

An Analytical Study of the Bodo Costume: A Special Reference to Kokrajhar District (BTR)

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1.1 Introduction

Assam is one of the most beautiful states of India, surrounded by hills and mountains. The Bodo's are one of the most significant tribes in northeastern India, particularly in Assam, both numerically and sociologically. They belong to the Mongoloid racial stock of the Sino-Tibetan group, and linguistically, they are part of the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family. The people were earlier called Bodo-Kachari, but now called only Bodo¹. The word 'Bodo' refers not only to an ethnic identity but also to the name of their language.

According to L. Brahma (1993), communities such as the Bodo, Rabha, Garo, Kok-Borok, Dimasa, and Sonowal belong to the larger Bodo group. The original homeland of this group is believed to be in northwestern China, between the Huang Ho (Yellow River) and the Yangtze (Yang-tsze-Kiang) rivers. The Bodo's are said to have migrated to Northeast India around 2000 BC and are now scattered throughout the north eastern region.

The weaving civilization of the Bodo's is very old. Every woman in Bodo society much know how to weave or otherwise she is neglected in their society and even male rejects for marrying her, A women in Bodo society who does not know to weave cloths is regarded as 'Aluri' or 'Aoluri' in Bodo language. In this context there is an old saying in Bodo society, "*Don't cry for less production of crop in one year; cry if women do not know to work and weave.*" (बोसोरसे माइ आबाद जायिखौ दागाब, हाबा मावनो रोडि हिनजावखौ गाब).

In the early periods, Bodo women who didn't knew how to weave traditional attire face difficulties in getting married. The Bodo women weave beautiful and colourful clothes with variety of embroidery designs for domestic requirement s from their family handloom. The Bodo women folks in a traditional Bodo family spend their leisure times in spinning, weaving and designing artistic dresses like- *Gamsha*, *Dokhona*, *Zwmgra/Jwmgra*, *Aronai*, *Phali*, *Gandu Si*, *Alon*, *Bisina*, *Si- Gwthar* etc.

1.2 Aims & objectives

1. To explore of the Bodo Costume.
2. To highlight of traditional knowledge of the Bodo women.
3. To study of the Bodo folk believes related to weaving and Costume.

¹ Juri Gogoi Konwar: Warp & weft textile tradition of the Bodo's, P- 20

1.3 Methodology

One of the most important parts in research is Methodology. For this study has **descriptive** and **analytical** method has been applied. Data has been collected from the primary and secondary source and has been systematically analyzed.

Primary data was collected from the various Bodo villages in Kokrajhar District through field visits, interview, observation, questionnaire method are used to collect the research data.

Secondary data has been collected from the already published books, journal, magazine, articles, newspaper, eBooks, Wikipedia and etc.

1.4 Importance of the study

1. To this study can be known of the Bodo society.
2. It can be known of the Bodo Costume.
3. Through this study known of the Bodo weaving techniques.

1.5 Area of the Study

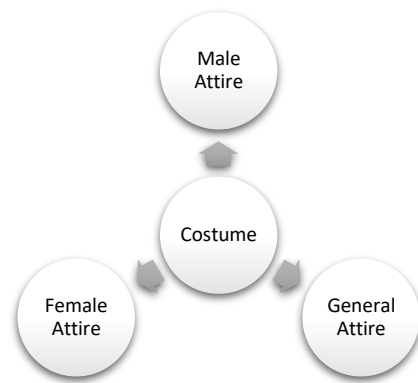
The Bodo constitute the largest populated tribe of Assam. For this study is specially focus on Kokrajhar District, which is located in Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) of Assam. Kokrajhar District is a headquarters of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) and the district shared an international Border with Bhutan and shared with West-Bengal State.

2.0 Bodo Costume

Costume of the Bodo community are the symbol of their traditional art and culture. Weaving in the Bodo society bears society great significance. In the 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. The weaving civilization of the Bodo's is very old. The art of the Bodo weaving has been transmitted from mothers to daughter from generation to generation. They are no formal practice of skill learning techniques or educational institution. In Bodo society all mothers teach her daughter to weave from a child. The Bodo Costume and Design is very Unique and Beautiful of the other tribe of Costume.

In the local language Handloom is called '*Hesanshali*' or '*Isanshali*' 'He' means *clothes* and 'Shali' means *place*. In every Boro house there is a handloom for weaving cloth. If there are more adult women, then there may be more looms according to the number of weavers. Their handlooms are very similar with the neighbouring Assamese looms.

