



Traditional Knowledge of Bodo Women in Textile: A Cultural Study

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Abstract:

The Bodos are known as patriarchy society in the world but the Bodo women are also not inferior to anyone. As the example, Bodo women have been able to display their skills through weaving, which hand-painted embroidery has given them a high status in society as professional from Bodo folk tales namely *Asagi-Bwisagi*. Their traditional knowledge of weaving clearly reflects their childhood skills in weaving from *Sudam/Garondai* weaving to becoming experts in shawl poles. Before, the Bodo women mainly spinning cotton and leather yarn or weave clothes by weaving yarn. They also weave beautiful colorful clothes themselves by dyeing them with red, yellow, green and other colors. We see the Bodo women taking equal responsibility with men in fulfilling the financial needs of the household.

Key words: Bodo women, Textile, Traditional knowledge.

1.1 Introduction:

The Bodo community is one of the most prominent tribes of North-East India. They have been mainly inhabited in Assam. The Bodo are said to be of Mongolian descent because of their shape, hair, eyes, and muscle carvings that are mainly of Mongolian descent from the people of the south-eastern region. In view of this, several historians and anthropologists have suggested that the Bodos belong to the Tibeto-Burman language group of the Sino-Tibetan language family. The term 'Bodo' was first used by B.H Hodgson to refer to the Bodo language and the Bodo community. The word Bodo is closely related to the word Tibet and many researchers have suggested that the word comes from the place where the Tibetans lived called 'Bod'. Rajmohan Nath said that "The inhabitants of various parts of the Bod country were known as Boddo-Fhisa or Boddo-Cha (Ficha-children) or the children of the Bod country, and were later known simply as the Boddo or the Bodo"(1978:16). Some scholars believe that the Magnolia community came from the Yangtze and Huanghu valleys and spread to North East India. They entered Assam mainly from the North-West, North and East of Assam and established their civilization in the Valley of Brahmaputra River and identified himself as the indigenous Bodo people of this place. According to some scholars they brought with them farming tools, language, culture, customs, food, weaving, dress, folk festivals etc. through which they have identified themselves as a strong community in North East India. Apart from Assam, the Bodos are also spread in west Bengal, Meghalaya Arunachal, and also spread in neighboring country Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh.

Bodo women take equal responsibility along with the men in managing the households. Women are also involved in the cooking, weaving, cutting, planting and harvesting of the household. They are very skilled in weaving and in household chores. Spindle from cotton, weaving cloths of their choice from various flowers, leaves, and fruits found in nature.

1.2 Aims and Objectives:

The main aims and objectives of this paper are to promote the weaving of the Bodo community and how the traditional skills of the Bodo women in this weaving are expressed. In addition, the Bodo people of the present materialistic society and future generations should try to bring importance and interest towards the clothing and weaving of Bodo women.

1.3 Important of the Study:

Each or every subject has a requirement. This paper is written with some needs in mind. Many women apply their traditional knowledge in weaving to preserve the culture of their nation. The skill is confined to only one corner of society. Therefore, I see the need to introduce their traditional weaving method to the people of the world.

1.4 Methodology:

To carry out this paper, mainly historical method and descriptive method have been followed. The historical method is used to study the background information on Bodo community.

1.5 Method of Data Collection:

In this paper, the data has been collected from the different sources. The necessary data has been collected from the primary and secondary sources. For collecting of primary data, different samples have been collected from the informants through face-to-face interview and telephoning with informants. Besides, the secondary data has been collected from different reference books, magazine etc.

2.1 Explanation:

The contribution of women in the patriarchy Bodo society is remarkable. Since they started living in society, they have been able to earn the various things they need to survive with creative skills. One of its notable creativities is weaving. It is no exaggeration to say that it is the most important part of the lives of Bodo women. They are able to introduce their art to the world. That the Bodo women know how to do weaving, it is evident from the folk tales '*Asagi Bwisagi*'.

The art of weaving of the Bodo women is the inexhaustible or inexhaustible treasure of the Bodo community. They have received it as hereditary property since the time of their ancestors. The weaving is a way of expressing the creative mind of the Bodo women and their love for the beautiful colors of nature. In the past, women who did not know how to weave clothes were looked down upon. They were difficult to get married. This kind of sentence is reflected in proverb like- '*Si danw rwngi hinjaoa habajaya*'.

The Bodos have set aside places for weaving since ancient times. The weaving place is called '*Isansali*' or '*Hisansali*'. The *Isansali* is built in the backyard or corridor of the house. It has four main pillars. The pillar is called '*Salkhuntha*'. By looking to the elders' traditional method of weaving in Bodo society, the young girls have also learned how to weave from *Sudam*. Since learning from the *Sudam* weaving, the Bodo women have become interested in traditional weaving and have mastered the knowledge of it. They have mainly acquired weaving skills as traditional knowledge.

