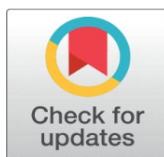
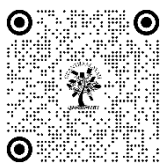


THE DANCE FORMS OF A DOUDINI IN KHERAI FESTIVAL OF THE BODOS OF ASSAM: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY FROM RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The Bodos are important tribes of the North-Eastern India, particularly Assam. They belong to the Indo-Mongolian group of tribes and are inducted as *Kiratas*. They are mainly scattered in the districts of Kokrajhar, Goalpara, Barpeta, Bongaigaon, Baksa, Dhubri etc. The traditional Bodos celebrate *Kherai* as one of their significant religious festivals [Brahma \(2008\) 14](#). They perform *Kherai* for well-being of their families, to yield good harvest and prosperity of the society. *Kherai* is a religious custom in which the primitive spiritual almighty is prayed earnestly. It is a prayer institution of *Bwrai Bathou* or *Sibrai*, the supreme deity of *Kherai* festival. Though there are mainly eighteen types of dances associated with *Kherai* puja but there are some additional dance-drama forms which are also counted after those eighteen dances and the main dancer of the puja is the *doudini* [Brahma \(2003\) 20](#).

Keywords: Bodo, Kherai, Festival, Dance, Doudini

1. INTRODUCTION

Festivals are the external vent of social department. Festivals are the essential facets of the cultural life of the people. In point of fact, festivals are the true reflector of the people's cultures. For the traditional Bodos, the *Kherai* festival is the substantial one. In this festival, different deities are worshipped. Among those *Bathou* is believed to be the chief god [Brahma \(2009\) 22](#). *Bathou* which means the latent old man, also known as Kharia Borai or Khuria Burai. The Bodo people are seemed to believe in *Bathou* to be present and felled through air, water, light, earth, and sky [Boro \(2010\) 30](#). To gratify the *Bathou* along with the other deities in *Kherai*

puja different dances are performed which are particularly called as *Kherai* dance forms. The *Kherai* performances predominantly illustrates their histories, their originality, their goal regarding the past, present and their daily way of life which is reflected in this festival. Singing and dancing are essential features of the *Kherai* ritual. *Kherai* dances are, therefore, the prayer dances of *Sibrai* or *Bathou* Brahma (2003)50. 'Douri', a male priest, 'Oja', an incantist and 'Doudini', a female dancer are the key figures taking part in the ritual of the *Kherai* worship. The *Doudini* is the key dancer during the *Kherai* puja. According to Liladhar Brahma there are eighteen types of *Kherai* dances Brahma (2003) 32. All the items of *Kherai* puja are performed by *Doudini*, and she is helped by the *Douri*, the *Oja* and a *Githal*. The *doudini*, *douri*, the *oja* are important part of *kherai* puja. Verbal and non-verbal communication takes place concurrently through the ritual. The *Oja* usually initiates the invocation. The *doudini* with disorderly long hairs and vermillion stained on her forehead dances with wild postures keeping rhythm with the beating of the musical instruments. While in this action she begins trembling and slowly and steadily she turns sub-conscious and, in this state, she possesses the power to tell the past, present and future predictions. There are four kinds of *Kherai* Brahma (2009)12:

- 1) *Darshan Kherai*
- 2) *Umrao Kherai*
- 3) *Phalo Kherai*
- 4) *Noani Kherai*

2. OBJECTIVES

The proposed research paper aims to study the following objectives:

- 1) To study the origin and the religious aspect of the *Kherai* festival.
- 2) To study and manifest the role of *doudini* in *Kherai* puja.
- 3) To discuss the different forms of *doudini* dance from its religious perspective.

3. METHODOLOGY

In this proposed study the primary data are collected through field work. The area for the field work is mainly selected from Goalpara district of Assam. Libraries are visited for the secondary sources and are collected from books, journals, audios, and videos.

4. DISCUSSIONS

4.1. DANCE FORMS OF THE DOUDINI

- 1) ***Doudini Onsrnai or Wlwngi Khangnai:*** *Doudini Onsrnai* or *Wlwngi Khangnai* is the first dance of *Kherai* puja. The *Doudini* sits in front of the *Kheraisali* or the *kherai* arena in the north-west corner. At this stage the *Doudini* starts moving and shaking her body. The *doudini* starts shaking her head irrepressibly at the chanting of the mantras by the *oja*. She imitates the gods and goddess with various gestures with her dishevelled hair and moves round the *Bathou*. The main deity of this dance form is *Bwrai Bathou*.
- 2) ***Bathou Tharnai Eba Phwtharnai:*** In this stage the *Doudini* sprinkles holy water around the *Bathou* altar in order to purify herself and the people present there. After this she starts putting vermillion to the musical

instruments such as the kham, siphung and serja by dancing in slow movements and worships them. The deity worshipped in this dance form is Bwrai bathou.

