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**Buddhi Raj Boro**  
Dudhnoi College, Dudhnoi,  
Goalpara, Assam, India

## **Kherai: The religious festival of the Bodos**

### **Buddhi Raj Boro**

#### **Abstract**

The Bodos who believe in many gods and goddesses observe verities of rituals. These rites and rituals are mostly connected with their religion. Their religion centres round the worship of 'Bathou Brai' or 'Cibrai'. Bathou is the Chief among the gods and goddesses worshipped by the Bodos. The religious minded Bodos worship Bathou Brai during the Kherai festival. Kherai puja is believed to be the greatest religious festival of the Bodos traditionally celebrated for the welfare of both personal and everybody's life.

**Keywords:** Kherai, religious festival, Bodos

#### **Introduction**

Kherai puja is the greatest religious festival of the Bodos. It is a symbol of hope and desire, which has been prevailing among them, since the time immemorial for the welfare of the personal life, they perform Kherai puja collectively once or twice in a year. Besides welfare of both personal and public, the Kherai puja is performed for the good harvest of crops. The Bodos are generally dependent on agriculture. So, before and after cultivation, they perform Kherai puja and propitiate different gods and goddesses for the success in cultivation. Kherai puja is very expensive and elaborate too. Due to economic strategy the Bodos do not perform Kherai puja frequently and regularly.

Though it is difficult to ascertain the origin of the Kherai, still some legends and folklores of Boro-Kachari give some clue about it in the olden days there was an old man named Jaraphagla. He had seven married sons. Jaraphagla loved his youngest daughter-in-law very much than the other daughter-in-law. But she felt it to be a sort of different likeness over her and she could not tolerate her father-in-law's attitude. So, he fled away from the house. Jaraphagla searched for her in all directions but could not trace her. Finally he arranged a Kherai puja (Kher means to flee and 'ai' means goddess). The song and dances that go to with it aim at exposition the vices and the outrageous behavior of the old man. The worshipper of Bathou believe that the word Kherai is a combination of two sounds Khe and Rai which means puja or the chanting before the chief god Bathou. Bathou Borai of Boro-Kachari is also known as Kharia Borai and Kharia Borai, which means the latent old man.

Therefore, Bodos believe that Kherai puja is performed in the name of 'Kharia Borai' who is endowed with all qualities. In Kherai puja, a cactus called 'Bwrai Bathow' surrounded by a small bamboo boundary is offered flowers, fruits and some grains. Different leaves and tulsi leaves dipped in a small pot with water is also kept nearby. The incense stick and Dhuna (coconut peel burnt in a small holder) is kept on burning, arousing nice fragrance. In this puja, 'Doudini', the oracle possessed by the gods plays the main role. The Doudini enchanted with mantras by the Deuri (Priest) performs the Kherai dance in front of the cactus called Bwrai Bathou. She is accompanied by the Kham (drum) played by the men at a distance. The beat of the music has to follow the exact rhythm as taught by the Doudini.

#### **Kinds of Kherai Puja**

The Kherai puja is of four kinds (i) Darshan Kherai, (ii) Umrao Kherai, (iii) Phalo Kherai and (iv) Nowani Kherai (family Kherai).

**(i) Darshan Kherai:** it is performed during the first week of the month of 'Kati' or 'Kartik' (September-october month). The Goddesses of wealth and welfare. This Kherai puja is meant for Mainao who is identified with Lakshmi (from Lakkhi), the goddess of wealth.

**Correspondence**  
**Buddhi Raj Boro**  
Dudhnoi College, Dudhnoi,  
Goalpara, Assam, India

So it is also called as the Lakhi Kherai and it is also known as the Sali Kherai. The later term clearly shows the association of this ceremony with the Sali or winter crop.

**(ii) Umrao Kherai:** it is held during the month of Ashar, at the end of the “Amthi Sua” (the unclean period) for the welfare of the villagers as well as of the crops. This Kherai puja is also known as the Ashu Kherai, being connected with the Ashu or a summer season crop.

