CHAPTER -V

ROLE OF BATHOUISM IN KHERAI AND GARJA WORSHIP

(I) Kherai:

*Kherai* is a kind of puja which is performed for the wellbeing of crops and human beings. It is the greatest religious puja and agricultural festival of the Boros which has been prevailing among the Boro society since time immemorial.

(i) Purpose of The Puja:

The Boros are predominantly agrarian. So they are generally dependent on agriculture mainly the paddy crops. With an objective of getting rich harvest of crops and also to know their future prospect the Boros celebrate this *kherai puja*. Because the prophesy relating to the paddy crops, any other natural calamities like trouble and distresses of man kind will be given by the *doudini* through this kherai puja. So the main purpose of this *kherai puja* is to satisfy the concerned deities along with the *Bwrai Bathou* for the same.

(iii) Origin of the term *Kherai*:

The term "*kherai*" is the combination of two words – "*khe*" and "*rai*" which are individually meaningful. Of course different scholars and experts have different opinions on the matter which are given below –
1. According to Dhuparam Basumatary an expert in the field of Bathouism as an insider, the sound “khe” is produced by the animals which are sacrificed by cutting its neck with a long sword and “rai daonai”, the meaning of which is praying.

2. Bihuam Boro, a renowned scholar and activist of Bathouism and the author of Gibi Bithai an epic fragment of Boro liturature was of the opinion that the term “kher” means to feel and understand the existence of supreme power and “rai” means to utter or pray the supreme power. The supreme power is known to the Boros as “Bathou”.

3. According to Mathur Basumatary an activist of Bathou religion, it is the composition of the three different words (khe + ra + i). The very word “khe” means “kneeling down” “ra” means “raisnongnai” (praying) and “i” mans “iswr” – the God. So the significant meaning of the terms is – while the devotee knelt down and prayed to the Bathoubrai (the God) whole heartedly in the “kheraisali” (place of kherai worship) is the kherai.

4. Mahini Mohan Brahma, a renowned scholar, said that it might have been derived from kairatoj > Kairat > kaira > khair > kherai.

5. Dr. Suniti Kumar Chettarji said the Tripuri celebrate the “ker” (kher) puja and hence it might have come into existence as kherai among the Boros. It is also termed as “khernang” in North Cacher., “kheraima” in Nepal and Kherai in West Bengal.
6. Dr. Kameswar Brahma support the opinion put forwarded by some renowned scholars that – (i) it must have been derived from the Khuria Bwrai or Khwria Bwrai> Khubrai> Khurai> Kherai (Khuria or Khwria Bwrai is the chief of the god and goddesses who is worshipped in the Kherai puja so for as their traditional practice is concerned).

(ii) The oja chant the mantras “khe-khe” (whole heartedly) in the kherai worship. From these term khe-khe (repeatedly and whole heartedly) mantra rainai (praying) it may be “khe-khe- rainai< kherai”.

7. Dr. Liladhar Brahma, an activist of Bathou religion is of the opinion that it may come from the word – Khwria Bwraikhou Rai = Kherai, i.e. – praying whole heartedly, addressing to the Khwria Bwrai, a chief deity of eighteen gods and goddesses which are worship in the kherai puja.

8. According to Girindra Brahma Dainary, a famous writer of Boro literature, the significant meaning of the term “kherai” is to pray whole heartedly to the Bathou Bwrai (the God).

However from the opinion of the above scholars we can say that the significant meaning of the term “kherai” is prayer to the God (through the god and goddesses) with the help of offerings which may be sacrifice of animals, fowls or prasads in the temporarily arranged Kheraisali.

It is noteworthy that the kherai worship is observed for the welfare of both private and public life and for the good harvest of crops.

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(iii) **Folk Etymology of The Kherai:**

The Boros have a myth recounting the origin of the *kherai* worship and *kherai* dance.

Once upon a time there was an old man whose name was Zaraphagla. He had five sons (another version says seven sons) and they were engaged to harvest the crops. In the course of time they become adult and matured. Therefore Zaraphagla solemnised their marriage in a year gorgeously. As a result his granary (capital) became empty and hence Zaraphagla asked them to go in search of fertile land and set up a new farm house.

The youngest daughter in law was Mongli (somewhere said Thenthamali) by name who was very lovely and respectful. She was not only beautiful but also expert in all household activities. So she was specially taken excessive care by her father in law all the time. Even when he arrives from a place she is the first person about whom he inquires. When he needs anything he would ask from Mongli only. This type of behaviour and partiality towards Mongli created jealousy in the minds of the other four (or six) daughter in laws. As a result Mongli was misinterpreted by her four/six bijaojali (wives of Mongli's husbands elder brothers) even they disclose to the other that there may be secret relation in between Mongli and Zaraphagla. This kind of misinterpretation came to Mongli's knowledge and she could not tolerate the matter, and so ultimately she fled away one day at dawn from her house without informing the family members.
Zaraphagla reached his house from somewhere else and searched Mongli- asked his daughter in laws where Mongli has gone? But nobody knew where she went. Old man Zaraphagla started his search somewhere near by his house but no one could give him any information regarding Mongli. He became like a phagla (a madman) and he decided to search her elsewhere. One day he took a small sized thophla (bag) and a thokhon (in Assamese tokon) and left his house and went in search for his daughter in law- Mongli.

Many days have passed by since he first started his quest for Mongli. He became gerardless of his own health and kept on searching without food and water for many days. As a result he looked like a mad man and people began to call him phagla (a mad man). One day he felt very tired and took a rest under a big shadowy tree. His fatigue rendered him fast asleep and he dreamt a mysterious dream. In his dream an old man appeared to him and told him to perform the kherai puja gorgeously with the help of grand musical instrument like Kham (drum) Zotha (Cymbal) sifung (flute) and suddenly disappeared.

Old man Zaraphagla got up and returned to his home and told all about the matter. He invited all his sons and performed a grand kherai worship in full moon night as per the dream and a woman appeared there from somewhere and began to dance as doudini (woman oracle) in the Kheraisali (place of kherai worship). She was non but Mongli the lost daughter in law of the old man Zaraphagla. So this kind of kherai puja is revalent till today. The Boros believe that the old man who performed the kherai worship was Mwnsin-si bwrai and the
old man who appeared in the dream was Bathou Brai. This is how kherai originated. It is also believed that—this kind of demonstration of kherai worship is performed by the Bathou Bwrai Himself to prevail among the Boro Society.

This folk etymology is associated with some songs which are sung by Zaraphagla when he moves from place to place in search of his daughter in law—Mongli. The following is a variant of the same song—

"O bihamzw Mongli aywi Mongli
Boha thangkhw nwng rotho ayo rotho.
Dubri bariyao agan nudwngmwn
Bala bariyao gwma bay."

**English Rendering:**

O Mongli, my daughter in law, where have you gone wait ‘O’ dear wait,
I saw your foot print on the dubori wood
but missed them on the sands.”

**(iv) Kinds of Kherai:**

The kherai puja is of four different kinds which are held in different sessions of the year—

(a) *Darchan Kherai* —which is performed during the first week of the month of *kati* (September-october). It is also known as Sali kherai or

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Mainao kherai which is meant for the worship of the goddess of wealth.

(b) *Umrao Kherai* which is held during the month of *Ashar* (June-July) after the *Amsisua* (Ombubasi) especially for the well-being of summer crops. It is also known as asu *kherai* which is connected with the asu or a summer season crop.

(c) *Phalw Kherai* which is held during the month of *Magha* (January) especially on the day of *Maghi purnima*.

(d) *Nowaoni kheria* which is performed by an individual family for the well-being of the family in particular if it deems necessary.

(v) Preparation for *kheria* worship:

(a) *Selection of kheraisali (place of kherai worship)* -

The Boros do not have permanent place of *kherai* worship. So, the *doudini* select a place wherever it is possible to celebrate the *kherai* which may preferably be at grazing field outside the village. In the first half of the day of *kherai* worship the *doudini* (woman oracle) is charmed and identify the particular place with her sword and established a temporary *Bathou* altar. Based on this *Bathou bindw* (altar) the whole area of proposed *kherai* worship is arranged. The total area may be approximately of 16x20 feet (320 square feet) in length and breadth from the south to north direction.
(b) Installation of Bathou altar:

On the Bathou altar a sijou tree (Euphorbia splendens) is planted with the help of their customs and traditions of the Boros. The sijou tree is surrounded by a round fence of small bamboo strips folded with five fastenings symbolizing the five religious and spiritual principles. This kind of practices found in the Boro society is called installation of Bathou altar (vide this philosophy has been discussed in the chapter II under the headline of five principles or philosophy of Bathou.) Under the sijou tree some materials are placed which are mentioned below—

(i) two *gasa* (the sacred earthen lamp which has a stand) supposed to be the male and female.