- 3) ***Damju Phetharnai:*** Damju means musical instrument and it is mandatory to worship the traditional musical instruments in Kherai puja. Musical instruments play a very great role in Kherai worship, and the musical players are welcomed from the gate of Kherai arena by sprinkling holy water and the blood of chicken. But in the present Bathou puja, the musical instruments are purified by vermillion or sindur which the Doudini takes from the Bathou altar.
- 4) ***Buhum Ha Swrjini Solo:*** After the purification of the musical instruments, the Oja starts telling stories about the creation of gods and goddesses on this earth. There is no dance at this stage, the doudini moves all around the altar.
- 5) ***Dahal-Thungri Shibnai Mwsanai (Shield and sword wielding dance):*** This dance is also known as Khopri Sibnai dance. Khopri is a large head gear made of bamboo strips and dried leaves. In this dance the Doudini takes a shield in her left hand and a sword on the right hand and dances advancing ahead crouching and bouncing. This dance symbolises to prepare oneself for the battle and hence sword and shield are used in this dance form.
- 6) ***Sa Gwlaao Bonai Mwsanai (Dance of tug-of-war):*** The word Sa gwlaao means 'long swaddle on a hands loom'. This dance is dedicated to God Khaji Mwdai. In this dance a long cloth is twisted into a rope and is held on either end by two groups of people and the *Doudini* then slopes tightly holding the rope and dances swaying right and left chanting the mantras at the tune of the musical instruments. This dance delineates the life process of human beings.
- 7) ***Khwijwma Fonai (Insect moving dance):*** Khwijwma fonai is an important dance of the Kherai festival and is performed in praise of the deity 'Abla Khungur'. During the *Kherai* puja a branch of a tree is illustratively planted in front of Bathou to portray as having the nest of an ant and the *Doudini* dances all around the bathou alter moving her arnai or jwmgra to get rid of the ants. It is purely a theatrical dance showing tactics to destroy the enemies of our mind through dance. The doudini in this dance form makes slow movements in the tune of Sip hung accompanied with the kham and jotha [Boro \(2004\) 25](#).
- 8) ***Thrungri Lanai or Satrali Mwsanai (Sword welding dance):*** This is also known as 'Satrali' dance it is performed to show the fighting's in a war. In this dance she is believed to reveal the war dance in the name of Ronsondi or Ranphagli. While dancing the Doudini hold swords in hand and also in her mouth and dances at the tune of Kham, Siphung and cymbals. It is performed to praise the deity of fire or sun known as Agrang. In this dance the Doudini holds the sword in both her hands and moves dancing round the alter of Bathou. This dance is the source of power and strength.
- 9) ***Gandwola Bwnnai (Dance of Dragon-fly trapping):*** This is an important dance form of the Bodos. It is performed as an offering to 'Khwila mwdai' deity of the bodo tribe. The word Gandwola means dragonfly. In this dance the doudini symbolises a dragonfly with her left hand and a fish on the other hand to trap the dragonfly through acting. The trapping of the dragonfly symbolises the dominance of the pride, haughtiness and dominance feeling of a human being [Boro \(2004\) 27](#).

