

Rites And Rituals Of The Bodo In Agricultural Operation

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The Bodos are agriculturist. They cultivate different kinds of crops like Bawa, Ashu, Sali etc. during the time of summer season.¹ No doubt, the Bodos are good cultivator and they are self dependent. In this regard Rev. Sydney Endle says that the Bodos are especially skillful in the construction of irrigation canals and earth-work embankments for diverting water from river beds into their rice fields and their efforts in this direction are very largely aided by their closely ethnic organization.² It is stated that when they proceeded and settled in the valley of Assam and some parts of North East India, they had crossed their earlier stages of life and became nomadic farmer.³ In earlier time, when they practiced Jhum or shifting cultivation they always tried to find out virgin land which could provide more productivity. With the passage of time, they gave up Jhum or shifting cultivation and started settled agriculture with ploughshare and other allied agricultural implements. However, concrete evidence has not been found so far when the practice of pre-agricultural activities and Jhum cultivation had been abandoned by the Bodos and when they have started agriculture with ploughshare and other agricultural implements. Even today the majorities of the Bodos are cultivators and inhabited in the village. Whenever the rainfall threatens to be below the average, the cultivators with their elders go to the field to bring the water to the paddy field from the nearest river.⁴

Keywords: Bawa, Ashu, Sali, Jhum, Agriculture, Rites and Rituals

INTRODUCTION**Pre-Agricultural Ritual:**

Before starting the actual ploughing the Bodos used to go to their own paddy field and select a site for the performance of the certain pre-agricultural rites and rituals. The selected site is plastered with water and placed a banana leaf on it with the following items towards the north-south direction for the purpose of the offering to *Mainao* (goddess of wealth):

- i. *Thalir Bilai* (banana leaf)
- ii. *Thulsi Bilai* (basil leaf)
- iii. *Thalir Phithai* (banana fruit)
- iv. *Alari Bathi* (an earthen pot for illumination)
- v. *Mairong* (uncooked rice)
- vi. *Gaiker* (milk)
- vii. *Goi* (areca nuts)
- viii. *Phathwi* (betel leaves)
- ix. *Dhup* (incense stick)
- x. *Kundung Aowa* (white cotton thread)
- xi. *Thao Gubwi* (mustard oil)

No *Dwori* or *Oja* is required for this rites and rituals as it is performed by head of the family or concern farmer.⁵ While offering is made the concern persons kneel down facing to the east and recited the following words:⁶

Dohai Ai Bima Mainao, Angni khulumnaikhou najao Ai Mainao-Dinwini be gwthar sanao, Jwnggha hal yeojennw nagirdwng, He bima Mainao nwnwnw ma hwnw ma thinw, Gwiya jwnggha mua daise, Gasibw mua mani Ai nwnwnw, Oblabw gws wgrbwkhou baoswmnanwi, Nwnwni khathiao aroj gabdwng-Jahathe jwngni be nokhora gainw lanai, Mai-dwikhou mwjangwi mwjang, Gaifungjwbnw hayw. Beni thakhai nwnw Bimani, Khathiao khoro gongglainanwi, Aroj gabdwng. Dwl dwl jatwng jwngni Maia bakri bungjase, Jababw jakonw haywi. De, Bima Mainao, Gole gole kulumw.

In this ritual both man and woman are allowed to take part and the propitiation of other gods and goddesses are also done. As and when the offering is over, the farmer or any male member of the family used to start ploughing.

Bawa Mai:

Bawa Mai (*Bawa* rice) is cultivated in the month of *Chaitra* (in Bangla Calendar).⁷ The growing grasses in that agricultural field have to be uprooted properly. After the completion of the tilling the land and uprooting the grasses the seeds are sown and covered with the help of harrow. Generally, it grows up to four (4) or five (5) feet high over the water level.⁸ It is also stated that in case of the *Bawa* rice, no proper care is required if once seedling is completed.⁹ Before sowing seeds, the head of the family or concern cultivator offer or the a pair of areca nuts, betel leaves, *Dhup* etc. for the buffer harvest of rice to goddess *Mainao*.