Many authors and researchers have classified Bodo costumes into two main types. However, in this study, Bodo costumes are classified into three distinct types. They are-



2.1 Dokhona

Dokhona is a traditional attire of the Bodo women. The length of the Dokhona is approximately 3 meters and width is 1.5 meter. **Dokhona** is woven in various colors and designs and holds deep cultural significance among the Bodo community. In 2024, the Dokhona was officially recognized with a **Geographical Indication (GI) tag**, acknowledging its traditional and regional importance. Dokhona can be broadly classified into two types:

- Langa Dokhona of western Bodo's
- Ogrong Dokhona of Eastern Bodo's

2.2 Gamsa

The most common and traditional dress for Bodo men is called **Gamsa**. The word *Gamsa* is believed to have been derived from the word *Gansa* through linguistic variation. It is thought to originate from the combination of *gan* (meaning "to wear") + *sa* or *phisa* (meaning "a small piece of cloth") — resulting in *gansa* (literally "a small cloth to wear"). The standard size of a Gamsa is approximately **2 meters in length** and **1.2 meters in width**. Recognizing its cultural significance, the Gamsa has been granted a **Geographical Indication (GI) tag**.

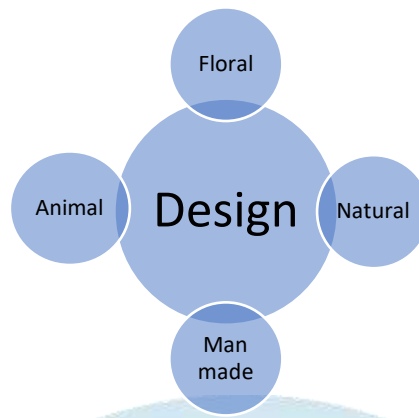
2.3 Design (Agor)

Design is most Importance part of the Bodo Costume. At present in the Bodo Society has been made by Desigs are:

1. Handmade design (Akhaini Agor)
2. Machine made design (Machine Agor)

1. Handmade designs of the Bodo's

Hundreds of handmade designs are found in the Bodo society, which always bloom on the Bodo traditional attires. The Bodo women are made by design own hand. Handmade design is much attractiveness and it's not easy process. Most of the Bodo weaver says that the *Hajw Agor* (Hill Design) and *Parwomegon* (Pigeon eye) is the most common and famous design on Bodo traditional attires. Among the colour Green, blue, yellow is favoured colour of the Bodo's. The Bodo Design may be categories as follows-



Among the popular handmade designs, the following are mostly used designed by Bodo women to decorate their attire:

- Hajw Agor (Hill of design)
- Agor gubwi (Main design)
- Phareo Megon (Pigeon eye)
- DaoraiMokhreb (Winkle of peacock)
- Phul Mobla (Varieties of bloomed flowers)
- Maoji Agan (Footprint of cat)
- Dingkhia Agor (A design representing fern of Dhekia)
- Singri Bibar (A design representing the Singri flower)
- Bwigri Bibar (A design representing the flowers of plum)
- Gongar thaiship (A design representing the fruit of Nui tree) etc.

Photo:



Traditional Handmade design (Dokhona)

2. Machine Made Design

At present in the Bodo society day-by-day increasing machine-made design on Traditional weaving. Its influence by the technology and Machine-made design is mostly using commercial purpose. Machine made design is not much attractive and its easy process. Machine made designs are:

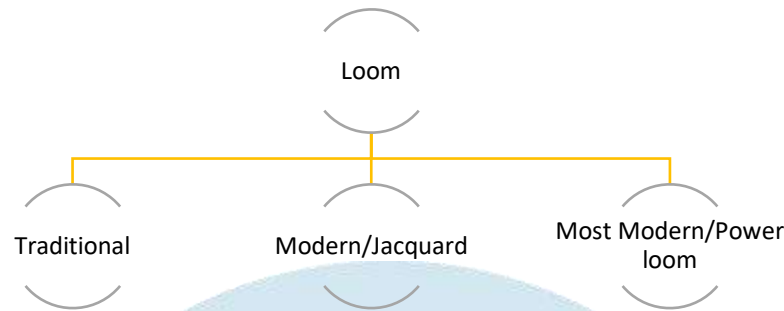
- Katalaga Agor
- Monipuri Agor
- Bodoland Agor etc



2.4 Method of weaving of the Bodo costume

The Bodo's called loom is *Hisanshali* or *Isanshali* in the Bodo language. The term of Hisanshali meaning *He* means 'Cloth' and *Sali* means 'Place'. It is setup/established of the corner of their household.

