. **Gwrjia Lakhinai haba**

In Bodo, the word *‘gwrjia’* means foster son-in-law and *‘lakhinai’* means keeping. Thus *‘Gwrjia lakhinai haba’* means marriage by service or servitude. A similar type of marriage also exists in the Lalung society called *‘Gobhia rakha’*. The parents who do not have sons usually keep the son-in-law for their daughter by marriage in their house for the purpose of caring them in their old age and for looking after their property. But before marriage the boy is required to render physical labour usually for a period of one year or more without any kind of remuneration at the house of the girl. During this period the girl’s father secretly examines the character of the would-be son-in-law. If not satisfied then the boy is sent back to the concerned guardian of the boy. If satisfied with performance of the boy then the marriage is solemnized at the house of the bride. It is an irregular form of marriage. It is almost similar to the Brahma marriage of Aryans. But this type of marriage is duly accepted and approved by the society. This marriage is solemnized in the pattern of matrilineal society. But there is no system of post-marriage ceremony, especially ‘Neotha siphainai’ or ‘athimongal’ (ath-mongola in Assamese). This type of marriage is quite traditional and still exists in the Bodo society.

4. **Dwnkhar langnai haba**

This is a marriage by elopement prevalent in the Bodo society. Both the boy and the girl after falling in love, flee away secretly from their house to an unknown place with the intention of getting married. After some days when they come back to their house the
marriage is solemnized at the house of the groom. This marriage is called 'dwnkhariangnai haba' meaning marriage by elopement. It is alike to the Paisacha marriage of Aryans. It is called 'Poluai Ana' in Lalung society and is popular among the Lalungs. In this type of marriage less expenditure is incurred.

In Bodo society marriage by elopement is solemnized immediately within a short period of time in a very simple manner. It is an irregular type of marriage but it is still current in the Bodo society.

5. Bwnanwi lainai haba

It is a marriage by force similar to the Raksasa form of marriage of Aryans. In former times, this type of marriage was largely prevalent in the districts of Kamrup and Darrang. In this marriage a girl was forcefully taken away from her parents’ house by the boy’s party to the house of the boy. Afterwards, the boy’s party compels her to get married with the concerned boy. This system of marriage is solemnized without taking the consent and approval of the girl and her family. It is not favoured socially, but it is also not treated as anti-social or illegal form of marriage in the traditional Bodo society. This form of marriage is found very few in number.

6. Dongkha haba

This is an irregular type of marriage. Earlier, this type of marriage often took place in the Bodo society. It is socially accepted form of marriage. The widow becomes a bride in this marriage. If a man, who may be a bachelor or a widower, comes to the house of a widow with the intension to marry her and accordingly, the marriage is solemnized with the widow as per the social norms, then this marriage is called as 'dongkha haba' or 'dongkha-thanai haba'. This marriage is solemnized in a very simple manner at the house of the widow. But before solemnization of marriage, traditionally a silver coin was given by the man to her as a symbol of stipulation of the proposed marriage. This custom is known as 'gongkhon hwnai'. In this form of marriage the man had to renounce his right on his paternal property but he was entitled to enjoy the property of his widow wife. This marriage is regarded as an irregular type of marriage.
The Bodo society is primarily monogamous but there are a few instances of rich persons and others with higher social standing who practiced polygamy in the society. Polyandry and inter-caste marriage was strictly prohibited in the Bodo society but sometimes an inter-caste marriage between a Bodo and a member from other tribes took place. Nevertheless, it may be mentioned that some of the tribes have little restriction in the number of husbands a lady can marry. For instance, polyandry is known to be widely prevalent among the Kinnaur tribes in Himachal Pradesh, and Monpas of Kameng in Arunchal Pradesh.

In the Bodo society the widow remarriage is prevalent and regarded respectably. It is called 'randi haba' in Bodo. A widow having the children can also remarry any person but under certain restrictions. The children in such cases are either left with the former husband’s family or may be brought along with her in the new family. The children brought along by the wife in the new husband’s home through this marriage are called 'lwkh keda'. A widow may remarry a younger brother of her deceased’s husband if the latter or his family agrees to it but not the elder brother under any circumstances. This system is also practiced by the Karbi society. It is an irregular form of marriage but it is socially permitted and accepted in the Bodo society. In widow remarriage no formal wedding is solemnized in the society, usually after a consensus the widow is brought into the new husband’s house where a brief mantra is chanted at the Bathou following a formal announcement of the marriage.