(ii) two fully filled *dons* (bamboo basket), one filled with uncooked rice and other filled with paddy grains, a pairs of areca nuts and betel leaves and also pairs of banana fruits as its shares.

(iii) two sacred swords, a *dahal* (tal) and a small piece of cane stick of two feet length.

(iv) a *lotha* or pot filled with the holy water (*doi gwthar*) is also installed there and branches of *jatras* , basils and nine pieces of *dubori bon* are kept in the pot for sprinkling the holy water.

The fencing is attached with two bamboo poles at the front side or the gate way of the Bathou altar in the name of *Ehiu Bwrai* (right side) and *Ehiu Burwi* (left side). Eleven pieces of cocoon tightened by *ewa suta* are tied to each pole.
Again one piece of 'kho' (small bamboo container) is also hung in the six/seven feet heigh of the pole.

Another most important part of kherai worship is “Bwiswmuthini ali” (the road of earth), where all offerings of sacrifices in the name of different god and goddesses are done by the douri (priest), the custodian of kherai worship. For this arrangement a kind of “ali” (small road at the size of one feet breadth and four or six inches high is made which is started from the Bathou altar to the northern side which may be of 10 or 12 feet long of the shape of roman ‘L’. This “ali” is well decorated with on gundwi (rice powder). Eighteen pairs of plaintain leaflets are placed on the decorated ‘ali’ in the name of eighteen gods and goddesses or deities. Each and every leaflet carries a lighted earthen lamp, along with pairs of areca nuts and betel leaves, pairs of banana and prasads.

In the eastern side of the ‘ali’ a line of eighteen pairs of “khangkhla” (a sacred plant) are planted and a line of “mayaje” (bamboo net) is made. The significant meaning of the term “mayaje” is – “the process of songsar (state of worldly existence) is as such as critical where human beigs have sustained their life critically and successfully.”

(c) Other materials required for the worship are –

(i) areca nuts and betel leaves in abundance;

(ii) banana (ripe and unripe) fruits, prasads in abundance;
(iii) more than twenty two earthen lamps, *ewa suta*, mustard oil in abundance; *dubori bon* (nine pieces), vermilion

(iv) fowls in abundance (minimum eighteen chicken including two red cocks and six pairs of pigeons are required) insence sticks, *dhuna*, cocoon, cane one piece.

(v) a pairs of *seref* bottle (two bottle of local liquor) and rice beer (*jou*)

(vi) sufficient plantain leaves

(vii) a white cloth (same as bed sheet)

(viii) a *khuri* (bowl)

(ix) basils

(x) rice powder

(xi) *khangkhla* eighteen pairs

(xii) holy water pot

(xiii) *gambari khamphlai* one piece

(xiv) *kho* (bamboo net)

(xv) *gasa* one pair (female and male)

(xvi) sword -2

(xvii) eggs

(xviii) *don* -2

(xix) *bijuli* bamboo-2

(xx) *mwkhna* or *lwkhna* (18 pairs).
(d) Musical Instruments:

(i) two *khams* (drum)-code name called by the *daudini* as – *khaolai* 
gwswm

(ii) two or four flutes -code name called by the *daudini* as-*khuga gwlao*

(iii) two cymbals -code name called by the *daudini* as –*gaorema*

For this act of *kherai* worship the man power is required as helper in order to supply the materials like mustard oil, cloths etc. and also the chicken and pigeons. The place of *kheraisali* (place of *kherai* worship) is shown in the photograph).

VI. Performance of *Kherai* Dance :-

The *kherai* dance are mainly of eighteen kinds, which are performed by the *Doudini*, can be discussed in the following manner –
(1) Bathou Gidingnai :-

After she possessed the spiritual power (which is called wlwnggikhangnai in Boro) she starts her dance performance where she moves around the altar of the Kheraisali (place of kherai worship) with the tune of musical band. She would point out the Douri to sacrifice a chicken in the name of Bathoubrai or Khoria Bwrai with the help of a sword and as a result the Douri sacrifices a chicken to the concerned deity.

According to Dr. Kameswar Brahma- “Bathou Bwrai or Khoria Bwrai is the god- in-chief of the Bodos. “ He is given the highest position among the gods. Along with areca nuts and betel leaves a pig is also sacrificed in his name. The head of the pig and a little quantity of the blood of the sacrificed pig are place togther on the altar.”

2. Chotrali or Chotraboli :-

Doudini hold one sword in her right hand and one shield (Dahal) in left hand and dances moving around the altar of kheraisali. This performance is performed in the name of Ranchandri or Rwnchwrtdri who is known as goddess of war and fighting and a cock is sacrificed in her name by the Douri.

There is a traditional belief among the Boros that if the musical tune of this Ranchandri dance is played on flute during the month of chaitro, the

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Assamese month (March-April) then the eggs of snake become gola (the eggs are rendered inactive and so young snakes cannot hatch from them).

But Dr. Liladhar Brahma named it as thungri gongnwi chibnai (chatrolee) where a chicken is sacrificed in the name of a Agrang deity. This dance again be known as Raigung chibnai.

3. Khophri Sibnai :-

This dance is performed in the name of Bura Ailwng, the deity of earth, the followers of Bathou Maharaja. While she dances she holds two things which are one sword in right hand and a shield in her left hand. Through this dance Doudini gives a demonstration on the tactics how a person can save himself/herself from the attack of the enemies in the battle field. To become a successful warrior the Boros worship him through Doudini and sacrifice a chicken in the name of this deity is the significance of the dance.

4. Mwsaglangnai :-

In this dance Doudini takes the two swords in her hands and perform her dance moving around the altar of the Kheraisali (place of kherai worship). In this dance a chicken is sacrificed by the Douri. This kind of Mwsaglangnai is performed several times during the Kherai puja.
5. Sa-gwlao Bwnai Mwsanai :-

It's a very powerful dance which is performed by the Doudini at Kheraisali (place of kherai worship). A long white cloth (which seems like a bedsheet but little bit of longer than it) is hold from the two sides by two groups where three or five gents in each group are involved just like the tug of war. The band of musical group play the music and Doudini starts her dance around the altar and move to the clothes where it is made ready. Sometimes she shakes her long hair relentlessly or violently. Its such an energetic dance that the cloth pullers are unable to keep her in balance. In the last moment of the dance she sacrifice a pair of pigeons without cutting the neck which is called Mosrainai in Boros. This offering is done in the name of Khaji deity. But according to Dr. Anil Boro, this dance is associated to the god of Abla khungur. However its an amazing dance that the public gathering appraised her by their big claps.

6. Khwijema fonai :-

In this dance Doudini takes two swords in her hand, sometimes she carries the sword on her shoulder and sometimes do the acting of cutting the tree at trunk. This dance is performed in the name of deity of Abla khungur. After a round performance of dance the Doudini indicates with her sword to sacrifice the chicken and the Douri sacrifices a chicken in the name of the concerned deity. The song associated with this performance which is sung by the musical group is as follows –
“Bwisag danni khwijema²
Aithengao orbai orphobbai
khoroao orbai orphobbai
Gwdnayao orbai orphobbai
Bwisag danni khwijema³”

English Rendering –

“Khwijema (a kind of bigger species of ant, red in colour, jamli pok in Assamese) of the month of Bohag,

It bite collectively at the leg
It bite collectively at the head
It bite collectively at the neck.”

Through this dance Doudini demonstrates how to cut the tree, how human beings getting the hindrance /obstacle from the insect like khwijema (a kind of bigger species of ant, which is popularly known as jamli pok in Assamese, who are very strong in unity and also attack the enemy unitedly, who are there in tree) while you are busy in cutting the tree. The significant meaning of this demonstration is – “the human being must know and learn –how to survive in such a critical world with the help of tolerance and perserverance.”

