

**TRANSLATING MARGINS: THE TRANSLATION  
OF DHARANI DHAR OWARI'S "MWIHUR"**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirement  
for the award of the degree of*

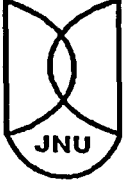
**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

**ESTHER SUKRITI NARJINARI**



**CENTRE FOR LINGUISTICS & ENGLISH  
SCHOOL OF LANGUAGE, LITERATURE & CULTURE STUDIES  
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY  
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जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय

**Jawaharlal Nehru University**


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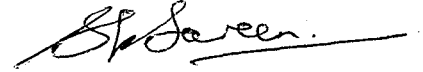
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**Supervisor**

  
(Prof. Harish Narang)

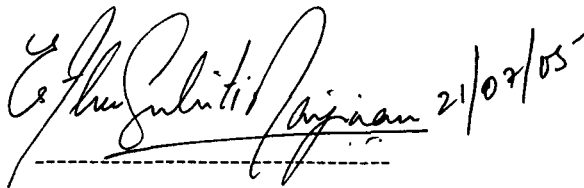
**Chairperson**

  
(Prof. S.K. Sareen)

**Prof. Santosh K. Sareen**  
Chairperson  
Centre of Linguistics & English  
School of Language, Literature & Culture Studies,  
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi-110067

## DECLARATION BY THE CANDIDATE

This dissertation entitled, *Translating Margins: The Translation of Dharani Dhar Owari's "Mwihur"*, submitted by the undersigned to the Centre of Linguistics & English, School of Language, Literature & Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or full, for any other degree or diploma of any University/Institution.

 21/07/05

Esther Sukriti Narjinari

Centre of Linguistics & English  
School of Languages, Literature & Culture Studies.  
Jawaharlal Nehru University  
New Delhi – 110067

Date: 21.07.05.

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21.07.2005

Esther Sukriti Narjinari

To my loving

*Āpha, Āi and Ābo*

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## Introduction

Woman: *Ngai! It is the same old story. Everywhere. Mombasa. Nakuru. Kisumu. Eldoret. The same old story. Our people...tearing one another... and all because of the crumbs thrown at them by the exploiting foreigners. Our own food eaten and leftovers thrown to us – in our own land, where we should have the whole share. We buy wood from our own forests; sweat on our own soil for the profit of our oppressors. Kimathi's teaching is: unite, drive out the enemy and control your own riches, enjoy the fruit of your sweat.*<sup>1</sup>

The given extract, as is obvious, encapsulates very vividly the plight of the Blacks in the wake of the widespread racism as practised by the white colonial masters. The current situation of the Bodos may not be as acute as that of the Blacks. But a differing mode of the colonization process still wreaked havoc on the culture, history, society and language of the Bodos, however benign the process might be considered to be.

The colonization of the Bodos, who are accepted in the academic circles as the earliest Indo-Mongoloid inhabitants of Assam, of Tibeto-Burman in origin, began directly with the coming of the British in 1826. With the coming of the British in the nineteenth century, problems of displacement, land alienation, marginalization, and economic degradation took place<sup>2</sup> on a large scale. The British during this time had taken firm control over the hills and the plains of Assam. The mode of colonization that the British adopted in these areas was the annexation of the kingdoms of local kings, the exploitation of these lands for growing tea, the introduction of the system of recorded land rights and encouraging migration to fill up the vast tracts of vacant

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<sup>1</sup> Thiong'o, Ngugi wa and Micere Githae Mugo. *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi.* ( Heinemann: Nairobi, 1976). 18.

<sup>2</sup> Pegu, Jadav. *Reclaiming Identity: A Discourse on Bodo History.* (Kokrajhar: Jwngsar Narzary, 2004).62



land<sup>3</sup>. This aggravated the problems of the Bodo people and their impact can be witnessed till today. Their land policy for instance was opposed to the usual practice of the Bodos who did not believe in owning a fixed plot of land as property. In the earlier days, they were nomadic by nature, practicing 'jhum' cultivation and mono cropping. But with the implementation of these British policies, the Bodo way of life received a severe blow. Coming under the British rule, the state of Assam began to undergo upheavals that encompassed the entire area and the communities living there. Jadav Pegu in his work, *Reclaiming Identity: A Discourse on Bodo History* rightly says:

Thus the insular nature of its existence was rudely shaken up and within a few years people from other parts of colonial India came in hordes to settle here or take up trades or jobs under the British government. The state was no longer the exclusive homeland of the Bodos and the hill tribes.<sup>4</sup>

In the present time, the demand of the Bodos for a separate homeland thus points to this historical event that has had lasting negative implications. Today, the Bodos live in a split identity both within and outside the state of Assam. Within Assam, the problems have risen due to the use of the term 'Assamese' to denote people living within the borders of Assam. The term is problematic precisely because it is inherently homogenizing and it silences the plurality of cultures existing in the state where a majority of the communities originate from the Sino-Tibetan Bodo race. Another important reason for the loss of identity is the break up of the entire Bodo race into numerous sub-tribes. This was primarily due to the resettling of the original Bodo tribe represented by today's Bodos in Assam especially those belonging to Kokrajhar and other neighbouring areas. In the course of time, these sections that branched off, came up with different variations in their original language, culture and customs thereby forming new sub groups. The evidence of this is seen in the fact that these tribes still retain their original linguistic structures. This is the reason why the allied tribes of the Bodo race are found in lower Assam, north Bengal and south-eastern Nepal where they are known as Meches; in the Brahmaputra valley as Lalungs, Rabhas,, Koches, Chutiyas, Morans and Sonowals; as Dimasa in the North

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p 61

Cachar hills; as Burmans in Cachar or Barak valley; as Tripuris or Tipperas in Tripura; Garos in Meghalaya and Hajongs in the foothills of Bangladesh adjoining Tripura. Even the ruins of the Cachari capital Dimapur in Nagaland testify to this changed reality<sup>5</sup>.

On the other hand, when a Bodo moves out of the borders of Assam, s/he again faces the problem of identity arising from the term 'Assamese'. As a member of the Bodo speaking community, I had at one time experienced this loss of identity when a certain acquaintance decided to speak convincingly within the confines of her limited knowledge about my identity. The person in question believed that I must be necessarily an Assamese, despite the fact that I was from North Bengal, for the simple reason that I was a Bodo. According to her, the Bodos were identified as living in places like Kokrajhar, Darrang, Guwahati, to name a few. Despite my repeated attempts to correct her perception that the term Assamese was inadequate to express the diversity of Indo-Mongoloid cultures, especially the Bodos, living alongside one another within the confines of the geographical entity called Assam. Since the term also denoted a particular language group called 'Assamese', her position remained unchanged. Here again I would like to refer to Jadav Pegu's work which has been able to focus on these debates objectively. In his *Introduction: The Bodo Identity*<sup>6</sup>, he refers to the meaning of the term as expressed by the noted Assamese writer, Homen Borgahain in the 67<sup>th</sup> session of the Assam Sahitya Sabha who refers to it as those people who have been residing in Assam who have been using Assamese for ages and who have accepted Assamese as their second language. Pegu further says:

It is difficult to imagine a Marathi living in Orissa, pick up the Oriya language and start identifying himself as an Oriya. Or for that matter, an 'Assamese' staying in Tamil Nadu, learning Tamil and calling himself a Tamil.<sup>7</sup>

Thus the concerns underlying these complex issues have been a motivating factor for me to choose to translate a Bodo work of art into the English language. Here I am obviously adhering to the notion of 'Translation' as being fundamentally, in the first

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<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p 63.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p 34.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p 1-14.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p 7.

count, a process of “cross-cultural communication”. Especially so because of the reality characterized by attempts of reaching out across political boundaries in order to establish global relationships between diverse cultures that we live in.

According to Sherry Simon, the “cultural turn” in translation studies is nourished by and contributes to the dynamics of cultural representation’ (p 137). According to her, the process of translation requires the understanding of the ‘local realities’ that a language is tied to rather than finding lexical equivalents. For her ‘the process of meaning transfer’ that translation involves, has more to do with ‘reconstructing’ the cultural values of the source text in the target text, and not to be simply involved in ‘finding the cultural inscription of the term’ (p 138)<sup>8</sup>. The perception of the process of translation through the *cultural eyes* necessarily draws our attention to the close relationship that postcolonialism and translation studies share. For, this is a site that raises such problematic terms like representation, hierarchies and power struggles. As Tejaswini Niranjana states in her work that the translation takes place between languages that are unequal in their relationship to each other; where the language translated into almost always stands in a higher plane than the language translated from<sup>9</sup>. Thus the significance of bringing cultural studies into contact with translation lies in the fact that it enables us to view translation through three perspectives that have been of lasting influence since the beginning of the twentieth century. The first being poststructuralism, which emphasizes, “the power of the language to construct rather than simply reflect reality”; the second, postcolonialism that “highlights the power relations which inform contemporary cultural exchanges”; and the last, postmodernism that “emphasizes that, in a universe where total novelty is a rare phenomenon, a great deal of cultural activity involves the recycling of already existing material.”<sup>10</sup>

As to the debate about the choice of language for translating into, notwithstanding what Meenakshi Mukherjee says in her essay ‘Divided by a Common Language’ from *The Perishable Empire* that the politics of translation within Indian languages is far

<sup>8</sup> Simon, Sherry. *Gender in Translation*. (New York: Routledge, 1996).138.

<sup>9</sup> Tejaswini, Niranjana. *Sitting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context*. (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1995).

<sup>10</sup> Simon, Sherry. *Gender in Translation*. (New York: Routledge, 1996). 136.

less than when translating into the 'master' language, I have chosen to translate into English precisely for two reasons. The most obvious one is since I am doing my M.Phil from a university which has English as the medium of instruction. The second reason is purely personal, because having grown up in an environment where English is the most commonly spoken language and considering the fact that my education has been in the English medium, it is but obvious that I would be more at ease in translating a novel written in my mother-tongue into English despite some of the problems that the choice of this language throws up.

In choosing to translate the particular novel in question, I have been guided by several considerations. The major one being, again, personal in nature. *Mwihur*, the novel I found, was an ambitious endeavour on the part of the writer, Dharani Dhar Owari. Even as he adheres to the popular taste of stories having a romantic aspect, he attempts to weave through his simple plot almost the entire world of the Bodos together with their world views, their social customs and taboos, their rites, rituals, festivals as well as the depiction of how the ordinary Bodo people live. The writer also shows the difference in the predicament of the Bodos as it was earlier and as it is at the present moment. A subtle depiction of the position of women, who have no say in important community matters is also made. He makes references to the legendary Bodo heroes like Jaoliya Dewan and Birgosree and their feats. Through the character of Loren, the novel brings in the voice of the newly educated generation. In voicing the unreasonableness of certain social offences, the author speaks through Loren observing that the superstitions that bind Bodo society need to be dispensed with. Considered as a novel that depicts the Bodo society, it is not much different from others in this category. Usually a love story that begins spontaneously and makes progress gradually, ends tragically either with the deaths of both the male and female protagonists or one of them. For example, in *Malati* (1983) by Samjit Kumar Brahma, the heroine is killed by her rival in love just before the day she is about to get married to her lover. These novels also focus on developing a perception of the Bodo society, making extensive references to the historical, mythological and socio-cultural background. *Mwihur* too, makes such references so extensively that it almost disrupts the narrative structure of the novel. But what is most interesting is the strategy of backwards-forwards narration which tries to bring in continuity almost like the style

of Conrad's *Lord Jim* and *Heart of Darkness*. The difference that *Mwihur* has, in comparison with the other novels, is that the descriptive passages of the changing Bodo society show a sustained and deliberate attempt to refocus our attention on these passages rather than on the plot. In fact, the story only seems to be a play for the author's intention of providing a historical and socio-cultural account through his novel.

The second reason that led to my choosing of *Mwihur* as a text for translation, is because of the fact that the novel has been given the distinction of being the best Bodo social novel for the year 1997 by the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, the literary body of the Bodos. It was awarded the Sameshwar Brahma Bantha.

And Thirdly, because the book has been prescribed as a textbook in the three years' graduate degree course of the Guwahati University. The value given to this novel in including it as a text book indicates its social significance within Bodo Literature and the community.

The target audience for this translation is no doubt a select English speaking group, with the consideration that the readers are unaware of the particular culture that the novel is about. Hence keeping in mind my central preoccupations with the translation and the concomitant problems, I feel it necessary that some preliminary remarks be made to introduce to the non-Bodo speaking reader the socio-cultural and historical background of the Bodos which I do in my First chapter. I have divided this chapter, **The Bodos – Life, Literature and Thought**, into two sections. In the first, I look into the social and philosophical organization of Bodo life, or in other words, their world view. And in the Second, I have dealt considerably with the literature of the Bodos. Chapter 2 contains the translation of the novel, *Mwihur*., I have in my **Conclusion**, talked very briefly about these problems of translation. And finally, to further aid a non-Bodo reader in the context of Bodo society, I have felt it necessary to provide a **Glossary** that gives the English equivalents and explanations of some of the Bodo terms that I have retained in the translation.

## Chapter 1

### **The Bodos – Life, Literature and Thought**

#### I

#### **Life and Thought**

The Bodos today comprise a major section of the ethnic mix of the state of Assam. They form the largest group among the plains in the Brahmaputra valley. They are concentrated in Kokrajhar, considered as the Bodo heartland, Bongaigaon, Bijni, Sidli, Tamalpur and Udalguri. According to the 1991 Census, the total Bodo population in Assam was 11,39,194. But there are also a large number of Bodo speaking people in the districts of Jalpaiguri, Coochbehar, Darjeeling, West Dinajpur and Malda in North Bengal. In these parts they are however known as the 'Meches'. According to Charu Chandra Sanyal, they are a Tibeto-Burman speaking Indomongoloid tribe who migrated to India through the Patkoi hills between India and Burma. They gradually spread to Assam, North Bengal and also parts of East Bengal (now Bangladesh).

The term 'Bodo' however had not always been used to refer to the present day Bodos (in Assam known as Bodo-Kacharis). The word was originally coined by B.H.Hodgson in 1846 during his survey of the Meches residing in the area of Darjeeling. He found that the people here called themselves 'Boroni Bisha' or 'Fisha' meaning 'Sons of Boro' or 'Sons of Man'. Hodgson thus took the word from them to be used as a generic term to mean a group of tribes sharing a common linguistic background. The Bodos thus include: Boro-Kacharis, Mech-Kachari, Dimasa, Thengal, Sonowal, Deuri, Lalung, Burman, Rava, Tipperah, Garos. We find this to be confirmed by G.A. Grierson in his *Linguistic Survey of India*, Vol. II, Part II, 1903. He says: "The generic term Bodo was first applied by Hodgson to this group of languages".

It is believed that in the ancient times, they were however known as 'Kiratas': in the Mahabharata (*Udyog parva*.18), we find that one of the sections of king Bhagadatta's soldiers were Kiratas; the *Atharvaveda* (X.4.14) refers to a Kirata girl who is digging a herbal remedy on the ridges of mountains. In terms of their place of habitation too, references can be found in the ancient books – The *Mahabharata* (926.32) points out that Kirata dwellers existed in the Himalayan regions, particularly in the Eastern Himalayas. The *Brihat Samhita* (XIV, 18, 29-30) also places the Kiratas in the North-east. The *Vishnu Puranas* (Book ii, iii) locate the habitat of the Kiratas in the marshy region of the hills of Assam.<sup>11</sup>

The Bodos were believed to be the rulers of Kamarupa, earlier known as the Kingdom of Pragjyotisha. Ruins found in Dimapur, Khaspur and Maibong also point to the extent of the Bodo Kingdom in the eastern parts of Assam. The various names of places in Assam, particularly of rivers, also throw light on the spread of the influence of the Bodo kings.

According to Dr. Ramesh Bharadwaj the Bodos had ruled in the Indus Valley Civilization. This resulted in the Aryanisation of the Bodos during the time of the advent of the Aryans in the North-eastern part of India. (It has been said that there was a simultaneous exodus of both the Aryans and the Bodo races in the early centuries: the Aryans from the North-west, the Bodos in the North-east part of India). According to Bhandarkar, the Aryans seem to have had knowledge of Eastern India as far as the country of the Kiratas. But their advent towards the east as A.C. Haddon says, was hindered by the dense forests which then covered the middle plains. But eventually they spread along the valley of Jamuna and Ganges. They also migrated into the rich alluvial plains of Assam from the early times. Many of them mixed with the aboriginal population and formed the Semi-Hinduised aborigines. The results of these movements and intermingling thus led to the Sanskritization of the Tibeto-Burman people, primarily the Bodos. The local pre-Aryan names of both Sino-Tibetan and Austric origin thus began to be linked with the Brahmanical Hindu notions of religion and its rituals. Sacred places were gradually Hinduised with the myth and legends contained in the Puranas. Such sanskritization of the Bodos was

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<sup>11</sup> Narjinari, H.C. *In Search of Identity: The Meches*. (Calcutta: Ashok Chakraborty, 2000).

initiated by the Brahmin missionaries who, in order to elevate the ruling House of the Bodos gave them a fictional descent of some hero of Hindu legend. Thus conferring on them the status of Kshatriyas a lower form than the actual Kshatriya class among the Aryans. This was however seen as a strategy of appropriation. S.K. Chatterjee says that the device of extending to the ruling families of the time, with Kshatriya lineage, was not new. In India it was an age old device. It was used to enable not only the military and culturally advanced aristocracy of non-Aryan origin but also powerful foreign groups like the Greeks and the Sakas and other Iranians, the Huns who settled in India, to be absorbed within the fold of the Hindu Society. But despite 'Aryanisation' among the Bodos they did not adhere to the shackles of varnajati system of the Hindus. They also never claimed such Kshatriyahood. One of the main reasons was their continuing underdevelopment in all major areas over which non-Bodos had until now, a virtual monopoly in terms of educational opportunities, problems relating to land and language.

Their initial steps for self-determination led to the creation of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha on 16<sup>th</sup> November, 1952, after a prolonged struggle since the British regime. The main demand of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha was to make Bodo as a medium of instruction. This was met out in phases. In 1969, it was first introduced as a medium of instruction in L.P. Schools of Kokrajhar Sub-division. Later, it was extended to various sub-divisions and districts of the whole of Assam. Gradually it was also used as a medium of instruction up to the secondary stage. The Sabha again proved to be a determining force when again in 1967, Guwahati University began offering Bodo as a Modern Indian Language (MIL) in degree courses as well as in NEHU and Dibrugarh University. In 1994, it was offered as a Diploma course and since 1995 as an M.A. (2 year) course. In fact in 1984, the Assam Government had given Bodo, the status and recognition of an associate official language in Kokrajhar district and Udalguri sub-division to the Bodo language. But despite such remarkable development in a short span of time, Bodo language and literature still needs to be developed further in terms of its content, production of text books, to meet the paucity of well-trained teachers and so on. Added to this, is the problem of the most appropriate script for the language. But education in itself is not sufficient for a community's complete all-round development. Certain measures of political and economic autonomy should be



provided by the Government. The demand for a separate homeland 'Bodoland' was subsequently initiated. Bineswar Brahma, the late President of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha says that even after fifty years of Indian Independence, the Bodo people have felt alienated from the mainstream, primarily because of the negligence by the State Government and by extension by the Government of India. Their basic problems and issues such as irrigation, health, drinking water, industrialization, and higher education have not been solved. In the 2000 edition of the yearly souvenir of the Delhi Bodo Association, he is quoted to have said that, "Their language, culture, tradition have not been presumed by the government for which they are very frustrated." In addition to that, he goes on to say that the influx of other Indian citizens from States like Bengal and Bihar has been changing the demography of the Bodo people in Assam. As an example, he talks of their alienated condition with respect to agricultural land despite the provision of protection of tribal belts and blocks in the Assam Land Revenue Regulation Act, 1886(Amended in 1948). Such provisions remain only on paper. This has resulted in their feeling that they have become a microscopic minority in some pockets and carry the apprehension that their culture and traditions may soon die out.

However, the creation of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) on February 10, 2003 gave the ultimate fruition to the prolonged struggle of the Bodos for national identity and a sense of belongingness. The BTC has been created as an autonomous and self-governing body under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. Following that, the inclusion of the Bodo language in the Eighth Schedule gives the promise of the ultimate realization of the dreams of the Bodo people. However, only the future would show as to how much of this space granted to the Bodos would prove to be the driving force in initiating development programmes for the Bodo community.

#### Agricultural practices of the Bodos:

Located mostly in the eastern part of Assam, near the Brahmaputra, the Bodos are agriculturists by nature. The Bodos are mainly paddy growers, rice being their staple

diet, and so the practices are generally associated with these. The consideration for their choice of plot for cultivation rests on the conduciveness of irrigation facilities and rain water. The best land for the Bodos is the land called the *jhamphøi daria ha*. Irrigation is carried out with the help of a constructed water channel (*jhamphøi*) which the Bodos themselves build.

While Jute (*phattø*), mustard seeds (*besor*) are commonly grown. But the growing of areca nut trees is the second most important cultivation. Other than bringing in money, these areca-nuts also have an important role in carrying out social functions and in almost all the rituals of the Bodo community.

Rearing of cocoons for manufacturing *endi* and *muga* silk is also another traditional means of livelihood. For this purpose the castor oil plant is grown to feed the *eri* worms.<sup>12</sup>

#### Food habits:

Other than rice, the Bodos are very fond of eating meat which is an essential item when guests come to their houses. Generally the Bodos eat chicken, ducks, pigeons, pigs, goats, deer, turtle, hare, and among the Christians beef is eaten. However, pork is the preferred dish among the meats above. At social feasts pork is the main source of meat dishes. Fish is also eaten especially sun dried or roasted.

*Jou* or homemade rice beer is also very popular among the Bodos. It is similar to the toddy of the south. But apart from that it has a great value too. *Jou* is used in social functions as well as in religious rituals like the offering of it to *Bathou-Brai*, the chief god of the Bodos.

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<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p 99.

### Traditional clothes:

One of the distinctive features of the Bodo community is their passion for weaving their own clothes. The women wear a *Dokhna* which is a large hand woven cotton cloth like a thick variety of cotton bed sheet which is tied around the chest and secured under the armpits. No other forms of clothes were worn earlier but the modern day Bodo woman pairs her *Dokhna* with a sari blouse that has now become an inseparable part of the Bodo women's traditional attire. The women also have to carry a *chadar* or *jumgra* (similar to the duppatta but only shorter, which is also hand woven). As for the Bodo men, they would wear a hand-woven *gamcha* tied around the waist and hanging till the knees. However in modern times, the men have discarded the use of this and have taken to wearing trousers but still retaining the use of *aronai* (a hand-woven scarf like cloth worn by men especially and used during the dances too). On special occasions they wear even a traditional tie.

### Homesteads:

Traditionally the Bodo homestead comprises of four huts built according to the directions and facing all four directions. The largest is called *noma no* or *noma* which is located in the north but facing southwards. The Bodos believe that the deity *Mainao* resides in this house. The house that is meant for the parents, is the eastern house facing west. The southern house which can be occupied by any one of the family members, faces north. The western house, facing east, is occupied by the married son if there is one. Unmarried boys and girls are housed in a separate house called *nocha*. The houses are made of bamboo poles, the walls of mud, smeared with cowdung and the roof of *thuri*, a variety of elephant grass. In recent years however these houses are rare to find. Bungalows and even concrete brick houses have taken their place.

### Nature of social structure

The social structure of the Bodos is primarily patriarchal but there are suggestions of the society having been matriarchal in the early days by some writers. Property rights are given only to male family members. The wife of a deceased man may get possession of her husband's inheritance but after her death it again goes to her sons. However if a family has no possible male heirs, the inheritance goes to the daughters.<sup>13</sup> The position of a woman is however not that of an inferior, degraded human being. Women are rather equal consorts in everything. Even when it comes to physical labour, for example during the transplantation and harvest times, women work as hard as the males. Allowance is also made to a widow to remarry if she so desires. The only condition being the elder brother of the deceased husband cannot be the husband. In case there is no son in a family, then the property goes to the daughter who in that case enters into a form of marriage where the bridegroom lives in the bride's house after marriage. This is referred to as *gØrjia lakhinai*. Such forms of marriage are seen in quite a few Bodo families even till this day.

Women can also indulge in the buying and selling of pigs, goats and fowls. However, Bodo society being patriarchal in nature, there are subtle shades of discrimination on the basis of gender. For instance, the natural biological cycles of a woman (during puberty, pregnancy) is considered unclean and certain restrictions are imposed upon her.

The Bodo society also seems to be divided into social groups having their respective totems. The traditional names given to these groups are *gotras* or *aris*. These were however not really a hindrance to the marriage customs. It is interesting to note that modern day Bodo surnames are a direct reflection of these social groups which used to exist earlier before the organization of a composite society among the Bodos. Some of these social groups or *aris* are as follows:

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<sup>13</sup> Brahma, Dr. K. *An Introduction to the Myths and Legends of the Bodos*. (Kokrajhar: Sri Pradip Kumar Bhowmik, 2004). 45.