Bodo women mainly use traditional knowledge in weaving. They are able to show their creativity and skills to others. Thus, their traditional knowledge of weaving is divided into different categories. These include;

2.2 Traditional Knowledge in Natural Variability:

Like other ethnic groups, the Bodo people have been loving nature since ancient times. They have been known as a race that lives in harmony with nature. The Bodos are spread out in the bosom of nature and they have brought the necessities of life from the bosom of nature. The food they ate, they collect small and large tools from nature. Mainly, it can see them closely related with the nature in preparing the different types of objects from the nature in their needed of weaving or decoration. The traditional knowledge of Bodo women is divided into two categories, considering the surrounding of nature. These are:

2.2.1 Dyeing of Color in Cloth:

Bodo women have been using traditional knowledge to dye the clothes and thread with various leaves, flowers and fruits of nature. Nowadays, when we find the variant colors or colored thread in the markets, but they like to use the colors and also, they have prepared themselves first, mainly from nature. The traditional colors were made by Bodo women. These are discussed in below-

Light brown- Boil the tea leaves and dip the thread in it to make the yarn light brown color.

Dark red- Henna leaves are dried and pomegranate flowers are crushed to give a dark red color.

Maroon- The twig leaf of the Teak tree is ground and the thread is added to the mixture of water to get the maroon color.

Purple- Malabar spinach fruit is crushed and the juice is applied to cloth or thread to dye it purple.

Yellow- Bodo women dye threads yellow by grinding the turmeric and adding lime to it.

2.2.2 Graphic of the Flora and Fauna:

Like the Bodo women make their own colors from the bosom of nature, we also see several graphed of flower patterns based on the various flora and fauna. The flowers that are created from nature are:

2.2.2.1 The graphic design made from the mountains and vegetation:

The Bodo women make much graphic design by looking to the mountains, grass and forests or evergreen nature. There are many different types of graphics such as *hazw agor* (mountain design), *lewa agor* (creeper design), *dingkhiya mohor agor* (fiddlehead green design), *singri bilai* (wood sorrel), *tharay agor* (wild ginger design), *phakhri bilai agor* (peepal leaf design), *laizou agor* (flag leaf design), *laihagar agor* etc.

2.2.2.2 The graphic design made from flower or fruits:

The flowers and fruits of various colors could bring joy and attraction to the minds of the Bodo women. Therefore, we can see them, the making of various graphic with encouragement in their weaving as *thoblo bibar* (lily flower), *bwigri bibar* (palm flower), *khangkhrikhola agor* (bitter gourd design), *mwitha bibar* (roselle flower), *thaizou agor* (mango flowers), *phami bibar* (lotus), *zoba bibar* (hibiscus flower), *rwimali agor* (pineapple flower), *thaigir bibar* (elephant apple flower design), etc.

2.2.2.3 The graphic design made from the birds, animals and insects:

There are many flowers or designs made of seeing to animals, birds and insects by Bodo women in their cloths. For example, *muphur apha* (the footprint design of bear), *gandoula* (dragonfly design), *sikhiri agor* (butterfly design), *zwrema agor* (a small kind of insect), *maozi apha* (footprint design of cat), *khangkhrai agor* (crab design), *pharou megon* (pigeon eye design), *daorai mwkhreb* (peacock design), *mwsou hathai agor* (cow's teeth design), *mwsrwm agor* (ant design), hedgehog design, *daobo agor* (egret design), *thamphwi agor* (fly design), *bema agor* (spider design), locust design, *swima agor* (dog design), *mwider agor* (elephant design), *mwi agor* (deer design), *gorai agor* (horse design) and so on.

In addition to these, graphic of designs are made of seeing the various scenes of nature. For example, *sun agor* (sun design), *okhaphwr agor* (moon design), *hathorkhi agor* (star design) and so on.

2.3 Traditional Knowledge in Preparation of Yarn and Handloom:

The traditional method of weaving is used by the Bodos have been in use since time immemorial. While a complete fabric is formed using a series of techniques. The construction of such a structure by them is very interesting. Based on the knowledge of Bodo women in weaving, the following are shown below:

2.3.1 Knowledge of Spinning Thread:

To weave cloth, at first need thread and this thread is spindled. In ancient times, cotton trees were planted and by rearing *Eri-Silk* worm to take the need of thread. Bodo women are very skilled in producing *Eri-silk* yarn from reared the larvae. For making *Eri-silk* yarn at first cocoon is covered and boiled in a large

vessel. Then they left to cool and tied in *khathri* (one kind of leaf) leafs or banana leafs for about a month. When the tied cocoon is rotten and loose it is spun on the stem of the shuttle in *batha bibungni sompla* (a pipe made from one kind of plants). After many such spindles, they spin in *Phaneb* or *Hebsa* (one kind of weaving tool). Also, in the past to spinning thread with shuttle, Boro women used to spin the thread in their thigh.

