



RESEARCH ARTICLE

TRADITIONAL PRACTICES OF DOUDINI DURING KHERAI PUZA OF THE BODOS: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The Kherai is the greatest religious festival or puza of the traditional Bodo people who worship Bathou through animal sacrifices. The Doudini is the epicenter of Kherai Puza. Any women or girl having knowledge of Bodo Gods and Goddesses and the worshipers of Bathou can become Doudini upto her capacity. She demonstrates various items of dance under the trance of Gods and Goddesses. It is said that she gives the lesson for human being through demonstration of different activities and dances. She tells fortune and misfortune also. The fortune telling of the Doudini is transmitted by the Oza and the Douri to the common people. The traditional Bodo people believe the telling of the Doudini as the Gods telling and means for peace and prosperity of all human being. The study will try to analyst the traditional practices in clear manner and propagate amongst their neighbours and abroad.

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INTRODUCTION

The Bodos are the largest tribal population in the state of Assam located in the North-East region of India. As per population census 2001 there are more than 13 lakh Bodo people in Assam. They are generally agriculturist people and live in villages and rural areas. Few of them live in urban and semi-urban areas nowadays. They have many festivals where their rites and rituals, customs, culture etc. is reflected. Amongst the various festival Kherai is one of them. The Kherai is the greatest religious festival of the traditional Bodos. The Doudini along with Oza, Douri, some musicians, two Bwirathis, large numbers of chickens are required in the Kherai Puza. The Doudini is the main performer of the Kherai festival. Without Doudini the Kherai puza cannot be performed.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to analyst the traditional practices of Doudini in clear manner and propagate it amongst their neighbours and abroad.

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METHODOLOGY

The study is based on self observation, discussion, interview and analysis of secondary sources and collected from topic related Books, Articles, writes up, etc. The Word *Kherai* is derived from the word "Khe" (Khengkchainai) meaning begging something like alms on behalf of all human being by the Oza (A man who initiates and performs the religious institutional works and also perform as Medicine man) to god and "Rai" (Raiphwdnanwi hwnai) means elaborately revelation or demonstration through various dancing activities by the Doudini under the trance of the God and Goddesses whatever is begged to the people.

So Khe + Rai = Kherai. So it is said that the Kherai means elaborate revelation or demonstration by the Doudini under the trance of various Gods and Goddesses in response to the repeated begging by the Oza on behalf of the human being for peace and prosperity. "The word Kherai originated from two parts of speeches *Khe* and *Rai*. *Khe* means *Khe-khe* or repeatedly or again and again and *Rai* means awakening or healing the sleeping soul of the human being with repeated chanting. In the Kherai the Oza awaken the soul of the Doudini and make it dance with the power of mantras". ((Convenor), 2011, P.-1).

The word *Doudini* exist Dou + Dini>Doudini. Here the *Dou* is a verb means to feed or offer something to someone or somebody, *Dini* is the suffix meaning let's do, here a female virgin person who performs the works of Dou on behalf of a person or group or groups of persons. The Doudini, therefore is the virgin girl or woman who feed or offered to the God and Goddesses on behalf of the human being for getting peace and prosperity for entire human being. "Doudini : A deities she-man who invokes all the gods and goddesses in the Kherai worship. She is in commune with them during the period of worship" (Narzary, 1988, P.-38).

The Doudini is a virgin priest and the nucleus of all Kherai festival. The Doudini is the path finder of the Kherai festival along with the Oza. She is the first *Wlwngikhangiri* (healer), the main demonstrator of various dance items under the trance related to God and Goddesses, fortune teller for the future of the individual and the society and the retrieving Mainao (god of wealth) of kherai festival. She is also the receiver of the offering on behalf of the deities and the link between the human and the gods and goddesses and the deities. The non *wlwngikhangra* (healer) lady or the women or the girl cannot become the Doudini. The Doudini cannot exist hereditarily. Any women or girl could be Doudini of her own. She has the capacity to *wlwngikhangra*(healer) and has the knowledge about the Bodo gods and goddesses or related with them and believer and worshiper of Bathou religion. She could become the Doudini up to her ability. She has her own capacity to acquire gifted knowledge. Sometime a girl or woman acquired gifted knowledge about the God and Goddesses from her dream, worshipping Gods and Goddesses, somewhere in the shadow of the tree, in the river or stream or any other else or places. The Kherai of Bodos cannot be complete or full without Doudini. The Doudini has the highest respect in the Kherai and considered to be sacred amongst the Bodo people. The Doudini imitate and dances under the trance of the Deities and foresees. She expresses all the finding in her prediction to the society through Douri and the members of the society believe it as the saying of the Gods and Goddesses. 'Without Doudini the kherai does not exist. Throughout three days and nights Kherai dances are performed to please the whole Bathou Borai and other gods and goddesses. The Doudini is the key dancer during the Kherai Puja' . (Brahma, 1992, P.-179.)