*Sampramari* or *Champramari* : This level corresponds to the Brahmins of Vedic Hindus. Mostly belong to the priestly class and officiate in marriage and funeral ceremonies.

*Narjinari*: These are the warrior class. They are also called the Jute-sect as Narjai refer to jute plant.

*Basumatari*: These are the landlords and cultivators as *Basu* means earth and *Mata* means mother.

*Moshahari*: These are the Tiger sect (*Møsha* means tiger in Bodo) group

*Hajoari*: This probably arose based on habitation of a section of the Bodos in the earlier days. Hajo meaning hill.

*Bargoyari*: These in ancient time were considered as the leaders of the village.

*Iswarari*: These are the worshippers of God.

*Doimari*: These are those who live near the big rivers (*døi* meaning water).

*Khakhlouari*: Cultivators of sweet gourd.

*Goyari*: These are the areca nut growers.

*Owari*: The name of the clan originated from the belief that these were the Bodos who planted bamboos for the first time.

*Swargiari*: considered to be direct descendents from *Bathou* and hence thought to be at the top.<sup>14</sup>

Some of them, especially the *Meches* in North Bengal, have however adopted Bengali titles like *Mondal*, *Roy*, *Singha*. The tendency of adopting such titles foreign to their cultures exhibit the tendency of the Bodos to be influenced and assimilated by what is thought to be a comparatively superior cultural group. These clan names were however not a hindrance to intra-marriages.

### Modes of recreation:

The Bodos also show a marked passion for music and dance. These dances are at times part of religious activities or festivals to mark certain seasons. Usually during the time of such festivities, a strong intoxicating drink called *jou* is also consumed in heavy amounts. The Bodo dance and music are however interdependent and share a special relationship. One cannot do without the other.

**Bodo music** – the music of the Bodos are necessarily played from traditionally made musical instruments made from bamboo. These are the *Kham* (the equivalent of a drum that is big, long and hung around the neck lengthwise); *Siphung* (a bamboo flute with five holes on it); *Serja* (similar to the violin except played inverted position; the body is made from the *Sijou* tree and the bow a bamboo strip); *Jotha* (cymbals); *Gongona* (the jew's harp made of bamboo); *Thorkha* (a kind of a bamboo clapper); *Japkhiring* (similar to a tambourine but made of wood); *Binyee* (similar to a sitar except the base is made up of a horizontally placed coconut shell whereas the trunk is made of wood or bamboo). Out of all these the three main ones are the *Kham*, *Siphung* and *Jotha*. They are even referred to as the 'Tribdyas'.<sup>15</sup> There are three categories under which Bodo music can be classified. The first being instrumental, the second, those songs, incantations and hymns sung in rituals and other cultural and social events and third dance music. The dance music is a special type that is performed only during bodo dances. The songs are also divided on the basis of the different types of dance.

**Bodo dance** - considered as a form of folk dance in which movements are very systematic. Dances usually have a significance of their own. They either depict the practice of religious customs, social festivals, the manner and process of Bodo marriages or at other times they refer to events of daily existence. There are many types of dances accordingly but the important ones are divided into the following categories: *Kherai dance*, *Habajanai dance*, *Bagrumba dance*, *Bwisagu dance*, *Raijwanai dance*. Of all these the *Bagrumba dance* is the most popular and the most

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<sup>14</sup> Sanyal, Charu Chandra. *Meches and the Tots: Two Sub Himalayan tribes of North Bengal*. (Darjeeling: University of North Bengal, 1973). 5-6.

<sup>15</sup> Brahma, Dr. L. *Religion and Dances of the Bodos*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Kokrajhar: P. K. Bhowmik, 2003). 48.

beautiful. It depicts the activities of young Bodo maidens and their inane gossips and merry making. The dance movements resemble the flitting of butterflies. These dances in turn are danced to the accompaniment of a selection of the Bodo musical instruments. For instance, the *kherai* dance uses the *Kham*, *Siphung* and *Jotha*; in the *Habajanai* dance only the *Siphung* is used; in the *Bagrumba* dance a combination of *Kham*, *Siphung*, *Jotha*, *Sherja*, *Gongona* and *Japkhiring* are used; the *Bwisagu* dance uses apart from the *Tribadyas*, either a *Sherja* or *Binyee* is used along with the *Gongona*, *Japkhiring* and *Thorkha*; *Raijaw janai* dance uses the *Kham*, *Siphung*, *Sherja* or *Binyee jotha and Japkhiring*.<sup>16</sup>

#### Community activities:

The Bodos also demonstrate a tendency to be bonded by a strong community feeling. They are thus usually engaged in group activities especially with respect to their recreational activities. This stems from the common perception among the Bodos that the individual was cared for by the community and thus the individual was accountable to his people on every count. This could be referred to as their 'morality' arising from their traditional beliefs, customs and practices. They also have a strong moral duty, not to the self but to the community. Thus some of their major rituals like the *Kherai Puja and GarjØ puja* are performed for securing the welfare of the village. However these involve a lot of preparations prior to the actual puja. For instance, before the performing of the *GarjØ puja* any guilty person who has indulged in an immoral activity must apologise before the gods of the *GarjØ puja*. The question of whether there are guilty persons in the village, is conveyed by the scattering of the various articles that had been placed on the altar the previous night of the puja. Because of their individual identity arising from his/her group, the Bodos are very fond of helping each other within the community. '...the life of each person was closely knit together with that of the community...'.<sup>17</sup> Hence their recreational activities are usually inclined towards a community involvement. *Saouri* is probably one of the more adhered to even in today. The reason being, *Saouri* is closely

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<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, p 47-8.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p 48.

connected to their mode of existence which is agricultural in nature. This group activity takes place because an individual of the community is unable to complete his agricultural activities of transplanting of paddy and harvesting. So this individual invites his neighbours to help him. The Bodos call this *Saori lingnai* and the participation is called *Saori janai*. In case it takes the whole day or longer, the one who invites arranges eating provisions to be offered to his helpers which are consumed on the spot itself.<sup>18</sup> *Mwihur* is another form of community involvement of recreation where they hunt wild animals and birds of the forests, especially deer and wild boars for the sake of meat or for pleasure and for those who are poor. In the earlier days the Bodos used *Jilit* (bow), *Bla* or *Thir* (arrows). At times especially for killing a wild boar, *Jong* (spear) was used. Fishing or *Na gurnai* was also indulged in primarily for personal consumption or for pleasure. This activity was however also indulged in by the womenfolk of the community forming groups for that purpose. The Bodos primarily catch fish from small running streams and rivers. The Bodos use fishing implements and traps made especially from bamboo – *Jikhai* (fishing trap), *Khobai* (a container to keep fish), *Khokha, burung* (forms of fishing trap). Apart from these they also use *Ze* (fishing net) which are of two types- *Zema* to catch big fish and *Zesa* a smaller net to catch the smaller variety of fish. Earlier fishing was mostly aided by using natural forms of poison to contaminate the water whereby the fish would die. They would for instance use a creeper *Rugubdi*, easily obtainable from the jungles. The cut strips from this creeper, about a foot long, would be tied in bundles and beaten with a stick in the water. The fruit of the *Gorol* tree called *Biskantra* which was first pounded in a mortar into a pulp and then mixed with the water was used. Other natural sources of poison was the bark of the tree *Kodaldanga, Siris* or *Lakhri*.

### Marriage customs

Bodo forms of marriage are also remarkable. There are a number of ways in which a man and a woman can get married. The man can practically kidnap the girl from her house which is known as marriage by capture or *Donkhatnai*; or the woman can

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<sup>18</sup> Narjinari, H.C. *In Search of Identity: The Meches*. (Calcutta: Ashok Chakraborty, 2000). 97.



willingly leave her house and stay at her lover's house until they are finally married by the consent of the community (this being mandatory) - *Khatsonnai*. Marriage can also take place through arrangement by the parents – *Hinjao Səngnai* as well as a man rendering his services to a particular household can get a bride for his services. This is known as *Gərjia Lanai*.

#### Traditional Customs and Practices of the Bodos (their Rites Rituals and Festivals):

The Bodo rites and rituals may have been an important part of their lives in the earlier days, but with the conversions and influence of primarily Hinduism, Brahma religion and Christianity, these traditional customs and practices have begun to wane. The significance of traditional customs and practices has been reduced to the status of just performing them simply to keep traditional culture alive. However, there are a few among the followers of Hinduism who still adhere to traditional customs and practices and in the process have brought about some changes in these.<sup>19</sup> These people in turn share an intrinsic relationship with their religion and their collective world view.

The rituals and traditional practices can thus be broadly divided into two, however not very distinct categories of cultural and religious rites and rituals. These customs and practices in a number of instances are also connected to superstition and beliefs.

#### Cultural rites and rituals:

With regard to women - most of these rites and rituals are linked to the life cycle of a woman from puberty till she becomes a mother.

**Puberty rites** – this is usually carried out in secret.<sup>20</sup> Where the girl on getting her first menstruations is kept confined to a room for three days and her meals are taken to her. On the fourth day she is allowed to come out of her quarantine, is bathed and

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<sup>19</sup> Devi, Premlata. *Social and Religious Institutions of Bodos*. Rev. ed. (Guwahati: Geophil Publishing House, 2004). 94.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p 95.

then allowed to resume her daily activities.<sup>21</sup> The ceremony that is specially carried out during this quarantine period involves the wearing of a new garment, *Dokhna* by the girl and the arranging of a feast by the parents. At this time a banana plant is placed where the girl takes her bath. This is carried out to symbolize fertility that will carry on the race. The significance of this lies in the girl having reached puberty, an indication of having survived the uncertainties of childhood where most babies in those times would die due to lack of any medical facilities. This rite is still prevalent in some parts of Assam like parts of the Kokrajhar district.<sup>22</sup>

**Pregnancy rites** – these rites are carried out in order to wards of evil spirits and to ensure a safe delivery. Here the pregnant woman is not allowed to go out alone on Tuesdays and Saturdays as the Bodos believe these two days to be inauspicious. She is made to bathe on the third day of every full moon after which she has to sprinkle holy water or *d̄oi* gather *sathmai* around all the huts and on the courtyard from the *Bathou* up to the location of *Mainao* who is believed to stay in the north hut. This is carried on till the day of delivery.<sup>23</sup>

**Birth rituals** – here, the umbilical cord of a newborn baby is cut with a sharp hard bamboo strip and then the detached cord is wrapped with cotton or muga thread. The placenta is later buried at the front of the main house (*noma*) or away from the homestead. The baby is then sprinkled with holy water while there is a chanting of a mantra.

### Festivals:

The festivals of the Bodos are usually harvest oriented, *Baisagu* being the most important one. It is celebrated in the month of April, performed in order to get a good harvest. *Domasi* is another festival relating to harvesting where earthen lamps are offered in the paddy fields, at the cowshed, the granary, at the altar of *Bathou* and near the *sijou* plant. *Kherai* puja is yet another harvest festival in which there is more

<sup>21</sup> Narjinari, H.C. *In Search of Identity: The Meches*. (Calcutta: Ashok Chakraborty, 2000). 57.

<sup>22</sup> Devi, Premlata. *Social and Religious Institutions of Bodos*. Rev. ed. (Guwahati: Geophil Publishing House, 2004). 95-6.

emphasis on religious rituals and rites. These rites are carried out by a *deodhani*, the key dancer and exorcist who becomes the medium between the gods and the worshippers. The last most important festival is called *Garjo puja*. This puja is done primarily to rid the village of all uncleanness so that the entire village can be protected from any calamity that might occur. These pujas are generally followed by much singing, dancing, eating and drinking *jou*. During these times the whole village is involved in merry-making that at times extends for a few days.

#### Social offences within the Bodo community:

The emphasis on social offences especially in the time of community worship reflects the morality and the world view of the Bodos. These offences are believed to bring about dire consequences to the village if arrangements are not made to rid the village of these evil effects. For instance the performance of the *Garja puja*, the village needs to be ensured of any evil before the puja can be performed. The nature of these evils necessarily arise from any immoral activities committed by any member or members of the village.

#### Religion:

As the wide variety of worship, especially pertaining to nature and its manifestations, was practiced initially by the Bodos to suggest that they were animists, and even polytheistic in nature. But a deeper analysis reveals that they believe in a supreme being who they give the name *Bathou* or *sibrai*. Historians and sociologists have tried to show that this chief god was no other than Siva of the Hindu pantheon, thus leading to claims that Siva was originally a 'Mech' or a 'Bodo'. The answer for their polytheism lies in the influence of Hinduism on their lives, or the *Sanskritisation* of their society. Like the many Hindu gods and goddesses, Bodos also have many gods and goddesses. But these are all the different manifestations of *Bathou*, their Supreme God. Hence they cannot be called animists. But on the other hand, they are also one

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<sup>23</sup> Narjinari, H.C. *In Search of Identity: The Meches*. (Calcutta: Ashok Chakraborty, 2000). 58-9.

since the Bodo community does show some characteristics of indigenous societies with regard to nature-worship. For the Bodos, nature and natural forces play an important role. They perceived these natural phenomena as subservient to the whims and fancies of a supreme, powerful being and in some way demonstrating significant changes in their lives and so worthy of being venerated. But then again the nature worship of the Bodos leads to their central belief in a supreme being and the rest are simply manifestations of it. This supreme being, *Bathou* is represented by the *sijou* plant.<sup>24</sup> Other than the chief god, they also have a number of gods and goddesses where gods of nature predominate but who originate also from *Bathou brai* – *Ailong* (the god of earth), *Agrang* (the god of water), *Khoila* (god of air), *Sanja Borli* (god of fire) and *Raj Khungri* (god of sky). The hanging up of a piece of cloth above the ground in the first part of the altar for *Kherai puja* represents their belief that God is formless.<sup>25</sup>

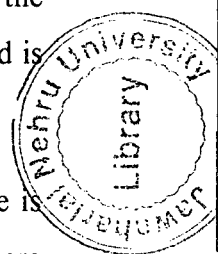
*Mainao* or goddess of wealth is also an important deity for the Bodos. In fact she is believed to be the consort of *Bathou brai* hence she is also called *Bathou brui* where *brui* denotes the female identity of the goddess. *Mainao* is worshipped especially at harvesting time in the fields. She is believed to be the guardian of the household. She is kept in the innermost part of the main house symbolized by a bamboo pole on a raised lump of earth with a red piece of cloth tied around it.

The Bodos also believe and worship spirits and supernatural beings. The Bodos believe that sicknesses, natural calamities like famines and earthquakes are caused by malevolent spirits. Thus frequent offerings of pigs, goat, poultry, rice, plantains are carried out. Their worship is mostly based in 'fear' rather than in love.

Bodos hold their ancestors or forefathers in high esteem and venerate them. They believe that ancestors have access to knowledge that the present generation might be a deprived one with regard to their legends and folk tales the origin of their religious rites and rituals. Moreover the ancestors are also viewed as a generation who could

<sup>24</sup> Devi, Premlata. *Social and Religious Institutions of Bodos*. Rev. ed. (Guwahati: Geophil Publishing House, 2004). 137.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p 147.



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come into contact with spirits.<sup>26</sup> The fact that Bodos worshipped their ancestors is validated by the account that Rev. S. Endle gives in his work, *The Kacharis*, 1911.<sup>27</sup>

Sacrifice has a very important place in the Bodo community. In almost all their rites, rituals, festivals, appeasements of evil spirits, an animal sacrifice is imperative for achieving atonement. For instance the 'cock' is an important fowl. It is customary to rear a cock in the house. A cock is sacrificed to propitiate the deity during the worship of a village *modai* (*gamini modai*) or of a jungle deity (*hagrani modai*) and of a river deity (*doini modai*).<sup>28</sup>

With time the Bodos have either been sanskriticised or have converted to Christianity. Today there are very few followers of the *Bathou* religion. The Bodos are rather divided into two main camps – the Hindus and the Christians.<sup>29</sup> However with the coming of the British in the nineteenth century, Christianity was embraced by a large section of the Bodo people due to the relentless efforts of the white missionaries. The significant outcome of this event was the first sociological and linguistic chronicling of the Bodo people with emphasis on their folklores, folk songs and legends.

Thus we see that the Bodos are a community that is bound by many superstitious beliefs and tends to be very religious. It is a community that also shows the influence of heavy Aryanisisation that has encompassed its entire social structure. As a result of this assimilation, the Bodos today are a wandering race trying to unite and revive their distinct culture as it had been before the time of sanskriticisation of their language, religion, social customs and world view.

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<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, p 146.

<sup>27</sup> Narjinari, H.C. *In Search of Identity: The Meches*. (Calcutta: Ashok Chakraborty, 2000). 83.

<sup>28</sup> Brahma, Dr. K. *An Introduction To The Myths And Legends Of The Bodos*. (Kokrajhar: Pradip Kumar Bhowmik, 2004). 65.

<sup>29</sup> Devi, Premlata. *Social and Religious Institutions of Bodos*. Rev. ed. (Guwahati: Geophil Publishing House, 2004). 149.

## II

### Bodo Literature

To traverse through the gamut of Bodo literary works, is similar to going on an epic journey like Odysseus. One encounters such a wide variety, that the mind is simply staggered by the sheer vastness of it: an enormous number of poems including the revival of folk songs and oral narratives in written form; the influence of the English literary forms as well as that of the Assamese; translations of and from other literatures, a large number of literary magazines, souvenirs and newspapers as well as a few experiments with the celluloid medium. This body of work produced in such a short period of time demonstrates the strong urge for self determination and development among the Bodos.

Although there are historical divisions made by some of the Bodo writers on the basis of their individual understanding, I have on my part felt to do the same according to my analysis and comprehension of Bodo literature. I have divided this bulky corpus into essentially three stages— The Missionary Period (later eighteenth and early nineteenth century); The 1920s to the 1950s; and Post 1950s.

However, it is important to point out at this stage that for many the history of Bodo literature generally begins with what these writers consider to be the period of folk literature. But in the course of my research, I have felt that it was not necessary to do so because of the anonymity of the original composers of these oral narratives. For if we refer to the Anglo-Saxon period of English Literature, the presence of manuscripts like the *Exeter Book* and the *Junius manuscript*, and of even anonymous hymns and lays provided the evidences of written oral narratives in that period. But when we come to a record of the folk tales, songs, legends, proverbs and charms of the Bodos, we find that their written evidence begins to emerge only with the coming of the European missionaries in Assam in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. There had been hardly any such attempts in this pre-missionary period by any individual or groups. The reasons for this can be traced to the fact that education had

not yet reached to these interior places during this time. And only after the Missionary period, with the spread of education among a few of the Bodos, was there any attempt at recording Bodo folk literature.

### **Bodo Folk Literature**

The road to 'self-determination' for the aboriginal and indigenous people have usually been through their Language: to establish one's language as the medium of creative expression. For the Bodos too, their first tentative steps towards finding a foothold, and a voice in the fast accelerating twentieth century realities of displacement, economic underdevelopment and land alienation resulting from the nineteenth century British policies, had been to develop their language. They had to educate themselves, strive for the appropriate script that would adequately bring out the nuances of their language, develop their literary traditions and move forward into an economic and political future.

Hence the reclaiming of the waning oral traditions of the Bodos was what the initial writers and enterprising individuals had to do. Extensive researches have shown that the Bodos had a rich past of songs, legends, proverbs, chants, stories and tales. They can be classified as verse and prose narratives.

The Verse narratives of the Bodos comprise of chants, songs, riddles and proverbs. These are usually ceremonial in the sense of being associated with rites, rituals and festivals, expressions of superstitions and beliefs, as well as engaging in songs of creation stories. Being a community wherein God and his manifestations in other gods and in Nature is of utmost importance, the Bodos have a wide variety of songs and religious chants and charms – For each religious festival like the *Kherai* puja, for each social event like marriage, for each cultural event like *Baisagu* (festival of spring). Generally lyrical and rhythmic in nature, this wide variety of folk songs and chants are sung at the time of purification, prayer, soothing of illness and diseases.

Its themes by and large cover their entire culture, social structure, everyday life, and a pride in their own community and culture. To start with, the patriotic songs describe

the bounties and the exquisiteness of their motherland; it aims to instill love for their land among the Bodo youths, to protect and be loyal to it. The songs of valour and courage, and of legendary heroes both historical and mythological try to instill a national pride. Such are the songs on Joholao Daimalu, Jaolia Dewan, Daoharam, Birgosree Sikhla, Gambari Sikhla (who fought with the Muslim invaders), Sikhna Joholao, and in the modern folk songs, of Omla and Shiba, the heroes of the script movement; songs about land and of hard labour and toil and its importance in the life of a common Bodo, the sweet nostalgia of bygone days of plenty also composed; Lullabies are sung on any subject that was visible to the eye in order to mollify the heart of the children – like on the Sun, Moon, birds and creatures. There are also Love songs that are characterized by pathos, tragedy, betrayal, jealousy; hymnal, ritualistic and religious songs and prayers are sung before household gods at particular religious ceremonies. Songs sung during *Baisagu* celebrations also form an important aspect of the entertainment and fun involved in these festivals comprising mainly of eating and drinking. There are also some pastoral songs about the lives and daily concerns of the Bodo community, of the beauties of the land, its vegetation, wind, flowers, birds; bardic songs sung in public places at times of distress in order to rouse the national spirit within the hearts of its people became important at the time of the revolution for a separate homeland. The didactic songs sing of the advice given by mothers to their daughters and sons, of the old and the elderly to the young children and the youth. The chief aim of songs of humour, is also composed to evoke pure laughter and merriment from its hearers. They are sung between equals at specific social events like marriages, focusing on the shortcomings of the bride groom, and humorous renderings of a life of possible doom for the bridegroom after marriage.

The Prose narratives comprise mainly of the folktales and the stories of legendary figures. Their themes are also similar to those of the verse narratives, depicting the pastoral picture of the simple Bodo people living alongside their animals and creatures in the beautiful natural surroundings, descriptions of everyday life of the Bodos clearing the jungles for cultivation, the young girls spending their time in spinning and weaving.



This body of wide and diverse number of folk tales and folksongs was the first to be translated and compiled by the missionaries. However, these oral narratives have been made available to us more only during the 20<sup>th</sup> century after the reinforcing of nationalist sentiment for the development of the Bodo community. This folk literature reveals the Bodo passion for love, curiosity, sentiments and imagination and for understanding the complex and intricate nature of the universe and all other natural phenomena.

Sukumar Basumatary's *Aboi Abouni Solo* (1968) and *Boro Khuga Methai* (Part I, 1974), Part II (1973); Nileswar Brahma's *Khonthai Methai* (1954); Rohini Kumar Brahma's *Serja Siphung* (1954); Pramod Chandra Brahma's *Sonaki Bijab* (1968); Mohinimohan Brahma's *Folk songs of the Boros* (1960) and *Boro Kachari Solo* (1972); Bhaben Narjy's *Boro Kachari Samaj aru Ssngskriti* (1966) are a few examples of the written form of literature in both Bodo and in other languages like Assamese and English.

### **The Missionary Period (later Eighteenth and early Nineteenth century)**

During this period, activity of writing also took the form of penning scholarly works on Bodo grammar. It has been usually the European strategy to first understand the local dialect or language of the area they wish to colonize, appropriate or evangelize, and then to begin the process of representation through the medium of translation activities. It began in the nineteenth century with the publication of Rev. Sidney Endle's, *Outline Grammar of the Kachari (Bara) Languages as spoken in the district of Darrang (Assam)* in 1884. To show the grammatical use of the Bodo language, some Bodo folktales were also included. In 1911, J. D. Anderson posthumously published another of Endle's work, *The Kacharis*. This is a sociological account of the lifestyles, culture, grammar and the specimens of the Bodo language of the Bodo Kachari which is a sub-group of the Bodo race. Since it was an age of colonization, it is but natural that the works of this period are for the most part, historical, anthropological, ethnological or sociological. There had been no proper and sustained literary activity on the part of the missionaries as well as the Bodos. For the latter,

because they were still mostly illiterate. But perhaps J. D. Anderson's *A Collection of Kachari Folk tales and Rhymes* (1895) was possibly the only exception. This had perhaps the first major impact on subsequent Bodo speaking people to motivate them into assembling and publishing the legends, their folksongs and folk tales that they had grown up with. This period saw numerous research articles on Bodos that were generally linguistically oriented. They would usually use the roman script with English renderings. Since the main objective of the missionaries was to propagate the Christian faith by educating the 'natives' as well as to boost their own economic flow, the works they produced had been limited to that purpose. Hence the few stories that were written in Bodo were Biblical in its content. Some of the important works of this period that became useful for later scholars to continue with a sustained exploration of the literature of the Bodos and their culture were: Grierson's, *Linguistic Survey of India* (Vol.3, Part 2, 1903) and Gait's *Census of India* (Vol.1, 1891).

