

A Study on Bodo Tribes and their Traditional Costumes of Assam

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Abstract

The Bodo tribe are the first largest tribal community of Assam. The cultural heritage of the Bodo tribe is enriched by various colorful cultural components. The identity of the Bodos as a distinct ethnic community is deeply embedded in their folk cultures and traditions. The traditional cultures are the ancestral root of their identity. Hence, it is imperative to know the actual form, content, characteristics and significances of the socio-cultural ingredients of the society. And to have a clear concept and idea about all these it requires extensive research, studies, analysis and collection of data and evidences. The study deals with the investigation and documentation of the traditional costumes of Bodo community of Assam. In this study the traditional ornaments are also documented to support the study.

KEYWORDS: Bodos, Cultural, Ethnic-community, Traditional costumes

INTRODUCTION

India is known for diversity of people, their cultures and religion and caste system. In every region of the country, different types of costumes are worn. A particular manner of draping certain costumes, use of jewelleryes can identify a person from which they belong to.

Assam is the beautiful gateway of North East India, the word Assam is derived from the Sanskrit word "asom" meaning "peerless". Assam is a land of rich art and culture. Assam comprises of both tribal and non-tribal population. The Assamese tribes include the Boro-Kachari, Mishing, Mech, Lalung, Chutiya, Dimasa Cachari and Karbi. Handloom textile cottage industry plays an important role in the socio-economic life of Assamese people, particularly in rural areas of Assam. It is one of the major ways of earning livelihood next to agriculture of Assamese people.

In order to understand the age old Indian traditional textiles, a study was carried out on the traditional textiles of Bodo tribe of Assam.

ORIGIN OF BODO TRIBAL COMMUNITY

The true ethnic Tribal Community of northwestern parts of Assam are Bodo Tribe and the Kachari is the sub branch of the Bodo. The Bodo Tribe resides in the Brahmaputra valley. Bodo Tribes are known to be the earliest settlers in Assam. They are the first to cultivate rice and rear silkworms. They are superstitious by nature and believe in rebirth. The word 'Bodo' has been derived from the word 'Bod' means Tibet. They are the largest ethnic and linguistic group of tribes. Bodos are a peace-loving people.

In earlier times Bodos were cut off due to the geographical area and weather conditions from other parts of the country. This was the main reason which led to the lack of education and economy among them. Due to this, the arousal of the Bodoland Movement was initiated. The movement started in late 80's under the leadership of UpendraNath Brahma who is now called as the Father of Bodos.

A Bodoland Territorial Council is formed to save and protect the culture, language and identity of Bodos. It was managed and headed by all Bodo Students Union (ABSU) and an armed militant group called the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT). The land given to the Bodos was called as Bodoland. Most of the Bodos arrived from Bhutan Passes. The 6th scheduled of the Constitution of India has conferred Bodo Tribal Community the status and prestige of Plain Tribe. Kokrajhartown is regarded as the hub of Bodo Tribal Community. The population of Bodos is now close to 1 million.

THE TRADITIONAL COSTUMES OF BODO COMMUNITY

Dresses and Ornaments of the Bodo community are the symbol of their traditional art and culture. Weaving in the Bodo society bears great significance. In ancient times a Bodo woman, without weaving expertise, was not given due respect in the society. From ancient times Bodo women have been using the dress materials which are handwoven by themselves. They create splendid designs on their traditional dress materials which are woven with the help of handlooms and some other hand made tools. These designs reflect the high quality of creativity, expertise and the artistic minds of Bodo women which also reflects their rich culture.

Traditional Dress Worn by the Bodo Male and Female

- (a) Gamsa: The 'Gamsa' is the male traditional dress of 1.5 m length and 1.2 m width and is used to cover the portion from waist to knee by tying it in the waist. Sometimes it is also used as a towel in bathing. It is weaved of different colors like green, slight red and mixture of different colors like- white & green, white & blue and more colors.



Figure 1 Gamsa

- (b) Aronai: "aronai" (small scarf) is the most beautiful cloth of Bodo people. In ancient age Bodo warriors used to put Aronai as a belt in the battle field weaved by their wives. Bodo people use to wear it in different ways depending on the occasions. Like in winter it is worn on neck to tie the neck, in dancing it is hanged on one side of shoulders and tie both the edge through another Aronai in the waist and in the felicitation it is simply hanged on neck. The main Agor (design)

used in the Aronai is “PaharAgor” or “HajwAgor” on the both edges and without it the piece of cloth weaved would not be known as Aronai.

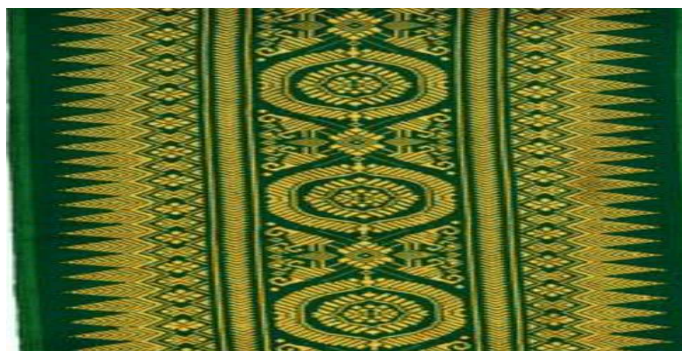


Figure 2Aronai

(c) Jacket/ KhotGosla

It is a simple sleeveless front opening jacket available in different colors such as yellow, green, Red, white with different decorative designs. It is worn by all the male folks on special occasions or festivals and socio-cultural functions. It is sewn both by the hand and machine.