Ashu Mai:

The cultivation of *Ashu Mai* (*Ashu* rice) is done in the month of *Paghun* and *Cwitra* of Bangla Calendar with the following methods of cultivation:¹⁰

- a. *Hadriao Phwnai* (sowing seeds in dusty soil)
- b. *Habruao Phwnai* (sowing seeds in muddy) and
- c. *Habruao Gainai* (plantation in muddy)

a. ***Hadriao Phwnai:*** In this method the land is tilled to make it soft and dusty. All the grasses present in the fields are uprooted and make it clean. After properly tilled and the uprooting the grasses the seeds are sown. A harrow is used to cover the seeds with the loose soil. When the height of rice is reaching upto six or seven inches, cleaning of the grass and loosing of the soil in the paddy field is done with the help of *Beda* (a tool made of wood for removing weeds and loosing soil used by the Bodos). This cleaning and loosing is called as *Ashu Beda Hwnai*. The purpose for conducting *Ashu Beda Hwnai* is to remove unwanted grasses which disturb to the growth of the rice and to slack or to make loose the soil of the field for the healthy of the rice.¹¹

b. *Habruao Pwnai*: In the method of *Habruao Phwnai* the land is tilled to make muddy or grimy one. The seeds are put into an air tied bag and put into water about two days till the seeds are sprouted. The germinated seeds are sown in the tilling field. As and when *Beda Hwnai* is necessary, it required to be done in the field to produce more crops.

c. *Habruao Gainai*: In this method the agricultural land is made muddy by tilling and properly leveled it. Firstly, the required rice seeds are put into bag and tied it. After that the bag is put into water till the seeds are sprouted. When seeds are perfectly sprouted, they are sown in the field. When saplings are enough mature for final transplantation, they are pulled out and transplanted in the paddy field.

Harvesting of the *Ashu* rice is normally done after two and half or three months from the date of sowing the seeds or plantation.¹² However, at present day the cultivation of *Ashu Mai* is almost discarded by the Bodos as it produce lees crops. So, the Bodos of today started cultivations varieties of the rice which are high yielding crops.

Maisali Mai:

The Bodos grow mainly *Maisali Mai* (*Maisali* rice) rather than that of *Bawa Mai* and *Ashu Mai*. The cultivation of these varieties of rice is done in between the *Bwisag* and *Badra* months of Bangla calendar). During this period the required rain used to get for the cultivation of *Maisali* rice.¹³ To plant *Maisali* rice, the Bodos plough the land four times to destroy the grasses and make the soil soft i.e. *Karainai*, *Samwr hwnai*, *Boro Hwnai* and *Pwmwonnai*.¹⁴ The following two methods are adopted for the cultivations of the *Maisali* rice:

- i. *Leosia* and
- ii. *Kasia*
- i. ***Leosia:***

Under this method land is tilled and make muddy as well as properly leveled it. For the purpose of the germinating seeds, it is put into the air tied bag for two or three days in the water. When the seeds are properly sprouted, they are sown in the field for final transplantation. This is called *Khwthia Phwnai* (sowing seeds of paddy) by the Bodos.

Before the sowing seeds the Bodos used to perform certain agricultural rituals in their own home in the name of *Mainao*. This ritual is executed in the *Bathou* altar placing a banana leaf on it with the following items towards the north-south direction: *Thalir Bilai* (banana leaf), *Thulsi Bilai* (basil leaf), *Thalir Phithai* (banana fruit), *Alari Bari* (an earthen pot for illumination), *Mairong* (uncooked rice), *Gaiker* (milk), *Goi* (areca nuts), *Phathwi* (betel leaves), *Dhup* (incense stick), *Kundung Aowa* (white cotton thread), *Thao Gubwi* (mustard oil), etc.

This ritual is performed by head of the family or concern farmer without taking the assistance of *Dowri* or *Oja*. The concern person is facing his face towards the east direction and sitting in kneel down position. He utters the following words at the time of offering is made:¹⁵

He, Ai Bima Mainao, Nwng Jahate Jwngni Mai Pwnaikwo, Jebw Kwipwd-Apwd Jahwya. Daoma-Daosa Habnanwi Gajri Kalama, Mitingayari Jataijwng Gajri Jaya. Bikainw Nwng Ai Bimani Katiyao, Aroj Gabnai Jabai.