This period also saw a lot of translation activities also with the objective of spreading Christianity. Some of them are *Gojom Rodaini Bathra*, 1939 (The Old Testament); *Bibelni Solo*, 1942 (Stories from the Bible); *Jishuni Maonai Dangnai*, 1938 (The works of Jesus Christ). There were also many translations of Christian Hymn books in Bodo written in the roman script. The importance of this period lay in the fact that it can be considered as the one of the first instances of attempting to understand the Bodo culture, however narrow the source of interest may have been.

#### The 1920s – 1950s:

This is the period when the first steps towards self-determination were taken, a direct result from the education that some of the Bodos received at the hands of the missionaries. Most Bodo writers desire to call this period 'The Bihar Age' or The Age of Flowering. The reasons for this is not hard to find. The first Bodo magazine called *Bibar* in manuscript form was brought out during this period by Satish Chandra Basumataary. The age lasted till 1952 when the Bodo Sahitya Sabha was established with the view of developing the Bodo language and literature.

The revival was spearheaded by the Bodo Chatra Sammelan, Bodo Student's Association, organized in the Cotton college campus, Guwahati, Assam in the year, 1919. The young Bodo students of this organization were influenced heavily by Shrimat Kalicharan Brahma, the social reformer and religious propagator of the Brahma dharma. This year saw the publication of the first Bodo book of North Goalpara containing songs of prayer for the *Kherai* festival to appease *Bathou brai*, the chief god of the Bodos. This period also saw the establishing of the mobile theatrical group, *Bodo Onsai Aphant*. Plays, historical and social were churned out in substantial numbers. For instance, *Jara Phagla Thenthamali*, based on Bodo folktales, *Soithorothi*, a mythological play were produced during this period. There were many translations of plays that were staged. For instance, *Obongni Phao* was translated from the Bengali, *Ananta Mahatmya* in 1937 by Bhaben Poronggiri. Some of the well known writers of this period were, Jogendra Nath Kachary, Kaliram Islary, Karindra Nath Brahma, Nomal Chandra Brahma, Dwarendra Nath Basumatary, pramod Chandra Brahma. The objectives behind the subject matter of all these plays were to bring about social reforms in the society and to rouse the national spirit towards love for one's culture and motherland.

#### Post 1950s –

This period started with the establishing of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha in 1952. The period was also called *Sorjilu Muga* or 'The Creative Age'. In this age again the aim of uplifting and reforming the society through literature was intensified. Especially, because the main literary figures were young social workers. These young men tried to bring about uniformity in spelling system terminologies in grammar and were engaged in expanding the Bodo vocabulary. This period produced a few short stories and poems. The famous *Radab* a collection of seven poems in epic style was published during this time in 1958 by Sama Brahma Chowdhury. The mobile theatres of the previous era continued to stage dramas and also quite a few translated ones, in different areas within Assam, and North Bengal.

The age of Renaissance in Bodo Literature is believed to have taken place within this period. It begins from 1963 and lasts till 1975 when Bodo as a medium of instruction till the matriculation level was accepted. This is the period where there were radical changes that hastened the development of the Bodo language and correspondingly of their literature. In 1963, the Bodo language was introduced as a medium of instruction at primary level of education 'for the first time in the Kokrajhar sub-division' as it was called then but now known as Kokrajhar district. In this year itself, the use of Bodo language was gradually stepped up as a medium of instruction till the matriculation level. However it could not be further upgraded to the higher secondary level because of insufficient funds made available to the Bodo Sahitya Sabha as well as the lack of immediate enterprise to undertake the writing of works for different the subjects taught in the schools in Bodo. This period is understood to be within the modern period. It was earmarked as the renaissance period because it was a time where widespread activities of the production of standard textbooks for education and the increased pace of the production of creative literature was undertaken. The period did not produce much original literary works but simply concentrated on producing school textbooks to meet the demand in the schools. For instance, Manoranjan Lahary's series of *Structural English Grammar and Translation (Anglo-Bodo)* for different classes was published during this period. It was from this year also that the 'Assam Text Book Production and Publication Corporation Ltd' under the education department of Assam government took charge of producing and publishing Bodo text books covering different subjects including language readers from the lowest level of education.

Translation activities were also restricted to the objective of generating texts from Assamese into Bodo in keeping with the standard and uniformity of text books in different languages. Translating for different subjects were carried out. Some books were revised: like Sukumar Basumatary's *Bodo Khuga Methat*, Part 1(1962); *Bopdo Khuga Methai*, Part2(1972); Pramod Chandra's *Sonaki Bijab* (1968); Chanakya Brahma's *Bathra Phandai Aro Bathra Khondob Jail* (1972); Bhabendra Narji's *Boro Kachari Samaj Aro Sanskriti* (1969); Mohini Mohan Brahma's *Boro Kachari Solo* (1972). Christian books of the missionary period was also translated from the roman script. For instance, *Gitfor* (1951) was a translation of the Old Testament Psalms;

*Godan Dengkhani Methai* (1975) – devotional songs/worship songs: *Gothar Buli* (pure sacrifice); *Gothar Bathor* (pure time); *Ishor* (god); *Gothar Jiu* (holy/pure life); *Jishu Krishto* (Jesus Christ) and so on. Published by Bodo religious literature society, Udalguri.<sup>30</sup>

Since an agitation was still going on for the most appropriate script for Bodo, the Bodo language had to depend upon the Assamese script till 1975. But from 1976 onwards, the Devnagiri script was adopted by the Bodos to write their language. For instance, Kamal Kumar Brahma followed the Assamese model for preparing Bodo language readers and grammars like the *Bodo Raokhanthi*, *Phoraisani Raokhanthi*, *Gonang Raokhanthi* for different levels of classes.

Experiments in translation activities were carried out by translating works of art from other cultures other than the neighbouring ones. But there was ample scope for distortions since these translations were not made directly, but rather, done indirectly through other translations of the same work. For instance, the translation of the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayam was not translated directly from the Source Language but from the Bengali and the English translations.

This period is indeed remarkable for the sudden acceleration of literary works and explorations into different mediums of expression like cinema as well as experiments with different genres. We see writers being influenced by writings from other cultures - *Phoiphin*, a book on lyrics was based on ideas similar to Tagore's *Gitanjali* (ibid). One act plays like *Nalanuha* by Satish Basumatary and Ananda Mushahary's *Lekha Gorong Hous Aro Lekha Rongi Hinjao* were staged around the villages, towns and districts during this period. The rewriting of Samar Brahma Chaudhury's *Radab*, the only poem in epic form into a play by Kamal Kumar Brahma (1972) was also done during this period. Documentaries and Bodo feature films like **Alayaron** in 1986 by Nilkamal Brahma and Heramba Narjary, and **Daina** (Documentary film) by Kamal Kumar Brahma in 1983 were produced. **Khomsi Lama**, a feature film produced in 1993 by Kamakhya Brahma Narjary, **Hagramayao Jinahari**, 1996, a short feature film by Jongdao Bodosa are the high points of cinema during the period.

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<sup>30</sup> Boro, Madhu Ram. *The History of Boro Literature*. (Kamrup: Priyadini Brahma, 2003). 6-7.

Biographies, usually of legendary historical characters as also mythical heroes were written. Prominent among these are, *Boroni Manek* on Shrimat Kalicharan Rabha, and *Phorlang Baba* also known as Kalicharan Junior written by Mahendra Narzary, Joholao Bishnuprasad Rabha, a revolutionary who professed communism and had to go underground written by Girindra Brahma Daimary; *Jariminni Solo*, a collection of life and works of some historical persons.

*Boroni Nidan*, 1961 by Mahendra Narzary is a book about the traditional Bodo system of worship and rituals. A few other examples of such literature are *Kherai Moshanaini Santhou*, *Doro Bathou Dhorom Bijab*, *Puran Phithikha*, *Bhagabati Gita*, *Kriya Darpan* by Kalicharan.

Several souvenirs and magazines were brought out at various conferences regarding Bodo literature or culture. However many of these magazines, journals and newspapers had in fact been started by the missionaries in the nineteenth century for propagandist purposes. It can be observed safely that these were among the most widely used mediums for the spread of the Bodo written language and its culture. The Bodo magazines proper however only began to be published only in the twentieth century. *Godan Phaisali* (1972), *Chipung*, *Jalaishree* (1975) brought out by the youths of Baganpara (Nalbari district), *Godan Thandoi* (1996) by the Goreswar Literary Club, *Sonathi Khampi* (2002), *Jinjiri* (2002) are some of the well known ones. Bilingual magazines like, *Prabah* (Stream) by Kokrajhar H.S. School circulated within 1957-68 and *Kunhipath* (Tender Leaf) by Langhin Pamegam H.E. School, Bodosa (still in circulation) and newspapers like *Banjar* (1972), *Thulunga* (1996), *Harkhab* (1997) were also produced during this period. In the area of Bodo Children's Literature, there were also some works that were brought out in this age. These books are usually didactic in nature having some moral lessons. Popular subjects were included in each and stories about legendary and historical figures. *Soloni Dengkho* (1985) by Tarun Narzary, *Mansi Jagra Mosa* (1997) by Bhupen Narzary, *Sase Simang Nunai Gotho* (2001) by Renu Boro, *Joholao Jaoliya Dewan* and *Joholao Silarai Dewan* (both in 2002) by Madhu Ram Boro are some well known publications in this genre.

There were also some experiments in Bodo travelogues, like Mohinimohan Brahma's *Sin Hadatao Dandies* and *Bharat Aro Amerikayao Daobaihoinei*; prominent articles on critical essays included *Harimu aro Sodomsree* (1992) by Mangal Singh Hajowary, Madhu ram Boro's, *Boro Thunlai Saorathaiari Jarimin* (2002) and so on. Bodo Songs were also compiled and produced in this period like the Collections of Bodo modern and folk songs, *Baidasi Garang* (1985) by Samin Narjary, *Jiuni Daha* (2002) by Khagen Lahary. Dictionaries like the *Student's Anglo-Bodo Dictionary*, 1986 were also published during this period.

In traditional genres of Poetry and novels, there were not many experiments in technique but the choice of themes were wide themes of national integrity, ideas of national spirit, patriotism and valour; espousal of worldly brotherhood and harmony were quite common. Themes of communist ideals – the cause of poverty; suffering, oppression of the poor and advocacy of self-reliance were also commonly employed.

The novels usually have social themes: Dharani Dhar Owari's *Mwihur*; of the woman hiding her love within her heart (*Oroina*) is one such literary writing. However, these novels were also very didactic in nature – criticism of polygamy as in *Sorangni Lamayao* and marrying within one's own community as in *Raonibo Raoba Nonga*.

Thus we can see that Bodo Literature has produced an enormous corpus of literary works in a very short span of time. The chief motivation was to establish one's culture and language and to bring about social reforms within the community. However a lot is left to be done. A major drawback of such over enthusiasm was the neglect of quality in these works.

## Chapter 2

### *Mwihur*

#### 1

The sun has already risen quite high.

In the *Manas* forest-land, it is the *khusra* (a kind of citrus fruit) fruit-bearing season. Golo walks towards his house after handing over the plough to his younger brother, Molo. Without even waiting for his aged mother, he scoops out some rice for himself and eats a little bit of it. Then he proceeds till the *Borshi* River (River Beki) taking with him his very own personal gun used for scaring away thieves. On his shoulders hung an easy-to-carry, small sling-bag. He also takes with him an old torch operating on three batteries, one *sikha* (dao), some cartridges and two half-smoked *bidis*. His purpose is to kill a deer. Anything, even a wild boar, will do as long as it suffices for at least two days.

The river *Borshi* is not very from the village. It does not even add up to two furlongs. If one talks about a Bodo village along the sides of *Borshi* shores stuck to the *Manas* forest-lands, it is Golo's *Nareng-guri*. To the north is the *Manas* jungle, to the south such villages like *Elengamari*, *Raghbobil* of the newly migrated *Soura Musalmaans*. Close to the villages in the east is the *Bangsho-bari* forest range office; some two kilometers further east are the *Fatimabad* tea gardens. It is the road going straight down from the northern side of the front of the range office which is the way to reach *Mothan-guri*. It is here that thousands of people come for picnics in the months of *poush* and *magh*<sup>1</sup>. There is a single strip of barren ground running from north to south along the shores of the *Borshi* towards the west of the village. As soon as you cross this and walk some two steps ahead, you come to a forest beat office on the river's edge. Some times, a couple of *chaprasis* stay here. However most come and stay at the range office. Once an elephant,

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<sup>1</sup> The months of December to February, according to the Bengali calendar.



in the middle of the night had come and pushed at the beat office. It seems there were some persons of the tea gardens from the *coolie lines* who had taken along some liquor as well as women for the night, but the elephant had scared them and had been able to chase them away that very night itself. Golo is very well aware of the activities of these *chaprasis* who used to stay at the beat office; His ear possesses all such information regarding their whereabouts.

Golo begins walking towards the western side along the *Børshi*. On the edges of both the eastern and western sides of this small river lay a wide stretch of sandy ground, covered with the *khashi* (elephant grass) and the *jaowa* trees. If both sides of the sandy banks are to be taken into account, the *Børshi* will be a kilometer wide. During the rainy season when there is flooding in the sandy stretch, it is then that the *Børshi* takes on a frightening appearance.

Golo keeps walking while gently treading on stalks of *khashi*, the *khashi* flowers are busy dancing the *bagrumba* dance with the gentle rising and falling breeze. The waves on seeing their perfect dance movements probably felt ashamed but still do not stop their own uncoordinated dancing; meanwhile, the birds and fowls of the air are sitting silent and gaping upwards, awestruck. For this reason perhaps, even the leaves of the *helashi* tree are clapping like two brass cymbals.

At midday, the wild animals and beasts drink and play in the *Børshi*. The breeze from the *Børshi* relieves their bodies of their tiredness. Yes, it is so; Golo remembers the words of his ancestors. In the earlier days there used to be only Bodo villages around the *Børshi* shores. The ghats of the *Børshi* would always be crowded with cows being given a wash and the mundane activities of bathing and washing going on whether it was in the mornings or at noon. On a mid-day like today, the old and the aged, the young men and women, the children, cowherds, everybody might have gathered together at the *Børshi* ghats. During these times the cowherds playing pleasing tunes on their flutes and the soft music coming from the plucking of the *serja* used to sound so wonderful.

The *Børshi* flows even today. Crystal clear. Its waters are pretty icy, like frozen ice. In the dry season, the river stretches out like a dead snake. But, during the rainy season,

what a sight it is! How the waters comes tumbling down boisterously from the mountain tops to bring victory to the *hayenaris* (people of the plains). During this time, the giant trees and vegetations are uprooted from the heart of the forests and brought along pulled and jostled from all sides. This brings luck to the people around the *Børshi*. Such varieties of sturdy trees like – *sal*, *segun*, *khaising*, *sishu*, *gambari*, *holok*, *sida* – are caught by the current and uprooted. The trees that each one gets hold of, are piled up and kept aside. They sell these as firewood while those parts that are of any use, are kept back for the household. Now and then, even wild animals and beasts come drifting by – alive or dead. *Aayo!* The flooding of the *Børshi* is simply terrifying.

The *Børshi* is one flowing history even today. Its flowing waters bring with it news about the *hajowari* Bodos from the northern Bhutan mountains. It seems in the past the *hajowari* Bodos had fought and quarreled with the Bhutanese because they could not recognize each another in the earlier days. The sentinels of the Bhutanese king had in fact thought our *Gambari Sikhla* (young legendary woman warrior) to be a female goddess. Our ancestors have repeatedly said – the clumps of *thørøi* grass on *ha daodaps* (raised clay like ovens) along the banks of the *Børshi* in the *Sonbari* reserve are nothing but the heads of Bhutanese sentinels severed, and buried by the Bodo youths and buried in the ground by them in the earlier days. *Aayo!* Unnerving and scary, it even bring out goose bumps.

History does not tell us the story of the *Børshi* river. But the actual river of the *hayenari* Bodos was the *Børshi* itself. It is actually not a river but an overseer sent by *sibrai-sibrui* from their abode in the mountain top. Yes it is so, ‘the *Børshi* is the *Bør-shi* (blessing) of *sibrai-sibrui*’s, meaning divine blessing’. The river splits into two tributaries in the valley to the north after crossing the Bhutan hills, one of which is the *Manas* or the *Manasi* and it flows towards the borders of *Kamrup* and *Goalpara*. It is on the ghats of that *Manas* river, that once a young *naudari* (boatwoman) having two husbands from the *Phathøi-bari* village near *Bijni*, would ferry people across on a boat while wearing a turban wrapped around her head. Our forefathers said that this young *naudari* had taken over the ghats of the *Børshi* too. Today the *Manas* and the *Børshi* rivers do not remind us of the story of only one *naudari*. They also try to talk of the courage and strength of *Gambari*,

young *Birg@sree* as well as the victorious acts of *Jaoliya Dewan*<sup>2</sup>. It evokes the echo of the jingling sounds of the galloping belled horses of the sentry Dogor Penlo of the East India Company, and the fight between them, and the great speed with which *Birg@sree* had moved her shield and sword. But one of the stone hearted sentinels of Dogor Penlo shot young *Birg@sree* dead while she was drinking water from the river. *Aayo!* Bodo *sikhla* (a young Bodo woman), you are all worthy of being worshipped at anytime. Which is why perhaps now and then, in the middle of the night, the ghost woman cries out screaming from the river's center, *Aayo!* O Mothers and Fathers! Rescue me, Rescue me. This is what our fore fathers used to say.

The annals may deny this but the Bodo race cannot. Golo's heart cannot deny it too. Even he himself remembers that at one time on the edges of this *Børshi*, there were only Bodo villages. In every village with a lot of pomp and ceremony, the *Kherai GarjØ* used to be offered. Golo remembers this as being told. And it also seems in every village during the time of the *Kherai GarjØ* celebrations, an old man having *khuru* (a ringworm type of disease) all over his body would come and drink *jou* (rice beer) with the people. Everyone knew where he stayed. It is only during those times of drinking *jou seref* (strong rice beer) that the old man would foretell whether that particular year there would be a bumper harvest, whether sicknesses and diseases would increase or the various forms of joy and sorrow that would take place among the community. The old man would then go away after he would finish eating and getting drunk. So our ancestors used to say, that everything would come true exactly in the same way as the old man had predicted. However at one time, Ram Singh's 'money- hungry dogs' had driven away the Bodos from the banks of the *Børshi* because of which the Bodos know how to run and climb to the mountain tops, while the others know how to push through dense forests. Even during the times of the Ahoms, a long time after that with the entry of the *Dimasas*, the Bodos on the banks of the *Børshi* had to run helter-skelter. And while those remaining in the present times after that, have begun to forget how to offer *Kherai GarjØ*. For that reason, the *Børshi* has brought with it terrifying ways and forced a section of the Bodo villagers to flee. Golo takes a deep breath and becomes pensive. Because in those floods in the

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<sup>2</sup> These are men and women of valour and courage in Bodo folk legends.

*Børshi*, they had to let go all their land and property, orchards and gardens to be washed away into the heart of the Brahmaputra river. And today, Golo is poverty stricken. Unable to have even a square meal everyday. Golo is increasingly becoming helpless to even nurture both his old parents and his fifteen year old growing younger brother, Molo.

Pondering upon all these things, Golo in the meantime passes the beat house, heading northwards. On reaching some open space, he sits on the rocks on the river's edge, under the shade of the *sishu* tree; the breeze of the *Børshi* was cool and satisfying. Since it was noon, Golo thinks to himself that resting for a while would be better. Putting a *bidi* on his lips he remembers the words of his forefathers again. It seems as though Golo had been given the chance to view the *Børshi* differently for the first time today. Golo has gradually forgotten to look at nature through eyes of love. Relentless killing of wild animals and beasts has gradually made him stone-hearted. Today, tears do not come to Golo's eyes anymore. His eyes are reddish and bloodcurdling at all times as though they are ready to devour just about anybody. But if he has survived till today, it is only because he could live off Nature. The one big question haunting his twenty-five years of life is why in a bid to survive he had to make such a choice. Golo knows that such a manner of survival is always difficult, tangled and twisted. Even so he cannot let go. He had been forced to take this path only. His twenty-five years of bitter-sweet experience, as well as the belief in his heart has taught him that in order to survive in this world, someone will have to be killed. In order to let others live in this world, someone will have to be born in order to be sacrificed. In today's civilized age, you usually see one race prevailing over another, the rich over the poor, the strong over the weak, the elder over the younger – subjugation can be seen around all the time. Is this the way of this world? Its rules and customs? Why does the race of mankind accept it to be right?

The manner of survival is like the unresponsive course of the *Børshi*. But was the *Børshi* really called 'Beki' as others call it? No it is not. Golo had heard the story that an old man had once narrated. In those days Hastings sahib had come to look for some land to set up a tea garden at *Bangshø-bari*. In order to see the *Bangshø-bari* soil, when riding on an elephant's back he reached the *Børshi* banks, he sees an old Bodo man sitting near the waters with his forehead in his hands. The sahib asked the old man in English – hey old

man why are you getting so wet, sitting near the water's edge? On being asked in an unknown language, the old man was startled. The old man had been feeling unhappy at the frenzied state of the *Borshi* and had been asking himself in his heart as to why it had not responded to their prayers. The old man accidentally spoke out the word *Bengakhai* loudly, indicating that the river had not responded.

The sahib thought that the old man had spoken out the name of this river surrounded by *tharoi* (straw or paddy seedlings). From that time onwards, the Bodos say that this river has been gradually called *Bengakhai- Bengakhi –Bengthi – Beki*.

Even Golo thinks that the *Borshi* has not responded till today. Otherwise, why isn't there an end to their sorrows? Nonetheless, Golo needs to take stock of his situation. If happiness is to be received in this world, suffering is needed. These thoughts startled him and he suddenly got up and walked into the heart of the jungle. At that time, the sun was beginning to set a little.

Golo's purpose is to reach the 'rhino' pond. In that pond, wild animals and beasts usually keep playing about. In the *khusra* bushes near the rhino pond, herds of deer come and eat the *khusra* fruit. Since the forest workers had lit a fire in the forest, the forest undergrowth and the dry *thuri* grass had all been burnt down. That is why it is comfortable to walk though the forest. But Golo is fearless. Be it anytime, whether at night or by day, the moment a gun is placed in Golo's hands, he needs no one else. In the *Manas* forests there are trees of different kinds about which he already knows everything, like the rows of *lewa* trees, the dancing of the leaves of the *sal-segun*, all of it. For thirteen years till date, he has been running around for this kind of work. Not even a deer, or a wild boar is able to flee if his eyes chance upon any animal. At times, he uses the catapult itself to shoot them dead. However, when he enters into the heart of the jungle, he takes his gun along. He shoots with the catapult only when the animals go towards the vicinity of the village houses to eat the grains and the jute plants.

On hearing the rustle of dry leaves in the undergrowth on the side of the clumps of the *khaising* trees, Golo looks towards that side carefully. But it was only a mongoose. Today's performance won't be any good, Golo thinks to himself. Deep in the forest, the

birds were crying out *khow-ow*. The monkeys on branches of trees, seeing Golo, made gestures at him. At this time, he hears loud chaotic noises from the direction of the rhino pond. He guesses that some people might be poaching for fish. But if the *chaprasis* know about it already, they will be chasing them away. Not only will they chase them, but also beat and even tie them and take them to the office. Golo tries to listen a little more carefully and stealthily keeps moving forward. It might be another half a mile more till the rhino pond. The people from *Khashi-bari* and *Ghilajhari* have dug a canal from the rhino pond.

Golo looks as though startled. A young Bodo woman was coming, running towards him. Who can it be running in this way in the middle of the jungle? A divine being or a human? In order to get a good look, Golo while standing among the *khusra* trees, keeps on watching for sometime and then realises that the fleeing woman was coming towards his direction only. She kept looking behind now and then as she was running. Golo stayed hidden among the trees. When she came a little closer, he recognised her as the daughter of Lantha mahajan of *Khashi-bari*. Golo's apprehensions were true. The *chaprasis* had been chasing the fish poachers, otherwise why would Dodere come running wearing a wet, mud splattered *Dokhna*? And if the *chaprasis* were chasing Dodere, then even Golo himself might be caught. On thinking this, he didn't know what to. Dodere had by now reached quite near. Stopping for a moment on one side, in the middle of the clumps of *khaising* trees, panting she began looking around to see which way she should be going. Golo spoke out, unable to stop himself any longer— Are you not Dodere? What happened?" Dodere couldn't reply immediately. Running into the dense forest, her breath came out in quick short gasps and she was tired. Suddenly hearing Golo's voice she got all the more startled and prepared to scamper off in fear again. But she collapsed on the ground with her exhausted body entangling itself in the *Iewa* tree.