**(iii) Phalo Kherai:** During the month of Megha (an Assamese month) specially on the day of Maghi purnima or the full moon night of the month of Megha, the phalo Kherai is performed. This Kherai is also known as the Danshrang Kherai, as it is performed during the full moon night of (Danshrang means the bright night of the full moon).

**(iv) Nowani Kherai (family Kherai):** ‘No’ means ‘house’ or a family. So, if a Kherai puja is performed by a family it is called ‘Nowani Kherai’ or the family Kherai. This kind of Kherai is performed by a family whenever it deems necessary to ward off evil or to ensure welfare. The Bodo people who believe in the traditional practices depend on the Kherai puja or the Garja Puja for their welfare at all times. So, whenever they face any trouble, they perform the Kherai puja.

God and goddesses worshipped during Kherai puja and the manners of their propitiation: The Bodo have many gods and goddesses, who worshipped during the Kherai pujas. They posse’s different positions in the hierarchy of the Bodo pantheon and they are offered different kinds of sacrifices according to their positions.

**Role of Doudini during the Kherai Puja:** A Deouri and a Doudini perform as the custodian of the Kherai worship under the guidance of an Oza. The Kherai puja continues for three days and nights. In the past, however Kherai worship continued for seven days and night. During those days and nights Kherai dances are performed to propitiate Bathow brai and other Gods and Goddesses. Doudini performs most of the essential rites during the Kherai worship with the help of the Oza and gidal. Besides, two drum (Kham) beaters, two players of the bamboo flutes (Siphung) and two players of Jotha (Cymbals) are also essential to help the Doudini perform the Kherai puja. The first role of the Doudini is called Doudini Anshrangi or Alongikhangnai. The oza chants at the time of the Kherai worship for the well being of the people.

‘Oi phipha guru  
Anan gocay binan gocay nong  
Ondo ondo nongni ogian  
Boro phicaphorkhou ondo nongno  
Oi corziguru nongno,  
Nongni khuroi dercin laocin raobo goilia,  
Oi Bathowabo bandwba cizowabo gorongba  
Boroni khugaya phongba.’

The English translation of the above mentioned charm is as follows:

Oh God, our father  
Protect your ignorant Boro children.  
You are the creator, preserver and destroyer

All in one, you are peerless.  
The alter of Bathow has five edges;  
So the Boros have five principles.  
We plant the Siju on the alter  
And light the oil flame  
And worship your whilst  
And flutes and cymbals play  
Of father, be merciful

The Doudini (female exorcist) plays most important role in the Kherai worship. She is charmed by the mantra (incantation) of the Oja where upon she falls into a trance and converts into a spiritual being like the deities. She is the key dancer during the Kherai puja. She can tell the tales of the gods and goddesses in their voices. She moves round the Bathow followed by the devotes and sprinkles holy water and dances Kherai dances to the accompaniment of the beating of Kham (drum), flute and cymbals. The Doudini demonstrates different dances to propitiate the gods and goddesses. She imitates the nature of gods and goddesses through these dances. She dances as many as eighteen kinds of dances like-Bathow gidingnai, Chotraoli, Khopri Chiprai, Khoizoma Phonai, Gandola Bonnai, Chagolao Bonai, Muphur Gelenai, Nao Bonai, Khamao Borkhonai, Daothoi longnai, Mocha Khaori Mochanai, Maozi Mengbrang gelenai etc. it is significant that these dance forms have sprung from the Kherai worship. Hence this are known as Kherai dances. These dances are fast of deep philosophical and religious significance.

#### Conclusion

Religion is the pin-point of human life to shape himself for better to the best living. There are so many religion in this earth. But the aims and objects of the term ‘religion’ is pointly to pray to God. The almighty Bathouism has long history came across since the Satya Yuga. As the Bathouism is one of the oldest religions we can belief and adore ourselves to attain the pin-points of achieving the boons or religions on this infinite solar system.

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