Figure 3KhotGosla

(d) Dokhona: “Dokhona” the main traditional dress of Bodo women is of length 2.5 m and width 1.5 m and it is wore to cover the whole body from chest to legs by tied one round at a time in the waist. Different Agor (design) and colors are weaved for Dokhona. “Matha” or “Salamatha” which is the term used for plain Dokhona i.e. Dokhona without Agor is popular among the Bodo people and used to wear in worshipping God. Among the colors, yellow is the main traditional colors and MathaDokhona with yellow color is used as a bridal attire. Besides yellow they use to weave Dokhona in a variety of colors like Gwthang (green), Gwja (red), Solayrong (violet), Neel (blue), etc.

The different Agors which Bodo people used to weave Dokhona are- (a) AgorGubwi (real design), (b) Parrow Megon(Pigeon eye), (c) DaoshaMwkreb (Winkle of chicken), (d) DaoraiMwkreb (Winkle of peacock), (e) KhiruAgor, (f) MaojiAgan (Footprint of cat), (g) TaigirBibar (Elephant Apple plant flower),(h) LaosungAgor, (i) HajwAgor (design of hills).



Figure 4 Dokhona

- (e) Jwmgra or Fashra: “Jwmgra” (Scarf) is used by Bodo women to cover upper portion of the body and is of length 2 m and width 0.7 m. Generally the Agors use in Jwmgra is bigger than that of Dokhona and it covers large area of Jwmgra. Among the different Agors “HajwAgor” (A design representing hills) is very popular and they use to wear Jwmgra with HajwAgor in their wedding.



Figure 5 Jwmgra

- (f) Endisi (Erishador): Endisi is a shawl type of cloth worn by female Bodos. It is very precious cloth among the Bodos. It is produced from silk worm and it is worn especially in the cold season for getting warmth.

Besides these cloths, there are various types of cloths which are used by the Bodos. For example khonia, phalli, gandusi, woolnisi, jisridanaisi, thosoksi, labsi, etc.

TRADITIONAL ORNAMENTS

The Bodo ladies had great fancy for ornaments. They adorned themselves with various ornaments to look more charming and attractive. The different metals and other materials used for the making of ornaments were gold, silver, copper, brass, bronze, amber, ivory, etc. different types of valuable jewels and stones were also used as ornaments. The ornaments of gold, silver, Amber, ivory were made precious and beautiful to look at. Bodo women used variety of ornaments for nose, ears, neck and hands. Most of them are made of gold and silver. They are usually thick and heavy.

The ornaments are not always worn. Many of them are reserved for ceremonial occasions. Bodo male persons usually do not wear ornaments.

The following are some of the ornaments worn by the Bodo women.

For the ear:

- Enti – plain round earring worn on lower part of the ear. Generally it is used for the kids and the girls.
- Khera or kheru
- Jabkhring (ear ring)
- Boula (for the upper era)
- Puthi – small flower attached to the ear lobe.
- Makiri or makhri – earring of gold or silver, ornamented worn on the lower part of the ear.

For the nose:

- Nakphul – a small flower or a knob struck to the nostril or to the outer skin of the nose through a hole made earlier.
- Bulaki – nose pendent.
- Nolod – a bead suspended from the lower nasal septum.
- Noth and Bali – a gold or silver ring worn through the hole in the lower nasal septum.
- Phul – gold or silver nose flower.

For the neck:

- Chandra har – it is a heavy necklace of the five layers hung on the chest from the neck.
- Bisaher – A necklace.
- Thanka-siri – It is a necklace worn round the neck.
- Poal – It is a necklace made of silver pieces.
- Rongborsa – It is a necklace of silver coins.
- Jongsama – Necklace made of different kinds of beads.

For the hand:

- Mutha – It is an ornamented bangle about 2 half inch wide.
- Ashansuri – A small bangle.
- Sangkha – A shell bangle. It is worn by the married woman.
- Gongkhon – It is like muthashan. It is very heavy.
- Astham – It is worn in finger. It may be plain ring or may be decorated with attractive design.

CONCLUSION

The traditional costumes of Bodo Tribe are unique and interesting. The costumes are woven using bright color combination with fine attractive patterns and designs. Earlier Bodo people grow cotton in their own field but now a days they purchased yarns from local market which are gaining popularity in other non-Bodo communities also.

This type of study will help to broaden the base of traditional textiles, preserve the traditional art form, diversify the designs in different forms and prevent them from going into extinction since these folk arts symbolizes the culture and tradition of various types of people residing in different regions.

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