"Don't run, don't run Dodere! It is no one else but only me Golo from *Nareng-guri*." Saying this, Golo began to running in Dodere's direction. Not being able to hear clearly, Golo's words, Dodere stops for a moment. But on feeling her head spinning, she collapses there itself. On reaching her, Golo stood around bewildered. Dodere had fainted. There was also no water to be found nearby. Even to go till the river *Borshi*, one

had to at least cover five furlongs. It would be good if at this moment he could pour some water on her head. Not knowing what to do, Golo removed his own sling bag and began fanning her with it like a hand fan. While looking around, he saw a ripe *lewa* (gourd) and without waiting a moment longer, in a single stroke, he chopped it both from the inside and outside and brought it along. He squeezed out the juice from the it on Dodere's head. The juice from the ripe *lewa* will almost fill up half a bucket. After alternating fanning and squeezing out the juice on her in this way for an hour and a half, Dodere's eyes gradually opened. On seeing her coming back to her senses, Golo asked her in a gentle voice– "Do you feel a bit better Dodere?" Dodere did not reply. Lying down helplessly in this way before a strange man probably embarrassed her. Hurriedly sitting up, Dodere moved her eyes around.

"Do you feel that your head has stopped spinning?" Golo asked again while putting away his torch, his *sikha* (dao) and the gun cartridges in his sling-bag.

"Feeling a little better" Dodere replied.

"What happened for you to have reached here? Do you remember?"

"Yes". She replied after settling her *Dokhna*.

"I guess you had come to catch fish isn't it?"

"Yes. The *chaprasis* had surrounded the pond bringing with them some four or five elephants. All of us ran helter-skelter, whichever way we could. We were some two or three women who were running. The *chaprasis* kept chasing us. I guess, they might have caught the others. One of them had also caught me tightly. Sensing his intentions to be wicked, I bit his finger rather generously. After that he stopped chasing me."

"No Dodere. He might still come after you, bringing along with him some more people. Come let us go towards the *Borshi*."

On Golo's urging, Dodere began walking behind him. Meanwhile, the sun had gone down quite a bit.

"Dodere, if you had not come across me, would you have been able to reach your house through such a dense jungle alone?"

"Only *Anan Gosai* (God) knows"

"Instead of running towards your house, why did you run towards the dense forest? We are at the moment some three miles away from your village."

"I was confused, *ada*. I felt as though I was running in the direction of my house."

"We cannot walk out of the woods now in broad daylight. The forest workers would be on duty on the forest borders, and they might even be searching for you"

"You'll have to reach me till my house, *ada*".

"We will need to sit for a while on the *Børshi*'s banks, Dodere. Even I would be scared if we didn't go until dark. I had actually come for hunting"

Dodere had already heard about Golo being a hunter. Despite the fact that they did recognise each other, they had never exchanged any words, not even once. Seeing Dodere preoccupied with some thoughts, Golo felt like teasing her – "You have now fallen into the hands of a stone-hearted hunter. Compared to the chaprasi I seem to be more wicked." So saying, Golo turned around to glance at Dodere. Their eyes fell on one another. Dodere's face turned pale, but she did not say anything in reply.

When they reached the river-side, in the west, the sun had already splashed the sky with red vermillion. The *khashi* flowers were dancing gracefully in the cool evening breeze. The wild ducks and the birds and fowls of the air were beginning to fly towards the jungle, heading towards their respective homes. Golo told Dodere to refresh herself while he put a *bidi* on his lips and lighted it for himself.



The entire day had been fruitless contrary to Golo's expectations. Somehow in the heart of the jungle, instead of coming across something, he had met someone. If somebody heard about it or if this event was to be told to someone, no one would believe it.

Seeing Dodere go up the *bori* (high land) from the water with a *Dokhma* dripping wet Golo said – “I guess you can enter the *Khashi-bari* and squeeze out the water, can't you?”

Golo asking her such a question, made Dodere feel embarrassed. She did not reply to his persistent questioning.

The biggest problem now was how to reach till the *Khashi-bari*. Which path should be followed? Even if one were to go through *Nareng-guri*, one would have to go by the forest office. From *Nareng-guri* till *Khashi-bari*, it would be two and a half miles and from that place where they had been standing, it would be about two miles till *Nareng-guri*. That was why Golo was thinking that coming from the south of the river bank would be a better option, Golo called out to Dodere. Both of them started walking.

“I wonder if we Bodos will have to survive on wild plants and animals from now onwards.”

“What can I say about it *ada*?”

“Just give it a little thought Dodere – even in today's civilized time, our Bodo people have still not left battling with the fish, wild deer, fruits and nuts, green vegetables, wood and vegetation of the jungle. Last year we were almost on the verge of a fight with the forest workers while we were on our way to pluck the *lonthi* (leafy) vegetables. The Bodos have still not been able to give up poaching trees, vegetation, fish and deer of the jungle. You see Dodere, most Bodos like to stay on mountains tops, and they build houses, form villages near the fringes of the jungle. Those one or two living in the towns cannot tolerate the prosperity of those with land and property. Selling all their riches, they run to the edges of the jungle, tell me isn't it so?”

“Yes indeed”.

“You see Dodere, we only seem to be clearing the land for another race. Today’s towns and cities were at one time places of Bodo settlements. Today’s *Guwahati* or what in ancient times was *Purgathaipur*, *Dispur* or even *Daisapur* were at one time Bodo lands. But today, those few families that still remain there, even they have taken up selling *Jou* for the sake of survival. Towns like *Kokrajhar* used to be the original land of the Bodos. However now, after having sold their houses and properties the people have run away to different places. If you look at the houses and properties, the gardens and orchards, they appear to be those of the Bodos. But its residents are *Baro-Bangals (Bangladeshi’s)*. My heart burns for this very reason.” Golo sighed deeply for the last time.

“Look! *ada*, an elephant is coming!”

Scared, Dodere, who was behind, moves to the front and acts as though she might cling onto Golo.

“Hush! There is nothing to fear Dodere; the gentleman of the jungle will not be unjust to man without any rhyme or reason. But nonetheless, just sit here for a while. He has come to drink water. When he finishes, he will go away by himself.”

However, Dodere trembled uncontrollably with fear. Golo pretending to shake her off from him, pushed her on the ground in the center of the jaowa trees. After playing for sometime in the water, the elephant entered the jungle again. Golo appeared to embrace Dodere. No evil thought sprang within his heart despite his having to embrace a woman in this way, that place is in the heart of the jungle. If one were to look for a place where true religion exists, then it exists in the heart of the jungle. It is only among mankind that ‘adharm’ exists. Both stood up again and resumed walking. This time, Dodere was in the front and Golo behind.

“What would have happened to me *ada*? *Gosain* (God) has saved me.”

“If a person lives truthfully, the benign lord will always help. Of course, one has to face many a dilemma. As sometimes in the past, even today I was wandering around aimlessly in this forest. Despite not having passed the matriculation examination, today I have to survive by selling meat illegally. I am impoverished even after working on another man’s land on shared cropped terms. What’s more, working as *abad* on the edges of the jungle is also not good. As soon as night approaches, one has to battle with the rhino and the elephant. If one has to say Dodere...”

“What?” asks Dodere.

“That is, if a person from another race decides to build his house and set up his properties, he at least considers a couple of important things. For instance – the quality of the water-fire-air of the place where one is going to build a house, whether it will be healthy for the body or not. Other considerations might be what kind of advantages can an easy access to roads give, whether there is a hospital nearby or not – all these are deliberated upon. On further consideration, for the purposes of education are there any schools colleges or not, all these are foremost in thoughts. Even after all that, a place to eat and drink, a place for buying and selling or the conveniences of markets-bazaars are first considered. But in our case, our eyes are only focused on the wood, the flora and fauna, fish, deer, green vegetables whether leafy or non-leafy that can be acquired from the forest freely.”

When they reached near the beat office building, the sun had set by then. The smear of darkness was gradually surrounding the banks of the *Børshi*. There were still two furlongs to cover to reach *Nareng-guri*. A thought seemed to strike Golo’s heart, Golo spoke–

“You can also stay in our village, can’t you Dodere?”

“In whose place shall I stay?”

“Why not in the house of Hambur’s elder sister who is from your own village?  
“She would be *bajøi* (sister-in-law) to us. Would it matter if you stayed one night at Dabari’s?”

“If it were possible I would have gone there”. Dodere spoke of her as though she were of her own blood. Golo felt good. Dodere said again –

“I also feel embarrassed to stay in someone else’s house. I call Dabari my elder sister too but back home my father would raise a hue and cry and would come looking for me.”

“You don’t worry about this Dodere. I will take a cycle and will just go and inform your father. If I took you with me and we happened to meet someone on our way they might think bad of us in their hearts.”

Dodere had been thinking about this too. A man’s tongue is not good. For this reason, she did not say anything to Golo in reply. Golo spoke again –

“I am a hunter. Most people look at me with both good and bad eyes.”

“Can *ada* not leave this kind of work?” Dodere asked understanding Golo’s words.

“Which one?” Golo asked in reply.

“Setting out for hunting all the time is not a good thing. Last year the shooting of a school teacher of our middle school by the forest workers scares me even today.”

“What to do Dodere. If I give this up, I won’t be able to take care of my old father and mother. After the flooding of the *Børshi*, the soils of *Nareng-guri* has become loose. Unfit to plant or transplant.”

“I have ten bighas of land irrigated by canal water *ada*. If you don’t find it revolting, you can go and plough on my land.”

“How did you acquire this land?”

“After selling hens, pigs, and *endi* (eri silk) cloth, I have been able to get this land. My step mother does not love me. If my father hadn't been there I might have been dying everyday. It is only because of my stepmother that I had to leave my studies.”

“I'll have to think over it for a day or two Dodere. It is not a matter of small thought to go and work *abad* leaving one's house and property far behind.”

Just at that moment, a light coming from a five celled torch is flashed from the beat house. Golo, thinking that their conversation must have been heard, tells Dodere to push back into the wild growth. He too scrambles up and sits alongside.

Golo understands that because of the commotion about the poaching of fish today, the *chaprasis* in the beat house have also been ordered to stay alert.

“Now what is going to happen today?”

“I am beginning to feel uneasy” Dodere says in a hoarse voice.

Golo pushes his gun into the undergrowth and accidentally collides with Dodere in the dark. With darkness setting in, the mosquitoes had begun to increase. Even after swatting, they wouldn't fly away fast. During all this, they heard a sound again as though an elephant had been splashing water with its trunk. Afraid, Dodere clung onto Golo. On being held suddenly in such a manner, Golo fell on his back among the bushes. Tightly holding Dodere, he got up again and cuddled her as if she were a small child. He felt some kind of sweet smell emanating from Dodere's hair. Golo's body bottled up. He rubbed his hands over her back and Dodere seemed to become more restless. Golo's heart just wouldn't stop beating.

“Dodere?”

“Huh...” Dodere's tired body makes her feel weak and unsteady.

“What did you think?”

“ Nothing.”

“In this way with a man...”

“Huh ho...” saying something like that, Dodere attempts to get even closer. Her heart beginning to feel all weak and wobbly.

“Suppose I behave like the *chaprasis*?

Dodere suddenly stands up. The village was going to offer *GarjØ mØdai* soon; she cannot let her body be tainted. Golo could not grasp the reason why Dodere did something like that. Feeling uncertain, Golo got up too and spoke in a way as though having committed some offence –

“Did you feel upset?”

“I did not”

“Then why did you stand up so suddenly?”

“The elephant is still splashing water.”

“I don’t think so. It could be the sound of the *chaprasis* going into the beat house.”

“Let’s go home.” Dodere says.

“Oh yes. Quite forgetful of me”.

Golo felt ashamed of his momentary lapse. He restrained his heart, knowing that he would sin if he thought of a woman in trouble in a wicked way. Both resumed walking, assuming that *Nareng-guri* was towards the west from the beat office.

When they reached Dabari’s place in *Nareng-guri*, the family had already eaten their dinner.

## 2

After seeing that Dodere had still not arrived till nightfall, Lantha Mahajan felt anxious. According to the sharp tongued Khowbali, Dodere was with some friends of the village. But because it had also been rumoured that some boys and girls had been arrested by the forest workers, Lantha felt that she might also be in the lock-up cell in the office. The people from the village got to know that those who had fought and quarreled more than the others had been arrested and butted with rifles throughout the way. But how could they go and enquire about it in the office? Everybody had been saying that whoever would be seen, could also be arrested. That is why Lantha Mahajan did not show any courage. After leaving instructions in the house that there was no need to serve rice as yet, Lantha, smoking a *chilim* full of tobacco, went out to meet Loren. It won't be possible to resolve the problem with the ranger in the office if Loren were not present. He was the one who was the guardian and the only literate son of the village – a B.A. pass. He had become the teacher of the new high school near the village. He was still not married. Even poor Loren would not have been able to study further had it not been for his uncle who had to sell off all his land and property. Till today, there was still some land mortgaged in the hands of a Mahajan of *Barpeta*. In fact, half of it has already been sold off by the Mahajan.

Loren had just finished taking his meals. Most have their meals early in the village since they live near the jungles. At that time it was already eight o'clock in the night. After hearing everything from Lantha's mouth, Loren becomes annoyed –

“*Adai*, there is always someone or the other who keeps falling into trouble. I am beginning to feel ashamed after seeing the behaviour and conduct of our people. Once earlier also, they had fallen into the same kind of problem when they had gone to pluck *lonthi* vegetables (leafy vegetable). Even today when they went for catching fish again, they must have met with the same problem.” Lantha said supporting Loren. He went on, “How many times will we say, *adai*. Even those one or two school-going children have stopped telling the

foolish boys and girls and have instead begun accompanying them to the forests to pluck *lonthi*, to eat khusra fruit and to catch fish illegally.”

“Then what else am I raving about? The Bodo race will have to wait that much longer to be able to stand on their own feet. What is there in the hands of the Bodo men and women? The Bodo who cooks rice beer in earthen pots do not know how to make one. They cut and clear the wild vegetation and undergrowth of the jungle, but they do not even know how to make the *sikha* (dao) and the axe. They do not know the art of making ornaments in gold and silver. However, they have all the time to assemble near villages and to sit around at the weekly bazaars or in every small tea stall near the roadsides. And if advised, they become upset. The Bodos are demanding a separate kingdom to keep their race alive. But suppose that separate kingdom were to be granted, then who would they lead? Are we to infer that we shall end up calling even the barbers from Bihar? Since they find all this disgusting, or because they feel too lazy to work, nobody tries to take up the responsibility of learning all this.”

“What else to say *adai*? The Bodos will continue to exist in this way.”

“How many Bodo boys have taken up the responsibility of giving a decent appearance to the Bodo talent of weaving the *dala*, sieve, *dukhal*, *khobai*, *jekhai*, and selling all these things at a decent price at the haats and bazaars or to even build sturdy shops?”

“None, I guess!”

“They have to employ people even for weaving clothes in the house. But if one considers everything together - the monthly expenditure of one man’s food and clothes, and the market price of the woven cloth. Then what profit do the women, leaders of the Bodo households get in weaving cloth?”

“No profit at all”



“And those one or two learned people who have become educated, only reproach other communities for losing their own history, the language and literature of their own culture, for the backwardness in wealth and of one’s own people, talking about how the Bodos had been in the past and what they had not been. Further saying that the envious and the opportunist races have stamped out and brought to an end the Bodo race, will that make a dead race alive again?”

‘Indeed not!’

“If a race has to be kept alive, each person of that race should try to stand on his own feet after leaving behind everything about the past. They - each one - must equally divide all kinds of work among themselves – so that none will have to be dependent upon some other community.

“True, very true, Loren *adai*. Everything happens to be true. But how many have thought about all these things. Living around the jungles for many years the community has almost begun to show the characteristics of the jungle.

“*Adai* there is one thing. The Bodos die because of eating rotten vegetables, fish and deer. But other races after using our *mu* (measurements) are beginning to fell and sell off so many varieties of trees and wild vegetation like *sal*, *segun*, *khaising*, *bonsom*, *teeta-saap*, *gambari* and also decorating their respective homes, whereas, in the eyes of the government, it is the Bodos who appear to be guilty. According to them the Bodos, living near the forests, have indiscriminately cut and completely cleared the government’s forests, as a result of which there are insufficient rains and storms in a year. It is about such situations that one says– the birds eat the fish but the fish bear the blame. Now, the policies of the government are beginning to be harsher, and one needs to be able to understand all these things. I feel embarrassed to report to the ranger, *adai lai*”

“You will have to come with me, at least for once you will have to go despite anything *adai*. I am worried only for your younger sister. Last week she had

kept saying no to her friends but whatever made her go today? Maybe my fate is bad.”

Seeing the Mahajan’s tearful face, Loren’s heart softened. It wouldn’t also be good, if he didn’t go. After all, it is a matter about the whole village. As the saying goes, one was destroyed but the kingdom was saved.

Both of them after taking a cycle each, moved towards the forest office. The office was at a distance of two miles and a half. They began to pedal towards the road on the boarder side of the jungle banks. On reaching the office they saw that Dodere was not among those who had been arrested. Nobody could tell where she had gone or what had happened to her. The arrested people were twenty in all. Fourteen men, the women eleven. Among the women, four were young. The items recovered from them, *pholo jekhai*, *khobai*, *sikha* and *ruwa* were kept near the lockers. There were even four peacock eggs on the table in front of the ranger. On seeing Loren, the ranger said–

“You see Mr. Hajowari, regardless of the repeated warnings, if the people from the village after entering this restricted area begin poaching the fish, deer, trees and wild vegetation from the forest what will happen to the government? Are we being cared for by the government for no reason? This forest is so productive for the government. It gets so much of income annually. Don’t the public know about all these? Tell me aren’t the government’s riches (*sampatti*) those of the public too?”

“Yes, of course, Mr. Goswami. Our people have not been able understand this till today. I am of the same opinion too. It would have been much better if our people had used the same strength and might that use in searching for leafy vegetables, fish, deer, and battling with the trees, the wild vegetation and the wild animals of the forest, for something different and pure work for the progress of mankind. However this is also a fact that the Bodos know only how to eat fish, deer and vegetables. But the *Bangals* and *Bhutanese* are the ones who steal different kinds of important trees and their essential parts”. Pretending to be angry, Loren peers at the villagers “Why should you folks

enter someone else's land? Didn't you know that this was the government's forest? You had been permitted to dig a canal there, but you were not allowed to go angling for the fish in that canal or in the rhino pond at anytime."

The ranger felt good at Loren's admonishing the arrested people in this way. Loren also secretly smiled to himself on being able to soften the ranger's heart. Loren spoke again –

"I think Mr. Goswami, sir, if you are able to catch them again from now onwards, you don't have to hit them with the butt of the gun, simply shoot them."

"One will have to shoot them in order to save one's life in case there is no way out Mr. Hajowari" the ranger added.

"I wonder if you might be at fault too, Mr. Hajowari! The fault is not much. What I mean is, if the government along with your efforts organized gatherings and meetings in villages for the sake of explaining to the simple village folks, I think it would be very useful. Because the illegal hunters enter secretly and are present there in large numbers".

The ranger helps Loren with what he had to say, and expresses hope for the realization of the government's plans if the likes of Loren offer their assistance. Later he releases all of them after handing them over as a guarantee in the hands of Loren and Lantha Mahajan. However, the kind of penalties they were to be given, were agreed to be discussed later.

Lantha kept feeling uneasy. He began to be more anxious in his heart when he didn't see Dodere, Loren asked again among those arrested, whether they knew Dodere or not. From amongst the young women, Dulerai speaks up –

"Dodere had been running in the direction of the middle of the forest going towards the north-west corners. Has she not reached home? We too....."

Dulerai, feeling embarrassed, could not finish the rest of it. Three *chaprasis* had been chasing Dulerai, Labari and Dodere. Dodere was able to flee by biting the hand of the *chaprasi*, but the *chaprasis* had been able to catch and arrest Dulerai and Labari.

“Wasn’t Dodere with you all?” Loren asked like a lawyer cross-examining in a court case.

“Yes, the *chaprasis* had caught Labari and us. But we don’t know how Dodere had been able to run away.”

“In that case, was she been left behind in the middle of the jungle, *adai* Loren?” Lantha began to be restless.

“If it is so we will then search for her with elephants after speaking to the ranger *adai*? Had we known earlier we could have by now sent a search party”. Loren also said as though he is a bit distraught.

By then it was going to be ten in the night. Coming out of the office they thronged in front of the gate, talking in buzzing tones. Some of them said that she might have reached home. For a while they were baffled in this way. Thinking that it would be better if Loren met the ranger again, he began proceeding towards the office.

But right at that moment, Golo appeared from nowhere on a cycle, breathless and informed them of Dodere having reached Dabari’s house. Only then did Lantha Mahajan’s heart lighten up. Loren did not go back to the ranger again. Earlier, Golo had gone till *Khashi- bari* thinking Lantha Mahajan’s house to be there. On being told that he had gone to the office, he immediately hastened back. Lantha then sent some two persons to bring Dodere back.

It was around twelve in the night that day when they had reached home.

## 3

Finally in the *Khashi-bari*, the time had come for the performing of the *Garjò-mòdai*. It was to be on the Monday after the coming weekly *bazaar*. That is why the village had been gearing up for the preparation of the offerings to the gods. Today in the evening, the village meeting is going to be held. At that time all those who are tainted with some evil influence, all those who had to cast away the gods from their homes, will have confess publicly. At this time of the village offering ceremony, suppose some one or the other does not confess his individual sins, the *Garjò-mòdai* will be upset and it would be unfortunate for the village too. This is one of the beliefs among the villagers. The sins of women are even greater. If she does not confess willingly during the ceremony of the *Garjò-mòdai* and if she willingly does not confess in the future too, then, it has to be done during child birth. Otherwise death will come there and then.

Today, they will also have to come to a decision with regard to two already known guilts. It seems Orang's son, Gabkho had come away from a Musalmaan's house after drinking tea there. Gabkho himself has confessed to this before his friends. Today the society would hold him responsible for it. And as for the others, Mendang had been beating his drunkard father the other day. Even if a drunkard, he is still his father. The act of hitting one's own mother and father is not tolerated by the Bodo people. And it also seems that the other day, Haitha had beaten the eldest among his younger sisters. He has to be punished for that too. Because in spite of being her elder brother, he cannot lift his hand against young Longdang, his educated younger sister. For a Bodo, this is a great offence.

But it is Dodere's offence which is the greatest among all these. The other day, at dusk, how did she meet Golo, a boy from another village and reached Dabari's house from the jungle? The *samaj* suspects that they must have indulged in something wicked. The *samaj* implying the reference to a quick-tongued man in the village who was called Laodab *dewani* (or the *proud* Laodab). Laodab *dewani*, is somehow

sustaining his household even if he can hardly make both ends meet. Now and then, he gathers some bunches of bananas and sells them in the market and bazaars since you can get the bananas for a lesser price in the village. While at other times, he even turns into a keeper of cows and buffaloes. Actually, he was not on good terms with Lantha Mahajan because he couldn't get Dodere for his son Møblao and as his daughter-in-law. That is why they don't communicate well. It is this Laodab *dewani* who speaks up in a sweetly sarcastic tone –

“That day it was not only Dodere but also some twelve to sixteen women who had gone for fishing. The others had either been caught or had fled to their homes. But how did Dodere get separated all by herself? Where did she meet Golo in the middle of that jungle? The event had occurred just before sunset. But where did she go that it became so late in the night? There is something here that needs to be known. It is for this reason that Dodere will have to utter the name of the *Garja-mødai* and confess before the community and they on their part will need to cross-question her”.

On the basis of Laodab *dewani*'s words, a section of the community thinks it might be true. Later on, according to the directions of the community, Dodere is asked to come out from her house. The courtyard of Dodere's house itself was where the meeting was being held since the evening meeting usually took place there.

Dodere then appears before the community. She feels very humiliated at Laodab *dewani*'s misgivings which he had presented before the community. Dodere does not like to speak like the others, she didn't even know how to. She is slow to speak. After the death of her mother she had, in fact become more reserved. On the prompting of the *halmaji* (village chowkidaar), she narrated the actual events as it happened despite literally dying with embarrassment. She then adds saying–

“Golo may be a boy from another village, but even then he rescued a woman in trouble, from lions and bears when she had strayed away into the heart of the jungle and also brought her away safe. If you suspect a person of such untrue things, you would commit a sin”.

Dodere could not say anything more. For a moment she feels her heart to be heavy and then she begins to cry pitifully. Seeing that nobody reacted the way he had wanted to Dodere's words, Laodab *dewani* feels ashamed and walks straight out from the meeting without any further ado.