³ Informant, Sri Orla Basumatary (M-65) Oja, Kherai, Gohpur.
7. Thungri Ganai :-

It is one of the most important amazing dances performed by the Doudini during the kherai puja. She starts her dance performance while a band of musical group played the tune on the one hand, and the sword will be made ready at the gateway of the Bathou altar where she performs the dance on the other. After one round of dancing around the worship place of kheraisali she moves to the place where two swords are getting ready for the dance and she stands on the sharp edge of the two swords and jump over it again and again, dancing and dancing for several times. The swords are held by four or six other male performers with the help of cloths. Doudini holds the Bijulee Bamboo while jumped over the sword and lastly sacrifice a chicken and takes the blood.

8. Gandoula Bwnnai :-

The term gandoula means dragonfly and bwnnai means hunting. So it means the hunting of dragonfly. Human beings as a best creature he/she must have a capacity to hunt someone else to survive himself/herself in the world. So Doudini acts the tactics how man hunts the dragonfly in her dance performance. Man, being a best creature he/she must have a capacity to earn something to the fittest survivor in such a world- is the significant meaning of this dance. In this dance a chicken is sacrificed by the Douri in the name of khwila deity.
9. Badali Gelenai :-

Badali (bat) as an animal survivor in the world which flies at night and feeds on fruits and insects from one place (tree) to the other. The same character of bat are shown in the dance performance. While Doudini, being a Badali (bat) tries to sit on the khangkhla, supposing it a tree, of Kheraisali, some other performers like Douri, try to scare her from the khangkhla by shouting hw.......hw.....(go away.....go away) etc. Involvement of himself/herself in the process of survival in the world is the significant meaning of this dance. In this dance a chicken is sacrificed by the Douri to propitiate the deity of Sangjani Ali Burah. It is also known as Badali Birnai (flies of Bat) in some other places.

10. Khamao Barkhwnai :-

The two khams (which are used here in this kheraisali) are adjoined in such a position where the player can easily play them. While the band of music starts the tune the Doudini also starts her dance performance and proceed to the kham and climbed over it. After her dance performance on the kham she sacrifices a pair of pigeon without cutting the neck which is known as Mosrainai in Boro in the name of Rajkhandra deity.

The meaning of the term "khamao barkhwnai" is climbs over the drum and dance on it. The signficance of this dance is the preservation and respect of the concerned deity by propitiating him through this worship and sacrifice.
11. **Mwsa Gelenai :-**

In the beginning a Douri pulled a red coloured cock and Doudini follow it up and try to catch it by crawling just like a tiger. Lastly, after turning two or three round performance around the Bathou altar of the kheraisali (place of kherai worship) the Doudini catches the cock and sacrifice it in the name of Bag Raja deity.

12. **Dahal Sibnai/Bunai :-**

For this performance the Doudini holds one shield in the left hand and a piece of cane (of 2/2 ½ feet long) in the right and starts her performance while the musical tune start. During her performance, sometimes she beat the shield with the cane in a position of half sitting and jump over and again, turning up anti clockwise around the Bathou altar of the kheraisali. In this dance a chicken is sacrificed in the name of Ailwng deity. The significance of this dance performance is – to save himself or herself.

13. **Nao Jaonai :-**

The meaning of the term Nao jaonai is boating, likewise the gesture of this dance is just like the boating. The Doudini takes one sword at her hand and use it like a oar of the boat. Like a boatman she takes a bag on her shoulder, ties a white cloth on her head which is called phaori or phaogri in Boro and a phengpha (whistle) which is made of banana leaf and is taken in her mouth. A
chicken is sacrificed in this dance in the name of choudri deity. But it is related
to laokhar gosai (Lord Krishna) according to Dr. Anil Boro. (Folk literature of
the Boros-P:53- Dr. Anil Boro). The significance of this dance is – leading
his/her body and soul in the world.

14. Neolai Gelenai :-

The style of this dance is just like the Bag Raja. Here also the Doudini
performs the dance by crawling on earth and follow a chicken (not red) which is
pulled by a Douri (priest). The gesture made by her is just like a mongoose as the
meaning of the dance name is playing of Mongoose. After turning two or more
round performances around the altar of kheraisali, the chicken is caught by her
and sacrificed to the concerned deity. Of course, according to some one else and
also Dr. Liladhar Brahma this Neolai gelenai dance is a secondary or
subordinate dance. But I came across in my field study at Jingabil, Mazbat,
Udalguri BTAD when its kherai festival or performance was held on 2 Dec/
2009, organized by Odaguri District Committee Bathou Dhwrwm Afat which was
performed as its part.

15. Mwisw Gelenai :-

In this dance performance the gesture of the dance of Doudini seems just
like a Buffalo. During the dance she raises her hands at her head and shows
herself just like a Buffalo which is an animal with two horns. After her dance
performance, lastly, a chicken is sacrificed in the name of Ai Dibaoliya deity. Some of the tradition bearer, would like to opine it as one of the secondary dances.

16. Mufur Gelenai :-

The whole character of this dance is just like a bear. The dance is performed by crawling on earth. While the bear is moving around the jungle in search of food it scratches the earth and throw it out to his backside. This kind of actions are shown by the Doudini and some actions are done by a Douri at the same time at kheriasali (place of kheria worship). While it is busy in searching its food, some other performers try to drive it (bear) away from the spot. In the last moment a chicken is sacrificed in the name of a deity which is known Burlee Buri. It is also a kind of secondary kherai dance so for as opined by some one else.

17. Gorai Dabrainai :-

Involvement of all the performers are essential for this dance, where a Douri is engaged as a horse rider and others, along with Doudini, involve themselves as the performers. Some of them become the person who drive it away and some others become the person who are driven out from the spot to the jungle. For this horse riding dance a banana branch is made a horse which will be ride by a Douri. In a queue position where in the front the Douri performed as
horse rider will be followed by *Doudini* and she will be followed by other performer. Among the groups one person feed the *ophri* (rice beer) forcefully to the rider and also to all performers, one person take the banana branch in order to beat on earth for a big sound. This performance is performed whimsically with a grand musical tune and the performer turned around the altar for several time and lastly flee in the south direction. A chicken is sacrificed in the name of a deity who is known as *Basumati*.

19. *Zaraphagla Dance*:

The last dance item which is performed at the dawn by the *Doudini* is *Zaraphagla dance* (which is performed in the name of *Zaraphagla*, an old man). This dance is associated with the story of *Zaraphagla*. *Zaraphagla* was the richest old man who has seven daughter in laws among whom *Mongli* or *Thenthamali* was the most beloved youngest daughter in law of *Zaraphagla*. *Zara* was always in favour of *Mongli*, he used to call only *Mongli* when he felt thirsty, hungry (when coming from somewhere else) and also inquired about any other essential materials (goods) like umbrella, *thokhon* (bamboo stick), *daba* (knife) etc. Other daughter in laws disliked the intimacy between *Zara* and *Mongli*, they would like to blame *Mongli* that she has a illicit relationship with her father in law. *Mongli*, who always believe the truth and reality, could not tolerate such type of blame. One day she fled away from her home without giving any information. As a result *Zara* become *phagla* (mad). He left home and
started to move in search of Mongli- “with no Mongli no rest”, without drinking and eating. The dance illustrated the acting of Zara when he was in search of Mongli.

For this dance performance Doudini being the Zaraphagla takes an umbrella, thokhon (bamboo sticks), jolonga (bag made of cloths) on her shoulder. In this item she presents some dialogues of Zara phagla just like Zaraphagla in the tune of Zara and select his bihamjw (daughter in law) from the public gathering and bring inside the kheraisali. She is considered as Mongli who was the younger daughter in law of old man Zara. She provide him (to Zara ) a full bowl of jou (rice beer). After this dance it turns to the last item.

(VII) Mainao Thisonnai or Borainai :-

The last item is Mainao Thisonnai /dikhangnai or borainai which is most important part of Kherai dance or Puja.