The dowry system is not known to exist in the Bodo society. In the olden days, those girls who had some physical defects or pre-marital sex faced with difficulty in getting married. In such cases, the parents gave some gifts, especially a small amount of money to the son-in-law for marrying their daughters. But it did not resemble the full form of dowry system, as practiced by other neighbouring communities. The dowry system among Assamese or Bengali Hindu communities used to involve the payment of huge amount of money or property as dowry. However, the system of bride price ('phon thakha' or 'thakha gwtang') was prevalent among the Bodos. The demand and the rate of the bride price varied from place to place and from time to time. It was charged more
in case of the marriage by force and elopement. In the recent past the demand for bride price went a modification whereby the groom’s father now offers it as a minor ritual to give an honour the bride’s parents.

The traditional Bodo marriage

The accomplishment of the marriage in the Bodo society, generally involve long and extravagant procedures. The Bodos have certain traditional beliefs and conception regarding the physical character of a girl during the process of bride selection. They have also a certain traditional custom of observation to assess the character of the girl. It is believed that the daughter usually goes after the character of the mother. In earlier times, the Bodo parents always preferred such a girl that who had a well shaped figure, pointed nose, bright eyes and fair face, well-set teeth called ‘hathai miji’ in Bodo, dark and long hair as well as expertise in the art of weaving and other household activities. Besides, during the time of proceeding to the bride’s place for the selection ceremony, the Bodo society holds certain traditional beliefs in the events occurring on the way and at the bride’s house. For instance, while going to the house of the girl at first for consultation if any member of boy’s party stumbles on the way; the boy’s party hears the sound of thundering on the way; sees a newlai (mongoose) crossing the road from right to the left side of the party or a snake’s running across the way in front of the party from left to the right side of the party then it is believed that the husband and wife would be separated sooner or later after the marriage. Besides, they also consider some sights during that time as bad signs, like if the members of the boy’s party see a funeral procession; washing of the courtyard and house, plastering of the house with compost of mud and cow dung, digging of the soil by hoe and the cutting of bamboo, etc. then it is believed that any one of either husband or wife may expire early after the marriage. But there are also some good signs whereas the proposal of marriage will be favourable. That is, when the members of the boy’s party reach at the house of the girl and the girl is seen being busy with the work of drying or husking paddy at the courtyard, and when the members of the boy’s party stand up on the verandahs and the girl is seen stepping with her left foot first at door of the Nomano, main house then it is believed that the bride would be
loving for her husband. Besides, while the girl is seen by the boy’s party as cleaning or sweeping the courtyard or combing her hair then the bride is believed to have a long life. These traditional beliefs of the Bodos are still held in good stead in their society in selecting the bride.

It may be mentioned that when the selection party reaches at the house of the girl anyone from the party members greets the parents of the bride with the following proverb.

"Jeraw thuri nuyw beyonw bathi garw"55

The above proverb may be translated thus: ‘Where thatch is seen the yoke is thrown there.’

It is usually uttered by the boy’s party in the beginning as a greeting to let the girl’s father to understand the purpose of their visit indirectly. But the consent of marriage proposal is not given by the parents or guardians of the girl in the first approach unless a proper investigation on the background of the boy and his family is done.

Earlier, the boy’s party was needed to keep pursuing and visiting the girl’s house until the parents had given a consent to the marriage proposal. In Gaolpara district there was a tradition for the selection party to carry an ‘asan-thofla’ (a package of silver bracelets), a pair of one rupee silver coins, a pair of areca-nuts, betel leaves and a pair of zou bottles or sereb to the girl’s house at the time of settlement. After the meeting with the girl’s family, the boy’s party leaves an ‘asan thofla’ by hanging it up at the verandah roof of the main house to know the consent of the girl’s parents. If the asan thofla was returned within a week then it was understood that the guardians of the girl had not agreed. The returning of this asan thofla to the boy’s family is called ‘asan phinnai’. If it were not returned to the boy’s family within a week then it was presumed that the marriage proposal had been accepted by the girl’s parents or guardians. But among the Bodos of undivided Kamrup and Darrang districts, a pair of zou bottles was hanged up at
the house of the girl to know about the mind of the parents. Such practices in terms of marriage proposal were not seen in many areas in the Bodo society.

Prior to the finalization of marriage proposal, there is a custom among the Bodos to invite the boy at the girl’s house where an opportunity is provided for interaction between the boy and the girl. This is called ‘houwa hinjaw nailainai’ in Bodo. Yet another custom is that the girl’s parents or guardians along with a few relatives pay a visit at the house of the boy so as to confirm the background of the boy and his family. This practice is called ‘no nainai’. These are the accepted procedures in a Bodo marriage.