After spinning the thread with the shuttle, the use of thread comes. *Matha* (cotton cloth) is given *maid*i (lukewarm water of rice) to weave the cloth and strengthen the thread. *Maid*i is added and squeezed or washed and dried and they making tread with *Nathai* (a kind of weaving tool, make from bamboo). The tread is spun and the fabric is ready to be woven or spun.

2.3.2 Knowledge of Spread Cloth:

Once the yarn is spun, the fabric is ready to weave. In the old days, there were no frames of making clothes like present days. They wore clothes in *Phaneb* or *Hebsa*. In addition, the frame is filled with thread in rows of banana stalks. To weave the cloth, place is first measured and two posts are pole into the ground at both sides straightly and the yarn is pulled from one pole to the other pole. In the old days, the Reed was made of bamboo. After choosing the yarn in the Reed, the yarn is neatly selected with a comb or with a bamboo stick (In the old days, the comb was made of bamboo). Before choosing the yarn in the Reed, the Bodo women dyed the clothes with ash, lime or a leaf or fruit to measure them.

2.3.3 Knowledge of Weaving:

The fabric is ready to weave than *Nw*(one kind of tread) thread yarn is picked up. In olden times there was no imported *Nw* yarn as there is available. Bodo women used a alloy thread as a *Nw* thread. To weave fabric, you first need four posts. There is made of hole in the middle of the previous two posts. The weaver loom post is made of coconut tree or bamboo. Weaver loom and shuttle are required to weave clothes

Weaver loom and shuttle are made of shawl trees. In ancient times, Bodo women made textiles with their own hands. Sometimes they would weave clothes by moving the shuttle with own hands. Nowadays, most of them started spinning yarn and weaving clothes in machine step by step process. Bodo women used to weave the textile by hand in the old days. Even today, although they don't weave clothes by moving some shuttles but still move shuttle and weave by their hands.

2.3.4 Knowledge of Designing:

The ability to make designs is a wonderful quality of Bodo women, although this is one of their admirable arts. In the ancient times, Bodo women knew how to make design of various living things physical form on their cloth as soon as they saw birds flying, animals passing / running in front of their eyes. They learned to make beautiful design by seeing the various forms of nature. There are two types of flower arrangement patterns of Bodo women. Such as-

- i) Making design with Heddles
- ii) Making design with Hand

Dokhona, *Sima* cloth, Drill cloth, warm cloth weave made design with heddles. Similarly, the *Fasra* clothes are design by their hand. Besides that, the design making pattern sometimes changes. Bodo women are very willing and skilled in making flowers.

2.3.5 Knowledge of making form of Cloth:

Bodo women weave various types of clothes depending on the time and weather. They weave various clothes for their own needs as well as for their family members. The fabric is mainly woven in two forms. Such as-

Men's wearing cloths and women's wearing cloths:

Clothes worn by men such as *Gamsa*, *Fali*, *Aronai*, *Sima* clothes etc. are the main ones. Clothing worn by women such as *Dokhona*, *Fasra*, and *Sadri* etc. are the main ones.

Bodo women are skilled in weaving men's and women's clothes as well as seasonal clothes depending on the weather.

Cold weather clothing and summer weather clothing:

The Bodos are used *Endi* cloth, wool cloth, *Salamatha*, *Sima* cloth, *Thalfora* cloth, *Gisi khatha* cloth as winter wearing. A fabric made by sewing the remaining yarn weaves to wear. *Matha* is mainly woven as summer weather clothing. In addition, Silk fabrics are also weaved for summer weather wear.

3.1 Findings:

The findings obtain from the discussion were:

- The Bodo people introduced their art of textile and weaving from the two rivers valley of west China, namely Huang Ho and Yangtze.
- The ecology of nature is the core of the creativity power of Bodo women.
- Bodo women have been able to take the culture to the development doorstep of the world through weaving.
- Bodo women were demonstrated to fill up their needs as well as the ability to live through weaving.
- Women are considered equality responsible with men in the family formation.

4.1 Conclusion:

Weaving is one of the most important integral parts of every community, allowing them to meet their needs. The Bodos also have their own weaving which they have found through traditional knowledge. Bodo women have also been able to showcase their skills through weaving. They have in-depth knowledge of what colors and graphing designs will make clothes look beautiful. However, the countryside Bodo women have been able to retain the Bodo culture by weaving with the traditional knowledge. Contribute to the development of our culture by paying attention to our textile and weaving. Traditional weaving seems to be on the decline now. The reason for this is the influence of modernity and technology. Nowadays, people are being used the machinery tools in weaving base on time and convenience. Rural Bodo women, however, have helped preserve the culture of the Boro community by weaving with traditional knowledge. Hopefully, the present generations will also help develop a culture by focusing on our traditional constructions.

Informants Name:

- i) Khonoli Boro; Age-75
- ii) Manamoti Goyary; Age-40

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