This last item of Mainao thisonnai (carrying of wealth) is performed by two selected young girls or women. These two young girls will carry the two don mairong (full of bamboo container uncooked rice) and mai (paddy grains), which are already kept at Bathou altar of the Kheraisali on her head one in each. A band of musical group would play the specific musical tune and Doudini and other audience also participate in the dance gorgeously with big slogan like –“Asu mainaoni- jwi, Sali mainaoni-jwi, Bima mainaoni –jwi; jwi Afa Bwrai Bathouni – jwi’’ etc. and keep it inside the granary of Douri of the village organization.
As I observed in the field Doudini is the main performer of the kherai worship or puja. She is the media through which the whole worship is performed. Addressing to the Afa Bwrai Bathou and thirty three crore (33 crore) deities the Bailung oja recite the mantras and Doudini (a woman oracle) becomes possessed with spiritual power (wlwngikhangnai) and the puja get started. After being possessed she gives messages on future prospect regarding the crops and diseases. Sometimes she cries for dissatisfactory activities of human beings due to disgrace of wealth (especially of Iwkhi or rice) and blame the man. In such occasion oja and representatives from public try their level best to convince her and provide what she wants to offer and sacrifice to respective deities. A band of musical group starts playing the kham (drum), sifung (flute), jotha (cymbal) and she starts dancing with her sword and sacrifices fowls to the respective deities.

Each and every item of Kherai dance contains three parts. Firstly, she starts her dance with the help of musical tune around the altar and identifies the deities to Douri to whom offer is to sacrificed with the help of sword and she keeps standing on Bathou’s jatha or bijuli bamboo on the one hand. Then Douri will sacrifice the fowls and give the blood at khurwi (bowl) to her on the other. Second part of musical tune is started and the Doudini offer the blood by dancing and sprinkling with her finger to all deities, even to the musical instruments (kham, sifung, jotha) and finally drink the blood. Suddenly, she becomes senseless but the oja and musical group brings her back to sense and thirdly and finally she starts dancing and wash the khurwi (bowl). So each and every item of
dances contains three parts. Likewise mainly eighteen kinds of *kherai* dances were performed during the whole night to the accompaniment of the musical tune played by the instrument players.

The types and pattern of dances are different, sometimes she takes *thungri* (sword), sometimes long white cloth, *thal* (shield) and *raidwng* (cane) and sometimes she takes the water pot. The performer as well as informant, while I was in the field study, told that each and every item of *kherai* dances are associated with songs but now a days these are not sung at the performance due to the lack of singer or performer. However the performance of dances are found very attractive and expressive alongwith the gestures of the *Doudini*.

It can be mentioned here that the *Doudini* do the sacrifice in some dances like *Sagwlaog Bwnai, Khamao Barkhwnai, Thungri Ganai* and the rest of the sacrifices are performed by the *Douri*.

Sometimes, if any of the musical group of players dissatisfy her with their uncomfortable musical tune she would look at the individual player angrily and blame them by calling the code name and saying the words like —

"*Dwi khaolai gwswm, -swbadwde!*

*Dwi khuga gwlao sudw de!*

*Dwi gaorema damdw de etc."

**English Rendering** –

"hallo black cheek, slap it!

4 Informant Miss Rajuli Basumatary, (F-26) Doudini, Gohpur, Sonitpur.

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Hallo long mouth play it!
Hallo gaorema (an insect) play it etc.”

There is no formal training to be a Doudini. Any woman can become a Doudini if she could possess spiritual power while the oja recite the concerned mantras along with a band of concerned musical tune at Kheraisali which may be considered as magical one. Other than this type of woman no one can become a Doudini even if she desires to be a Doudini.

The performers of Kheria dance are –

(a) Doudini (woman oracle) who is the main performer,

(b) Bailung oja who chant the mantras,

(c) Boro Douri who is entrusted to sacrifice the fowls for and on behalf of the public.

(d) A band of musical group who play the kham, sifung, jotha (drum, flute, cymbal),

(e) Public who supply the required materials for sacrifice and offering (like areca nut, betel leaves, fowls, banana, mustard oil, eggs, cane, cloths etc.)

It is also mentioned that in earlier days pigs, buffalos, ducks, goats etc. were sacrificed in the name of different deities in different pujas. But now a days goat, fowls (chicken and pigeon, some where ducks and pigs) etc. are sacrificed.
INTRODUCTION:

In Bathouism there are several ways of worshiping the Bwrai Bathou or the God and Garja puja is one of them. It is observed twice in a year.

Traditionally there are eighteen kinds of Garjas in Bathou religion.

These are given below :-

(1) Lwkhi garja
(2) Asu garja
(3) Gao garja
(4) Songe-songe garja
(5) Songe-songe fwrja
(6) Garja Sio-sin
(7) Garja Dio-sin
(8) Maoria garja
(9) Saoria garja
(10) Sem-semali garja
(11) Dosemali garja
(12) Sam-sam garja
(13) Khal-dano garja
(14) Nel-dano garja
Of which only two are observed in natural context. They are – (i) *Lwkhi* garja and (ii) *Hambai* garja. Remaining sixteen garjas are observed within these two main garjas. All these deities are worshipped through these two garjas. Plaintain leaves are placed in the name of all the deities and various things such as fowls, areca nuts, betel leaves, vermilion, bananas etc. are offered or sacrificed in their names. The *oja* (medicine man who chant the mantra in the puja) repeatedly chants the mantras in the names of these deities and in this way the *Garja puja* is observed. The following is a description of *garja puja* which I observed during my visit to the spot of my field work.

(i) **LWKHI GARJA** :

This *Garja* is observed in the name of *Lwkhi* or *Mainao* (goddess of property and wealth). It is usually observed before the time of harvest of crops in and around of *khathi dan* (Assamese *Kati mah*) to ensure a rich and proper harvest so that the peasants do not have to starve or suffer owing to some unforeseen disaster or natural calamity.

This *garja* is celebrated by dividing into two parts of deities where the Boro deities viz- domestic deities, which are nine in number, are offered in the
northern part and other nine deities which are designed as *Harsa* deities viz-deities of jungle, are offered in the southern part. The Boro deities are benevolent deities and that’s the reason why Boro people worship them for the welfare and prosperity of their families, village community as a whole. On the other hand the *Harsa* deities are worshipped by offering fowls, fruits, prasads in order to get relief from troubles and distresses while they go to the jungle in search of collecting firewood, thatch etc. and also while go for fishing, hunting. Because the Boros, as per their migratory character is concerned, dwelled amidst the jungle by cutting down the jungle as their new land and engaged themselves in agricultural works. They believe in the motto- “If truth ever exists, it dwells in the jungle”.

So they never forget to worship these *Harsa* deities in order to appeal them so that they would not harm their families and cattle.

**The deities of both Boros and Harsa are given below** –

1. *Wrwn Bathou*
2. *Biswahari*
3. *Mahedeva*
4. *Bormali*
5. *Laokhar gosai*  
   *Boro deities*  
6. *Sikhna Bwrai*
7. *Dwisa*
8. *Dwikhlong*
The manner in which the things are offered or sacrificed in the names of the various deities are as follows:

(1) A pair of pigeons are sacrificed in the name of Wrwn Bathou.

(2) In the name of Biswahari (goddess of snake) too, a pair of pigeons are sacrificed.

(3) In the name of both Bormali and Mahadeva a pair of pigeons for each of them are sacrificed without cutting but chanting by some mantras. It is believed that these deities do not accept the blood.

(5) A pair of pigeons are flown (set free) in the name of Laokhar gosai (deity of cowherds)

(6) A pair of pigeons are sacrificed in the name of Sikhna Bwrai

(7) A pigeon is sacrificed in the name of Dwisa
(8) A pigeon is sacrificed in the name of Dwikhlong.

(9) In the name of Santhi a pigeon is sacrificed.

10. The noma no has several occupants or deities and several fowls are offered in the name of respective deities. For instance five chickens are offered in the name of Garja, Ailwng, Song Raja, Duwari Bwrai and Duwari Burwi one in each. An egg is offered in the name of Mainao (goddess of wealth and property)

11. In the name of Bag Raja (Ba-Raja) a red coloured cock is sacrificed (He is believed to be a jungle deity).

12. In the name of Simsa Bwrai and Simsa Burwi a small chicken for each of them are sacrificed.

13. In the name of Jwmwn Bwrai and Jwmwn Burwi too a chicken for each of them is sacrificed.

14. In the name of Phwrja phisa a hen is sacrificed.

15. A white cock and a white hen is sacrificed in the name of San Mwdai (goddess of Sun or light).

16. In the name of five Baro Birgwn Sikhlaphwr (air borne fairies) a chicken for each of them is sacrificed. They punish the evil doers or sinners by creating troubles for them. The names of these five fairies are (i) Hamphey (ii) Dumpheny (iii) Maidangshree (iv) Dhwnshree and (v) Jambi.
17. In the name of Bhoot Bikhas (goddess of spirits) a hen is sacrificed.