- 10) *Dahal-Thungri Shibnai Mwsanai (Shield and sword wielding dance):*** This dance form symbolises a war. In this dance form the doudini takes a shield in her left hand and a sword in the right and dances as if she were fighting in a battlefield.
- 11) *Khamao Barkhwnai mwsanai (Dance performed on a drum):*** This dance is dedicated to God Rajkhandra, who is believed to be the foremost son of Bwrai bathou. In this dance the doudini ascends the kham and dances on it. In this dance form the doudini holds a cane stick on her right hand and a chicken on the left hand making various movements moves around the altar and when reaches the kham, pays obeisance to the kham by squeezing the neck of the chicken and sucking the blood. The moral of the dance is to bow our head in front of the god to gain knowledge and power [Narji \(2015\) 20](#).
- 12) *Badali Birnai mwsanai (Dance of Bat flying):*** 'Badali' means bat and this dance is dedicated to God 'Alibwrai deity' of the bodo tribe. In this dance the doudini makes slow rhythmic movements around the bathou arena to the tune of kham, siphung and jotha like flying of a bat. The character of a bat(badali) is represented through this dance such as to flying at night and to feed on fruits and insects. It is a dance drama where the doudini let her hands free and arms open dances with simple attractive movements. The doudini performs this dance to please the deity and the devotees to have good crops.
- 13) *Mwicha Gelenai mwsanai (Dance of buffalo showing):*** This fascinating theatrical dance is dedicated to Ai Dibaboli deity of Kherai puja. The doudini covers up her head with a shawl and holds her both hands backward and appears as the horns of a buffalo and then dances galloping and shaking the head as a buffalo in its aggressive mood would do. The doudini makes fast and rapid movements in this dance form. This dance form symbolises honour and respect for others.
- 14) *Bhathou Gidingnai (Bathou cycling dance):*** This dance is devoted to Mother deity or Ai Bima reveals the wandering spirit of human nature. In this dance form the doudini holds a sword on her one hand and the other dancers also accompanies her at the rhythm of kham, siphung jotha and jhapkhiring. The doudini kneels down and bows the sword kept at the bathou arena.
- 15) *Nao bhasainai (boat floating dance):*** It is a theatrical dance and is dedicated to a deity of rivers. The doudini prepares a boat of banana stem and dances all around the bathou puja arena.
- 16) *Muphur Gelenai (Dance of bear playing):*** Muphur means bear in bodo language. Muphur Gelenai is performed by the doudini to depict a bear and is dedicated to the deity Burli Buri of Kherai puja. The doudini makes some crawling and scratching movements to show the activities of a bear. At the same time the douri helps the doudini at the kherai sali and the other performers tries to drove the bear [Brahma \(2009\) 39](#).
- 17) *Mainao Borainai (dance of Mainao deity):*** It is the last dance of Kherai puja dedicated to the deity Sarini Jwnwm bwrai which means the eldest god. In this dance form two young girls are selected to carry a container full of uncooked rice and paddy grains which are already kept on the bathou altar. They move around the bathou altar along with accompanists and other performers from the audience. In this dance form the Doudini figures the form of Mainao deity, and she sits on gamari wood in front of Bathou altar

which is believed to be holy. She is believed to be possessed by the Mainao deity. After some ritualistic propitiation and chanting of mantras the doudini performs the dance to the rhythm of the Khum, Sip hung and jotha.

- 18) Mwcha Gelenai (Dance imitating the tiger):** The doudini performs this dance to worship the Mwcha raja deity which means the tiger king deity. The doudini dances around the Kheraisali to symbolize the nature of a tiger and also of dogs at the tune of the sip hung, kham and jotha. In this dance the doudini tugs a red coloured cock to mesmerize the doudini and in effect the later follows and tries to grab it by crawling like a tiger. After gyrating two to three rounds of the bathou altar the doudini seized the cock and oblations it in the name of God Mwsa raja.
- 19) Gorai Dabranai (Dance of horse riding):** The word Gorai means 'horse' in bodo language. This dance is presented to Bwisumuthi God of Kherai puja that is the mother earth. The doudini here symbolises horse-riding and dances around the Kherai arena. The Bodos believe that God Bwisumuthi was a soldier and the Doudini performs the Gorai Dabranai with vigorous strength to personify the action of the soldiers. The dance represents the physical and will power of human beings [Boro \(2010\) 35](#).
- 20) Nao Jaoni (Dance of boat rowing):** This dance is related to water and is dedicated to 'Soudri' deity, the god of water. The doudini holds a sword and moves ahead like rowing a boat. Dancers from the audience acts like a boat and a few dancers accompanies the doudini as if they were helping her in a boat to sail across a river. But the co-dancers suddenly refrain from the act of rowing the boat, which implies that have to face lots of troubles and hindrances while crossing the sea. It is also a theatrical form of dance, and this dance represents that only through the religious means the misfortunes of the life cycle can be overcome. The moral of the dance is that life is like a vast sea where the human beings have to travel with dejection and deprivations and to overcome these one has to follow the path of sincerity and truthfulness [Boro \(2010\) 36](#).
- 21) Dao Thwi Lwngnai Mwsanai (Dance of blood controlling):** This dance is performed just before the worship of the God and Goddesses phathali or asan. The doudini shakes the head forward and backward ruffling the hair and moves her body shaking like a chick.
- 22) Zaraphagla Mwsanai (Zaraphagla dance):** It is performed in respect of a man named Zara and it is a theatrical dance that does not have any particular steps of Kherai puja. Zara Phagla was a faithfully follower of Bwri Bathou and hence this dance is performed to depict him. The doudini puts on a coat and dances in a humorous manner at the tune of the kham and sifung. It is a merrymaking dance performed with mirthful laughter, eating and drinking. Initially only the male used to perform this dance style with a sad mood while being drunk, but later both the male and women folk enjoys the dance.
- 23) Thenthamali Mwsanai (Thenthamali dance):** Thenthamali Mwsanai is one of the Kherai myths. Thenthamali was a famous hunter he was gigantic with rugged energy and a good dancer, but he was also an alcoholic. Once when Thenthamali was on his way to a Kherai festival, he had a terrible fight with a tiger and though he was wounded in his left hand he wrapped his withered hand with rags and danced throughout the night in Kherai puja. In this dance form, the doudini puts on a coat and have the palm of her left hand bandaged in rags evoking the person in whose tribute the dance has been performed.