The members of the community decide to slap a fine of rupees fifty on Mendang for lifting his hand on his father, and, a fine of rupees five on Haitha for beating his second sister. However in Loren's opinion, Mendang's father is also guilty of drunkenness. Loren advises –

“If you drink *jou* (liquor) you should be able to stomach it. The law does not allow you to assume that you can torture others or your wife and children the minute you get drunk. That is also not the right conduct of a man. One should not be given an excuse for an offence committed under the influence of liquor. There are also examples of drunkards like that who after quarreling and fighting in the household, sells off all the farmlands, wealth and property of the family. If it is possible, cooking of *jou*, burning and, selling it and also drinking needs to be stopped. According to the opinion of Odebani's father, Mendang's offence should not have been an offence but was still considered as one. So for the sake of this, he should not be imposed a fine of rupees fifty. I think just for a show of respect to the *samaj* even if it is five rupees, it will do, I think. That Mendang's father will not quarrel in the house or fight after getting drunk, something of this sort needs to be written down for the *samaj* and Mendang just for this day will touch the father's feet and ask for ‘forgiveness.’”

The *samaj* also agrees accordingly with whatever Loren had to say, and reconciles both father and son.

“Drinking tea in the house of a non-Bodo is not a very big offence”, analyses Loren, giving his logic. In Loren's opinion those who have jobs or those who are learned and educated in the present time do not consider eating and drinking in the house of a non-Bodo an offence at all. A school-going child like Gabkho, can go along with his friends to *Baro-Bangals* and could eat and

drink with them. If you ask why, then it is because they need to mingle with everybody. The important point here is whatever caste (*jathi*) it may be, they should be neat and clean and should have the ability to know right from wrong. That the belief you cannot eat or drink in a family of another caste are actually those of the orthodox *Brahmins* who are usually all opportunists. Hence there is among the Hindu race discrimination on the basis of high and low caste, and the attitude of superiority among themselves. These are all the negative aspects of Man. Look at the world's largest religions, Christianity or Islam. They do not spit on the despised of the lot or find them revolting, but instead embrace them as themselves. If a Moslem man or a Moslem woman, gets married with a Hindu man or woman, the latter loses his/her *Hindutva*. The Hindu *samaj* throws them out but Islam or Christianity embrace and take them in, which is why the Hindu race is gradually dying. The Bodo race has no relationship with the Hindu race, their main religion is *Bathou*. It is we who have been the great Mongolian race who a long time back, much before 1500 BC, had been the people from central Asia and the civilizations of China, Babylon, Siberia, Hittites along the Mediterranean sea and the river Hwang-ho and who had entered by divine blessing into our grand India. This is an admirable thing that till today there is no caste division among the Bodos. The Bodos believe that man's origin is not superior or inferior, everybody is equal. That is why one can see the Bodos uniting quickly on important matters even today the leadership is unbiased. Because of the advantages that this gives, one can see the Bodos till today in groups of large numbers setting out to do such jobs like constructing roads, digging canals, partaking of *saori badali*, and building houses and bungalows for the community people. There are quite a many important practices of the Bodos that other races can learn from.

Such an in-depth analysis by Loren, softens up the heart of the community. Everybody accepts that Gabkho's fault cannot be considered as one. With this, the village meeting ends that day.



## 4

Golo shakes with fury over MØblao's sudden act of teasing him. Somehow he decides to clench his teeth and stay but he still finds his heart feeling restless.

Golo had been walking towards the *Børshi* banks thinking of washing himself also while bathing the cows, after having already released them from the plough and having driven them to the banks. His heart had been feeling heavy, after meeting Dodere the other day. He couldn't say what had happened to him. Golo from that day onwards had found a new purpose in life which Dodere herself had given him. That day after leaving her in her sister-in-law Dabari's house, he had not been able to sleep throughout the night. The image of the *Manas* jungle kept floating up before his eyes. He even seemed to find himself touching and rubbing Dodere's forehead all the time, even while he was dreaming and while he was awake. All through the night, he had to be in that state of unforgetful bliss. Even at the age of twenty-five, Golo had never harbored any wicked motives in his heart on seeing the face of a woman. He had never looked at anyone with the intention of falling in love or to even find out what falling in love was. He had not got the time to do so.

Golo feels ashamed of one thing. Even being a woman, Dodere has been able to buy land and property, but Golo has not been able to do so even after being a male child.

In order to nurture his family, he has been forced to walk that path where he has to take away another's life. *Chee!* What a worthless piece of job this is? Golo curses and despises himself. But he also thinks about what could be the way out. He had been studying in a school and was not such a dull student. But because of the wretchedness of his family, along with his own fault when he had become wayward, he could not even pass his matriculation exams. His gallivanting everywhere and playing football when he should have been studying, had been indeed his mistake. Golo understands this only today. Whatever it may be, with what words would he go and work on Dodere's land now? Moreover, what will the people say? How can he build a house in

Dodere's place and work as hired labour, leaving his own family? He could not find the answers to all these questions.

With all this in his mind while herding the cows he was nearly going to bang into Møblao at the village cross-roads. It was Møblao who spoke first—

“Hey, Golo what are you thinking about so deeply while going your way?”

“Oh! So it is Møblao. Where did you go?”

“I had gone to look around across the *Børshi*, looking for a cow. One of my cows used for ploughing died on me”

“To buy or to hire?”

“I would buy after all, if I do get one. But nothing. Couldn't get any. They were willing to give on hire out but even for hiring you need quite a lot of money, a fixed price of six *mohon* for one”

“How can you hire a cow by paying so much? If you don't have the means then it will simply have to be so. I think buying would be much better”.

“There is hardly even any money, Golo, and on top of that I am getting poorer everyday.”

“What else to do? Both of us brothers, did not even continue with our studies, now to look after the old man and woman itself has become a great punishment. So long then Møblao, let's get going. Look the cows are beginning to go the other way. *Aiee hoh hoh...*” Golo runs towards the cows. Møblao also resumes walking. But then he retreats a few steps and calls out again,

“Hey brother Golo, the other day it seems you were able to get quite a good catch while hunting”

“What are you saying?” Golo also turns back and asks.

“I am talking about your going for hunting brother. I might have also complimented you nicely. So what if you didn't know Dodere. But my! Is she not beautiful?” Golo did not say anything in reply. Seeing him stand astounded Møblao calls out again –

“The other day the village community had been pressurizing Dodere quite properly...”

“What are you going on about Møblao? Have you really thought me to be like that?” Golo replies slightly annoyed.

“If one came across a beautiful young woman, alone in the heart of the jungle who would let her go, Golo? Even *munis* and *rishis* cannot restrain their hearts then what are we? He! He! He! Don't mind. I simply teased you ”. After saying something like this, Møblao walked away hastily. He senses that Golo has become angry. Golo didn't know what to do in his anger. He almost felt as if he should throw his *møshou lauthi* (stick for herding cows) at Møblao. But he somehow manages to hold his patience. Why should the community think that he had committed such a big crime against Dodere? In that case, Dodere must have felt very humiliated. As it is in the house, she is not tolerated by her step mother, and now her stepmother will have one more reason to scold her. Poor Dodere, how long will you have to suffer this mental torture!

Golo himself could not answer the questions in his heart. There are just so many doubts in a man's heart which cannot be grasped, and which remains unanswered. Whether rich or poor, elder or younger, right or wrong, holy or devoted or thief or a dacoit there are thousands of questions in everyone's heart. It is not possible to search for the answers to all these or to even analyze them all.

After bathing the cows properly, he herds them in one corner of the fencing. As soon as he has finished eating his meals, he rests for a while. But sleep evades him. Instead, Golo thinks about Dodere, whether she herself had said anything to someone in the village? That day, Golo was not able to grasp at what Dodere had been thinking. Had he felt like it, Golo could have done something or the other to Dodere that day. Golo thinks that more than love, there is no end to the desires of the body between a man

and woman. But what had Dodere been thinking of doing? When both of them were sitting in the middle of the *jaowa* trees after seeing an elephant going for drinking water, and when on hearing the elephant squirting water with its trunk near the beat office, Dodere had then hugged Golo and had been breathing heavily while they sat huddled together in the dense vegetation, then. Dodere's slender fingers had been forming letters on Golo's chest. When he recollects all these things, Golo's head instantly heats up even now.

But what is Dodere's heart like right now? Golo thinks of this too. To be able to grope into a woman's heart is difficult. He feels himself beginning to fall in love with Dodere without his fore knowledge. He himself believes that even Dodere may have liked him. But what quality does he have or even wealth and riches that Dodere's heart and eyes would have seen and fallen in love with him? Golo also thinks about this too.

While he was lost in such thoughts, the sun had gradually set. But it was only when his mother came and yelled at him, did he come to his senses. He got up quickly and set about to go to the fields to crush the clods of earth.

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## 5

Dodere had been sitting at the loom but her heart was heavy. It was rather unsettled. The *simli* cotton of *phagun*<sup>1</sup> month was flying about. She herself could not grasp what she is remembered and what she did not. There is no end to her thoughts. She finds no taste in mundane activities like eating and drinking. Ever since the day she strayed into the forest, her heart has not been feeling right. That day it had been quite late in the night when they had reached home from Nareng-guri. After that, she had not been able to sleep the entire night. Golo's face kept nudging her heart every now and then. Seeing Golo's character and behaviour, Dodere felt like worshipping him like an idol – *Aayo*, How wonderful was Golo's character, like the spotless moon, there was hardly any dirt on it.

If one asks as to what a woman adores most and falls in love with, one can say it has to be money – silver – and outward appearances. But the heart of a pure woman adores and falls in love with a man of good conduct more than anything else. The debate is, that by and large it is difficult for a woman to get a man close to her, so she doesn't get a chance to test the conduct and character of that man. But in today's culture, their eyes hardly notice these things anymore. Most boys and girls look at wealth and riches and outward appearances first. Because of which sorrow and troubles come quickly to them in their married lives and later becomes bitter they increasingly.

Bodos are a race who like living unsystematically and peacefully. Pleasurable pursuits are not a part of the Bodo culture. Even till today, most marry according to their parent's choices. But of late, with the entry of the *Baro-Bangals*, the influence of the characteristics of other races and the negative aspects of Man can be seen among those one or two among the learned and the rich.

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<sup>1</sup> The Bengali months of February and March.

Dodere has seen all this with her own eyes and realizes that money and wealth, paddy and granary, all such things cannot be the criteria for an eternal life. If one's conduct and behaviour is upright, one can achieve all this during one's lifetime. What is required is a pure heart and a chaste mind.

Had Dodere's heart been easily influenced like the others, she might have run away to Møblao's house a long time ago. Some times Møblao would come twice in a day and lie in wait for Dodere and would try to catch her eye, making it appear as if he might carry her off any moment. He would try to goad her at every place and corner along the village roads. And occasionally he would come and ask for water despite not feeling thirsty, and would also come and ask if there was any rice beer or not. Somehow, for unknown reasons, Dodere could not help hating Mablao. She detested the very sight of him. If a woman's eyes for some reason find someone unappealing to her conscience, there is no scope of liking him later; and suppose, she does find him appealing then she cannot even leave him.

Laisari, Mablao's sister, teases Dodere now and then- "If I could get you as my *bajoi*, I would really like it very much, Dodere". Can Dodere be less? She gives a befitting reply- "You will have to first clean your forehead with the waters of the *Børshi*. Go and tell your brother to build a concrete bungalow if you want me as your *bajoi*." Laisari would say nothing in return. Being a child of immature years she did not have the ability to understand too many things. She would think in her heart of hearts, with what will her elder brother Mablao build a nice concrete house when at times they nearly have to starve.

Dodere increasingly begins to feel more and more embarrassed while weaving on the loom. Till today she has never really liked anyone in particular or had even fallen in love with. But regarding Golo, she has already dreamed of so many things. Dodere feels embarrassed with herself. She had told Golo to come and work in her land but he has not shown up till today. What must he be thinking? Or was he simply lying to her?

Dodere feels like knowing Golo's heart. She wonders what Golo thinks about it? Has he been able to understand her vulnerable heart or has he not? She secretly asks herself.

What had she said that day that made her move so close to Golo's side. Her heart had been thirsty for something.

“Give...”

“ Oof you silly, what is it that you can't give first?”

“What have you been thinking so deeply? I guess you must be remembering *gumØi!*”

“ *NØmpha hØn!*” Dodere shouts back looking at Hambur's face as if threatening.

“Come on dear, let's go. Sumari and the others have been waiting for us on the road.”

Leaving the loom Dodere goes inside and searches for a *phalli* (a small cloth). She asks Hambur,

“What have the *endi* leaf pluckers bought today, dear?”

“What else will they buy. They've bought the usual stuff. I have bought some twenty pieces of areca-nuts. It seems Maibari has bought some two *tollaks* (kgs) of yarn and Subari some two kgs of rice”. Hambur replies.

“Call them in for a while dear. Let me also take some rice.” Says Dodere. Maibari and others however presently arrive there themselves after finding them take too long.

After having a piece of betel nut each they go out to pluck *endi* leaves. Their aim is to go till the *Soura Para* around the *BØrshi* side. But Dodere and Hambur secretly thinks of visiting *Nareng-guri* on their way back? Dodere's hope is that perhaps she might meet Golo. She has already told everything to Hambur herself. She shares with

Hambur every little thing, both good and bad. So far Hambur has been Dodere's most intimate friend. Wherever she goes, Hambur has to be there along with her. That one day they may have to go their separate ways has never really occurred to them, even in their dreams.

They go to the *Soura para* along the *Børshi* to ask for the leaves. The Bodos cultivate silkworms, but it is the *Soura Bangals* who are the owners of the *endi* leaves. In the old days there had been only Bodo villages along this *Børshi* river. But there are none today. The Bodos have all dispersed in different directions. Today, groups of people from West

Bengal and Bangladesh have come in hordes and built houses, constructed villages along the *Børshi*. They have gradually occupied the *Sonbari* grazing reserve illegally. There are no more places to graze the cows and buffaloes. Since half of the people of this area are disunited, none could stop them. *Nersing-bari* as well as *Nareng-guri* have all been taken over by the *Soura Bangals*. In this matter, the then Congress government had aided this influx of outsiders. The narrow-minded leaders like the Mondals, the Kanongos had been only feeding their own respective bellies. But it did not strike their minds that one day this will be a great problem for the whole of Assam. The government had continued to rule for thirty years with their votes in free India

On the fringes to the east of the *Børshi* river, are the far flung Bodo villages like *Nareng-guri*, *Barangabari*, *Khepsinpara*, *Golagami*, *Dindang para*, *Asrabari*, *Thalit-bari* and *Khagra-bari*. To the west, from the river, are the villages like *Samtha-bari*, *Labdang-bari*, *Helashi-guri*, *Udal-guri*.

The waves of the *Børshi* dance even today. They also make the *khashi* flowers dance. But not to the music from the *serja* and the bamboo flutes of the Bodo cowherds, but to the *bhatiyali* songs of the *Soura Bangals*? You can no longer hear the *bringda-bringda* of the *kham*, the *thuri-ri-rit* of the flute being played, the *khroba-khrob* of the cymbals. You don't even get to hear the *sliu-sliu* crying of the birds from along the *phakri* trees near the *Børshi*. What you hear is *polligeet* (folk songs of Bengal). While plucking *endi* leaves, Hambur and the others neared the courtyard of Hambur's



sister, Dabari's house. Dabari was Hambur's own sister. Seeing her and the others coming to pluck *endi* leaves, Dababri speaks up – “You don't have to go till the *Soura* villages to search for *endi* leaves anymore, dears. It was only the other day when some of us had gone there that something that shouldn't have happened occurred. If you so want to rear silkworms then start planting *endi* saplings in your respective homes. What profit is there in trying to get *endi* leaves when you have such things as areca-nuts, betel leaves, rice, *dal*, and yarn? Your brother-in-law keeps on scolding me about this.”

“Yes, *abo* dear, you are right. It can be said that there is no profit in buying *endi* leaves to rear silkworms”. Dodere interrupts and says.

They could not rest for too long. There was hardly any sunlight left. They should be reaching home.

But Dodere's heart keeps feeling uneasy. She tries as much as she can to look around, but she can not see Golo. Burying her heart's desire within her heart itself, she sets out towards her home with her steps dragging.

## 6

The case of illegal fishing was resolved mutually due to Loren's interventions. It was for Loren's sake that the ranger had resolved the case after going to the court. That day, had the incident come to be known almost immediately, Loren would not have then let the ranger reach the courts or even to the police station. However, almost immediately after the incident, that very evening the game washer had been sent by jeep to the police station and the police OC was brought. The lawyers had been saying that a government case cannot be mutually resolved in this way; but how does it matter if the heart was good! It was because of the ranger's talking to the OC that the matter ended without any further ado.

Before arriving at the mutual understanding, Loren gives his word to the ranger that from now on the Bodos living near the forests will not enter the jungle in groups anymore to bring fish, deer or green leafy vegetables without taking prior permission; the entire *samaj* will keep this in mind. In the *baisagu* season when *lonthi* vegetables are required, the ranger will himself appoint his own men and bring it to the office itself. They would then keep distributing among the Bodos after calling them in batches.

Loren forms a new committee from among the villages near the forest. This organization was called "*Abad Raikha Khalamgra Apha'*" (The Committee for Protection of Harvest). The function of this organization was to develop some kind of warning system for protecting the harvest from wild animals of the jungle, and to also get some compensation from the government for crops that had been stamped upon or eaten by wild animals. Last year, elephants had destroyed the young paddy saplings while these were still tender. One of the elephants had gone mad and had killed two people. Because of the committee's continued cry for appeal for compensation before the Forest Minister and the Chief Conservator, they had been able to secure large sums of money for some twenty families. The families of those two killed by the elephant, received money worth rupees 5000 each.

This year a new problem has arisen in the *Khashibari*. Now and then an old tiger comes and carries away cows, buffaloes, goats, pigs from the sheds. In all, the tiger has taken away six cows, four goats and three pigs. In order to catch that tiger, the government as well as the forest department has to be informed. Otherwise, someone might shoot it accidentally. Then in that case, the entire village will be gravely blamed unnecessarily.

The government had tried to catch that tiger after the people expressed their frustration. But after trying for an entire dry season, they were not successful. At that time, the government in order to catch this tiger spent an amount of rupees 6000 in making a trap and in total had to spend rupees 11,000. But alas! They could not catch the tiger till the end. Later a government sanctioned hunter had come to shoot it. After trying for two months, even he did not succeed. At times he was unable to come across the tiger, while on other occasions, he found it inappropriate to shoot. He perpetually fell on one or the other position of disadvantage. Once when he was able to shoot, it had only touched the tiger – it did not die. The worms and flies must have already begun breeding eggs in the wound already. Later, the government hunter had to wash his hands off the matter too.

But the community however was not want willing to drop the issue. The tiger had still not stopped coming to the village. On being compelled, the ranger announces that if anyone could shoot by himself, he could do so along with the government sanctioned hunter. A rich reward would be given if the person succeeded.

On hearing the ranger's announcement, Golo felt his body warm up. But he remembered Dodere's words – "Can *ada* not leave this kind of job?" Dodere's one word changed Golo's mode of survival. Since then Golo had not tried to go towards the forest on the pretext of going for hunting. And whenever he felt like hunting, Dodere's visage would fall on his heart. From that day onwards, he helped his younger brother take to ploughing at home. As for himself, he went and worked as a daily wage laborer in the tea gardens.

Golo thought to himself that if he put his heart to it, he would then be able to catch this tiger the first time itself. That Golo's aim never fails, this was known to

everybody. But what was to be done now? Golo kept feeling restless. The addiction for shooting wild animals could not be underestimated. On the other hand, because of this particular tiger, the entire community had to go through a dreadful time. If he succeeded in shooting, it would be the community that would be relieved. Until now he had been shooting wild animals for the sake of his own stomach only. This time it would be for the sake of the community and Dodere should feel happy with this, in fact she would be. So thinking this, Golo hardened his heart and slowly advanced towards the forest office.

That Golo is one such illegal hunter, the ranger is aware of. But he has not been able to catch him for even once. He has heard people saying that Golo has been hunting and selling the meat. A man living near the jungle. It is difficult to know at once, his immediate whereabouts. If only one is able to catch the man red-handed along with the meat, only then the man can be punished. But are those who buy the meat any less? Even they do not disclose anything. As soon as the ranger saw Golo, he asked – “What Golo, will you be able to shoot a tiger? If you can, you will get a reward. The hunter sent from the government is also here among us. If you can go along with him, then shoot it.”

On hearing the ranger’s words, Golo smiled slightly and said while scratching his head – “I have never shot in this way. Who told you that I can shoot?” The ranger spoke as though threatening- “You rogue, you think I am not aware of anything? I keep hearing the number of deer you kill and eat. But you keep absconding, little brother. Some day you might be caught by me only”.

Golo did not mind the ranger saying such things because there was love in the ranger’s rebuke. People can be both good and wicked. Perhaps someone must have informed him.

“Let the others only shoot sir. If necessary, whether or not I’ll be able to, I might try from the back. If in case, I have to shoot, then I won’t need anyone sir.”

“Ah you fool, without a licensed government hunter you think you will be allowed to shoot? It is not a small matter to shoot a tiger. That is why I am telling you to take along the government hunter just for namesake only. If you succeed in shooting, your name will be known only to us.”

It was then that Golo finally understood what the main point was. He had heard that Assam’s famous Tarun Ram Phukan had got his title of tiger-hunter in this way. The Bodos from south *Guwahati* say that once upon a time the tiger shooter was actually Tarun Ram Phukan’s Bodo mahaut. Only after the tiger had died, the gun was given to Tarun Ram Phukan and a photo had been taken and brought.

After telling Golo to go ahead, the ranger went ahead on the jeep till the *Barang-bari* beat office. The government hunter Rehman sahib was already present there.

Golo also begins walking. Till *Barang-bari* beat office it is two kilometers far. He keeps thinking of Dodere throughout the way. Does Dodere really like him? But nothing whatsoever has happened. Ever since meeting her in that heart of the jungle till today she has not come before him even for once. It is Golo who has thought to himself that he must be the first to have begun liking Dodere but what has Dodere been thinking of on the other hand? If Dodere had really liked him, she would surely have come at least once to meet him. Of course, she had asked him to visit her first. Dodere must have been waiting for many days sitting in her house.

But Golo revises his thoughts. Even the gods cannot understand a woman’s heart. Their hearts turn good in a second and sour in the next. They are capable of despising the same person whom they had loved before. Some women pretend to love by hiding it in their hearts, while some genuinely love. These women are not quick to speak, but inside, their hearts break. At most times you cannot understand their thoughts. A woman’s heart is very unpredictable – this Golo concludes. Because of woman’s varied beauty, their manners and behaviour, a lot of writings have been left behind in the pages of this world’s history. Events have taken place. The city of Troy in Rome, the golden city of Lanka had to be destroyed. But the example of their love has also left the world humble. Epics like Homer’s tale of the *Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, Kalidasa’s *Abhijanam Shakuntalalm*, Valmiki’s *Ramamyam* have been written primarily because

of the conduct of women. That is why whenever one speaks of women's conduct, Golo folds his hands in the form of a salute. Before letting oneself free with a woman, it is important to see whether there is poisonous sake or an insect in the *ketki* flower or not?

If you consider the conduct of Rangao, the child of Møblao's second wife you will find it a bit surprising. Rangao was given in marriage to a boy called Bouda. His father Bobra was a *Mahajan* (money-lender). Bouda was the only son. Rangao might have been able to live in peace and happiness. But after a month of marriage itself, she had run away to her father's house. Later she had been staying as a maid in Gobla *Mahajan's* paddy mill. But finally she becomes the second wife of Møblao, a man-servant of the paddy mill itself. Today, they hardly get anything to eat. Almost always having to starve. That is why, whether the woman race search for the desires of her heart or, whether she first considers the hunger of her body, nobody can say anything....

While thinking of all these things all along, Golo reaches the *Barang-bari* beat office. The *chowkidar* of the beat office, Kancha, tells him that the ranger and others have gone till the *Khashibari*. Golo also sets out on the way.

If you enter through the middle of the *Khashibari* village from the northern side, and if you go past at least three households, you come to Dodere's house. Golo had been thinking of visiting her at once. But if he did, it would become late. He has to meet up with the ranger on the other hand. They must be still sitting in the house of Loren. But had it been yesterday, he could have come away after visiting them for a short while. But on remembering the community's suspicions regarding the incident in the middle of the jungle, he decides to not visit and advances towards the village center. He feels a bit ashamed. He feels it is not right to desire a return to the person whom one helps and does good to when that person ran into some trouble. In the end, Golo visits Bandaru, who at times would accompany him for hunting.

When after leaving three houses from Dodere's place, he reaches the gate of Loren's house, he finds the ranger Mr. Goswami, the famous tiger hunter, Jaid Rehman (rumoured actually), and a group of *chaprasis* and two elephants in Loren's shed, all

sitting in the courtyard. In the courtyard there was also a mahaut, a noisy bunch of small children, old men (even Lantha mahajan), and women with children on their hips. Thinking that Dodere might also be present, he looks around everywhere. But she wasn't there. As soon as the ranger sees Golo he calls out – “Come, Come Golo, we have been waiting for you only” Golo did not reply, he goes and sits on the bench near the ranger.