The horoscope matching for both the boy and the girl before the fixation of date for the marriage proposal has come to occupy an important place in the Bodo society. Earlier, this practice was not prevalent among the Bodos. It is probable that this system appeared among the Bodos in the middle part of the twentieth century. This practice is called ‘rashi nainai’ in Bodo. In the Bodo society, the date of marriage was traditionally fixed on a day keeping in mind the convenience to both of the families, excluding Tuesday and Saturday. This event generally takes place at the house of the girl in presence of the village elders. The non preference of marriage on Tuesday and Saturday comes as a result of the belief that these two days are ‘Gwsa-barai’ meaning days of strong effect. However, the change gradually dawned in the Bodo society in regard to the fixation of the date of marriage. The custom of consulting the Hindu calendar (Panjika) is observed for selecting any auspicious day for the marriage like any Hindu neighbours. This apparently is a strong influence of the Hindu religion as practiced by their neighbouring Assamese community.

The most important pre-marriage ceremony of Bodo marriage is ‘Goi-khawnai’ meaning cutting or peeling of areca-nuts. In this ceremony, the groom’s party comes to the house of the bride with betel-nuts, biris, cigarettes, sugar, slaked lime, tobacco and other items. They entertain the bride’s parents, relatives and villagers. In former days, an adequate quantity of rice beer and sereb were carried by the groom’s party to the house of the bride for entertaining them. Sometimes, it occurs that when the villagers come to
know about the arrival of groom’s party they, as a tradition, demand betel-nuts and also money from the groom’s party by blocking their path at the entrance.\footnote{59}

**Biban langnai**

There is a tradition of ‘biban langnai’ in the traditional form of Bodo marriage. The *biban* generally consists of three categories, viz., ‘Dwhwrwm’ (religion) *biban*, ‘Mainao’ (a deity of wealth) *biban* and ‘Lawkhar’ (cowherd) *biban*. On the body of a pair of earthen pitchers, the signs of sun and moon are painted with *sunwi* (slaked lime). It is believed that the signs of sun and moon show the eternal truth in the name of traditional Bodo religion. In earlier days, the *biban* contained *zumai*, areca-nuts, betel-leaves, etc., but the use of rice beer has been discouraged to an extent from the society long back. There is no earthen pitcher in *lawkhar biban*, but it has two numbers of ‘*kho*’ a bag-like made of bamboo and containing some quantity of rice, salt, turmeric, mustard oil, fish, vegetables and a pair of betel-nuts. This *biban* is given away to the cowherds on the way before reaching at the house of the bride. But the two *bibans*, *dwhwrwm* and *mainao* are carried by two *barolangphas* (groom’s attendants) to the bride’s house (See Plate 19) along with other items.\footnote{60} In the early period, a pig was carried to the bride’s house by the two *barolangphas* and it was equally cut into two parts of which one part was kept for the house of the groom and the other part was given to the bride’s parents. This practice is known as ‘*oma-khoptang*’ meaning cutting a pig. But this practice went a slender change in observance in the sense that it became optional and practiced only when it is convenient for both the parties. Apart from this, the groom’s party is required to entertain the bride’s villagers with areca-nuts, betel-leaves, biri-cigarettes and tobacco on the day of marriage. After end of the ceremony, the barks of the areca-nuts are thrown on the roof of the *Nomano*, the main house. This practice is called ‘*goi-khithu garkhwnai*’. The barks of the areca-nuts remain on the roof of the house till the marriage ceremony is completed. It is believed by the Bodos that this practice brings good fortune to the couple.\footnote{61}

There is a pair of girl called ‘*bwirathi jora*’ engaged as the receptionist for the bride in the marriage. They are selected by the groom’s family from the village. They distribute areca-nuts, betel-leaves and slaked lime at the house of the bride till the end of
the ceremony. Besides, the zumai, sereb, biri, and tobacco are also distributed by them in many occasions.

“Awi! bwirathi lolia,
nwngni khithu elo elo,
goi khawnaikhou,
jwnglai jalia”

English rendering of the above stanza of folksong is: “O sluggish bwirathi, your peeling of areca-nuts by itching your anus, we’ll eat no more”.

It is evident from the folksongs that the villagers of the bride cut jokes at the bwirathis when they are found slow in distributing the betel-quid. In former times, while the barolangphas and bwirathis performed dance at the house of the bride they carried a big piece of soil called ‘hathor’ in Bodo on their back. This type of primitive practices has become redundant in the modern period in the Bodo society. The marriage institution has come to become a highly reformed and standardized event with strings of good customs of the yonder period Bodos.