18. In the name of Kuber a red cock is sacrificed.

(A) In the name of Ganesh a red cock is sacrificed:

Besides this offering a bottle of seref (country or local liquor) is also offered. In addition to these a silim thangkhu and ganja are also inserted in the trunk of the Ganesh.

The above given and discussed in the serial no.10 is called Noma No (main house of the garja worship) or Bathou in the name of its main occupant of Bathou Bwrai Himself (the God).

This Noma No has got several parts as well as rules of its own. Besides it has several occupants in it, the chief among them is Garja Mwdai or Bathou Bwrai Himself who is also known as Song Raja, the owner of Bathou. In the name of this Garja Mwdai, mairong donse (a basketful of uncooked rice, the material used in making the basket is bamboo) is offered. On the surface of the rice a laijou (a plaintain leaf) is placed, then again a pair of areca nuts and betel leaves along with a few uncooked rice are placed on the plaintain leaf. Besides a pot of wine especially prepared by the Boro Douri by observing some specific rules is also offered. The wine pot must be fresh and unused. A bunch of bananas is also offered. After all these offerings a cock and a chicken are sacrificed in the name of Song Raja or Garja Mwdai. The next occupant of the hut is Mainao Burwi. An
egg is offered in her name. The remaining occupants or deities of the hut are *Duwari Bwrai* and *Duwari Burwi*. In their name also two chickens are sacrificed.

The ritual of *Mainao Langnai* (carring out of wealth and property) is done from the hut.

(B) In the figure indicated (B) denotes five *Gongar* deities. A chicken is sacrificed in the name of *Simsa Bwrai –Burwi* or *Gongar Raja* and the half portion of this sacrificed chicken is cooked and offered to the five other *Gongar* deities (shared).

In the name of the deities mentioned above (given) a pair of areca –nuts, betel leaves and bananas are offered on the plaintain leaf for each of them. Small gaps are mentained in between the *fathali* offered for deities which are called *Nathai* and in these *Nathai* finely cut pieces of areca nuts and betel leaves are offered. In the name of each deity a pair of incense sticks are burnt. Besides these, small flags are fixed (unfurled) in front of each deity. The colour of these flags should be red and white alternatively. The *seref* (liquor) offered to *Gonesh* is distributed or shared among all *Harsa* deities.

**Preparation of Garja :**

The day before the *garja puja*, during the day time, a purification ceremony called *Habsa* or *Absa hwnai* is observed by the worshippers. This ceremony is observed at any selected place within the village which may be on
the road of the village or may be in the office or in the land of village community. The purification is compulsory in case there are any kind of adulteration or violation of prescribed norms (for instance violation of eating norms, sexual norms etc.). A pair of chickens along with a pair of pigeons are sacrificed in the name of this purification ceremony.

Then on the day before starting the *Garja puja* a pigeon and a hen is sacrificed in the name of the local river, one which flows near the village.

**Absa / Habsa Hwnai:**

This *Absa/Habsa Hwnai* is a kind of pre-preparation of *Lwkhi Garja* which is worship just before the *garja puja* starts. In this worship a chicken is sacrifice while *bailung oja* chanted the *mantra*. The *mantra* is given below-

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"Dai nang jwdw nang afa Bura Bathou moharaja sibinang khat janangwn bad janangwn. Dai dondokhou, nwng afanwnw jwng gothaina hwbai, manw hwnbla dinwi rubibar (17-11-13) khali sansuni be somao jwngni satthagami-satthagamia jabai-Mohonpur, Gopsar Mohonpur, khwla ha gejerao fwbai Nimaipur, gejerao thbai Pup Begapara, khwla ha jwbtharnayao thbai Hokhradoba, gejer thakhwao thbai Dhalkhata, saha jwbtharnayao thbai Uttar Begapara. Be satthagamijwng swrniwa nokhorni, gamini gao giathi raijw fisafwr raijw janayao khwndw khwndw, bandw bandw, bhool bhranti thalangnw hagou. Manw jaya janw jwngtho mansisw-munus maya, nwngswr jabai deb debogn ai afa. Bekhainw hwndwng thakhw thakhw gwrwnthifwr jalangdwngbla-
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Significant Meaning:

These are the utterances made during the purification ceremony observed by the Nimaipur Ancholik Committee Bathou Dhwhwrwm Afad before the Lwkhi Garja. This ceremony is essential before every Lwkhi Garja. Therefore, on the 17th of November, 2013 (Sunday), at noontime, people from seven villages viz. Mohanpur, Gopsar Mohanpur, Nimaipur, East Begapara, Hakradoba, Dhalkata and North Begapara congregated for this ceremony. During the ceremony Bathou Bwrai was invoked and appealed to purge them all and the concerned place too so that Lwkhi Garja could be observed. The devotees

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5 Informant: Sri Gajen Basumatary, 58, Bailung Oja, Dhalkata, Udalguri.
humbly admitted before Him that being mortal beings it is probable that they
have knowingly or unknowingly committed innumerable sins in their life. They
remorsefully acknowledged the dwindling state of purity among mankind,
compassion, human relationships, education and religiosity for which their lives
have become miserable. Thereafter they appealed Bwrai Bathou to be
compassionate and considerate towards them. They appealed Him to purge them
all and also the concerned place of all the possible impurities so that they could
prepare for the Lwkhi Garja.

The Boro Douri, who is already selected and appointed is to play some
specific and pivotal role for this Garja puja. He is the only person who is
allowed to cook or prepare the jou gwthar (especially prepared rice beer) just one
week (minimum) before the scheduled date. No other female member, even the
wife of Boro Douri, is allowed to touch the item as its strict restriction is
concerned. Again the Douri of both Boro and Harsa are restricted from eating of
rice at any other family.

The committee of the village community declare or announce the
scheduled date for the celebration and call upon all individual families to co-
operate by contributing minimum jou thatse (one jar of rice beer) and a chicken
or pigeon for the ceremony.

The committee of the village community give an announcement to confess
if any one has committed or involved himself or herself in any kind of sexual
relationship in between unmarried couple when a general meeting was held and it
will be resolved to celebrate the ceremony or puja by fixing the date unanimously, if no such case is found.

**Materials Required for the Garja worship:**

Sufficient areca nuts, betel leaves, bananas, uncooked rice, paddy grains, hens, cocks, chicken, pigeons, vermilion, incense sticks, dhuna, plaintain leaves, don (a basket used to keep uncooked rice which is made of bamboo), bamboo, a jatha made of the lips of the bamboo, sacred thread (ewa suta), earthen lamps, (saki), match box, cloths for flags (red, white colour), dona (plates cut of the trunks of banana tree).

**Mainao Langnai:**

Mainao Langnai (the ritual of carrying away the wealth and property) ritual is an essential part of preparation by each individual family of the village. For this celebration every household of the village plant a pair of banana tree in front of the gate of their houses and send a representative (a female member of the family) to bring the Mainao (wealth) to their homes so that she (Mainao or Lwkh) would bless their homes with good fortune of wealth and property.

The representatives who go for carrying out the Mainao (wealth and property) should prepare herself aptly or properly for this purpose before going to the Garja site. She must take her bath, then she should put on a new and clean or fresh dokhna (cloths), besides she should let her hair loose. A *sandri* (a sieve
made of bamboo, *saloni* in Assamese) is also required for this purpose. At the
center of this *sandri* three small or low posts of bamboo should be planted in the
style of three corners of a triangle. Then *awa khundung* (sacred thread of *ewa
suta* usually used in religious ceremonies or *pujas*) is wrapped round the three
small posts or poles. There after an earthen lamp is placed inside the area within
the three posts. Then the person concerned carries the *sandri* (sieve) on her head
and proceeds towards the *garja sali* (the site of *garja puja*) to carrying away the
*Mainao* to her home. Goddess *Mainao* is supposed to be the daughter of *Bathou
Bwrai* as per Boros belief is concerned.

