

ISSN 2347-8934



# **JOURNAL OF FOLKLORISTICS**

**Volume II**

*Editor:*  
**Anil Boro**

**FOLKLORE RESEARCH DEPARTMENT  
GAUHATI UNIVERSITY**

Journal of Folkloristics

A Research Journal, Published from the Department of Folklore Research , Gauhati University. Gauhati 14, Assam, India.

Volume II

2014

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# A FOLKLORISTIC STUDY OF BWISAGU SONGS OF THE BODOS

Purnima Boro

**Abstract:** The present study is an attempt to make a folkloristic analysis of the Bwisagu songs which is inseparable part of Bodo folk literature. The Bwisagu festival is the most important and popular seasonal festival of the Bodo people. They observe this festival by dancing, singing and marry-making besides the related ceremonial items like cattle rites, worships etc. The present study is descriptive approach to highlight and manifest the songs of this seasonal festival.

**Key words:** Folkloristic, festival.

## Introduction:

**Bwisagu** is an important seasonal festival of the Bodos and it is celebrated about seven days with the various rites including cattle worship, worship offered to dead ancestors, house cleaning, feasting, exchange of good-will and formal bidding of the festival etc.

Reverend Sidney Endle wrote *The Bodo Bwisagu festival lasts for seven days which little or no work is done, the whole period is being given to merry making, dancing, feasting etc. the people abandon themselves to sheer merriment, the younger folks especially giving themselves up to dancing and singing.*

The word Bwisagu means beginning of the New Year or season. It is the most popular seasonal festival of the Bodos. According to Mr. Dhuparam Basumatary, the word **Bihu** is a Boro word **Bi** means 'beg something' and **Hu** means 'give' or 'donate'. Thus, 'Bihu' means to give what is begged (bi + hu = bihu).

On the other hand, Sangeet Natak Academy awardee Kamini Kumar Narzary has rightly observed that 'Bwisagu is a Boro word which has the origin in the word '**Bwiswagu**', **Bwisw** means year or age and **Agu** means start. Hence, Bwisw+agu = Bwiswagu>Bwisagu, or the starting of the year or age.

## Different types of Bwisagu songs:

The Bodos celebrate the Bwisagu festival from the last day of the *Chait* month. On first day, they observe cattle rites, and next day, they celebrate *Mansini Bwisagu* (Man's bwisagu). During cattle Bihu all cattle are given a wash, their horns and hooves are smeared with oil. They are decorated with garlands made of gourd, brinjal, turmeric etc. The cows are taken to the nearest pond or river for bathing and chants the rhymes –

*Lao za phanthaoza*

*Bwswr bwswr er hanza hanza*

*Bimani khither phiphani khither*

*Nwngswr zagwn halua gidir*

*Bima gaidebadi daza*  
*Phipha bolodbadi za*  
*Bari khonani embu bongla*  
*Bibadi za gidir zangila*  
 i.e. Eat gourd, eat brinjal  
 Grow up year to year,  
 To spite your mother and father,  
 You will be large bullock;  
 Do not be short statures like your mother.  
 Be large like your bull father  
 Like the frog in the corner of the garden  
 May you be stuck and long?

The boys strike the cows gently with twigs or the branches of *Dighilithi* (*dighalati*)  
 plant and sing:

*Digilithi mwswuni muli*  
*Digilithi laothi khri khri ganthi*  
*Dighiliti laothi khri khri ganthi*  
*Zwngni mwswua zagwn bolod zathi.*

I.e. The whip of the dighiliti  
 Is a great medicine for cows  
 Its strokes make cows  
 Yield more milk  
 Every calf will grow to be a mighty bull,  
 And no cow will be small  
 All cows will be big and tall.

The boys throw pieces of gourd; brinjal and turmeric towards the cattle and they are cleansed in the river. Then the cattle are left free in the grazing field. In the evening the cowsheds are cleaned and the cattle are given new ropes.

The next day is meant for human beings. On that day Bodos offer worship to the *Sijwu* plant that is *BathowBwrai* (Lord Shiva). The next stage is offering food and drink to their ancestor and recently dead relatives. It is customary to eat fowl's meat prepared with a bitter leaf called *Khungkha* or other wild vegetables of different tastes (*gwkhagwkhwizana*). They also offer it to the visitors on that day.

From the next day dance and music become a regular feature and the boys play on drum (Kham), flute (siphung), the four stringed Serja, thorkha (split bamboo) and the girls play on harp (gongona) and cymbal (jotha) and dance together.

The young boys and girls go to each house hold, sing songs and dances and have blessings from the elderly people. Through the songs the boys and girls express their joy and mirth and pay respects to the family. The female members of the family give them rice or money.