According to the Bodo tradition, a pair of betel-leaves, betel-nuts and a small amount of rupees, gamcha and dokhna is offered by the groom’s family to the bride’s parents and relatives. It is called ‘gawdwn’. It is offered as a mark of respect at the bride’s house before or during the marriage ceremony. Besides, some gifts are presented by the groom’s family to the bride. The gifts usually consist of a dokhna thawsi, a jwmgra or alwan (a scarf for covering the head), a blouse, a pair of asanmuthi (bracelets), a mirror, a comb, a pair of anklets and a bottle of perfumed oil, etc. Before leaving her house the bride pays respect to the supreme God, Bathou Bwrai by bowing down in front of the Bathou and then her parents and family members, kinsmen and friends. This is called ‘bidai lanai’ meaning bidding farewell. Afterwards, the bride is taken by the members of the groom’s party accompanied by the bride’s villagers at the house of the groom. On the way, the villagers rejoice by dancing and shouting slogans for the couple.
When they reach at gate of the house of groom the bride’s feet are washed and she is sprinkled with sacred water which is prepared by the Douri. This ritual is performed by the groom’s younger sister usually. Besides, a fresh egg is moved around the head of the bride seven times and afterwards, the egg is thrown on the ground to the southern side. This practice is called ‘dawdwi newsinai’. It signifies that the bride has been purified. This practice is seen among the Bodos of Udalguri, Kamrup, Nalbari and Baksas districts. After that, the bride is welcomed and led by two girls to Nomano, main house of the groom. Then the proper marriage is traditionally solemnized on the day of arrival of the bride at the house of groom. In this occasion, a big feast is arranged and the groom’s family supplies the pork and zumai (rice beer) abundantly.

The last social formality which is observed by the Bodo society is ‘nirikh bosonai’ meaning severance of relation. It is also called ‘mamai mara’. In this occasion, the father, uncle, paternal uncle or any other person from her father or mother’s side represent as the guardian of the bride. The bride’s guardians are respected by the groom’s family offering a pair of areca-nuts, betel-leaf along with rupees twenty-five paisa on a banana leaf after saluting them. If the guardian of the bride accepts the rupees twenty-five paisa and does not return it then boy’s family is required to feed up a pig, goat, etc. as per the agreement made in the time of offering. After the performance of nirikh bosonai, the bride’s family does not have any authority on the bride as per the social custom of the Bodos.

The newly married couple is brought back to the courtyard where the exchange of love, respect and blessings takes place between the newly married couple and the guardians and members of both the villages. After that, the bride’s party leaves the groom’s house. However, before going to their respective house they use to come directly at the house of bride where a small feast is arranged by the bride’s parents. This feast is called ‘agan gakhwmwrai’ meaning erasing of the foot-prints.

However, most of the rich people and literate persons are noticed to have preferred the form of arranged marriage where long drawn social formalities are followed. The rules and social customs in respect of marriage formalities appear to have
the variations from place to place and from village to village and from religion to religion.

**Hathasuni khurnai**

The ‘hathasuni khurnai’ is the traditional system of marriage of the Bodos. It is held at night in the house of the groom. In earlier days, it was highly approved and practiced in each Bodo marriage prior to advent of Brahma dharma in the traditional Bodo society. The word ‘hatha’ means a wooden bowl having a handle and ‘khurnai’ means serving of the foods or curry. In this marriage, a pair of cock and hen is killed and then the bride cooks rice and prepares a curry of powder-grounded rice and chicken with kharwi (soda) without putting spices and turmeric. This curry is called ‘Ondlakharwi’ or ‘Onlabugaw’.

In this ceremony, it is the duty of a bride to feed the groom for the first time with her hand. Before offering the food to her groom at first, a little portion of that meal is offered by the bride to the household deities of the *ishing* (kitchen) on the banana leaves. Then the *Douri* (priest) chants mantras invoking Bathou Bwrai and Mainao Burwi and even introduces the bride to the groom’s household deities and from this day, the bride is entitled to enter and cook the food items at the kitchen of the groom’s family.

During the marriage the groom and best man wear turbans on their heads with white *phalli*. The groom and bride and their attendants give respect to all family members, relatives and village elders. After that the groom and the best man are seated on the ‘*khamflai*’, a wooden seat made of *gambari* wood in front of Bathou altar in the courtyard whereas in the opposite direction the bride and bridesmaid also kneel down. The cooked rice and *ondlakharwi* are also placed in the middle of the bride and the groom and a pair of *alaribathi* (earthen lamp) is then lighted (See Plate 20). The *Douri* chants the marriage mantras invoking Bathou Bwrai and Bathou Burwi and even mentions the names of groom and bride and their parents, villages. In accordance with the direction of the *Douri* the bride after a salutation, puts a garland of flowers on groom round his neck. The bride also offers a little portion of cooked rice and *ondlakharwi* to
the groom and the best man on the plate of banana leaves or metal dishes (See Plate 21). After that, the Douri makes declaration that they are wedded. From this day, the couple is socially permitted to live together as husband and wife. The bride then personally serves the ondlakhari to all the villagers at least once to each. In Bodo society there is a tradition of giving advice to the new couple by the Douri and the village elders about the new responsibility and duty in the family and society from this day.