'A Kherai festival is performed by a Doudini or a female priest. She is help by a Douri or a male priest. The Doudini makes offerings to Bathou and other deities. While in action she is supposed to understand what Bathou and other deities want men and women to do for peace and prosperity. She conveys them to the Douri and he conveys them to the masses around him. Hence the Doudini acts as an agent interpreter between Bathou and the Douri' (Boro, 2011, P.-133). The information given by Bihuram Boro above is seen true only modification through the observation is that the Doudini under the guidance of the Oza performed the Kherai Puza with the help of the Douri, a pious and orthodox man with the overall responsibilities of the religious institution also known as *gidal* and the offering in the puza is either made by the Douri on behalf of *Doudini* or *Doudini* herself. In Kherai puja the *Doudini* performs most of the essential rites with the help of

the Oza and a Douri known as *githal* or *gidal* (*Gital* or *Gidal*) who is a follower of the *Oza* who performs the duty as a helper of the *Oza* during the Kherai Puja.

Along with Oza and Douri, two drums (Kham) beaters, two players of the bamboo flutes (Siphung), two players of the *Zotha* (Cymbals) and one pair *Bwirathi* (the virgin lady who arranged all necessary things to Doudini) is also essential to help the Doudini to perform the Kherai puza.

The practices of Doudini can be divided into the followings

The first stage of the Doudini is called as *Wlongikhangnai* or *Doudini Onshranai* meaning healing. In this stage she is charmed by the formula of the Oza and the music of the Kham, Siphung and *Zotha*. Here after worshipping the Bathou and the Kherai altar the Doudini with offering pair of areca nuts and leaves where necessary, sprinkle holly water, inspect all the altars when found correct then she sit in the meditation and trance with the charmed of the Oza and the music.

The Second role of the Doudini in the Kherai puza is to demonstrate different kinds of dances which are generally the activities of at least 16 to 18 main items represented by different Gods and Goddesses as believe by the Bodo people. She moves round the Bathou and sprinkles holy water from a pot and dances while the drums (Kham), flutes and cymbals are played on. The worshippers also join in the circle of dancing with Doudini. While Doudini dances, she imitates the nature of the god and goddesses. She demonstrates as many as eighteen kinds of different dances. By this time she changes her nature into three stages. First, she changes her mood, secondly, she assimilates her with gods and goddesses and thirdly, she imitates the nature of different gods and goddesses. Doudini holds a long sword (*thungri*) and a shield (*Dahal*, which were used by the Bodos during war in earlier days), take crown with the *busi* cloth, shield and ring of cane on the head sometime while she dances.

In the third stage she converts into the spiritual being. Here the Doudini tells fortunes about the individual and the society. She tells fortune of the people, the good and bad days of the villagers, success and failure of the cultivation and regarding the duties and responsibilities of the villagers for their safeguard from any danger in near future. Here she also trance by other gods and Goddesses and imitates and dances various kinds like *Zaraphagla*, *Tentaimali*, *Topabudang*, *Bagurumba*, *Gwthang-Gwthwi mwsanai* (Dances of dead and alive), etc. Sometimes she also drinks wine (rice-beer) and others think on half-conscious mood imitating the person's of yesteryears.