“Have you heard Golo” the ranger says, “The tiger seems to be hiding in the forest. The bonded laborers who had gone to work on the *Usola* fields have seen it. Right now we have been thinking about the ways we can shoot the tiger.”

“What can I say sir! You decide among yourselves please.”

“You will also have to go along with the elephants. Let the great Rahman sir take one of the guns and you take another. I will also carry one. You ride on one of the elephants with two of the *chaprasis*, we, Rahman sir and I, will ride on the other one.”

As directed by the ranger, they begin going towards the *Mokhona* forest on elephants. Golo remembers some thing, if one has to go to the *Mokhona* jungles and forgets to offer *prasad* on a plantation leaf in the name of the forest god, not even a fowl can be caught. Golo knows the glory of the *Mokhona* jungle. There is a pond there. In both its eastern and Western sides, there are two *phakri* trees (peepal trees). The branches of both the *phakri* trees have covered almost the entire pond. Unless you enter through it, you cannot even see the water. But in the middle of these *phakri* trees or in the waters of the pond, you cannot even see one fallen dried leaf. It looks as though someone has just swept it all squeaky clean. There are a lot of fish in the pond. If you stand on the sides, you can see long and enormous snakes swimming to and fro. But there is nothing to be afraid of. Here in the middle of both the *phakri* trees, after placing two pairs of betel nut and betel leaf on plantation leaves, you will have to bow three times facing towards the east and then after that whether you wish to eat fish or deer, whatever you will ask that you will get from the *Mokhona* jungle. But if you don't offer a puja you will not get even a single fish from the pond. Instead the snakes

will frighten you. Golo has gone to this dreaded place many a time. But only within some three miles of it. Thinking it better not to tell the ranger about this matter, Golo did not say anything.

Golo's thought comes true accordingly. As soon as they had reached the *Mokhona* jungle, they saw the old tiger from far. But the tiger on seeing them hides in such a place that even after searching till sun set, it did not appear again. They returned later on.

Even last night Golo had got to know from Bandaru's mouth that the tiger had tried to steal Hobga's cow. Golo thinks that the tiger must surely return today to take away Hobga's cow again, so if they lie in wait for it in the night they might be able to catch the tiger. He decides to keep watch at Hobga's with a *chaprasi* after telling the ranger. But the ranger leaves both of the *chaprasis* in the *Baranga-bari* beat office instructing them to see to the arrangements for food and lodging. But nothing happened. Even if it had come till Hobga's place, it did not appear. Instead, it somehow boldly carried away a male pig from Jongir's. In this way, after watching for a week, they finally could not catch the tiger.

"Even the tiger dies if it eats a hundred cows!" Such were the rumours when that tiger accidentally enters the *Fatehmabad* tea gardens. On that day, the santal women tea leaf pluckers on seeing the tiger sleeping in the middle of the *siris* trees, get startled and run away shouting and falling over each other. They immediately inform the forest office. That day, the respected Rahman had gone with the chief Conservator of *Mothanguri*. The ranger had come again to the office for some reason after having made arrangements for food and lodging in the bungalow. At that time only, after getting the news of the tiger, he sends for Golo and also sends word to Rahman sahib himself through the wireless to *Mothanguri*. But even before they could reach, Golo goes in search of the tiger taking an elephant with him, the tiger frightened by the shouting of the *coolies* had been sitting like a tomcat waiting to pounce upon a mouse on one side of the bungalow of the owner of the tea gardens. Golo makes the mahout take the elephant around the saheb's bungalow and shoots at the tiger's shoulders. After getting a bullet, the tiger in one jump clings onto the elephant's trunk but at that moment Golo aims at its head and shoots. Immediately His Highness, the tiger falls



and rolls on its back. Only at that time, the ranger Goswami, the hunter Rahman sahib and a group of *chaprasis* arrive. Seeing Golo's valour, Rahman sahib thanks him and leaves after telling the ranger to give Golo a reward.

## 7

That day Dodere had unjustly pretended to be angry with Golo after seeing that he did not visit her even after going to and fro in front of her gate. He being a male child, can he not understand the heart of a woman even a little? Or is the man a fool? Or is it, that he does not remember what she had said earlier? She feels her head crawling with insects while asking such unanswered questions.

That day Dodere's heart had not been feeling too good. Even before the sun had risen, there had already been some trivial bickerings between her step mother and herself. She feels angry at her step mother who oblivious of night or day would always go to another's house and drink rice beer. Even till today, there was too much of bonhomie between her and with Mablao's aunty, Gødao. Theirs was a relationship where both can eat rice if taken out from each other's mouths. That her step mother has been planning to trick and give her away to Mablao, Dodere was beginning to get the smell of it gradually. For that reason she is careful in matters of food and drink. Most of the time, Dodere takes out her portion of curry herself and eats.

At times her stepmother would drink more than required and would come and scold the male and female servant of the house for no rhyme or reason. After that, she would thrash Dodere. Usually Dodere would not react. She would only curse her own fate herself. There didn't seem to be anyone in her stars who would care for her past, present and future. Just after giving birth to Dodere, her mother had died. It was her grandmother, the old woman, Daokhi who had brought her up. Last year, the old grandmother had died suddenly. Now there were only her step mother's daughter, Raimali and younger brother Binaram. Raimali would be ten years old and Binaram about four years. Apart from them, there was her father, two male servants and one maid. This was their family. In a small family like this, there should not have been much fighting and quarreling, but it was only because the stepmother's attitude and behaviour was not very good. Are all the stepmothers of the world like this? Dodere asks her heart. There is this one disgrace that they do not love their step children over all stepmothers. Why?

Just because one is a stepmother, is she not allowed to love another woman's child? Why does a woman's heart become like this? But it is also about women only that it is said, they are the world's loving mothers? The books of ancient religions have for several years described about womanly qualities. Dodere takes a vow that she will at least not be like her stepmother.

Because of the burning sensation in his stomach and chest, Dodere's father, Lantha has left drinking. Today, it will be some three months. Now, as soon as it is morning, he eats stale rice. He is a man living near the hills! And on top of that, because of working almost the entire day in the field, his body feels weak. Till today, he eats three times a day taking into account the morning's stale rice. Hardly any tea-drinking habit. In the morning, he is given stale rice along with the salted black tea of the man servant and the maid's.

That day also, the usual petty bickerings with her stepmother and Golo not visiting her despite passing her place makes Dodere feel confused and agitated. She wondered as to where she could go that will bring her peace of mind. Even if she was angry at Golo, she tries to coax herself again – “What is Golo to you? What right do you have to get angry at Golo? These questions to which there were no answers, quiten down Dodere's excited heart. She remembers afresh – there is no one indeed there in the world for her. Tears roll down her eyes all by themselves. On the orange tree near the loom, a pigeon sings a tragic tune. For some unknown reason, the rose flowers near the well had begun to fall in clusters. At that moment, her pet kid having entered somehow through the loom in the intervening period was licking her leg. Probably it had come to console Dodere? Not caring for weaving at the loom because of various thoughts pressing her down, she goes straight into her bedroom and throws herself on the bed. Not knowing what made her feel unhappier, she begins sobbing relentlessly.

Seeing Dodere lying down like this, Hambur did not startle her unlike other days. She asks like an old injured woman – “Now what is the matter with you? I guess you are remembering *gumoi* only.”

Dodere feels good the minute she has Hambur by her side. In an instant, her worries disappear somewhere and she shoots up straight and without looking towards Hambur wipes her tears discreetly.

“I think you have become mad” Hambur says – “What is it that makes you feel like crying all the time? If you can’t bear it any more, then why don’t you write a letter and send for him?”

“Who is there that I can send a letter with? Who do I have?”

“Very true, dear Dodere, *gumØi* has also gone to shoot a tiger by himself”

“Ah silly, why will he go to shoot a tiger? It has been said that someone else, some government official will do it”.

“I swear, it will indeed be *gumØi* who would seek out the tiger and shoot it. This is what the people are saying among themselves”. It was only then that Dodere realizes the rumors to be true. Hambur spoke earnestly about this. Dodere speaks as though a little delirious –

“Let them go wherever they want to. What concern do we have with others?”

“Now what is this for dear” as though able to guess, Hambur says clapping her hands – “I think someone was remembering him only a few minutes back and was even crying secretly.”

“Why didn’t he visit me even after coming this side? Hoping that he can work on some good piece of land, I had given him an offer, but he did not bother to come.” Dodere could not stop herself anymore, knowing herself to have been caught. But can Hambur be any less? She extracts words from the stomach. That is why Dodere never really keeps anything from her. Both begin counting on their five fingers to search for a good day in a week and how to go and meet Golo one day.

## 8

To get her secretly married off to Møblao, Dodere's step mother Khowbali to that purpose decides to give her *haina muli* in the name of Møblao on the sly. Daokha *ojha* of *Daorai-bari* knows the medicine. If this were to be done without anybody knowing, she will need to be good towards Dodere first. Thinking about this, up till now she has been showing some affection towards Dodere.

Dodere finds her stepmother's sudden show of affection surprising. Of course, she also feels a little happy seeing her stepmother drink less. It is this rice beer only that eats the insides of a man's head. Dodere thinks to herself that perhaps her stepmother might have stopped after seeing her father. In that case, there will be peace in the house again.

Lantha Mahajan does not understand all this. He only knows how to search for another manservant and maid, how to enjoy one's livelihood by working hard. According to him he should not be forced to borrow from others or even forced to lend to others. But how many are of this opinion? Most of the Bodos of the village are increasingly losing heart in hard work. As soon as it is morning, it is the markets shops which they frequent from morning till noon. Every time, it is the tea-stalls for them. Their conversations are only about what job they get, what they get to eat, and drink. While returning from the bazaar shops, they also enter the *coolie lines* on the way and return after drinking *methai seref* (sweet rice beer). In fact, on the bazaar days, there is drinking and eating among men and women. Some go out in order to buy rice husk, but they come away spending everything they had on drinking and eating. What to say to whom? If one goes onto give advise about such things, you usually end up looking bad. Being a criticizer, Lantha is hence not liked by his own relatives in their heart of hearts. We are earning, so we are eating with our own money, what is it to you? The replies are somewhat like this.

And these days, a new group of boys are beginning to be conspicuous – they neither go for ploughing nor for hunting. Most of them are illiterate or have left their studies

midway. As soon as it is morning, they enter the many shops and hotels on the crossroads and are constantly chewing away something or the other. They pass their time from morning to night in liquor and gambling. If you search for most of them, they would be found in *Megharpara* of the *coolie bostis*. It is in these matters that the Bodo community is beginning to sink increasingly. How will the emerging youth of a race which has still not been able to stand on its own feet, show its face before other races? More so, when it's old and experienced folks do not even take the responsibility of bringing them back to the right path? How will they compete with others?

The *Khashi-bari* village has still not been healed. A section of them have begun running away to different places after selling their ancestral homesteads. Even after running away one does not get to hear that they are doing well, that is why Lantha does not go out too much. While at home, he keeps fooling around in his kitchen garden, plants greens and leafy vegetables. Vegetables like *lao*, *jingkha*, *pherla*, *khumbra*, *baromashi*, *phanthao* will not be found exhausted in Lantha *Mahajan's* house. Even for this, people come begging every time and then leaving with them. If he doesn't give, they sarcastically say that he has become too rich. That you will receive or even have the ability to give away freely in today's age, can no longer be seen.

Lantha is unable to understand his second wife getting angry at Dodere and scolding her now and then. He gets angry at her when she complains about Dodere without stopping, the moment he comes back from outside. Sometimes she even belts Dodere on the back, but what else to say about such things. Lantha does not see any of this way out it. Only if she could be just given away to someone or the other, the trouble would end.

That Dodere is not really like the others, Lantha is well aware. Solemn and slow to speak, just like her mother. But in household chores, who can say that she is ignorant? When he sees Dodere's way of working, as well as her wisdom, conduct, and her facial features, Lantha remembers his first wife. Today Dodere, by weaving, rearing goats and pigs has been able to acquire land all by herself. For all this, Lantha, in fact encourages her.

The young men and women of *Khashi-bari*, hire vehicles and go to the cinema every now and then. They throw a lot of money there making the vehicle and cinema owners rich, but Dodere never goes with them most of the time. Only when Hambur accompanies her, does she end up going at times.

In the end, Lantha thinks Dodere should be given away after finding a good family. But he hasn't found a suitable match as yet. Laodab *dewani* has already come and told him twice. But he did not have the desire to give her away to his family. He does not want to give her away in his own village or somewhere near his house. Laodab *dewani*'s house is also not very suitable and moreover if a girl is married off to a nearby village, one gets to hear a lot of rumours.

Even if the heart desires to keep the son-in-law as *gØrjia*, it is not right to think such if Dodere does not consent. Through Hambur, he gets to know that Dodere does not want a *gØrjiya*<sup>1</sup> because of her stepmother. If need be, she would remain unmarried. That is why Lantha feels there is no way out.

“Are you in the house *adai*?” Loren comes and yells.

“Oh yes I am here. Come here.” Lantha was sharpening a fishing trap in the corner of his hut. “Ah! You are sharpening a fishing trap”,

“Ah yes what else to do. It is Tuesday today and ploughing is also not favorable. Not knowing what else to do, I took this up in my hands.”

“Then it is good. According to our *Bathou* religion we are prohibited from working in our fields today. And we also need to do the small, trivial household chores a little bit.”

Dodere quickly brings out a chair and Loren sits. She says, “We don't even have any tea leaves, what is the point in *ada* drinking anything else?”

“Don't bother I have come after having my food, I have actually come with some important matter to say.”

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<sup>1</sup> A system of marriage according to which the bridegroom is required to stay at the bride's house and serve the parents for two or three years before marriage.

“So you have eaten some rice already? Then there should have been a tumbler of rice beer.”

“There’s no need. I am also considering leaving the habit of drinking. Even otherwise, I hardly drink at all these days.”

“Cut some areca nuts and bring them child.” Lantha calls out

“Yes, I am bringing” Dodere replies after entering the kitchen porch.

“There seems to be a problem that has cropped up *adai*. The land near the jungle has still not been settled. These days, no worker is allowed near the jungle. Moreover the government has taken it upon itself in order to chase people from the forest lands. The other day on meeting me at the tea garden bazaar, the ranger had told me so”

“In that case, it is quite a problem. It is twenty-five years now? We have built houses and bungalows and made firm orchards of areca and jackfruit trees, if today we have to go away from here, where will we be able to build another place like this?”

“What to do! The people themselves are also regularly paying their taxes. We have already submitted many applications and representations to the government. The MLA who won the last elections had given his word saying he would talk with the minister and settle this matter. How come now he hasn’t said anything.”

“Whoever goes to *Lanka* eventually turns into a *Ravan adai*, what to say to whom.”

“There is no room anywhere for the Bodos anymore. The land that was cleared for the Bodos in the belt block, even that has gone over to the hands of other races? The brainless Bodo race has allowed other races to snatch everything from them. How will our race continue to survive like this?”

“It can be thought of in this way.”



“What a fate for us to be born as Bodos? Do you know what an anthropologist has said *adai*?”

“How will us folks know, *adai*?”

“He has said that the Mongoloid children seem to be born with 47 chromosomes or layers of blood. But others are born with forty-six chromosomes only? Why? But the anthropologist has not said how this happens. They have said that ordinarily even if only twenty three pairs of chromosomes meet in the mother’s womb a child is born. The faces of such children are round, with high cheek bones, small slanted eyes as well as a face full of pimples during youth. It is said that a child with a face like this is called a Mongolian child. In London, a Dr. Down has said this after carrying out experiments. It has been announced that these children are to be called the children of Down’s syndrome according to his name

“It might be true *adai*, you guys will know better”.

“Whatever it is, even in these matters we are of no service too. If we don’t know how to work together and eat among ourselves how will it be possible? Some, who are becoming wealthy due to their good luck, do not know how to spend it. Most Bodo *Mahajan*’s do not keep money in the banks. They are afraid of being known as rich people by the government. For that reason, they keep their money, *paddy*, *jute*, *mustard*, and *lentil dal*, with the *Marwaris* or *desowalis*. But the dumb Bodo *Mahajan*’s do not know how much profit these business people make with their paddy, jute, money and riches.”

“It’s not that there are no such people, there are actually.”

“Let whatever has happened be. We need to get the land problem settled. If need be we could go to *Dispur* to catch hold of the Bodo minister. Because of that, the *halmaji* has been asked to call a meeting later in the evening. *Adai*, since you are the leader of the village, that is why, if you tell the *halmaji* it would be good”

“Ok, it will be possible *adai*. I will go now and inform him” Loren gets up and goes away. Lantha too walks out to check whether the servants have fed water to the cows or not.

## 9

That both will abruptly come across each other in the middle of the bazaar, this hadn't occurred to Golo. It didn't even to Dodere. Both had not seen each other. But it was only when Hambur asks – “Has *gumØi* come to visit the bazaar?” then both of them get startled.

That womenfolk should come to the markets and *bazaars*, Golo does not like it even one bit. When the men folk themselves are there, why should the womenfolk have to come to the markets? The women of the *Soura Bangals* never come to the markets and *bazaars*. Of course the working women in the towns and the cities, or the wives of those working men consider going to the markets and *bazaars* as something of a hobby. But in the villages only the Bodo and Nepali women are seen. Most Bodo women do not know how to read and write, so they get cheated in matters of buying and selling things.

On Hambur's words, they appear startled and both of them look at each other. Golo and Dodere for quite sometime can not tear their eyes away. They get engrossed in it. It was only later that coming to her senses, Dodere getting embarrassed, tries to hide behind Hambur. Not knowing what to say or do, Golo simply says -

“Oh there is Dodere also. Have both of you come to visit the *bazaar*?”

“We have come to buy yarn *gumØi*”. The quick tongued Hambur replies. As it is, from her elder sister's Dabari's husband's side, Hambur has to address him as *gumØi*.

Somehow, Dodere could not utter even a word. She searches for the next thing to say after one speaks but was unable to do so. Although taking today into account, it wasn't even a year that they hadn't met, but it almost felt like one. They had not come across each other. But Dodere has been thinking of talking about all the past events when she would happen to meet him. But today, words don't seem to come to her head. Even Golo feels a slight hesitation. It is a matter of meeting in the middle of the

*bazaar*. Crowded and uncomfortable, dashing against each other. Who knows from which side and what kind of stares would be directed towards them? It is for this reason only that Golo feels more uncomfortable. Being unfortunate, that day Golo had very little money. He could not even invite them to go for a cup of tea. Dodere, meanwhile, kept scribbling letters with her big toe on the ground.

“How come the gloomy person is not saying anything” Hambur jokes with Dodere. “How come usually ...”

“Oof you silly” she pushes Hambur from behind.

“I could not keep your word Dodere” Golo speaks with a little serious face - “I cannot leave my house. How can I work *abad* in someone else’s fields as hired labourer leaving my old parents so far behind? It’s a matter of living near the forest, they are also left on their own”

“Even if you didn’t want to work *abad*, couldn’t you have shown your face at least once?” It was only now that Dodere was able to find the opportunity to say something

“Actually there is no opportunity to show one’s face when one is working as a daily wage worker in the tea gardens. Time just flies by.”

“Why didn’t you drop in the other day? I guess you had time to shoot a tiger”

“Oh, that day I was about to drop in. But the respected ranger had been waiting there in Loren’s place. That is why, seeing that I was short on time, I could not drop in. Besides the people seem to be suspicious of you– thinking about all these too...”

“Being a male child, if you pay heed to all that, then what should we women do?”

“Understanding it to be a disgrace between a man and a woman...”

“If you were scared of disgrace, then there was no need for you to have snatched me from the jaws of the tiger and the lions. Whether I ...” Dodere interrupts and speaks not letting Golo finish what he had been saying.

But she herself could not complete her words too. From both her eyes a spring of warm tears flowed down. Two market goers with their *lungi* hitched high, pass by, avoiding them from near, thinking to themselves “Now what could have happened to them”.

“Don’t make your heart so weak, Dodere. I have come to know what’s in your heart. But it is the ability to hold one’s heart back that is man’s greatest deed. Even if your heart runs away with your emotions, you should keep it in check with a horse whip.”

“We are planning to visit my sister and *gumØi*”

“Okay, then that’s good”

“We will go before the coming weekly market day. You be at your place and make arrangements for a fowl. Tell your old mother to keep aside some cooked rice beer” Hambur teases Golo.

“It is only Hambur who is always grinning and cheerful, having no sorrows, no worries. A person should be like this only” Golo tells Hambur smilingly.

“When I don’t have anything to worry about, then what for should I worry? It is you people who seem to have all kind of worries.” Golo feels embarrassed and even Dodere’s teary face becomes red with embarrassment. On meeting Golo’s eyes, she is unable to speak. Something sends a shiver down their bodies.

“Yes I have forgotten to tell you’ll something.” Golo says – “I have secured a job in the forest. Seeing me kill a tiger once, the ranger has offered me the job of a *chaprasi*. I have to join in two days’ time. Hence, if you go to my village, I cannot be sure of meeting you both? But I will try my best.”

Dodere is startled at this new information. Still she feels uneasy about the matter of the job. Hambur speaks again, like before –

“Then in that case, gumØi will be a service man. It is good”.

“So long then, both of you carry along. Let me see again whether it will be good if I take up this job. After working for some two days if I don’t like it, I will drop it.”

“Now why should you be leaving the job? If there is no landed property in the house then how will you earn your livelihood and live?” Dodere attempts to give expression to her opinion.

Hambur bids him farewell, saying “So long then to you too gumØi ...” but Dodere does not say anything back, she simply says goodbye with her eyes that said ‘go then’. Golo understands what Dodere’s eyes had said today.

The eyes of a woman work the job of a thousand letters. It is the eyes only that tell of her likes and dislikes. It is because of the eyes that the beauty of the world and, its outward appearances attract a man. But it is these eyes that sometimes make man get into trouble in this world. That is why, probably for a blind man, the world doesn’t exist.

When he was about to go away after dropping Dodere and her friends, Golo was almost going to dash into MØblao and was just about to go away without saying anything. MØblao had been watching Dodere’s conversation with Golo from a distance. He became angry and felt jealous. ‘When the woman marketer speaks to another man in the markets and *bazaars* there is something fishy’. He gossips to himself secretly. He follows Dodere and her friend.

Dodere and her friend enter a yarn shop and go over and sit with the women there. The yarn women sellers usually keep plenty of betel nuts, and betel leaves on sheets of newspapers for those customers who come to buy yarn. You can eat as much as you can.

Probably because of this, the Bodo women visit the *bazaars* themselves. However, the moment they get to know that the yarn shopkeepers are Bodos, they feel awkward to

buy from them. These Bodo shopkeepers also charge a little more from them. The non-Bodo *Bangal* shopkeepers are better to bargain with and they also charge less. This is what the Bodo women think. But by calculatingly offering betel-nut and *bidis*, and making two tollaks into three tollaks and then selling it to them, the cunningness of the non Bodo *bangals* are not grasped by the Bodo women. They know how to allure them. Thinking about all these things, despite those few who prevent the Bodo women, they still do not stop going to the markets and *bazaars*. Matters were different in the past. Earlier there used to be Bodos everywhere in Assam. But now the markets, *bazaars*, roads and streetways have all been filled by the *Baro-Bangals*. In today's times, if the Bodo women saying that they want to capture the old cultural traditions of the Bodos of the past keep going to the *bazaars* and not stop, it is a matter of shame.

MØblao, following reaches Dodere and her friend. MØblao begins to walk up and down once, twice, thrice in front of Dodere, hoping to catch her attention. Because there were many women relatives from his village; he did not enter the shop. He enters the tea stall near the yarn shop for a cup of tea whether he felt like it or not and keeps sipping his tea, facing directly towards Dodere's direction. But ultimately Dodere did not look at MØblao.

MØblao takes a long time to drink his cup of tea. Meanwhile he has been unable to buy the things he needed to buy. On the other hand he was also afraid that in case they disappear from his sight. MØblao saw no hope in the fact that they will soon come out from the yarn shop, later, not knowing what to do he goes towards the *bazaar*. No sooner did he come out from the fish *bazaar* with two eels, when he meets Bishukhe. Bishukhe forcibly takes MØblao to drink tea with him again. MØblao did not feel like drinking tea at all. 'I had tea just now' he says, trying to avoid the invitation. But Bishukhe was adamant. In the end, not finding a way out, they enter the next tea shop under the *phakri* tree.

As soon as he had finished drinking tea he remembered suddenly that his mother had asked him to bring for her some dry prawns and *dabkha* fish. MØblao thinks to himself that he should buy at least one of them. After having gone to the fish *bazaar* when he visits the yarn shop again; he does not see Dodere and her friends. MØblao

feels edgy. He thought it was better to drop the idea of buying fish for now, and take a round of the main *bazaar* and search for them. But even after taking one round and entering every shop, he could not see them. MØblao becomes worried and wonders where they might have gone! He slowly begins to get angry with Bishukhe in his heart. He feels whatever has happened was Bishukhe's doing. They must have proceeded in the direction of their houses. Hardening his heart, he decides to go and get the fish his mother had asked for.