It is also observed that the groom puts vermillion on the forehead of the bride like the neighbouring Hindus. But in the earlier days, there was no tradition of putting vermillion on the forehead of the bride in the traditional Bodo society. However, they wore ornaments as married women, viz., asan muthi (bangle), sabtimala (necklace) or garphata which were given by the groom at the time of marriage.

In former times, the feast of the hathasuni khurnai lasted for three to seven days. The main items of the feast was consisted of rice, pork, zumai, sereb which were supplied plenty. The people took meal on 'lai', plates made from leaves and even used 'dona', a bowl made of rinds from banana plant, for drinking rice beer. These were prepared by the villagers one day ahead of the marriage ceremony. Traditionally most of the households of the village and relatives from outside the village used to bring the zumai and sereb as a mark of honour and solidarity, in the marriage feast. The rice beer was stored well in large sized earthen pitchers called 'dabkha' or 'maldanga' in Bodo. Later all the people gathered, would take part in merrymaking and feasting at the house of the groom. The bride also takes turns in distributing zumai, sereb, water and other eatable items at least once to the villagers. The celebrations sometimes lasted even for the whole night. The people had enough things to eat and drink at the marriage ceremony in the past. The use of pork in the marriage was not compulsory and it depended on the economic capacity of the groom's family. Earlier, the traditional system of Bodo marriage was a very festive one which is known from the folk songs sung by the youngsters in the time of marriage ceremony.

“Gwdwni dina bohaw thangkhw?”

73
Angkhamni ali, bedorni akhai

Jouniphukhri gwilalwi bajwi

gwilia, gwilia..."67"

English rendering of this song is: “Where have those days gone? When there were mounds of cooked rice, delicacies of meat, pool of rice beer, no more elder sister-in-law, these are no more…”

Thus the traditional system of marriage of the Bodos is very simple. The followers of Bathou religion perform this form of marriage at the house of groom only. However, certain marriage customs of the Bodos seemed to be peculiar to other tribal society of Assam.

Neotha siphainai

The neotha siphainai is the most important traditional post-marriage ceremony of the Bodos. It is also called ‘athimongol’ (ath-mongola in Assamese). It is held on the eight day of marriage i.e., after seven days from the day of marriage, at the house of the bride. In this occasion the bride, the groom and their attendants use to visit the bride’s parents. In earlier times, a cock and a hen or a pig and a pair of zue (rice beer) bottle or a pair of serab bottle used to be brought to honour the bride’s family and relatives. But long back the carrying of a pair of a cock and a hen or pig by the newly married couple to bride’s house at athimongol got disused in the society. Instead of these, some sweets, pitha (cakes), aasi pitha (a kind of cake), etc. are taken to the house of bride’s family.

On the day of arrival, the following night, a small feast is arranged at the house of the bride. It is attended mostly by the bride’s relatives. The village elders also attend the athimongol ceremony if they are invited by the bride’s family. In this occasion the bride and the groom and their attendants give honour to the bride’s family members, relatives and village elders, and in return they also bless them by offering gifts either in the form of articles or money. In the afternoon of the next day, the bride leaves for groom’s house after taking all the gifts received on the wedding ceremony and belongings remained in
her father’s house. Thus *athimongol* is an occasion for the groom to familiarize with the members of bride’s family and the relatives as well as the villagers.

**Divorce**

The practice of divorce is prevalent among the Bodos. Under special circumstances the divorce is socially allowed by the Bodos since time immemorial. There are certain social formalities under which separation between husband and wife may be permitted and approved only by the village council. But usually the village council gives its approval only if the separation between husband and wife is absolutely necessary. The divorce is done by the social formality called *‘pathwi lai bisinai’* meaning tearing of a betel-leaf in the society. The Bodo word *‘pathwi’* means betel-leaf and *‘bisinai’* means tearing. In respect of divorce the system of tearing of betel leaf has an important place in the Bodo society. Accordingly, a couple holds a betel-leaf and tears it in presence of village council and the villagers. The tearing of a betel leaf is a symbolic act only but indicates that a torn betel leaf can never be reunited. So, their married life is separated forever. The practice of tearing a betel-leaf is also widely prevalent in Rabha society in case of divorce and it is called *‘panchira’* by the Rabhas. There is a traditional belief among the Bodos that anyone of the divorcée who obtains a major portion of the betel-leaf torn, may be have the chance to enter first to a subsequent marriage if so desired. But the divorce is rather very few in the Bodo society.