Khwthia Phunai:

Khwthia Phunai is called uprooting the seedling in Bodo. Under this method the nurseries are uprooted after twenty (20) or twenty one (21) days from the date of the sowing the seeds. In this time the Bodos follow some traditional custom. When the sapling becomes mature, the elderly female member of the family offers a pair of areca nut and betel leave lighting the incense sticks in *Bathou* altar in the name of *Mainao* (goddess of wealth) and starts uprooting the seedling. The pulled out nurseries are transplanted in the agricultural field.¹⁶

ii. *Kasia:*

In the *Kasia* method, the saplings are transplanted temporarily in the paddy field for twenty (20) to twenty five (25) days. After that, they are pulled out and the upper part of the foliage has been cut off for the re-transplantation. It is believed that by doing re-plantation in such a way more crops will be produced. So, *Kasia* method is generally practiced with the aim to produce more crops. The work of the cultivation of the rice is normally started in the month of April. The month of November or December is the period for harvesting.¹⁷

Mai Gaijenai:

Mai Gaijenai is meant the first plantation of the paddy by the Bodos. The followers of *Bathouism*, the traditional religion of the Bodos have been observing certain rite and rituals for the beginning of their plantation work till today as per their custom and tradition. For this purpose, the head of the family is selected an auspicious day. On the selected day an elderly woman of the family is lighted an *Alari Bathi* at the *Bathou* altar and offered the items like *Thalir Bilai* (banana leaf) *Thulsi Bilai* (basil leaf), *Thalir Phithai* (banana fruit), *Mairong* (uncooked rice), *Gaiker* (milk), *Goi* (areca nuts), *Phathwi* (betel leaves), *Dhup* (incense stick), etc. in the name of the *Mainao* with the following prayer words:¹⁸

Dohai Afa, Noni giri Bangni giri nwng afa, Bwrai Bathounao Alari saonanwi, Maikhou dinwi akhai lajennai jabai, Jababw-lwngbabw jwbnw mwnnai nonga, Muthasea sni mutha janangwn afa, Nwng bifani bwrao, Jamnw mwnnai nonga, Semnw mwnnai nonga, Song Bwrai - Song Burini, Bwrao Noni giri bangni giri, Jeblabw- Janayao lwngnaiyao, Mwjangwi mwjang lakhinangwn, Alari bathi jwngnai baidi, Fisafwrni khafalao jwnghw nangwn, De, dohai afa Bwrai Bathou.

After performance of the ritual is over, women members of the family along with the other female members of the village are going to the agricultural field. When they reached the paddy field, the woman of the concern family lighted a *Alari Bathi* (an earthen lamp which is made of mud and put some oil on it and thread is there for lighting) in the corner of the field which had already been done ploughing. With the completions of the offering of *Alari Bathi* in the paddy field, all the women who came to the field started plantation with the saplings which kept ready for the purpose.¹⁹

Nangwl Jangkra:

As and when the activities of cultivation including plantation of the paddy in a season is completed, each family of the farmer is organized a feast for those villagers or persons who were involved in their agricultural work which is known as *Nangwl Jangkra* by the Bodos. On that day, they have enjoyed by smearing and throwing mud with each other. On that occasion abundance of *Jwo* (rice beer), *Oma Bedor* (pork), *Dao Bedor* (chicken), *Hangsw* (duck), *Na* (fish) etc. are offer to those people who had undertook in the cultivation work.²⁰

Mainao Lainay:

A ritual which performed in the pre-harvesting of the paddy is called *Mainao Lainai*. *Mainao Lainai* denotes to bring the Goddess of wealth to the house.²¹ This ritual is performed to keep the grain of paddy at the granary. In this ritual an elderly woman or a woman of the family arranged an offering to *Mainao* by placing the following items at the *Bathou* altar on a banana leaf. The items are: *Thalir Bilai* (banana leaf), *Thulsi Bilai* (Basil leaf), *Thalir Phithai* (Banana fruit), *Alari Bathi* (an earthen pot for illumination), *Mairong* (uncooked rice), *Gaiker* (milk), *Goi* (areca nuts), *Phathwi* (betel leaves), *Dhup* (incense stick), *Kundung Aowa* (white cotton thread), *Thao Gubwi* (mustard oil).

When offering is made, the elderly woman or woman of the family utter the following words:²²