In the four stages she retrieves the *Mainao* (the Goddess of Wealth) from the *Kheraisali* (place of Kherai) for the human being. Here the Doudini gradually returns to her earthly senses after converting into spiritual being with the sprinkle of the holly water by the Douri. She sits down in front of the main circular altar and remains quite silent. This posture of Doudini is considered as a symptom of her being hunted by the goddess of wealth. The Oza, Douri and their associates then start worshipping the goddess of wealth (*Mainao*). Then they pray

Mainao (the goddess of wealth) to be always with them and the Oza charmed the mantras or saying and others supported him: One of the mantras runs as follow:

He ai mainao,
Onnanwi thadw no-ao;
Boraina langnswi,
Nwngkhou jwng nwi;

Oh! Mother goddess of wealth,
Kindly come to our hut;
We will welcome you there,
We all take you to there.

Hearing this entreaty, the Doudini, on behalf of the mother goddess of wealth says;

Orao garna zagwn nwnswrw,
Daiao garna jagwn nwnswrw;
Thangfin nwnswrw fainai lamajwng,
Thangfaya ang nwnswrjwng.

You will take me throwing half into fire,
You will take me throwing half into water;
So go back by the way you have come

I will not go with you (Boro, Swrbang Subung Bihuram Boroni Swrzi (Sethi Khwndw), 2009, PP.-151-152).

Hearing this, the Oza, Douri and their associates make promise not to pollute mother Goddess of wealth by throwing her into fire and water as apprehended. With their promises, the goddess of wealth slowly rises from sitting. She then picks up a basketful of rice from the altar and passed it over her head to the receiver and starts dancing around the altar. She is followed by the Oza, Douri and their associates. This signals the end of the Kherai Puza.

“Dress of the Doudini is minor difference in different places. Though they put the dress as their own, most of the time they put the Bidon Dokhna and red coloured blouse” (Affad, 2009, P.-24). It is said that the Dokhna Thaosi was the original Dokhna of yesteryear’s *Doudini*. It is said that Dokhona Thaosi is not another Dokhona but the style of wearing, i.e. putting Dokhna which is not tied on the waist is known as Dokhona thaosi. One white coloured busi cloth about 9.5 feet is hanged from both sides of the soldier and tied in X shape in back and front side at the waist for making tight in dance, walking or the hiccup in the Kherai puza by Doudini. It is also tight at the waist by another white busi cloth of about 4.5 feet. During some of the dances the Doudini crown or covered with white cloth about 6.5 feet long supplied by the Douri. Another about 1.5 feet white busi cloth is taken as handkerchief during some of the dance. The Doudini unknot her hair during Kherai. The doudini accept various materials like Dhub, Shields, Sword, cup having blood of chicken, areca nuts and leaves, etc. from the Douri and use in the offering.

The main point to be noted here is that during the offering and dances no one co-dancers or follower’s limbs should be touch in any body part of the Doudini. If her body touches by

someone except the Douri and the Oza she feels down and become senseless. This could be fortifying by the Douri and the Oza by sprinkling the holly water.

The Doudini drinks the blood of the chicken sacrificed known as *Daothwilwngnai* (drinking of chicken blood) in the name of the Gods and Goddesses. When someone who is considered as sinner presents in the area of the Kherai puza he/she could be punished or driven out by the Doudini. The Bodo people perform this Kherai festival by purifying the entire unholy one and this gathering belongs to only the holly persons.

RESULTS

The Doudini is the main performer of the Kherai Puza. The healing, demonstration and imitations of 18th different types of activities under the trance of 18 different gods and goddesses are done by her. The Oza, Douri, two kham beaters, two flute players, cymbals players, one pairs of Bwirathi and the co-dancers helps in the performing of the Doudini. The Doudini tells fortunes which are belief to be the telling of the God by the Bodo society. The Doudini accept offering on behalf of Gods and offered sacrifices. The Doudini drinks the blood of chicken on behalf of Gods which is known as *Daothwilwngnai* (drinking of chicken blood) by them. The Doudini retrieve the Mainao (god of wealth) in the Kherai puza. The dress of the Doudini is special, etc.

Conclusion

The Doudini is the epicenter of the Kherai festival of the Bodos. The works of the Doudini starts from the *Kham Hogarnai* meaning allowing kham for the Kherai puza and ends to the *Kham phwtharnai*, meaning penance of Kham. The Doudini is the only virgin priest who assimilates her with gods and goddesses, imitates the nature of different gods and goddesses, demonstrated different dances, offered sacrifice, tells fortune for the bad and goods, retrieve the Mainao for peace and prosperous living of human being. She is considered as the path bearer of peace and prosperity of human being.

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