**Economic activities**

Agriculture was the mainstay of the Bodo economy in the Brahmaputra valley. So, the Bodos were agrarian people and they mostly liked to live in the villages. Their economy was primarily the self-sufficient agrarian economy. Their method of ploughing the field of earlier days was primitive, usually done by means of a pair of oxen bound to the yoke. But the Bodo people learnt the modern method of cultivation with the use of modern techniques and tools, such as tractors, power tillers for their cultivation from the last two decades of twentieth century. Since the agriculture is the main source of their family income most of the Bodo people desire to possess more cultivable fields in their
family. They mostly select the alluvial land called 'hamaha' meaning the mother of the soil. For cultivating the lands the Bodos have several means, such as self-cultivation, adhi (share) system, bondok (mortgage) system, saori lingnai system, etc.

Rice is the staple food of the Bodo families. The varieties of rice, like, maisali, ashu are largely cultivated. In terms of production, maisali (sali in Assamese) is obviously much higher than ashu (ahu in Assamese) and bawa (hao in Assamese). The fact is that yearly floods constantly enrich the level of natural fertility of the maisali field. The traditional Bodos usually raise the three varieties of paddy crops once a year, viz., maisali, ashu and bawa. But the cultivation of these paddy crops now declined to a great extent from the Bodo society long back. The fact is that in terms of production, these paddy crops are much lesser than the other new varieties of crops. So, instead of these crops, they accept the cultivation of new varieties of paddy crops, such as basmati, ponkoj, ranjit, etc. It may be mentioned that in earlier days, in case of non-availability of rain water in their paddy field the Bodos made artificial means of irrigation for diverting water from river-beds into their paddy fields. The manure of cow dung is used by them to increase the fertility of land but the varieties of artificial fertilizer are also now used to a large extent. The cultivated crops for domestic use are mainly vegetables, mustard seeds, jute, black pulse, dal, potato, tomato, garlic, onion, sesame, brinjal, chilies, etc. But whatever surplus remains in their family, is sold in the nearby markets. Most of the Bodo family for their income use to sell the areca-nuts, betel-leaf, jack fruit, mango, litchi, lemon, etc.

Animal rearing is one of the main occupations of the traditional Bodos. It is also a major source of income for the maintenance of their family. Most of the Bodo family depends upon the possession of a large herd of cattle in the family. The cows are reared not for milk, but for the male progeny, as the oxen are largely used in the agriculture in the absence of modern technology. In the early period, it was also used as a medium of exchange in the traditional Bodo society. Besides cows, some of their domesticated animals include the goat, buffalo, pig, fowl, duck, etc.
The Bodo people did not like to carry trade and business. They thought themselves unfit to carry out any trade and business like other communities. This traditional belief held good stead among the Bodos in ancient times. On the other hand, there was no good transport and communication in the Bodo populated areas. As the Bodos inhabited in the northern foot-hill regions of Bengal and Assam they maintained border trade links with the bordering hill tribes on the north and through them the Tibetans and Chinese traders. Most of their exported commodities were consisted of cotton thread, *endi* and *muga* thread, cotton cloths, *endi* cloth, silk, wrappers, tobacco, betel-nut, dry fish, rice, etc. The trade was not carried directly for the lack of easy routes, but there were some passes or *dooars* especially in the North frontier of Bengal and Assam. These passes are still known as ‘Kachari-dooars’ meaning door or gateway opening to the Kacharis. There are several dooars or duars, such as Alipur duar, Kalikhora duar, Jom duar, Burwi gwma duar, Gwrholia duar, Chirang duar, Chapaguri duar, Bijni duar, Chapakhamar duar, Buxa duar, Khaling duar, etc. These passes still exist in between Assam and Tibet through Bhutan. The route to Tibet run across the Himalayan Mountains parallel with the course of the Brahmaputra river. One of the most important trade routes was the ‘Lhasa-Tawang- Udalguri’ in the present district of Udalguri. Here a small volume of barter trade occurred between the Tawang Hills tribes and the Bodo tribes of Udalguri region. But during the last two decades of the eighteen century and the first two decades of the nineteenth century this trade route was disrupted because of the Maomaria rebellion in Assam and the invasion of the Burmese troops. Consequently, the Bodo economy deteriorated considerably to some extent. Nevertheless, the trade relation between Bhutanese (*Gongars* as called by the Bodos) and the Bodos continued and traits of revival to its earlier grandeur can be noticed.