The traditional is not portable and fixed at ground permanently. At present, three types of looms are found among them, like- *traditional*, *modern* and *most modern*.



The weaving process of handloom may be classified are-

1.Sizing and winding



1.Warping and Beaming



1.Looming

2.4.1 Traditional Loom

The Traditional loom one is the fixed system which can't be shifted from one place to another. This system is slowly decreasing. The Bodo traditional loom is known as names such as Sal-Khuntha, Daophang, or Tat Sal and is a type of Throw-Shuttle-handloom where the loom setup on a four post frame fixed to the ground. Bodo women sit in front of the loom, using both legs on a footrest to operate it and employ the basic weaving motions of shedding, picking, and beating to create intricate designs and traditional Bodo attire.

Bodo people used traditional tools which are made by themselves with local resources such as bamboo, wood, iron and thread robe. The weaving tools are divided into two categories: -

i) Tools for spinning and winding and

ii) Tools for weaving.

The commonly used traditional tools are: (1)Shal Khuntha, (2)Shal gandwi, (3)Makhu, (4)Bobin, (5)Ban gwza, (6)Rashw, (7)Baleb, (8)Gonshi, (9)Shal saikhong, (10)Bwo dangi, (11)Gorai, (12)Swrkhi, (13)Danganatha, (14)khila bari, (15)Shal khila, (16)Gorkha, (17)Nw, (18)Gorai khunthia, (19)Khadini, (20)Phaneo, (21)Khuntha, (22)Khaitha, (23)Ujunabari, (24)Nw hasung, (25)Hashib, (26)Zenther, etc and many are used by them. But these tools are changes by day-to-day.



Photo: Traditional Loom

2.4.2 Modern/Jacquard Loom

The modern/jacquard is mixed up with the traditional and new method. It is a little scientific and can be shifted from one place to another, which was developed from the initial stage of the 21st century. In the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) Govt. was providing these machines to increase and develop of the Bodo handloom through the Bodoland Handloom Mission. It's a good initiative to handloom sector.



Photo: Jacquard Loom

2.4.3 Most Modern/Power Loom

The third of the *Isan Sali* of the Bodo's is most modern/power loom. It can be shifted from one place to another and cloths are woven in scientific method with the help of machine and tools. The designs of cloths are woven using different plates and tools. Who are opening weaving centres are using this system for the purpose of business.

Motor for musra and flower plates. In place of swrkhi they have used bobbins. The khundung swngnai is converted into drum, now khonnai into G.I. wire fixing. The musra sanai system is also converting into a motor and electric system. These are beginning to ending pully dependent on electric.



Photo 13: Power Loom

2.5 Folk Believe of Weaving

In Bodo society, weavers hold certain folk beliefs related to weaving, which are still carefully observed, especially in the Kokrajhar district. These beliefs are-

1. The weaver does not begin the weaving process on **Tuesdays** and **Saturdays**, as it is believed that starting on these days will cause the weaving to proceed with difficulties and not go smoothly.
2. When a person dies in the village or home, the Bodo people observe a mourning period of three to seven days. During this time, weaving activities are strictly avoided, and no loom is used for weaving or warping.
3. Before starting to weave, the weaver cleans their hair thoroughly. It is believed that if the hair is not cleaned, the weaving process will not be completed quickly or smoothly.

3.0 Findings

Some of findings following are:

1. The Bodo costumes are very unique and colourful compared to those of other tribes.
2. Weaving is a traditional knowledge of the Bodo women that knowledge transmitted from generation to generation.
3. Bodo women are very expert to weavers.
4. Blue, green, and yellow are the most favourite colours among the Bodo's.
5. The Bodo costume is classified three types.

Conclusion

The study shows that weaving is not merely a craft but a cultural essence of the Bodo Society. The costumes of the Bodo community are unique, colourful, and symbolic of their ethnic identity. Bodo women have preserved this tradition through generations, passing on their knowledge of handloom weaving, designs, and folk beliefs. While modern looms and machine-made designs are gradually replacing traditional methods, the cultural significance of weaving continues to play a vital role in maintaining the heritage of the

Community. Thus, the Bodo costumes and weaving practices are not only expressions of art but also vital markers of social, cultural, and historical continuity.

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