Oh, Apha Anan Gosai, Ojwnggha swrbadongbla, Nwngni swrzinay, Asu Mainao, Sali Mainao, Bahandari Khumari, Jiu rahanigiri. Nwngnw jadwng bima Mainao, Nwi ai bima Mainao, Jwngkhou nagarna, Ranhwana ukhwihwana Mwnnwgiyi khalamna, Da hogar, da gwma, Jwngkhou nwng ai baosri jana. Jwngni gabjrinayao, Thadw nwng ai, Jwngni Maihendw Mai bakhriyao. Oraibw onthaibaidi, Gilir mohorwi jwngkhou onnanwi, Nwng ai bima Mainao, Khulumw jwng nwng bimakhou. Nwi ai bima Mainao, Athingjwng jothrodphlangbay, Hasibjwng sibphlangbay, Orao phanse, dwiao phanse khalamphlangon. Bi daini thakhai, Nimaha hwnangwn, Orai nong bimaya, Gorseya gornwi, Jananwi thanangwn, Ai bima Mainao, Jwngni Maihendw Mai bakhriyao, Buhumni jib-jibi, raijw-rajya, Boikhoubw sukhu gwjwn, Raha hwna lakhinangwn, Oh, ai bima Mainao, Dohai Apha Bwrai Bathou. Ahamde swithwni mwdai, Swrgwao dong Bwrai Bathou, Hayao dong sijou biphang, Thulunsi gwthar, Beniphrai raobw gwithara, Raokhoubw nuhura khwnaya, Raokhoubw mithi mwnlia. Bungdw aiphwr aphaphwr, Ojwnggha dongbaoyw swr swr, Jwngni aiphwr aphaphwr, Boibw nujaphwidw nwngswr, Mainao garja, Asu Garja, Gaogarja, Songe songe Garja, Phuji jagra sibsini garja, Dibsini garja, Moian garja, Maoria garja, Dawang garja, Saoria garja, Thia garja, Dosemali garja, Gogo garja, Dong aro kholadani garja, Mithizagra Niladani garja, Gwthar sem semali garja, Nwngswrnw jidain garja. Arw dongbaoyw swr swr, Gaswikhoubw baonswi danw, Gothar khum bwrainanwi, Baidi baothai hwnanwi. Phorwaphwr, Jekhaibwrai, Asu Mainao khobai bwrai,

Jwmwnbwrai Jwmwnburi, Nujaphwidw Apha nwnng merubwrai. Maorbwrai, Maor-buri, Mwnsri Dwisri Budaru bwrai, Dongswi Swinasi sikhla, Gambari, Akhaisri Maothansri, Dohai ai apha nwnngswr, Dani mwdai nonga nwnngswr, Saithoni mwdai nwnngswr, Phao phuja jabwdwng nwnngswr, Houa hinjao gotho gothai, Sukhunai sukhaywi lakhidw srai. Lwmja sajayao naidw, Khwiphwdao onnanwi lakhidw. Houaphwra hagraayo thangwn, Hinjaophwra dwiao thangwn, Khwiphwd najahwnw beonw, Mwnnai nonga dukhu jahwnw. Daoboalai swmakhwi. Daokhayalai phurakhwi, Daima daisani daiya, Ulthaywi bwhwiakhwi, Lwithwni onthaiya gwjaoakhwi, Nwi dinwi Apha bwrai Bathouni swrji, Laijam sreng sreng bonanwi, Gwthar baothai hwnanwi, Baidi khum bwrainanwi, Nwnngswrnw baonswi jwng nwi, Be gwdan bwswr, Bwisagu bwthwrao. Sahani lwmja sajaphwr, Saha hogarhor nwnngswr, Sanjani lwmja sajaphwr, Sanjaha hogar hor nwnngswr, Swabni lwmja sajaphwr, Swabha hogarhor nwnngswr, Jwngni aiphwr aphaphwr, Dohai Apha gedemaraja Bwrai Bathou.

In the next day of the offering, an elderly female member of the family goes to the paddy field early in the morning after taking bath. This is mainly done before the sun rise. While she is going to the paddy field, she is required to carry the following items:

- i. *Dwi Gwthar* (holy water)
- ii. *Dhup* (incense stick)
- iii. *Thulsi* (basil leaves)
- iv. *Thalir Bilai* (banana leave)
- v. *Jorase Goi Phithai* (a pair of areca nut)
- vi. *Phathwi* (betel leaves)
- vii. *Khasi* (sickle)

When she reached the paddy field, she sprinkles the holy water on the paddy which is to be brought to the home to keep in the granary. After the completion of sprinkle of the holy water on the particular paddy, she placed all the items mention above on a banana leaf and offering is made to the *Mainao*. With this offering she started cutting some of the matured paddy which she will put in the banana leaf and tied it. Then, she will carry that binding paddy on her head and proceed to her house in the silent mode. The paddy which she brought to the home is kept in the granary with the belief that Goddess *Mainao* has brought and a place is given for her in the granary to make the family rich and wealthy.²³

Mai Hanai:

Mai Hanai denotes cutting of rice plant. Before the harvesting of the reaped paddy, a ritual is performed in which offering is made to the *Mainao* with the items like- areca nuts, betel leaves, *Dhup* etc. in a selected site of the paddy field. After this ritual is over, the actual work of the harvesting i.e. cutting of the mature paddy will be started and carried them to the house directly by making bundles. Sometimes, the cuttings of the paddy are kept in the paddy field for two or three days for more exposing to the sunlight to become more dry. In earlier days, the women carried the sheaves on their hand whereas the men carried with the help of *Sulabari*²⁴ on their shoulder. Sometimes bullock cart also used to carry the sheaves.