Meanwhile, Dodere and her friends after buying the yarn and buying hairclips, bangles and oxidized neck chains each, enter the tea stall where MØblao had earlier taken tea. The seats for the women were separate - in the interior of the stall. Since it is cordoned off by a screen they cannot be seen from the outside. But they were able to see everyone who passes by. Seeing MØblao walking to and fro twice, thrice in front of the stall, Hambur teases Dodere –

“Look there dear, *ada* must be looking for you only”

“*Aayo habab*, it is strange and unnerving. Why will *ada khowbla* look for me? I can't stand him even a little bit”.

“We saw him that time; he had been sitting in the tea stall near the yarn shop in the hope of getting a glimpse of us”

“Oh! You are also no less alert my dear. What had you been thinking when you had been staring at him?”

“What can I do if someone is watching? The one who had been staring, it is his sight that has weakened”.

After making another round and not finding them again, MØblao carrying one weight on the shoulders and the other hanging awkwardly in his hands, he carries the two *khisiyas* (a type of fish) balancing himself. Only then could he begin walking fast in the direction of his house. Dodere and her friends had already gone ahead. They won't have gone very far. Even the *kherandai* (centipede) moves faster than a woman. He would soon catch up with them midway.



On the road, MØblao passes by groups of people from his village and the neighbouring ones. Everybody asks him the price of the *khisiyas* he had bought. Having to say that again and again all the way through, he feels weary. Some of them asked him the reason for his walking in such a hurry – ‘Last week he had been walking side by side with the villagers. On the way up as well as on the way back. It is weird, he is behaving grumpy now?’ But it is only MØblao who knows the nature of his troubles today. If the people from his own villages ask, he replies that he has to go and bring the cows. But the villagers from his own place know that it his father or his younger brothers and not MØblao who bring in the cows. That is why, to the people of his village, he says that he has some other work.

After walking on for sometime, it was only two furlongs left to his house. As soon as he reaches *Barang-bari*, he can see his own village through wide cultivable lands. Running through the middle of the land is a path for people to walk on. MØblao sees that Dodere and her friends were not there on this road between these two furlongs. Or have they reached already? *Chee!* All this nonsense happened because of Bishukhe. He gets angry again with Bishukhe. *Ma khimOjanØ*, why did he have to come across Bishukhe today? MØblao getting angry on his own, finds no way of letting it out. Loathing comes to him. If he had taken one more round, perhaps he would have met them, but even this he had not done.

MØblao thinks about his next move. He has walked so fast that even if they had come an hour earlier, he should have met them on the way. Now there is no way out. He can't even wait on the crossroads anymore. What would people think? He thinks therefore, that it would be better to go straight to their houses and ask for news about them. And so he begins walking.

After dropping the things in his house, he comes out again and walks in the direction of the village. While returning from the *bazaar*, from the *langana* (gate) itself he had tried to look around inside but he did not see Dodere. This time, he enters their house straight away. The household was deserted and desolate. The stepmother Khowbali sat cleaning *arum* leaves. MØblao feels uncomfortable. He had no business there. With what would he start and begin talking? He cannot even refer to and speak about Dodere directly. The weakness of his heart would be understood. After all, there is no

one who would want the weaknesses of their hearts to be known. As much as they could, try to keep it hush hush. But the manner of this weakness is such, that one feels, it has no security? At times it appears to be so thin that even if one tried one couldn't sense it even after much struggling.

“Is there no body in the house *madøi*?” He calls her *madøi* according to the nature of his relation from his village. Because it is to him, that Dodere will finally be given that is why he takes her as a half aunt and a half mother-in-law. But he decides that he'd call her mother-in-law only after he finally gets Dodere.

“No, there is no one; your uncle has not come back from the *bazaar* as yet.”

She did not say anything regarding Dodere. Or have they not still returned. Even if she were at home, how come she has not come out knowing that it is Møblao, as though he was an unknown person. A person who earlier, used to exchange a few words here and there, now acts confused.

“Yes, what are you searching for?”

“Nothing really *madøi*. There are cows on the *dhubli* (barren fields). I have come to take them.”

If he asks for areca nuts obviously, she herself won't come and give it personally. Her hands have touched *arum* leaves. If Dodere is there she will ask her to get it. Thinking in this way, Møblao asks again-

‘I guess you have betel leaf? I could also do with a piece of betel nut’

Just at that moment, Raimali, her daughter returning from the village steps into the courtyard. Seeing her daughter she says –

“Here Raimali, your *ada* there wants to chew on a betel-nut as he leaves. Break a piece for him”.

She was not there. Møblao's hopes did not materialize. He quickly puts the piece of areca-nut in his mouth and leaves immediately.

Today his stars are all in the wrong positions. His thoughts have not materialized after all. Otherwise, how can one miss a person even after having met in the *bazaar*? Had he come across her in the market again, he would have forcefully taken her with him and could have bought her some tea.

When he was about to enter the village after taking the cows from the *dubli* he sees Dodere and Hambur returning from the *bazaar*. They have already crossed *Barang-bari*. He feels his heart lighten up, but he feels irritated at something not having taken place. He hits the cows unnecessarily and drives them till the house.

## 10

Golo realizes the importance of seeing Dodere in a new light. The day he met her in the *bazaar* he had been contemplating many a thing throughout his way back home. Even now, it is about midnight but he can't sleep as he can't find any respite even after being anxious.

What did Dodere see in him to make her like him? This is what Golo considered to be of utmost importance. He has neither a house nor lands, only his self. But Dodere is the daughter of a Mahajan. Wonder what the stepmother might even be thinking! Do her mother and father know about this matter? However, he himself had heard that Møblao likes Dodere. It will be Møblao only who will finally take her. Then why is Dodere behaving in such a manner? Golo finds it difficult to even believe himself.

Seeing Dodere in the market, he remembers her eyes. *Aayo*, so passionate! That Dodere is capable of giving such a look, this Golo had not thought about. When they had met in the heart of the jungle, Dodere had not looked at him with such eyes. Together with that, the tenor of her voice was also so endearing! When he hears her voice, he feels as if he has made it his own a long time back. Her betel nut stained rosy lips, plump blood red smooth cheeks, the eyes of a deer, large bosomed, and hair almost touching the hips. On recollecting all these things, Golo feels a heat in his body.

Dodere looks best when her face takes on a slightly sulky look. To love the look of irritation of one's beloved, is one of the main symptoms of falling in love. At that time their faces look more attractive and pronounced. Even though Dodere hadn't been able to complete what she had been saying, but Golo had been able to grasp her obvious liking and falling in love with him. He is even ashamed to dream that Dodere could like a poor miserable like him. *Aayo* the beautiful Dodere... for a while Golo remains lost with Joy in his heart.

The biggest problem for Golo now, is how to accept Dodere's feelings of love. The problems in the family just seem never-ending. It has not been possible to leave the family in the hands of his only younger brother. Right from childhood, he has not been doing any hard work. He has been sent to school, but soon after joining the sixth standard he left. Today, his fear is that, if he hadn't been there he might have gone on the wrong path. The environment of the neighboring tea gardens is not good. There are just the excited hulla bulla of drinking and eating only. The truth is if children are to walk in the right path, the environment of the society should be good. If they hang around with bad friends they turn bad in no time. Even though he did not have the resources, he had at least tried to educate his younger brother. But even that did not work out. For this reason he feels unhappy at times. His mother has become bent down from the waist, the father after suffering from typhoid, is a little crippled in the leg. He can no longer do any kind of hard work. Yet he weaves *dalai* (sieves) and sells them in the main *bazaar* of the tea gardens.

If it becomes very necessary, a male servant will have to be hired, Golo thinks. But if the younger brother also helps him with the plough, then the work will then become easy.

In the past, they had plenty to eat. He remembers and feels like crying. Orchards of areca nut, betel leaf, lemon and oranges and fertile land available. His father would give money whenever they asked for it. If on a particular day, you asked for money to buy books, then he would dig up the ginger, and the next day if you said you needed to buy clothes, he would pluck betel leaves or dig up the turmeric. If one were to observe that one at time the happiest family of *Nareng-guri* had been Golo's it wouldn't be wrong. But while staying outside for studies, he could not complete it because he had fallen in with bad company.

Golo feels happy with one thing. The office is around his house. That is why he can come and visit his family now and then. Golo has been kept on to do this job because he was a man living near the jungle. Golo's destiny has again been linked with the jungle. Today it has fallen in Golo's lot to protect those same wild animals that he had for fourteen years hunted, secretly hiding in the interiors of the jungle and shooting the wild animals. But now he has to protect them from hunters who are like the way

he herself had been in the past. God's plans! No one can understand. Who would have known that the same man who bought rice after taking their lives would, today, protect those same lives and be able to buy rice?

Golo thinks to himself that – he needs to atone. During the past fourteen years he has lost the count of the number of deer and pigs he has shot. When can he wash away all these sins? At the time of shooting a deer, how piteous its cries sound, tears falling from its eyes. Aayo! It is indeed a cruel job. But what other way was there? How would he have survived? Golo asks himself again. Probably his past sins would be pardoned, if today he is able to save those same animals from the hands of other hunters. For this reason, Golo decides that he has to accept this job.

And Dodere... he will marry her. If he marries Dodere, he would leave her in the house only. He won't keep her in the office quarters.

Golo imagines a vivid image of a new life with Dodere in his heart.

Golo could not say when he slept off around dawn,. In the morning, when his mother wakes him up, only then does he open his eyes. The sun had in the meantime had risen quite high. But his ears still keep ringing with the sound of the beating of the drums of the *santhals*, the crying of the anklets in the jhumur dances.

## 11

Somehow she stays that one night in *Nareng-guri*. When early in the morning she returns home, Dodere finds her heart feeling lonely. She feels hurt at only one thing that even after giving his word. Golo did not show his face. Even after reaching home, she keeps feeling not up to do any of the household chores.

Is this only called falling in love? Dodere questions her heart. Since childhood she had never dreamed about anyone in this way. And today, night or day, and even during meals there is only one anxiety, the face of only one man that keeps appearing every now and then. It's been so many days, she had hoped to converse properly with Golo sitting by her side. But till today, this hope hasn't materialized. Dodere herself starts feeling as though she has been searching for a flower garden in the middle of a desert. This flower garden is faint and always beyond one's reach. If you take two steps forward, it seems to go one step back. But how many more days will she have to wait?

'Wait, wait don't think so deeply as yet'. It is Dodere only who checks herself back. Has Golo's heart been able to grasp her love for him? Suppose he has, then what does Golo's heart say? But Golo has never told her that he likes her and even she herself has not said so in the presence of Golo. Then whose fault is it? But that day, Golo should have known when they had met in the *bazaar*. Hambur had kept teasing me. And I had not protested. No, this cannot be true, Dodere thinks. 'I'll have to go to the forest beat office with Hambur'. Others may think whatever they want to but – it is Golo who is the true love of her life and has to be her partner till the end. This is what Dodere hopes.

Golo has taken up a job; this is good news, in fact very soothing. But even before he had taken up this job, Golo had already been selected by her. If it gets too much for her, Dodere will simply inform Dabari and run away to stay in his house

After having finished eating a little rice for her midday meals, Dodere while lying, keeps pondering it. But in not time she falls asleep and begins dreaming –

... A bungalow on a raised wooden platform in the heart of the jungle. Precariously leaning. Wild vegetation all around, only trees, wild vegetation and plantations. The house is of *thori* (a harder variety of elephant grass) like a *daak* bungalow (wooden bungalows for forest officials in the forests) constructed with bamboo skids, the walls washed with white limestone. In front of the entrance to this house there is a river. The gurgling waters keep flowing from east to west. On the river's edge on the other side there is a small wide open place. Full of sand and stones. The deer and tiger are playing, and even drinking water together. All around the house there are flower gardens right up to the entrance. Sweet smelling flowers like roses, *bilai phakri* and other kinds. In the surrounding jungle and around the house, the birds and fowls are telling stories to each other. A gentle breeze has been sweeping the verandah on top of the bungalow.

From the verandah of the bungalow, the river can be seen clearly as far as the banks. Dodere, sitting along with Golo in the verandah, is plucking out the grey hairs from his head. The shameless wind in the meantime tugs and spreads Dodere's hair on Golo's shoulders. Golo does not say a word, he spreads her hair on his chest himself. The *khow* bird (the cuckoo) and the bird that lays its eggs on the ground are singing the best in the jungle. Two elephants, passing the gate, begin going towards the river's edge. In the past, she had never been really afraid of them, but that day somehow she feels afraid and is held tightly by Golo. Suddenly, the clouds come from nowhere and cover the sky. And within no time a storm sets in. The hailstones first fall on the verandah in ones and twos, and then bigger ones.

“A storm is on us. Let us go into the room, my darling.”

Dodere is still afraid of the elephants. Golo, taking Dodere in his arms, as though in a hurry, goes inside and tries to put her down on the mat. Dodere



holds Golo firmly around his neck. As she falls onto the bed, she pulls Golo towards her too.

Both roll onto each other - Dodere pushes Golo down once and Golo too, disentangling Dodere from his chest brings her around in front of him and biting generously on her cheek, stands up.

“*Aayo* dear, it is now stinging” Dodere responds. She keeps feeling her cheek burn.

But at this time there is a boom sound... someone has fired at Golo through the open window. Golo is bathed in blood and almost immediately falls flat on the ground.

Dodere shouts with anxiety and fear. Even after firing at Golo the sound of the gun of the still being fired, boom, boom, could be heard in some corner of the room Dodere begins screaming and sobbing...

Hambur had come thinking of taking along some company for picking snails. On getting there, she comes to know that Dodere has been sleeping with the door shut. When she goes and stands by the door, she hears Dodere saying “*Aayo hai* it keeps burning”. What could have happened to her in broad daylight? Hambur thinks and bangs on the door. Dodere then begins shouting all the more loudly. Dodere wakes up only then when Hambur keeps kicking the door as if to break it down.

Dodere feels her head reeling. When she opens the door, her face is wet with tears. The right cheek is still red as though bitten by an ant. Hambur tells her that. Even then the cheek does not stop stinging.

## 12

Now and then, the fish thieves go to the rhino pond and upset it. For that reason, the wild animals find it difficult to play and drink water at leisure. The forest department decided to enclose the rhino pond by erecting a permanent concrete wall to fence it off in order to store water for the wild animals for future dry days in the future. In order to make the pond look scenic, they planted five to six flower bearing trees all around it and in the middle off the pond they scattered some *phami* flowers (water hyacinths).

Five miles from the crossroads, on the road going towards *Mothanguri*, the forest department has undertaken to construct a new road two miles long, facing westwards. During this month, the *karmacharis* from the range office keep going there only. The ranger sends Golo to the laborers more than the others, the disbursing of the labour payments to the laborers being his responsibility. Seeing his enthusiasm in his job, he gives him a promotion to the post of a game washer after only two months. The previous game washer Kalipada Chowdhuri has been transferred to the *Rangiya* divisional office. Kalipada Das is from *Sylhet*. Some of the *chaprasis* feel jealous at Golo's getting a promotion after two months only. But it was because of the ranger that they could not speak against him.

Golo acquires a new experience after entering the service. But the important point in the discussions among the employees was, how did Golo get a promotion within two months of joining the service. The employees did not also get along well among themselves. Every one of them is involved in corruption. Golo has already found out which sentry has got links with which tout. They have already been caught twice for selling wood on the sly after pairing up with the *Soura Bangal* touts, staying around the office. They even seem to have a contract for poaching fish and deer. Of course, he knew everything over earlier. Besides he has seen that during *Kartik* and

*Agrahayn*<sup>1</sup>, when people are given permits to cut *thØri* (elephant grass), the sentries take their own share. Can the government save the property of the forest, if such is the case? Might be that at one time Golo himself was a poacher, but he had no link with any sentry; nor did he maintain any underhand relations. Golo poached for livelihood and not for addiction or for enjoying meat with rice beer. Whereas officers from the town would come here and enjoy eating and drinking at the bungalow near the range office throughout the night. Some from the ranger's office would also join the party. If that is the case, then what was the offence if Dabla, Gobla and others living near the forest hunt deer for meat.

Further, Golo becomes troubled when he remembers another experience. The hunters near his village whose identities are known, have begun to consider Golo as their enemy. They presume that Golo who was himself a poacher might have disclosed everything about them to the range office. Those sentries who envied Golo told this thing to the other poachers. Now because of Golo, everyone has become scared to enter the forest for poaching. Discussions of this kind can be heard at garden *bazaars*. Some say that he has become arrogant because of his employment. Golo fails to make them understand that even though he was also a poacher once, he has never informed any sentry about them. They enter the forest to steal, but what is the use of asking the sentries who already know. Now without any consideration, they are blaming Golo. And nowadays the tenaciousness of the other poachers was such that they had planned to confront Golo who according to them is charged up because of his new job.

And later on, he begins thinking that it might be very difficult for him to work for the forest department. In today's incident, Golo had been coming from the rhino pond on his bicycle through the sandy stretch on the *BØrshi*. On other days, he would never take that way, but today when he does, it leads him into trouble. He meets MØblao and the others, in the center of the sandy stretch. They see him from afar, but they still did not care to hide. Golo was in full uniform at the time. Seeing MØblao and others he gets down from the bicycle and asks- "Where are you going MØblao in broad daylight?"

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<sup>1</sup> The months of October – November and November – December respectively according to the Bengali Calendar.

“We are going to the *Børshi* river-banks to find if there is any bird available. Please don’t take it otherwise sentry sir.” There is in Møblao’s words, a tone sarcasm.

“I don’t have anything to say Møblao. Not me, but if some others happen to see you then things may go wrong. You should not come in broad daylight. It is not good to come along the path that is used by the forest officials. In the near future, you should be a bit careful about this.” So saying, Golo leaves.

Golo understands that Møblao and the others had appeared before him intentionally. “Let us see what Golo can do to us”. Throughout the way, he keeps thinking about this. But all said and done, he is a government servant and paid for this and so he has to perform his allotted duties. While on duty, if he finds even his elder or younger brother committing a crime, then he has to tell them not to.

Even after reaching his quarters, he was thinking about Møblao and the others. But he does not inform this in his office. After that, he closes the door and begins making arrangements for cooking. Earlier, for two days, he had eaten from the mess. Today he cooks for himself. To be single is better as he is free to either eat or choose not to. Sometimes he can eat his rice with one green chilly or sweet potato mixed with oil and salt.

At this time the office *chowkidaar*, daju enters shouting –

“*Bada babu ,Bada babu* what are you doing behind the closed door?”

“Who is it daju? I am cooking rice”

“Open the door and see, you have some guests come to meet you”

Wondering who might have come in this scorching midday, he opens the door and to his pleasant surprise his eyes falls on Dodere’s. Hambur was also with her.

“Ah, so it’s actually the two of you who have come. Come, come in” he calls them in.

“They had been standing in front of the office looking for you only. I got to know only when I went there. I told them that he has just returned from the forest so they are lucky” daju leaves after saying this.

He gave them two cane stools to sit on but instead of sitting, they asked whether there was a well nearby. On being told that there was a tube well, they went towards it to wash their hands, feet and their face.

Golo becomes confused, not knowing what to do.

“I have come to reach *abo* to you *gumØi*” Hambur says as she enters the kitchen after having washed her hands and feet along with Dodere.

“It will be you who I will keep to myself *bibangna godai* (young sister-in-law).”

“Well if you want me to be your second wife, you will not be able to maintain me. I eat two full plates of rice” entering the inner room she says – “How come *gumØi* is cooking rice only now”.

“Ah yes, I have just come back from the forest”. In the meantime, Dodere also comes into the porch after washing up.

“Both of you should have food with me Hambur. There is *singhi* fish (catfish) which I bought yesterday”. Golo says dusting the table and looking at Dodere discreetly.

“We have already had our meals at home” Hambur replies – “But even then let Dodere cook. Let me just visit my *abo*, I have to bring a kettle”. Both of them enter Golo’s bedroom.

“Silly girl, are you planning to go by yourself?” Dodere asks as though mildly protesting.

“Let *gumØi* keep a watch from his room. What is there in it, the place is just two steps away.”

In response to Hambur's words, Dodere says nothing. Anyway she feels as if an opportunity has been given to Golo and herself to speak to each other in private. Hambur had already told this to her on the way

"Won't you take some tea" Golo asks Hambur

"No thank you but I will eat rice with catfish when I return."

After arranging all the necessary things were needed for Dodere, Golo reaches Hambur halfway up to the *Nareng-guri* road and asks her to come back soon.

On returning, he sees Dodere has been separating the husk from the rice in the kitchen. After entering the room, Golo could not find any thing to say to Dodere by way of conversation.

"The rice is full of husk. Can't you buy after carefully looking through?"

"The rice from the market is like this only." Saying so Golo takes the fish near tube well area in order to wash it. Dodere stopped him. She will do it.

After taking the rice off from the oven, Dodere pours oil in the *kadhai* to fry fish. Golo saw her face turn red due to the flames of the fire. Golo asks her –

"What made you come here?"

"Why, can't I come? Once I came to my elder sister's house and you wanted to meet me but you did not turn up, why?" Dodere asks and then said again, "The whole night I had somehow closed my eyes to sleep and then left straight away in the morning."

"It's okay"

"It's okay" Dodere mimicks Golo's words and then with love she looks at him.

"Truly, I did not get time." Golo replies half smilingly.

“One year has passed yet you did not get time. Thinking that you can visit anytime, I would keep some rice beer for you. But no, I guess you did not pay a visit because you found us people detestable.”

“On what ground could I have visited you Dodere?”

“Why? Can’t you visit simply without any reason?”

“Once Dababri *bajØi* had told me. But I could not go in the end.”

“I have had a bad dream and now I am afraid.”

“What kind of dream? But you know a dream is a dream only. It never really comes true.”

“I hope it does not come true. Even then can you say that dreams never become reality?”

“No they never do. At times the preoccupations of a person enter the unconscious part of the mind and when they go to sleep exhausted, it then takes the form of a dream. That is why some say that dreams are another version of what is thought during the day.’

“Supposing my dream comes true...”

“No it won’t Dodere, dreams do not come true. In fact, old people say that in reality, the opposite happens.”

“If so, then it is alright.”

Golo then goes out for taking a bath. The curry was done even before he finishes taking his bath. Dodere then decides to serve Golo first; he hadn’t had anything to eat since the morning. But Golo did not want to eat first.

“We have already eaten some food at home. So we are not that hungry. You start eating. Let Hambur come back and then I will eat along with her’ –

Golo could not say no to her and so he ate first. When Golo had eaten Dodere cleans the utensils and covers all the bowls. She sweeps the kitchen and cleans it up making it spick and span. She also sweeps the room Golo sleeps in. With the touch of a woman's hands, Golo's room looked beautiful. Having eaten, Golo had been resting on the bed. Dodere, thinking of sweeping underneath the cot, goes on her knees and with her broom sweeps out the dust when she finds a letter. The letter had been addressed to her. In the beginning itself, it was written –“Dodere my sweetheart”. Dodere smiles to herself secretly. Noticing that Dodere had suddenly become under the cot, Golo bends down to look.

“What is that? Where did you get it? Golo asked.

“I have been able to catch the thief of hearts’ Dodere says laughingly. Golo wonders how the folded letter kept under the table cloth could have got under the bed. Later he remembers that while he had been cleaning the table the letter had fallen down. Feeling embarrassed inside, without thinking, he catches hold of Dodere's hand in order to snatch the letter from her.

‘Dodere had just gone beyond his reach, when on Golo's attempts at snatching the letter; she is unable to go on. Golo tried to snatch the letter but could not. Both of them got involved in a tug-of-war fight, each trying to grab the letter. One tried to snatch while the other held it all the more firmly.

“If you did not want me to read then why did you write?”

“I have written no doubt but I have not sent it yet” saying this, he appears to crush Dodere's tightly enclosed palms a little too hard.

“*Aayo* what a hard hand this is.”

“Then why don't you open your palm?”

“I will not. This is my letter.”

“In that case, here you are”. Saying Golo pulls her hands once more. Dodere falls upon Golo.



“Ah..ung..” Dodere feigns a cry and presses down upon Golo. Golo pushes her and makes her fall by his side and attempts to embrace her, like embracing a child who is frightened after being scared on seeing a wild dog following behind. Just like a child, Dodere too clings onto him.

Golo does not feel like snatching the letter anymore. On the contrary, he feels his heart and body warming up. A baby need not be taught how to suckle the mother’s milk. One simply has to direct the baby’s mouth to its source of food. The baby knows instinctively that it needs to suckle. Similarly, Golo’s hands need not be taught what to do even though he has never fallen in love. Golo’s hand runs over Dodere’s front and back.

“Dodere...”