- 24) *Lantha Gurzi Mwsanai (Lantha gurzi dance)*:** Lantha Gurz was a Kherai dancer and was very much passionate of dancing whenever he heard of Kherai celebration. It is believed that Lantha Gurzi was a tiredless man and possess enough energy to dance whole night and travel miles to take part in the Kherai festival. The doudini shows various actions of Lantha Gurzi by creating an air of persiflage among the audience.
- 25) *Daowang Buthua Mwsanai (Daowang Buthua dance)*:** Daowang Buthua or Daoang Budua was a Kherai dancer and a drunkard man. The doudini puts on along coat and turban on her head dedicating the dance to Daowang Buthu. On the other hand, Daowang Buthua is also believed to be a large bird with yellow and thick beak, the other dancers from the audience represents the nature of this bird and performs the dance with much pleasure.
- 26) *Saoria-Daoria Mwsanai (Saoria-Daoria dance)*:** Saoria and Daoria are two brothers and are called martyrize of Kherai festival. They died by a tiger attack when they were on their way to join a Kherai festival. The doudini depicts their bravery and courage through her dance.
- 27) *Maozi Mengbrang Gelenai (Dance of besmeared cat)*:** This dance is performed with a sheer purpose of amusing and creating a roar of chortle and giggles among the audience. One of the dancers streaks his face with charcoal and other colouring substance to make himself appear like a spotted cat and then dances around the Bathou and another dancer from the group figures the nature of a dog and barks at or run after the cat.
- 28) *Neolai Gelenai Mwsanai (Dance of mongoose playing)*:** The dancer imagines the posture of a mongoose and dances like it. He makes different movements like crawling and jumping etc to create entertainment among the audience.
- 29) *Mwchaglangnai mwsanai*:** It is the main dance of the Kherai festival which is performed by the doudini followed by any dance of Kherai puja. It is also performed at the very outset of the Kherai puja, and the puja begins with this dance form when the doudini drinks the raw blood or offers flowers to the kheraisali. This dance is just for the entertainment of the audience with graceful movements and ecstatic smile. There is no song in this dance and is performed with the rhythm of the kham and tune of the sip hung.

These are the dance forms of the Kherai festival that are performed by the deodhani accompanied by the Kham, Sip hung and Serja depicting various movements.

4.2. MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

The Bodos have various traditional musical instruments used in their music and dances. They are discussed below [Brahma \(2011\) 65](#):

***Kham*:** *Kham* is the main traditional percussion instrument of the Bodos. It is a long, big drum bigger than the Bihu dhol of bihu dance. It is made from the trunk of trees like *Sama*, *Kanthal*(jackfruit), *Thaijau*(mango) and many more. The two sides of the *Kham* are made of goat's skin while the braces are made of buffalo skin.

***Siphung*:** It is a long flute made of bamboo and it is about 27-29 inches long [Chetia \(2010\) 45](#). It is made from a particular bamboo known as *Owajlaw* in Bodo language. The speciality of it is that it has five holes for playing and one for blowing.

***Serja*:** *Serja* is a harp like instrument. It is like violin of the Bodos. Though its body is made of *Kanthal* or *Sijou* wood. *Sijou* (*Euphorbia Splendens*) is best for

making Serja [Boro \(2004\) 70](#). The lower part of Serja is hollow and a half part of it is covered with goat's skin. It has four strings made of muga silk. It has four tuning knobs, one bridge and one bow made of bamboo strip. The bow string is made of a small bunch of hairs of a horse tail.

Jotha: Jotha means cymbals which is basin like musical instrument beaten together in pairs. This instrument is of brass metal. It is a percussion instrument and is often used in pairs. It is basically made of metal and is used to keep the rhythm or timing of the song or dance.

Jhaphkring: It is a two piece of wooden frame which has small oval holes penetrating completely on its body to adjust the metallic discs coins like by pins. More than one discs are adjusted in each hole because of which sound is produced as a result of friction made by each other. When the two frames are struck with one another, the wood and metal pieces produce clapping and jingling sounds. It may also be called tambouring [Das \(2012\) 50](#).