It may be referred that a few Bodo people from Parbatjhora area of present Dhubri district carried business on timber trade. Some of the active traders among them were Swrwn Mandal, Kaula Mech and some others. The most of the timber merchants were Bengalis and Marwaris and they mostly lived in the Dhubri town. Kalicharan Brahma, the preacher of Brahma faith also carried on his father’s business of timber trade. He along with some big timber merchants of Dhubri used to carry timbers to Dhaka for sale.
through the route of river Brahmaputra. Besides, trade relations with Bengal were also developed. But they could not make much success in their business owing to small capital formation and the lack of organized system of trade. So, Kalicharan organized Trade Guild called as Brahma Company in 1972 CE with a view to assisting the young Bodo traders at Dhubri. Accordingly, each and every member of the company invested a sum of rupees fifty to the company’s fund. In need of time, the member traders could avail loan from the company’s corpus fund to run their business. But this company did not last long due to lack of proper management and sustained only for a few years.

From the last two decades of the twentieth century, the Bodos are seen taking up small businesses dealing in various items, such as vegetables, fishes, other food grains, areca-nuts, betel-nuts and various agricultural products in the rural and also in urban markets. There are a number of small markets which grew up in the rural areas and thereby the Bodos were encouraged to make sale of their various products and domestic commodities in the nearby markets. A section of them also became economically successful by engaging themselves in various modern economic activities, like contracts, builders, wholesalers, etc. Their business basically confined mostly to hardware, agricultural wholesales, transports, constructions, weaving and garments, printing and stationery, butchery, etc. It is also observed that most of the Bodo women ventured into the business of selling vegetables, food grains and other home products at their local markets. But a good number of Bodo family still lived below the poverty level too as per the government reports. It was due to the fact that the gap between the rich and the poor in terms of economic status became wider in the Bodo society.

Most of the Bodo people of ancient times were also fond of dwelling in the nearby forest for the purpose of agriculture and domestication of animals as well as for availing access to forest resources, etc. But this trend had been reversed from the last two decades of the twentieth century and most of the Bodo people were drawn towards the urban life. Most of the Bodo family desire to possess house and land in the urban centers in search of livelihood and better facilities and consequently, a good number of them were also found living in various towns and cities of Assam. A section of them also migrated to
distant cities and towns seeking alternative livelihood and took up even the untraditional occupations, like daily wage earner, manual labour, etc. Thus it was a good turning point of development in the history of the Bodo economy.

The rearing of a kind of silk-worm on leaves of castor oil plants is one of the most important cottage industries of the Bodos. It is an important aspect of the traditional economic activities. At a very early age, the Bodo women folk learnt the art of weaving and thus the loom became an inseparable thing in a Bodo family. The culture of the silk-worm known as endi (eri in Assamese), and the manufacture of the endi cloth’ is considered by the Bodo family as a very profitable one for their family income.\(^{77}\)

It may be mentioned that the Bodos learnt the cultivation of paddy, jute, endi, cotton when they lived on the banks of the river Hwang Ho and Yangtsi-Kiang and later on developed the culture of spinning and weaving.\(^{78}\) The Mongolian Bodos are known to be the earliest inhabitants and pre-dominated the valley of river Brahmaputra and so, it has been called ‘the reservoir of Kirata or Mongoloid people in India’.\(^{79}\) It is probable that in Assam the Bodos were the first tribe to practice the culture of the silk-worm rearing and to bring out the silken yarn from the cocoons. At initial stage, it was done manually by the Bodos. The Bodos and other groups of Mongolian people originally manufactured the cloths of ‘pat’ and ‘silk’ in the valley towards the North-western China and introduced first in the valley of Brahmaputra.\(^{80}\)

Since the Bodo women are very expert weavers they wove the endi cloth at their handlooms in order to produce warm wrappers. Besides, various types of cotton cloths were also woven on their handlooms both for home use as well as for sale at the markets. These products could occupy a very good market not only in Assam but outside also. However, the valley of Brahmaputra was famous primarily not for the silken cloths but for the endi cloths by about 400 BCE.\(^{81}\)

It is mentionable that the king Bhaskarvarmann gifted a cape called ‘ho-la-li’ made of coarse skin lined with soft padding to the Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang when the latter visited the palace of the former in Kamrup. The ‘ho-la-li’ was designed to protect one
from rain and cold. It seemed that the word ‘ho-la-li’ or ‘halali’ came from the Bodo words, ‘hi’ (cloth) and ‘lali’ (purple tinged). The ‘halal’ is a Bodo word meaning luster emitting and Bhaskarvarman presented a ‘halali’ coat made with Bodo silk to Hiuen Tsang in the seventh century.\textsuperscript{83}