Now *Mainao* (goddess of wealth and property) is kept inside a small hut
called *Noma No* in *Garja sali* (place of *Garja* worship) which is also called
*Bathou* and *Song Raja*. Before *Mainao* could be carried away permission has to
be obtained from the *Bathou Bwrai* or the father of the goddess *Mainao*. This
task is done by the *oja* who pleads on behalf of the people who eagerly waits to
carry away *Mainao* to their respective homes. The *Oja* gives promises to *Bathou
Bwrai* or *Song Raja* for and on behalf of the people in exchange for the *Mainao.*
The promises is “**we will preserve you benignly. We never spoil you.**”

A grand slogan will be shouted by the performer and also dance will be
performed by the representative when carried away the wealth to their homes.
Slogans are –

“**Bima Mainaoni .......jwi**

*Asu Mainaoni .......jwi*
English Rendering –

“For the mother Mainao.........hurrah
For the Asu Mainao.........hurrah
For the Sali Mainao.........hurrah
For the father Bwrai Bathou.........hurrah”.

(ii) HAMBAI GARJA

Hambai Garja is also another kind of Garja. This Garja is a kind of puja which is observed during the month of Bwisag (towards the end of March and April). Here the deities are the same ones who are worshipped during the Lwkhi Garja. The objective of this Garja is to ensure a safety against different kinds of ailments or diseases and to make the villagers free from any kind of danger. The village folk believe that the place of Hambai Garja worship should be on the western side of the village and it should also be situated near a river. All the offerings are almost same to that of the Lwkhi Garja but only few more items are included in this Garja. Besides these new items of offerings, two more rituals are performed in the Garja as its speciality. These are (a) Lama gathenai (blocking of entrance through which evil doers come), and b) Bhasani (floating away of offerings)
(a) Lama Gathenai :

This *Lama gathenai* (blocking of entrance through which evil deities come) ritual is an important part of *Hambai garja* which has come down the generation traditionally since time immemorial. There’s a general belief among the followers of *Bathou* religion that pestilences such as *Markhi Ornai* (epidemics like bubonic plague, diarrhoea, cholera etc.) and troubles and distresses or danger usually come from the northern side (usually from the densely wooden hilly region). That’s why it is necessary to block this way in order to stop the inflow of diseases or other troubles. For this special practice two important things are required viz- (i) *Mora thokhon* (dead stick) and (ii) *Jiya thokhon* (life giving stick) which are made of straw. These two sticks are placed at the northern end of the village as the destroyer of the evil forces. The mantras is –

**Lama Gathenai Mantra :**

*Aham fwd se,*

*Dohai afa Bwrai Bathou*

*Nwi dinwi Bandwguri gamia*

*Hambai garja hwdwng-jwngni be*

*Hwnayao thinayao mabafwr gwrwngthi jabaibla*

*Jwngkhou nimaha hwnangwn*

*-Dohai afa Bwrai Bathou khoroni thow mwnhwngwn*

*Khoborder afa jwngni gamiao*

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Kh widang khwifwd, bemar ajar, makhri maor

Jahwnw mwnnai nonga-

Sahani humai khwlaha narthe nangwn,

Khwlahani humai saja narthe nangwn,

Swnabhani humai sanjaha narthe nangwn,

Sanjahani humai swnabha narthe nangwn.

Khobordar

Naha thangwn-mwiha thangwn

Hagrayao bongrayao hanthigwn

Jibou jibadjananwi, mwsa mufur jananwi

Bhoot-bikhas jananwi

Sigi sogo khalamnw mwnnai nonga

Noni mwnis noao sofwhwnangwn dei

Afa Bwrai Bathou.

Nwi dinwi beni thakhainw

Mora laothi jiya laothikhou

Rwikha giri hisabwi dwnnai jabai.⁶

Significant Meaning:

This oration is a part of the *Lama gathenai* ceremony (evil path blocking ceremony) that was observed by the people of Bandwguri village as a part of

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⁶ Informant: Sri Gabda Basumatary, (M-75), Majuli, Udalguri.
**Hambai Garja.** During this ceremony *Bwrai Bathou* was invoked and appealed to provide all round protection to the residents of that village. They appealed Him to protect them from all kinds of danger such as danger from wild beasts and poisonous snakes, dangers from evil spirits and deadly diseases or epidemics etc. They also appealed Him to ensure safe return of those who venture out of the village. Finally, they concluded the ceremony by planting two sticks—*mora laothi-jiya laothi* on a specific spot at the outskirt of the village to serve as talismans to ward off all evils and dangers.

**(b) Bhasani:**

This ritual is an old practice which has been considered as most important part of *Hambai Garja*. It is a ritual of floating away the various objects offered or sacrificed during the *Hambai Garja*. The things are like a head of a goat, pigeon, chicken, which are sacrificed during the *Garja puja* and also included areca nuts, betel leaves, vermilion, banana insence sticks which are floated away on a raft made out of banana trunks. It is believed that the evils of the village can be got rid of in this process. None of the performers are allowed to look back at the floated items as so far as the traditional belief and faith is concerned.

**Role of Garja performance:**

The following are the responsible persons who play vital role in *Garja puja.*
(i) **Bailung oja:**

An oja who is termed as Bailung oja in Boro is an indispensable part of all the pujas and celebration of traditional Bathouism. He is the one of who chant the mantras and envoke each and every deities and the Douri offers and sacrifice the fowls and animals in the name of the respective deities. The success or failure of the puja depends upon the role of the oja in case the oja commits any error in chanting his mantras or if he skips the name of any deity in chanting their name then the puja may turn into a failure. For instance in No.2 Bandorguri village’s Garja, during an offering ceremony to the deity of Mahadeva, a pair pigeons which were supposed to die after the completion of the chanting of mantras, did not die just because the name of Mara-jiya river was unintentionally left out. That is to say the oja plays a vital role from the begining of the puja till the end.

(ii) **Harsa Douri:**

All the offerings and sacrifices to Harsa deities are performed by the Harsa Douri. It is the Harsa Douri who does the sacrificial task while the oja chants the mantras.

(iii) **Boro Douri:**

All the offerings and sacrifices to the Boro deities are performed by the Boro Douri with the help of the Oja. He is entitled to a share of half part of each of the things which are sacrificed like pigeons, chickens etc. in the name of the
deities. The remaining half part goes to the devotees (village community) who feasts upon it.

(iv) Raijw Raja:

The Garja puja is performed for the welfare of the whole village. The role of Raijw Raja or public of the village is to provide all the materials required for the puja. Since there is a general feasting after the completion of puja the village keep themselves busy preparing for the feast like cooking various items and preparing jou or rice beer.

WORSHIP PERFORMED BY THE FAMILY IN PARTICULAR

Bormanı or Biswashari (Puja for snake goddess)

This is a worship performed by individual families in particular, once in a year by the followers of the traditional Bathou religion. There is no fixed date for this performance. Some families worship it during the time of Wngkham gwrlwi janai (new cooked rice) in the month of (Assamese) Aghon (Nov-Dec) and some others perform it in the month of Magh (Assamese) or Jan- Feb and also some other worship it in the month of Bohag (April- May).

The guardians of the family perform this worship with the help of an oja (who chanted the mantra) at the five different places of the homestead. These places are:

(a) north east corner of the compound.
(b) at Bathou altar

(c) inside the ising khona (kitchen)

(d) at the foot step of the granary and

(e) inside the cowshed.

(a) The first and foremost performance is held at the north east corner of
the compound in the name of Bormani or Biswahari (the goddess of snake). The
Boros believe that the creator of pains and trouble is the Biswahari. Therefore a
black he/she goat is sacrificed in her name in the place. Of course, some families
sacrifice a pair of pigeons for the same. However, it is mentionable that the
performance is based on the tradition since long time. Those who sacrificed goats
in the past should sacrifice only goats and those who have been sacrificing
pigeons from the past should sacrifice only pigeons. For this performance a place
at the size of 3/4 sq. feet is cleaned after cutting down its grass and jungle during
the time of pre-preparation hours or day. The place is washed with the water
before starting the worship. A plantain leaf is placed and a pair of areca nuts and
betel leaves are kept on the leaf along with an alari bathi (earthen lamp), pair of
bananas, some quantity of gazi or prasads, incense sticks, small quantity of
uncooked rice (mairong alua) etc. and made ready. It can be mentioned here that
these kind of ingredients are required in the four other places also. The place
where the performance would take place and also all the other items are sprinkled
with the holly water (which is already prepared for the purposed) and make it
purified. The guardian performer takes his bath and kneel down during the performance is taken place. The oja chants the specific mantras on the one hand and the worship is started by the guardian performer for and on behalf of the family on the other. In the meantime, some prasads and betel leaves are given to the goat to eat at the worship place and then the goat is sacrificed by cutting its neck at a stroke with the help of a sharp sword. The blood and the head is offered to the deity.