“Huh..”

“Do you really love me?”

“I don’t know”

“What about Mablao? Golo asks in jest.

“*Nompha khowlai...*” swearing and pretending to be upset she tries to get off Golo’s chest. But will Golo leave her so easily? Instead he holds her more firmly.

“I have come to know that your stepmother has already thought of giving you away to Mablao.”

“Let her give her own daughter; I am not her daughter and neither is she my mother”

“Chee. You should not say like this. She maybe your stepmother but she is after all your mother.”

“Why does she have to do something like that knowing that I don’t like him?”

“What is wrong in it? Why don’t you go away with him”

“*Nod hai*” Dodere pounced on his chest.

“*Aidei..*”

“Hurt? Feeling some pain now?”

“I’ll get you” says Golo pinching Dodere’s cheek

“*Aaiyee...* I think you have gone mad”

“I think *you* have gone mad”

“You better marry me fast or else I will willingly run away and enter someone else’s house.”

“Really?” knowing that she was joking, Golo embraces her more boldly as if he could have opened his chest like a door, he would then have liked to put her in and take her away. Both of them begin to forget themselves. For a moment they keep quite.

“*GumØi , nØi gumØi*” Hambur shouts while banging on the door. Dodere hastily gets up and runs towards the tube well area. Golo opens the door, hair tousled.

‘What took you so long?’ Golo asked

‘It is because of my sister. She was hardly letting me go. She didn’t want to let me leave so early. She made me spin and now she has asked me to go back to her place along with Dodere. She said we should not return home today.’

“It is better then. The sun has almost disappeared. Go and both of you have your food I have already eaten my share earlier.’

After taking food they say goodbye. Dodere asks Golo to visit her place next time. She makes him promise and if he says he won’t even this time, she would mind it.

While they were leaving, as soon as they reached the *khamshali* (portico) Hambur teased Golo again– ‘*gumØi* should wash his tee shirt. There is a black spot of kajal on

both sides of your chest. So saying she bursts into laughter. Dodere bites her tongue. When Golo looks down at his tee shirt, he sees the kajal from Dodere's bindi on her forehead had stained his entire shirt.

## 13

Khowbali had given Dodere the medicine. But it did not really work. She had heard that daokha *ojha*'s medicine never failed, but it appeared that it might not work for once, Dodere's step mother was deeply surprised.

Dodere did not know whether she had been given any medicine or not. She has been eating and drinking as usual. And doing the usual work.

Meanwhile, Møblao was angry with Dodere and Golo. When he was lounging on the southern banks, the right place to smoke a *bidi* the day he had met Golo on the banks of the *Børshi*, then he had heard the sound of the ranger's jeep. They all had hidden in the forest. The ranger had gone till the rhino pond. Møblao thought to himself that it must have been Golo, who after arriving in the office had sent the ranger. But Møblao and his group did not know about the work at the rhino pond. Thinking that they won't be able to do anything that day, they returned towards the house. Coming along the riverside and keeping the gun at *Nareng-guri*, they went towards the direction of the beat house. Walking by the road along the forest office, one could see Golo, Dodere and Hambur standing on Golo's verandah. At that time, only two hours were left for the sun to set. Møblao's fading anger was rekindled, like the adding of shreds of paddy husks to the fire rejuvenates it. Later on, Møblao waited for him in the market place. But not seeing him come till the darkness had invaded the sky, he went away to the *coolie lines* to smoke *ophri* (rice malt).

After two days, he got the news that Golo had come to stay with Dodere's family. That day it seems, there had not been anyone in the house. It was only when Golo was returning it seems he had come face to face with Dodere's stepmother at the entrance. After knowing this, the animal in Møblao's heart began to stir up to take revenge on Golo and Dodere. He swore to himself that he would either finish Golo or Dodere. But Møblao had to first analyse as to whose fault was greater among the two – Golo's or Dodere's? He thought of Dodere first: Why did Dodere not like him? He lived near

her house, always meeting her and knowing about her. And yet why did her heart not turn around for him?

There is no man as deprived as the man who is spurned by a woman. If the woman he adores finds him revolting and intolerable then the ferocity of a wild animal rages within him. If any barriers are created by anyone, when one is in love, then that man can kill. Or else, the breaking of a heart can lead to a person killing himself. If you think from this position, even Dodere needs to be punished. But he also speculates she might even start liking him if Golo is not around. Møblao thought that enticed by Golo's job, Dodere had fallen in love with him. For this reason, Møblao ended up thinking that the main reason behind Dodere not liking him could only be Golo. But Møblao comforted his heart thinking that some day he would chance upon Golo in the heart of the jungle.

Today it is the celebration of *baisagu*. All the young men and women, the old and the elderly, the small children of the village are dancing, whistling, rejoicing. In their respective groups, everyone is involved in drinking *jou*, collecting eggs - the old men among themselves, the old women with the other old women, the young man with the young men and frying *khaji* with the tips of *dingkhiya* (wild ferns) and making *bathon* (chutney) by mashing boiled sweet potatoes. Young children are following the groups going around collecting eggs. They tag along these groups till they finished collecting the contributions.

Lantha *Mahajan* and two others are drinking tea after claiming that they have given up drinking. Some people are trying to force others to drink, pulling and jostling them in every direction. But Lantha and the others did not drink. Whether they drink or not, they cannot leave the community people.

"The *baisagu* dancing, singing and whistling of today before others is really a shameful way of displaying the Bodo culture", Loren says to the group in general. The *baisagu* songs of the earlier days, the playing and plucking of musical instruments, the dancing and the whistling were not of this kind. Those days, the playing of such instruments as the *kham*, *siphung*, *serja*, *gongona*, and *jotha* has all stopped. But actually, these are the major musical instruments of the Bodos. The

harmonium and *tabla* that have come into our culture now, are actually the icons of the West Indian culture and not of our Mongolian race. If you play the *baisagu* bardic tune, it has the power to bring tears to the real sons of the soil even today, because, there is an inseparable relationship between the sound of the *serja* and the spirit of the Bodo race. It has the power to awaken the soul. Similarly, we have to feel ashamed in our traditional attire. It looks more like the attire worn by actors and actresses of a *jatra* party or of theatrical performances. The bodies of already drunk Bodo old men and women heat up with fury when after wearing these kinds of clothes on *baisagu*, they tell each other stories to the sound of a *Hindi* duet or do the ball dances. But come and play the *serja*, *kham*, *siphung*, and almost immediately they would keep their tumblers of rice beer aside and dance along with them. It is this that you call the hunger and thirst for one's culture".

No one can argue against Loren's words. He is the only one who is knowledgeable and the wisest among the villagers". If only the community elders decided, that no one in the coming year should be allowed to bring in groups of dancing troupes who do not wear the traditional clothes, or dance and sing to the playing of Bodo musical instruments."

Lantha invites Loren to drink some rice beer that he had in the house. Loren had been drinking with the others but not to a state of intoxication whereas the others had been drinking a glass or two of strong rice beer. For this reason Lantha thought of taking Loren along to his house and secretly decided to give him a tumbler of *jou* (rice beer). To Lantha's invitation Loren replies— "Let me first go back to my house and then I'll come. You go ahead *adai*, let the water be first boiled".

Coming back home, Loren enquires after the man servant and the maid servant. After that eating a piece of betel nut he proceeds towards Dodere's house. In the meantime, the sun is almost about to set.

No one from Dodere's family was present in Lantha's house at that time. Even Lantha himself had not arrived. Perhaps, he hadn't been able to leave the company of the others. Dodere's step mother was also out with the old women, drunk along with them, and the children had all gone to watch the groups going around collecting eggs.

One of the male servants had gone home. The other had gone to bring in the cows and even the maid seemed to have gone home. Loren saw that the gate of the eastern house was open. From inside the house he heard as if somebody had been fighting and kicking. A thought crossed his mind, Loren entered straight into the main hut of the house. When after crossing the middle room, he reached Lantha's bedroom, the sight that greeted him, made his blood boil instantly.

Clamping Dodere's mouth, Mablao was trying to destroy her honour.

Dodere was trying her best to resist by pushing, kicking and punching with her hands and legs. Mablao's hand was covered in blood, perhaps Dodere had bitten him. Just at that moment when the lust in Mablao's heart was preparing to finish what he had begun, Loren went and kicked him from behind making Mablao's head reel. Like a lion who has tasted meat, Mablao, furious, turned sideways to see as to who it was when Loren went after him again. Like a dog caught in the act, he shot out and disappeared. Loren ran after him, a second time. But Mablao ran through the areca nut trees. Just at that time Lantha reached the courtyard. He dimly saw Mablao running, but could not recognise him. Only when he found Loren running after him, did Lantha realize that something has happened, and ran along with Loren shouting "Who is it, who is it?" But by that time Mablao had gone far out of their reach.

## 14

After a long lapse of time, only this year the Assam government has agreed to allot to the villagers the plots of land under their control around the jungle. And even this was possible, only because of Loren and the others taking responsibility upon themselves. For the purpose of this work, they had to go to all the offices, missions, *kanangos*, SDO, DC, the secretary of the revenue branch, land division and to the lower ministers who were connected to the forest department. It was impossible to count the number of times the reminder notes and letters of plea had to be sent.

Today, the forest minister and the respected revenue minister are supposed to come for an investigation and they would give away leases of land that each of them owned. The respected minister would stay in the *Barang-bari* beat office. From the morning itself, Loren and the others have been continuously going and coming up to the beat office. Despite for everything having been arranged, it still didn't seem to be enough. The ranger has ordered for four chickens, twenty eggs, scented rice, a variety of bananas, some milk and all such things to be collected. But if one was available, the other was not. The entire morning went by in this.

They will stop only when the ranger also takes time off for leisure. There was frequent going and coming in the jeep from the range office till the beat office. The area all around the beat office needs to be neat and clean. The *sishu* trees in front of the beat office between the two sides have been white washed. The battered, torn articles lying around the corners of the beat house have been stored in different places. The ranger's cultivator, *kancha* along with his wife have been sent away to their homes together with the jersey cow. Today, they cannot live at the beat house. There is no place. One can say that some of the dirt accumulated over one year has been washed away only today. Meanwhile, there also lies on Golo's shoulders, a great responsibility. The ranger had already sent him into the forest in the morning itself. He had to kill a deer no matter how, because it has to be served to the respected ministers. As ordered in the morning itself, Golo had left with two *chaprasis* along with an elephant.



The respected ministers arrived at midday. The ranger showing them the way took them till the beat house. Even before they were seated, they were both served a glass full of coconut water and a little later, an assortment of sweets and such things like roasted, cooked, and fried varieties of bananas, apples, pineapple. Which ones to eat first? Alas! the minister of independent Indian subcontinent and you people, the parched, ill-fated poor public! A continent, where in every one hundred some eighty people do not have sufficient food to fill their stomachs, are not able to build house, cannot even get a patch of land and even the portion of a rag is not sufficient to clothe oneself. But the lifestyles of the monarchs of the subcontinent show such fascinating signs. Isn't heaven and hell here itself? Loren thinks to himself secretly.

Meanwhile the cooks keep feeling uneasy. Chicken has already been cooked. Chicken soup, fries, roast, everything has already been made ready. If only deer meat could also have been served, how they might have been lauded. Everybody desires to be praised – the department, its washers. This has come to be today's accepted Indian culture. The Indian people work less and desire more, work less and say a lot. As expected, the minister begins to go through all the land papers. He had brought along his private secretary. The minister will dictate and the secretary will write. Just at that point, the hunters and the *chaprasis* along with the elephants appear in the beat house, back from the jungle. On seeing them from far, the cooks become happy. The ranger also feels relieved. When Golo goes hunting, the hunt never fails.

But when the *chaprasis* pulled out the blood soaked body of Golo wrapped in tarpaulin from the vehicle, only then did the face of the ranger become pale. In a matter of seconds there was confusion among the people. When the ranger going near the minister said, 'We are undone sir', only then did Loren, Lantha and the others realize that Golo was no more in this world.

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The *chaprasis* continued with their narration that they had been chasing a deer, when they came face to face with a group of poachers. The *chaprasis* had been thinking of frightening them with gun shots. But at that very moment one of the hunter's bullet,

pierced Golo's chest. Later on, they had all fled in various directions. The *chaprasis* on seeing Golo dead, had not pursued the poachers.

The ranger then enquired from the *chaprasis* whether they had not recognised even one of the poachers. They replied that they couldn't. All the hunters had beard.

The sad news about Golo, spread immediately in all nearby villages. The ranger sent the jeep to fetch his parents and brother.

Dodere had just reached the tube area well with the utensils. Just at that time, Hambur came running and panting and gave the terrifying news saying, "*GumØi* it seems, has been shot dead in the jungle". Hambur began to sob loudly. But Dodere said nothing. Tears also didn't roll down her eyes. But even as she stood straight and stiff around the well, she suddenly fell flat to the ground. Hambur cried out aloud. Dodere's brother and sister ran to the well. Her step mother reached there last of all. To inform her father, she sent her son Binaram quickly to the beat office. Dodere's soul had by then already breathed its last. Only then did the crow that had been cawing right from the morning around the well, fly back towards the jungle.

## Conclusion

### Problems on Translating *Mwihur*

There has been a sudden spurt in the interest in translation studies during the last two decades. However, having made advances in newer ways of understanding texts from the perspective of culture, problems involved in the actual process of translation have remained unresolved more or less. As Theo Hermans puts it 'that blackest of black boxes' which is the human mind and the site of occurrence of the actual process of translation, still fails to reveal the actual conversion. A language is not just some kind of a linguistic structure, but one that gains meaning only within the context of a particular culture. Therefore, language comes to us as a system with codes of representation, power, and identity that only arise out of culture. It is a 'cultural memory' which the reader participates in when s/he reads literature (Talgeri).

Literature uses words with which the people of that language community can associate the experience of their composite cultural past. The word is essentially a cultural memory in which the historical experience of the society is embedded.<sup>1</sup>

Thus for Talgeri, the problems of translation arise because of a 'cultural re-contextualisation'. According to him, the translator has to "...recreate this participatory experience of the SL (Source Language) culture by re-contextualising it in the TL (Target Language) culture, so that the TL reader so to say can participate in an alien cultural experience"(ibid).

Ganesh Devy, on the other hand, arguing against the notion that translation is a 'fallen creature' says, that translation is actually an attempt to revitalize the original in another verbal order and temporal space (p 186-7). Alluding to Indian metaphysics of the concept of the transmigration of soul, he says that like the soul that still retains its essential significance, translation too does not change into another work of art in itself but retains the original essence of the SL.

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<sup>1</sup> Talgeri, Pramod. 'The perspectives of Literary Translation' from *Cultural Transference to Metonymic Displacement*. (Bombay: Popular Prakashan Ltd., 1988). 3.

It follows then that the real problems of translation occur because there is more to it than simply searching for equivalents in the TL. They arise because of the inadequacy of a particular language system not having the necessary lexical equivalents that impart the same cultural spirit that the SL possesses.

During the course of translating *Mwihur*, therefore, I had to, at each step, constantly battle in my mind to find the most suitable word or expression in English that would express adequately the Bodo experience. Like the problems of portraying characters in their novel who have never spoken in English that the three doyens of Indian English literature, Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K.Narayan faced, I too faced this dilemma. I had to capture in my translation, an experience that was culture specific. I could not provide the characters in the novel with dialogues that a person from Britain would speak, or even like the English spoken by members of the Indian urban middle class in their university classrooms and social gatherings. So in order to stick as close to the original text was possible, there were a few things that I did. For instance, I retained the use of the kinship terms like *abo* (elder sister), *ada* (elder brother), *madøi* (aunty from the father's side), *adøi* (uncle from the father's side) to let the local color be reflected, But the other major problem resulting from this is that, these words denoting kinship are not used just as they are. They are also used as a form of address to another member of the Bodo community without the implication of the kinship. For instance, if I were to converse with a Bodo lady, I would address her as either *anøi* or *madøi* which actually means 'aunty' but used here without the kinship implications. It works on two levels, like the use of the word 'saala' in Hindi. At one level, it refers to a kinship and on another, it is used as a word of abuse.<sup>2</sup>

As with speakers of *Hindi*, in Bodo society too the language of men at times is a little different than the language spoken by women. This is primarily in terms of their pronunciations. The gender distinction is further demonstrated by a kind of suffix appended to the noun as in *bisajø-* daughter, *bisajla* – son.<sup>3</sup> The English language being gender neutral does not have the scope to accommodate these gender differences in its language. For instance, if a Bodo male were to ask someone whether

<sup>2</sup> Prasad, G.V. "The Untranslatability other: The Language of Indian English Fiction." *Literary Translation*. Ed. Gupta, R.S. (New Delhi: Creative Books, 1999). 115-123.

<sup>3</sup> Halvorsrud, H. *A Short Grammar of the Boro Language*. (Assam: H.Halvorsrud, 1959). 11.

s/he has had food, the question would be presented as – “mohai thangØ *ra*?” or, “mohai thangØ *lØi*” where the addition of *ra* and *lØi* denote masculine speech in Bodo. A female speaker of the native tongue would on the other hand ask the same question as – “mohai thangØ *hai*?” Here the extra *hai* denotes female speech. However it should be kept in mind that such usage is primarily colloquial, only to show easy familiarity between the two native speakers. However, these significant gender markers are lost in English translation.

Another major problem that I faced was the difference in the social and geographical backgrounds between the writer of the novel and me as a translator. This becomes a problem since although both of us come from the same linguistic and ethnic background, because of centuries of assimilation with other ethnic communities of our separate regions (Assam and New Jalpaiguri respectively) there has crept up in our respective spoken languages some significant variations. These variations are in the nature of intonations and difference in the usage of words for certain common words. Moreover, Bodo language is in a transitional state where a lot of words from other languages are being assimilated everyday in their speech. This is further complicated by the presence of four major variations of spoken Bodo in Assam itself, depending on the geographical locations<sup>4</sup>. The writer who comes from the Goalpara district, speaks a variety of Bodo that is an intermix of Bengali and Bodo words. The influence runs so deep that today these Bengali words have been modified and accepted as Bodo words. For instance, in the novel, we find words like, *othoso* which is the modified Bengali *othocho* meaning ‘in spite of’. Luckily, this is also a feature of the Bodo speaking people from the districts of New Jalpaiguri of the North Bengal region where I come from. But I wasn’t so lucky in certain other cases.

Another related problem that arises because of this, is the difficulty for me to imagine some of the common everyday images and the maxims, proverbs, the type of vegetations, birds and animals of the region from where the writer originates. The problem is aggravated by the fact that I had all my life been in Kolkata and only visited my native village annually and these too became less frequent as the years advanced. However, even those few times that I was exposed to the village life of the Bodos, the nature of our food habits, living conditions and type of clothes were

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<sup>4</sup> Bhattacharya, P. C. *A Descriptive Analysis of Boro Language*. (Calcutta: Registrar of Gauhati University, 1977). 11-12.

sufficient inputs for me to endeavor to translate a literary work like *Mwihur*. I was also helped immensely by the sense of cultural and patriotic consciousness towards our community that existed in my family. A direct result of this was the insistence on my father's part that both his children should know Bodo.

Like many Indian languages, the Bodo language is also replete with re-duplicative words like *lasØi lasØi*, *sri sri*, *jiri jiri* as well as words that show striking characteristic expressions when two nouns are related to each other and where at times the last word is simply a well-sounding variation of the first one as in *ha-hu*, *hor-san*, *lama- sama damnai- denai*, *gannai-jumnai*, *gugrung-gagrang*.<sup>5</sup> Since English language doesn't use reduplicatives so frequently, I had to use expressions wherein the music resonance of Bodo reduplicatives was lost.

Some difficulty was also faced by me in matters regarding the translation of abusive terms in the Source Language. A literal translation would render the term in the Target Language meaningless. For example, the literal translation of *nampha hØn* will be 'say it's your father' but this sounds meaningless in English, so I translated it as 'your father's head' which indicates swearing on one's father. However, I am not sure if my way of solving this has still been able to capture the cultural connotations of these words.

It was also difficult to create the onomatopoeic effects in the target language to the same extent as created by the author in the source text wherein these contributed to the aesthetic value of the discourse. For example, instead of using the word fighting, the equivalent sounds involved in fighting and quarreling have been used in the Source Language as in '*gregreng-gugrung*'. It was a major problem for me to translate the sounds made by birds, animals, objects of nature and those of musical instruments. Unable to find appropriate cultural equivalents of these sounds in English, I have retained them as such. For example, the *bridang bridang* of the Kham has been retained as such and letting the meaning emerge from the context and the choice of the sentence structure.

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<sup>5</sup> Halvorsrud. H. *A Short Grammar of the Boro Language*. (Assam: H.Halvorsrud, 1959). 55-6.

Exclamatory words and interjections in the Source Language could not also be literally translated at certain places in the Target Language as these sounded inappropriate. In some cases, I left them out completely while in others, I have used such exclamatory words like Alas! For *thøiblabø*, which literally means 'even if I die'. As for the interjections, I retained them as they are, adding the meaning in Target Language immediately after I had used the original word. For example, *aidøi* (indicating sudden pain), *honøi* (look out), *nøi* (loud calling).<sup>6</sup>

The narrative also switches from the present to the past and back because of this at times, the sentence structure of the discourse may be jarring in the Target Language. But as far as possible I have stuck to this basic choice of tenses, for to have ignored this would have amounted to ignoring the intended narrative technique of the writer. However at times, I have had to change the tense from the present to the past to make the structures comprehensible. Again, I have deliberately used very simple structures of English. I have also deviated from accepted sentence structures in English in order to capture the spirit and flavour of the Bodo language.

Translation of literary texts is almost always very difficult primarily for the reasons that these are heavily culture bound.. What we can do is to minimize the gap between the language systems of the Target Language and the Source Language. By resorting to various techniques and devices like the use of words and expressions from the source text as such, or to give the approximate means in parenthetical clauses immediately inserted, immediately after the original words or expressions. Thus, the only solution possible for the translator is to stay as close to the original text as is possible. While this way, at times affects the readability, it may retain the 'meaning' intended by the author in the choice of expressions and structures.

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<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p 60.

## Select Glossary of Terms

<i>Coolie Lines</i>	The bonded labourers or 'serfs' working in the tea gardens of Assam. They are also referred to as "Bengali coolies" but were actually 'Santhals, Oraons, Kols, Bhils, Mundas, etc.'. See Pegu, Jadav. <i>Reclaiming Identity: A Discourse on Bodo History</i> . Kokrajhar: Jwngsar Narzary, 2004.7.
<i>Aayo</i>	Term of expression denoting surprise.
<i>Abo</i>	Elder Sister.
<i>Ai</i>	Mother.
<i>Ada</i>	Elder Brother.
<i>Gumøi</i>	Brother-in-law.
<i>Dokhma</i>	Traditional wear of a Bodo woman.
<i>Anan Gosai</i>	God.
<i>Madøi</i>	Aunty from Paternal side.
<i>Bajøi</i>	Sister-in-law.
<i>Chilim</i>	The detachable upper portion of a small earthen smoking vessel called <i>Hangkha</i> .
<i>Adøi</i>	Paternal uncle.
<i>Jou</i>	Home-made rice beer.
<i>Haina muli</i>	Love portion.
<i>Nømpa høn</i>	Swearing by taking the name of the Father.
<i>ha daodap</i>	ovens made out of clay that are slightly raised above the ground.
<i>Sikha</i>	a long knife like a dao.



<i>Dala</i>	A bamboo wicker for keeping grain.
<i>Dukhali</i>	A basket for domestic use.
<i>Jekhai</i>	A bamboo net used for fishing.
<i>Mu</i>	An arm's length, a cubit.
<i>Pholo</i>	A fish trap like a basket.
<i>Ruwa</i>	A small axe.
<i>Halmaji</i>	Village chowkidaar.
<i>Bathou</i>	Chief god of the Bodos. Also known as <i>sibrai</i> .
<i>Mohon</i>	An old Indian weight of 80 pounds or maunds.
<i>Endi</i>	Eri silk.
<i>Baisagu</i>	A spring festival of the Bodos.
<i>Ojha</i>	Village medicine man.
<i>Khaji</i>	Any fried food.
<i>Serja</i>	An inverted violin of the Bodos.
<i>Kham</i>	A long drum.
<i>Siphung</i>	Flute.
<i>Hajowari Bodos</i>	A Bodo title that refers to the Bodos originating from the mountains.
<i>Sibrai</i>	Supreme God of the Bodos or <i>Bathou</i> .
<i>sibrui</i>	Supreme Goddess of the Bodos or <i>Mainao</i> .

**N.B.** The use of the symbol Ø in the Bodo Language as in 'BØrshi' indicates that the word Has to be pronounced as 'ur' where the 'r' is silent. This is according to the *Bodo- English Dictionary* edited by Moniram Mochari. In some other cases, a 'w' is used instead of the symbol 'Ø' as in the title of the text *Mwihur*.

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