Mara Hwnai:

Spreading of sheaves is called *Mara Hwnai* in Bodo. No ritual has been found in the *Mara Hwnai*. To spread the sheaves on the ground from shell, the Bodos used two or more bullocks by tiding side by side and made them to move round.²⁵ When the rice is separated, the grains are stored in the *Bakri* (granary) or *Duli* (rice container made of bamboo).

Wngkham Gwrlwi Jahwnay:

Eating of new rice is called *Wngkham Gwrlwi Jahwnay* in Bodo. *Wngkham Gwrlwi Jahwnay* is organized in the month of December. For eating the new rice, the grains which had stored in the granary will take out and expose in the sunlight by placing on a bamboo mat or on the ground which is already plastered at the courtyard. When the grains are dried up they are dash in wooden mortar which is called *Uwal*²⁶ with the help of pestle, the *Gaihen*²⁷ in Bodo. Then a *Songrai* (winnowing fan) and *Sandri*²⁸ (sieve) are used to separate the grain from the husk. Before eating the new rice, the concern family offer prayer not only the *Bathou Bwrai* and *Mainao* but also other gods and goddesses with the help of *Dwori* or *Oja*. Until and unless this offering is not completed, nothing can be cooked or consume by any member of the family.²⁹ The following items are arranged for of the *Puja*:

- a. *Thalir Bilai* (banana leaf)
- b. *Thulsi Bilai* (basil leaf)

- c. *Thalir Phithai* (banana fruit)
- d. *Alari Bathi* (an earthen pot for illumination)
- e. *Mairong* (uncooked rice)
- f. *Gaiker* (milk)
- g. *Goi* (areca nuts)
- h. *Phathwi* (betel leaves)
- i. *Dhup* (incense stick)
- j. *Kundung Aowa* (white cotton thread)
- k. *Thao Gubwi* (mustard oil)
- l. *On* (grain rice)

When offering prayer the following mantras are recited:³⁰

Nwi apha Bwrai Bathou, Swrjigiri, apha Obonglaori, Bathounigiri apha, nwnngw dwhwrwmni bipha, Gwhwnigiri apha, nwnngw mulugni bipha. Nwnngw Anangosai, Obonggosai, Swrjigiri apha Obonglaori, Nwng derhasargra, mithisargra, nuwathari apha raikhagiri, Nwnngw rangrasi, mitha, hasing, barigongtham, Nwng phanseyno phana phantham apha harsingoi Satham. Nwnngw swrzidwng, nwnngw khangdwng badwng, nwnngw dwidendwng, Nwnngw gelehdwng, nwjwr hordwng, boikhwobw phwjwbsrangdwng, Dinwini be gwthar sansri gwthar bubliyao, Angni gwswwdwm jiu baobay nwng aphanao. Nwnngni onnai, nwnngni bwrsarsrinay, nwnngni phwrwngnay, Gwrwbjwng ajaonw ang nwnngni sigangao soMai labay.

When the prayer is over the concern family started cooking the new rice and *Onla Wngkri*³¹ which is the traditional curry of the Bodos specially prepared with rice powder with chicken. It is compulsory for every family of the Bodos to prepared *Onla Wngkri* during the *Wngkam Gwrlwi Janai*. Other items such as *Oma Bedor* (pork), *Hangsw* (duck), *Bwrma* (mutton), *Na* (fish), vegetables etc. are also cooked. *Jwo* or *Jumai* (rice-beer) is also offered in abundance. Cooked items are firstly offered to decesses of the concern family and gods and goddesses, mainly to the *Bwrai Bathou* and *Mainao Buri* and started consuming.³²

CONCLUSION

No doubt, the Bodo possess very rich tradition of the in rites, rituals and ceremony. Some of the rituals are totally associated with the agricultural operation. In course of the agricultural work, the agricultural activities are always in associations with the rites, rituals and ceremonies. The custom and tradition of the ritual practice in agricultural work are still in vogue.

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