After this performance all the performer move to the Bathou alter at courtyard and sacrifice a chicken in the name of Bwrai Bathou. Next to this offering a chicken is, again, sacrificed inside the ising khona (kitchen) in the name of Song Bwrai and Song Burwi and also offer an egg in the name of Mainao Burwi at same place. A red cock is sacrifice at the footstep of granary in the name of Bagraja deity and again, lastly a pair of pigeons are sacrifice (of course some family set free) in the name of Laokhar Gosai at cowshed respectively.

The rural folk gives importance and perform this worship as its compulsorily worship once in a year. They always extend help and cooperate with each other in any kind of domestic or family practice. Therefore, when a village family observes a family worship, all the members of the family and the relatives too will attend the worship and extend their cooperation.
The mantras refer to the concerned deity who is prayed and appealed not to afflict them with any kind of pains in the body and also request not to disgrace their cattle and fowls.

**SALAMI OR SALAMNI:**

*Salami* is also a kind of worship which is performed by a family in particular and also by a village community.

But this is not the main worship, but an alternative of *Bormani* or *Biswahtari* (snake goddess) or any other annual worship like *Garja, Kherai* for the village community. This worship is done usually when a certain family fails to do the annual pujas due to some unavoidable circumstances.

In this worship the head of the family sacrifices a chicken in name of the respective deities and informs that due to some unavoidable circumstances such as financial crisis or shortage, domestic problems, he could not perform the worship. He also assures them that he would surely worship them in the coming year by any means.

The place of this worship is selected at the north-east corner of the campus of that particular family.

The same worship is performed by the village community also but rarely seen on some ground. They sacrifice a pair of pigeons and a chicken by the roadside of the village community where the *Douri* with the help of *oja* along with few more members of the community play the pivotal role.
These worships, however, are not performed by the followers of modified Bathouism.

**GUNAKHAR**

**INTRODUCTION:**

This is a kind of domestic or family puja which is celebrated once in a year. But due to some unavoidable circumstances this family which I have referred to in the second paragraph could not celebrate this since three years. As a result they had frequent night mares and some of their domestic animals like cows, goats, fowls too died without any reason. Therefore, this family decided to worship this puja in order to get rid of the above mentioned troubles.

It was my finding in the field study at the village No.2 Bandorguri, P.O. Bandorguri, Dist.- Udalguri, BTAD (Assam), dated 18-05-2011 (Wednesday) at Mr. Rajesh Khakhliari’s (42) family which was celebrated or worshiped from 8.00am to 2.00 pm.

Here in this puja or worship four paternal relatives who are called Bahagi in Boro who have already got separated within the village and also some maternal relatives who are called Khurma’s in Boro collaborate by sharing various offering items. Among them a family would contribute a goat (black in colour), others will provide the fowls and they will engage themselves physically, mentally during the worship.
In this puja one black coloured goat, two pigs, seventeen chickens and three pairs of pigeons, are sacrificed in the name of different deities at different sacrificial places.

In this worship an oja played a vipotal role. While he chanted the mantras, family's Douri sacrificed the several fowls and animals and other relatives provides the chickens, pigeons and any other necessary material from the stock when required.

**Aim of the puja :**

Aiming at the relief from any trouble and distresses of the family members, its welfare and prosperity, it has been celebrated since long time from forefather to this generation.

**Description of the puja :**

This *Gunakhar puja* is performed in five different places within the campus of the family as its different parts at the

(i) north east corner of the campus,

(ii) *Bathou* altar

(iii) kitchen

(iv) courtyard

(v) cowshed
The required materials are betel nut-leaves, prasads, banana fruits, plantain leaves, saki, uncooked rice, basils, vermilion, holy water, a sword, mustard oil, a black colour goat, three pairs of pigeons, seventeen chickens, two pigs etc. for the whole performance.

(i) At the north-east corner of the campus:

At the chosen corner of the campus, the separate places adjacent to each other, are prepared for the worship of Biswahari, Mahadeva and Bormali on the day before the puja. On the day of the worship or puja the three places are arranged from the north to south. On each place a plaintain leaf is placed on which five fathalis (leaves) are layed out and again on each fathali (leave) some prasads, pairs of bananas, pair of betel nuts and leaves are offered as shown in the chart given below.

These above shown three places are arranged in the name of Biswahari, Mahadeva and Bormali respectively from the north to south serially. In the
northern two places which are arranged for the Biswahari (the goddess of snakes or pains) and Mahadeva, a pair of pigeons are sacrificed without cutting the neck. It seems magical one that a pair of pigeon is hold at the place by the douri while oja chanted the mantras, when oja started his mantra, on or before completing the mantra the pigeon got dead. After sacrificing two pairs of pigeons in the same process in two places it started the sacrifice at the third important place.

For this act of sacrificing a he goat is brought and after it bathed, with the help of other member it is castrated. This goat is arranged for the sacrifice - a banana trunk is kept inside the middle of the four legs of the goat, the douri stays in a position of kneeling down and get ready for sacrificing by holding the sword, some other relatives or worshipers also accompany at the sacrifice. Some of them catch the tail of the goat, some others catch the legs and the body, at the same time the oja chants the mantras and the douri cut the neck at a strock. The following mantra is chanted while the worship is performed;

"Aham, dihai afa Bwrai Bathou nwi dinwi Gunakhar pujakhou dinwi nwngswrrnw, bwswrekhia puja khou dinwi nwngswrrnw hwdwngmwn, jibon hotya pujakhou hwdwngmwn, fisafwr beohainw dinwi nwngswrrw jibon hotya pujakhou dinwi nwngswrrw (ajaonanwi) lanangou, beohainw ma khalamnw dinwi khailab githoa nwngswrrnw rannanwi hwdwng-khurnanwi hwdwng, baidisina baidimwia khalamnanwi dan dokkhinikhou hwdwngmwn fisafwr, beaonw nwngswrrw swithwni giri swithwao thanangou, manni giri manao thanangou. Beohainw wjwnghai swr swr dongmwn aywi bima guru beohainw- mora dhwnsri dongmwn,
jiya dhwnsri dongmwn, ai nodi dongmwn, ai mwnasw dongmwn; wjwnghalai swr 
swr dongmwn- rani fokhri, raja fokhri dongmwn; wjwnghalai swr swr dongmwn-
ai bima guru beonw nwngswrw swthwni girī swthwao thanangwn, mannī girī 
manao thanangwn. Wjwng ma khalamnw — nala nali, dwisa-dwikhlong baidisina 
baidimwia dongmwn fīsawr, beohainw ma-dwima thwiblabw rega thalangw 
hwnnanwi bungdwnngmwn- dinwī khailab gothoa (Rajesh Khakhiali) nwngswrw 
bwswrekhia pujakhou dinwi nwngswrw-Gunakhar pujakhou jibon hotya 
pujakhou hwdwnmwn-2 no Bandwguri gamini khailab gothoa dinwi 5 no 
Majulini ai afsawrāb fwinanwi gasibw fwinanwi be pujakhou hwdwnngmwn-
khailab gothoni nokhorni gotho gothai bisi fisakhou nwngswrw dinwi baidisina 
baidimwia khalamnanwi sīgi sogo khalamnw mwnnai nonga-swthwni girī 
swthwao thanangwn, mannī girī manau thanangwn-dohai guru aifwr khwnasong 
de dinwi...