Assam is very rich in nature and natural sources. There is bounty of hills, rivers, birds, animals, trees etc. The Bwisagu festival is also seasonal and it is celebrated in spring time, and it is also the beginning of the New Year (According to Assamese Calendar). During this season, nature changes its colour and greenery comes to the nature. The *cokoos* also used to sing and welcomes the new season. Nature brings new hopes and aspirations among the people. So, in *Bwisagu* songs nature reflects clearly and the young boys and girls express their feelings of joy and mirth through the songs –

*Bwisagu bwthwrni okha hanaizwng  
Bomphang bilayabw khrob-khrob akhai khobw,  
Zwngni gswabw bagurum bagurum mwsanw  
Lubwikhangw hail wgw lubwikhangw.*

i.e. (With the showering rain of *Bwisagu* the tree leaves clap *khrob-khrob*,

We also want to dance *bagurum bagurum* anxiously)

Spinning and weaving has a great importance in the socio-economic life of the Bodos. The handloom has been closely related to the life and thought of the weavers. Through weaving their imagery, thought and feelings reflect in their rich artistic skill. Among the Bodos spinning and weaving has prime importance. The Bodo women weave their dresses themselves with different types of natural colour and *agor* (design). The following song gives a glance of this artistic skill of the Bodo women –

*Thang – khalthnag sal gabnai  
Habab ada  
Nwngkhwu gsw khangnanwi  
Agor ernayasw khana nangbai.*

i.e. The loom makes sound *thang-khalthang*

Oh, brother remembering you,  
My design has become shapeless

The spinning and weaving is one of the most important parts of folk culture of the community. In early ages, it was a source of socio-economic growth too. Weaving is

practiced in every home. When a village girl sets her loom, other girls of the village come and join and assist. They sit down at spinning competitions, commenting in humorous songs on the quality and fineness of the yarn, the design woven and the standard of cloth in the process of production.

Come friend,  
 Let us weave the butterfly  
 And to make the design  
 Of our mother old.  
 Let us weave the butterfly  
 That gathers floral honey sweet.  
 Let us weave the flying bird  
 On our cloth and display to all.

Agriculture is the main occupation of the Bodos. During the time of ploughing the paddy field or reaping the grain they sing work songs during *Bwisagu* in which, both menfolk and womenfolk take part. The following song is connected with paddy cultivation during the monsoon.

*Asar danao phwiw,*  
*Okhani dwi bana*  
*Ayo onjali,*  
*Baikhuni bwthorao,*  
*Nulainai jayw jwgnha.*  
 English rendering-  
 .In the month of asar  
 Comes the flood  
 Oh! My sweet heart  
 In the rainy season

We are about to meet each other.

Various types of jokes in *Bwisagu* songs are also seen among the Bodos. This type of song gives us some idea about the relationship of the family members and about their sense of humour. This type of songs is often found between boys and girls, sister in law and son in law etc. The young girls make jokes to the boys. The following song, gives a glance of joking among the young boys and girls –

Boys:

*Wua barini wua mewa*  
*Okhanaiblanw nwnswr awa phawa*

- Girls: *Habab adamwna halaubw thanga*  
*Mwiaubw zaya*  
*Nwi nwnghwrkhwu naiphingwna*  
*Nwinwnghwrkhwu phisai lagwna*
- i.e. (Boys: Bamboo shoot of bamboo plants  
 You girls are workless everyday
- Girls: Oh brother, you don't know how to plough  
 We don't care you  
 We don't marry you

The custom of paying money for the bride is an ancient social custom of the Bodos, and it is known as *gaojwnthakha* (bride price) in Bodo. Some scholars want to say that this bride price is a tribal feature. If the youth belong to a poor family, he regrets his inability to pay the bride price which is an important part of their tradition. The bride groom family have to pay this bride price during the time of marriage. Even sometimes, this bride price becomes unaffordable. Then a baffled lover cry out against parents whose demand for a high bride price has set up an obstacle in his path to happiness. The *bwisagusong* related to this custom is

*Bilw budangni na bingsi*  
*Ayo nwnglai ma ese dam bisi*  
*Nwnghkwu langnwbla nanga nanglaigwn*  
*Bangase thakha*

*Habab gwrib gundra yazalaigwn halai-haphai.*

(Why are you so costly dear? A big amount is required to pay for you,  
 But being a poor boy where the money shall I get)

The Bwisagu songs also express the beauty of nature and it gives a description of the spring time along with the physical beauty of women. The Bwisagu songs are incomplete without the physical beauty of women. In Bodo society, the Bodo women keep long hair and they are expert in weaving and spinning. The physical beauty of Bodo women are found through the Bwisagu song –

*Agwi gonthong zongzid*  
*Zanziau naywbla mwzlai zanzi*  
*Adwiau naywbla wua mewai*  
*Zerauwbw akha-phakha*  
*Zeraubw mwnnw thanga.*

i.e. (Oh beloved, the pointed nose of you, your waist is like the waist of an ant, bamboo shoot like legs, you are skilled in every sphere, the girl like you are rare in this world.

The significance of this song is expression of physical beauty of a beautiful girl. Love is also an important theme of the *Bwisagu* song. The love and attraction among the young boys and girls, frustration and separation etc. also reflect in *Bwisagu* songs-

*Habab ada gwswjwng gwsw jadwngbwla*

*Mwnjwng mwn jaswngbwla*

*Ai aphanau angkhwu swngphwi*

(If you are in love with me

If you want to marry me

Come and talk with parents of mine)

#### Conclusion:

There are many special characteristics of the *Bwisagu* songs. The first characteristics of these songs are that it is oral songs which are traditionally bounded and transmitted orally from generation to generation. These songs were impersonal and composed by illiterate people. The *Bwisagu* song is an important part of Bodo culture and tradition. Due to need of the hour the collection and preservation of those oral songs has become necessary. These songs provide us sufficient data regarding various aspects of the folk life and society. In this sense, these songs are powerful item of folklore. They serve as the pulse of the society. The elements of folklore are social products; they are created refined and transmitted by the people. Folklore serves the society in a variety of ways—it provides amusement, validates culture, educates the people and serves as a vehicle of social protest.

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