Thorkha: It is a bamboo clapper made by splitting a piece of bamboo in the middle. It is used to keep the rhythm in the both dance and music.

Bingi: It is a single stringed Bodo musical instrument having a best divided shell of a coconut at the base. It is made of bamboo or wood with a coconut shell attached at the bottom. The whole face of the shell is covered with goat's skin. It is played with the help of a bow. The length of the bingi is around 21 inches and the length of the bow is 13 to 15 inches [Das \(2012\)](#).

Gongana: It is a wind instrument made of bamboo. It is also called Jew's harp. The instrument varies from 6 to 7 inch in length and $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ in breadth. It is mostly played by women and girls [Boro \(2004\) 35](#).

Janjengra: Jajengra is made of bamboo splits. It is generally used during the time of festivals.

Khawang: This is made of brass. It is similar to that of Jotha or the cymbals but bigger in size.

5. COSTUMES OF THE DOUDINI, OJA AND THE DEURI

The doudini puts on a very simple costume in Kherai festival. She puts on a dokhna, it is the traditional and principal dress of the Bodo women worn from chest to ankle. The *doudini* dress up dokhna in the left side and the lower part is left free. It covers the whole body and is tied at the chest and waist with aronai or the bodo scarf. She lets her hair open throughout the performance. The oja, douri and the other male performers wears a bodo gamcha which is big in size than the Assamese gamcha on their waist, than they sometimes put genji or half shirt for the upper part of the body and a bodo scarf wrapped around their neck or tied to their waist. The doudini and the other performers puts on a headgear or phaguri made of gamcha and a coat required according to the dance numbers of Kherai puja.

6. CHANGING ASPECTS OF THE KHERAI DANCE FORMS

Various changes are seen to be taking place among the Bodo societies. Many changes are noticeable in the social, cultural, religious, and economic lives of the Bodo people. The folk-dance forms of the Bodo society are affected by various forces and factors that have resulted in a continuous change.

But various modern instruments are used in the Bodo folk dance forms at present. Along with the Kham, Sip hung and Jotha, Harmonium, Casio and guitar are also used for better sound effect. Some taboos are found regarding the playing of the

instruments. But in the present society these taboos are not strictly followed, and these are all restricted.

Regarding the changes in the dress pattern, it is observed that it has been revised. Dokhna is the traditional dress of the Bodo women. There are few changes that are to be found in the dress and colour code of the folk-dance forms as for example in Bardwisikhla dance though the female should wear Dokhna of yellow colour in this dance form and Regeregang of red colour, but it is seen that they wear green colour Dokhna along with multicoloured Regeregang. Similarly, in Habajanai dance the female folk dancers wear only the red coloured Dokhna, but now they wear dokhnas according to their own satisfaction and comfort [Narji \(2015\) 105](#).

In the present society the dancers are very much aware of their look while performing. So, both the male and female dancers put makeup on their faces and this vast change is observed has reduced the simplicity of the dance form. Changes which have been seen in the field of folk dances has created a change of awareness among the respective Bodo tradition and culture. This awareness has influenced them in organizing their various cultural activities.

7. CONCLUSION AND FINDINGS

Folk dances were a spontaneous outcome of the ritualistic practices involved with agricultural deeds, social practices, fertility observance, superstitions, or other ritualistic activities [Das \(2012\) 47](#). The Bodo folk dances which are described above focuses on the impulsive emotions and feelings of their joys and jublations, sorrows and critical moments of life associated with seasonal agricultural activities, new births, marriage, victory in war, funeral, social customs etc. The doudini is the only female dancer in the Bathou or *Kherai* institution. She is believed to be possessed by a divine power and she can talk about the past and can also predict the future. In *Kherai* puja along with the deities of the Bodos the gods of different leading religions of the world are also worshipped according to the respective customs. The doudini demonstrates the tales of the gods and goddesses and also impersonates their nature. While dancing the *Doudini* also holds a long sword(thungri) and a Dahal(shield), which were used by the Bodos in the battlefield [Boro \(2010\)206](#). The Bodo folk dances which are described above projects the spontaneous emotions and feelings of their joys and jublations, sorrows and critical moments of life associated with seasonal agricultural activities, new births, marriage, victory in war, funeral, social customs etc. Further, it has been emphasized on the changes in the folk performing arts of the Bodos in respect of dance, music, dress, make-up and choreographs. Though many Bodo people are trying to preserve their performing arts some of them are dying under the forces of development and modernization. Therefore, there is an urgent need of establishing a museum and archive for documentation and preservation of these dying folk performing arts of the Bodos.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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