Hwng......wjwnghalai swr dongmwn—aiywi bima guru, beonw nwngswrw—
ai bisohori dongmwn, ai mohadeb dongmwn, ai bormali dongmwn, wjwnghalai 
swr dongmwn-mora dhwnsri dongmwn jiya dhwnsri dongmwn—ai nodi 
dongmwn, ai mwnasu dongmwn,-nongna nonga fisawr?—dongoda—?—swthwni 
girī swthwao thanangou hwdwng, mannī girī manao thanangwn. Dinwi 
wngswrwkhailab gothoa bwswrekhia pujakhou-jed Danni 3 tharikao(18-5-
11, Budbar) nwngswrw Gunakhar pujakhou dinwi nwngswrw bwswrekhia 
pujakhou, dan dokkhinikhō hwnanwi jibon hotya pujakhou hwdwng hwnnanwi 
bungdwnngmwn, swithwnigirī swithwao thanangwn, mannī girī manao thanangou
These utterances were made by the priest who performed the annual Gunakhar Puja at the residence of Mr Rajesh Khakhlari of No-2 Bandwguri who

Informant: Sri Gabda Basumatary (M-75), Oja, Majuli, Udalguri.
happens to be one of my informants. Mr Rajesh being the head of the family performs the sacrificial task and therefore is being referred to as the Khilab Gotho during the puja. The priest at first invokes Bwrai Bathou and then implicitly refers to other deities namely Barmani, Mahadeva and Barmali and thereby informs them that the annual Gunakhar Puja or the puja involving sacrificial ceremonies is being observed by the Khilab Gotho. He informs the deities about the presence of some river nymphs like Mora Dhwnsri, Jiya Dhwnsri, Aai Nadi, Manasu, Rani Phakhri and Raja Phakhri during the puja. Besides these river nymphs he also utters the names of numerous brooks and canals and finally appeals to all the deities to accept the offerings and bless the family of the Khailab Gotho for all the inhabitants of No-2 Bandwguri are also praying on their behalf. The priest appeals to them not only to bless the family but also to refrain from tormenting the family in future.

The priest then repeats his previous utterances with a melodious tune and rhythmical rendering. Besides the melodious rendering, one or two other additional details are also included by the priest. This time those deities who were implicitly referred to in the previous utterances are explicitly invoked including one or more deity, i.e. Biswahari. The priest again confirms the presence of the various river nymphs named earlier. As it is quite customary among the Boros to mention the day and month of the puja, the priest too mentions the date and month (which was the 3rd day of the zeth month) of the Gunakhar puja and gives details of the various offerings made to the deities. He
then appeals to the deities to look after the concerned family so that they do not have to suffer. He tells the deities that the sacrificial ceremonies were being done exactly the way Guru Mena had told long time ago. Therefore, the deities are appealed again to accept the puja and the offerings made by the concerned family.

(ii) At the Bathou altar:

The second performance of worship is done at the Bathou altar of the courtyard. An ali (path) starting from the Bathou altar to the northern end is made which is same in arrangement with Kheraisali (the ali/path signifies the process of life is mandatory for every human being), where eighteen fathalis (plaintain leaves) in the name of eighteen deities are laid out on which some common items like pairs of betel leaves and nuts, pairs of banana fruits, some prasads are offered. An alari bathi (earthen lamp) is lighted in each fathali in the name of each deity and pairs of insence sticks are burnt. Pairs of khangkhla (a kind of plant like kohuah bon in Assamese) which are eighteen pairs in number in the name of eighteen deities and a maya je (a net made of bamboo strip which signifies the critical process of human life) are made. Afterwards sacrifice starts serially and respectively from Bathou altar in the name given and discussed below –

1. First of all a red cock is sacrificed in the name of Bwrai Bathou at Bathou altar.
2. In the second also a red coloured cock is sacrificed in the name of Wrwn Bathou.

3. In the third, four hens are sacrificed in the name of four goddesses who are known as Laifathi, Narathi, Sarathi and Lafathi respectively.

7. In the seventh, a hen is sacrificed in the name of Ailwng deity, the deity of earth.

8. In the eight a cock is sacrificed in the name of Agrang deity, the deity of water.

9. In the 9th a chicken (either cock or hen) is sacrificed in the name of Sikhri-Sikhla.

10. In the 10th a chicken is sacrificed in the name of Jal-khungri, Bish Khungri, the goddess of water.

11. In the 11th a chicken (if the colour is white it is belief to be the good one) is sacrificed in the name of San-chakra, the deity of pains.

12. Four chickens, one in each in the name of Lal-Khubir, Dola-Khubir, Gwja Khubir, Baria Khubir, are sacrificed respectively.

16. In the 16th a chicken is sacrificed in the name of Didi-Boini, the goddess of hills.

17. In the 17th two chickens, one each in the name of Jukhuni Bwrai and Jukhuni Burwi are sacrificed.

It is mentioned that the head and blood of the sacrificed chickens are offered at respective plaintain leaves which are already arranged for the same
before it starts serially and systematically from the Bathou altar to the end. Each pairs of Khangkhla are garlanded which carries a cocoon and a leaf of jathrasi (a kind of small plant) alternatively just like a garland of flowers.

In each and every performance of sacrifice an oja recites the concerned mantras and the douri sacrifice the chickens one after another to the respective deities continuously.

1. Wrwn Bathou
2. Laifathi
3. Narathi
4. Sarathi
5. Lafathi
6. Ailwng Mwdai
7. Agrang Mwdai
8. Sikhri Sikhla
9. Jol Khungri, Bish Khungri  
10. San Chakra  
11. Lal Khubir  
12. Dola Khubir  
13. Gwja Khubir  
14. Baria Khubir  
15/16. Didi —Boini (goddesses of hills)  
17/18. Jukhuni —Bwrai Jukhuni Burwi

(iii) Inside the ising (kitchen) :

The third performance of worship in Gunakhar puja is done inside the ising (kitchen). The two places are arranged where five plaintain leaves in each places are laying out to the northern direction. Pairs of betel nuts and leaves are offered, an alari bathi (earthen lamp) and pairs of insence sticks are lighted. The western one is arranged to worship in the name of three pairs husband and wife who are recognized as Song Bwrai and Song Burwi, Bulli Bwrai and Bulli Burwi and Jwmwn Bwrai and Jwmwn Burwi. To them a chicken and a female pig are sacrificed inside the kitchen.

The eastern place is arranged for Mainao Bwrai and Mainao Burwi. In this worship a pair of betel nuts and leaves and also an egg, only, is offered. In this performance no other people are allowed to enter into the kitchen even the
aaja also but no restriction for the people who are paternal relatives. Performance of this place is completed after this offerings.

(iv) At the Courtyard:

This place of performance is arranged at the western edge of the courtyard to the western direction. For this performance three different places are arranged where five **dathalis** in each are laid out for the sacrifice. This sacrifice is performed in the name of **Jukhuni Bwrai –Burwi, Khuria Bwrai-Burwi** and **Daina Bwrai-Burwi** respectively from the south to north serially. Pairs of betel nuts and leaves, prasads are offered one earthen lamp in each place and pairs of incense sticks are lighted in the places.

This worship is performed by the maternal relatives (khurma) because it deals with the worship of female members who are already married in other families. And hence any male member of maternal relatives is allowed to perform the sacrifice.

For this performance of sacrifice the most important materials are – one new sieve, one **uwal** (a wooden husking implement usually used by the Boros, **ural** in Assamese) and a **sikha khongkhai (a dao)**. After taking bath the male pig is castrated and its legs are tied by the rope. With the help of one bamboo the two persons arrange the pig for sacrifice. Its back should lie on the **uwal** (keeping the pig upper face) while a **gamla** (container) covered by a new sieve is kept ready in the western side attached with the **uwal** to contain (preserve) the blood when it is...
sacrificed. After getting all ready a performer does the sacrifice by cutting the neck with the help of a *sikha khongkhai (a dao)*.

It is believed that these deities are very furious therefore they are also worship while this celebration is held once in a year.

**(v) In the Cowshed:**

Lastly, for the last worship, a place in the cowshed is washed and a plaintain leaf is laid out where a pair of areca nuts and betel leaves are offered and an earthen lamp, pairs of intence sticks are also lighted. In this worship (the *douri* perform the arrangement) a pair of pigeons is set free in the name of *Laokhar gosai* while the *oja* chants and complete the mantras.

It is mentionable that each and every respective deities are called upon through the mantras when the worship is performed and all the respective deities are requested to accept the offerings and he/she is appealed to protect not only the members of the family but also the cattle and poultry of the concerned family from all kinds of the trouble and distresses.

**(ii) Taboos:**

(i) There should not be any kind of impurities or adulteration in the village like sexual relationship between the young unmarried boys and girls or any male and female or extra marital affairs among married couples.
(ii) The *Douri* has to undergo fasting from the preceding night of *garja* and *kherai* performance. Even he is not allowed to take any dish or meal (dinner or super) after the purification of the village.

(iii) Taking beef, killing a cow or hurting a cow with a *dao* or any forbidden work which brings a curse upon our head should be avoided. If it happens it must be purified before the pre-preparation.

(iv) The *jou* (rice beer) which is made for offering to the deities must be prepared by *Boro Douri* himself, no other females are allowed to prepare or even touch the preparation.

(v) No one from outside is allowed to enter into the *kheraisali*. 

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