The Bodos rear the silk-worm on the \textit{endi} or castor oil plant leaves. The feeding of the silk-worm on the castor oil plants is a traditional culture of the Bodos. The \textit{endi} cocoons called ‘phithwb’ in Bodo are more soft and smaller in size than the ‘muga cocoons’. The larvas which are taken out from the cocoons are called ‘emphou latha’. This is a craved delicacy of the Bodos and it commands a good price in the market. Besides, the Bodo women also spin silk threads from the cocoons by their hands for weaving all kinds of cloths not only for home use but also for commercial purposes. The spinning of silk thread is called ‘Khundung lunai’ in Bodo. The Bodos generally use two types of threads, \textit{endi} and \textit{fathw} in weaving for manufacture of various cloths. But most of them like \textit{endi} (eri in Assamese) cloth more than the \textit{fathw} (pat in Assamese) in the rural village. In the interior Bodo villages, most of the poor Bodo families continue to work on the silk-worm production within their homestead through traditional method. But they now produce only \textit{endi} cloths which give a very low income in the family. However, these add a substantial addition to the family income.

One of the most important economic activities of Bodos is the bamboo and wooden handicrafts. The Bodos are expert in making the crafts of bamboo and wood. They make various types of bamboo crafts, such as \textit{songrai} (platter), \textit{sandri} (sieve), \textit{khada} (basket), \textit{jekhai} (fishing scoop), \textit{pholo} (fishing trap), etc. Besides, some crafts of wood made by them are \textit{uwal} (mortar), \textit{gaihen} (pestle), \textit{dingkhi} and various tools. But there is no reference of professional craftsman in the society.

Certain tools made from bamboos and wood were commonly used as weights and measures by the Bodos in the past. Earlier in Bodo society, a small bamboo basket called ‘don’ or ‘khada’ in Bodo was used as a unit of measurement for their crops especially the paddy, corns, pulses, mustard seed, sesame, etc. Generally, the \textit{don} or \textit{khada} is made of bamboo, plastered with of cow dung. The weight of a \textit{don} of crops would be almost equal
to 5 kilograms of paddy. The *khada* in general, is not only made for measurement of crops, but also used for certain other household activities. The barter system has been prevalent among the Bodos since ages. The *khada* or *don* was used as a unit of measurement and weight at that time. The paddy crops and any other things become a unit of value in barter system of traditional Bodos. But the using of *‘don’* or *‘khada’* as a certain unit of weight and measures for paddy and other measurable crops has still not become extinct from the society in most of the interior Bodo villages.

Traditionally, the Bodos liked fishing and hunting. The Bodos catch fish in rivers, lakes, ponds, streams and flooded agricultural fields with their traditional fishing tools, such as *jekhai*, a fishing scoop (*jakhoi* in Assamese), *khokha* (fish trap), *sen*, a small fish trap (*sepa* in Assamese) and *pholo* (a kind of fishing trap), etc. Both community and individual fishing is a common affair among the Bodos. However the dried fish called *‘nagwran’* is a delicate food for the Bodo villagers. This *nagwran* is made as *‘napam’* which is very favourite item of the Bodos. This *napam* is also sold in their local market sometimes. Thus fishing is meant partly for their consumption and partly for selling in the market. Earlier, the selling of fish was prohibited in the Bodo society, but long back this tradition had been abandoned and now the Bodos are actively engaged in fish trade in various levels.

Hunting is another important culture of the Bodos. They loved hunting as much as they love the meat of their hunt. The Bodos hunt many wild animals, such as *mwi* (deer), *sesa* (hare), *oma* (pig), *neolai* (mongoose), *jahamalai* (a kind of polecat), etc. They have some traditional hunting tools, such as bows and arrows, spears, axes and other primitive weapons and flat shields. The nets were also used for hunting. In ancient times, the rich Bodo man used to hunt on elephants. All these activities have been more or less discontinued in the Bodo society with the advent of education and modernity among the Bodos. In fact many of them contribute in many ways in preserving wildlife in their areas. It is observed that, as the realization dawned on them about the value of all these natural resources, they now disliked going for hunting except during their *Bwisagii* festival. The cutting and collection of firewood in the forest is also an important aspect of
the traditional economic activities of the Bodos. The Bodos gather these partly for
domestic use and partly for sale in the nearby market. Dwindling forest cover in areas
where Bodos reside and availability of other modes of fuel has led to less dependence on
fire woods for their fuel. Thus, the changes in the traditional economic system of the
Bodos contributed a lot towards the development of the traditional Bodo society in the
Brahmaputra valley of Assam.

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