

A Study on Bodo Weaving: Advent of Modernity and Future Prospect

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Abstract:

Weaving is an amalgamation of the science and art of fabrics and fibers. Like most of the tribes of Northeast region of India, the Bodo community had ensured to carry along the tradition of weaving to reflect their identity. Their clothes reflect the symbol of their identity. The Bodos or the Boros are believed to be the earliest settlers of Assam. They constitute a very important section of the different ethnic groups and races settling in Assam with their distinct cultural and linguistic traits. Racially they belong to the Mongoloid stock of the Indo-Mongoloids or Indo-Tibetians. They are said to have migrated in Assam in ancient period. Notwithstanding the processes of cultural assimilation and fusion, the Bodos have maintained their distinctive identity through the ages. Linguistically the Boros include a large group of people who are the speakers of the Tibeto-Burman speeches of the North and East Bengal, Assam and Burma. At present, the Bodo race can be seen mostly inhabiting in the North-Eastern region of India, especially Assam, dominating the four districts of Baksa, Chirang, Kokrajhar and Udalguri.

Keywords: Bodo, Weaving, Designs, Modernity, Dokhona.

Aims and Objectives:

- i) To study the traditional weaving practices of the Bodos.
- ii) To study the impact of modern technology in Bodo traditional weaving.
- iii) To understand the future prospect of Bodo weaving.

Methodology:

The study is carried out with special observation made from the different Bodo weavers of Udalguri District of Assam. The data are collected from secondary sources and through the observation made by the author. The sources of secondary data are books, journals, research articles, handloom report etc.

Introduction:

Spinning and weaving has been universally practiced in India since ancient times. Textile and the practice of weaving in the Indian sub-continent is said to be over 7,000 years old, evidenced by loom weights discovered at a grave site in Mehrgarh Baluchistan dated to the seventh millennium BC (Clifford:2). Traces of purple dye found at Mohenjo-Daro, in an about 3000 BC proves that cotton was spun and woven in India during that period (Khatwani, Khawani: 100). With

reference to Assam, the art of sericulture can be seen practiced since the time immemorial. The art of sericulture and rearing of different kinds of silk worms for the manufacture of a variety of silk cloths were known to the people of North-East India since the days of Ramayana and Arthasastra. From the evidence of the Arthasastra, Harsacharita and other classical writers, it is inferred that in the art of rearing silk worms and the weaving of the best kind of silk cloths, the weavers of ancient Assam had earned a reputation that was at par with the Chinese (Boro:41). However, the exact date in which the people of Assam and Bodo community as a whole adopted the art of weaving cannot be identified. Weaving forms an important part of activities among the Bodo women and knowing that art is highly appreciated in the society. Bodo woman as a good weaver finds special mention in the book "*The Kacharis*", written by Sydney Endle which is regarded to be the earliest work on Bodo society. They used different types of traditional technique for weaving. They construct a loom for themselves for the available local materials. Endle mentions that the looms are usually set up on a shady side of the dwelling house. Thus, weaving occupies a prominent place in the society.

Indigenous Weaving Practices of the Bodos:

Weaving is an integral part of the women folk of the Bodo community. As remarked by Rev. Sidney Endle in his book *'The Kacharis'*, rearing of the silk worm known as *eri*, and the manufacture of the *eri* cloth has been regarded as one of the chief and very profitable industry among the Kacharis. Hand woven textile occupies an important place in the culture and civilization of India since very ancient times. Discovery of loom weights in the grave of Mehrgarh Baluchistan, dated to the seventh millennium BC signify the practiced of weaving since that period. Rearing of silk worms and weaving in Assam finds special mention in the Arthasastra as well as the Harsacharita. Bodo women are also associated with the weaving and rearing of silk worms. However, the exact period of development of weaving among them are not known. Bodo women, as an expert weaver has found special mention in *'The Kacharis'*, one of the earliest works on the Bodos. They are influenced in their textile production by the elements of physical environment as well as by their folk songs, rituals, myths, legends, ceremonies, festival, social organizations and cultural norms. Indira Boro in her entitled article *'Sericulture and Weaving Industry of the Bodos: A brief Discussion'*, has regarded Bodo women to be an expert weaver and known as born weaver in Assam. The art of weaving has been regarded as one of the dignitary activities among them. Every Bodo woman are said to know the art of weaving and spinning. The women of Bodo community can weave all types of weaving apparels because of which weaving has been considered as dignitary work as well as cultural identity since the early periods. Anil Boro in his book *'Folk Literature of Bodos'*, gives a glimpse of folk songs, those are highly associated with the culture of Bodo weaving. According to it, the Bodo woman who does not know the art of weaving and spinning are not asked for marriage. Based on that, weaving occupy a prominent and significant place among the Bodo women and community as a whole. According to Sydney Endle and B. K. Brahma, a Bodo woman who does not know the art of spinning and weaving is regarded as *'aluri'* (good for nothing) and are neglected by the society. As remarked by those books and authors, weaving forms an important part of

activities among the Bodo women and knowing that art is highly appreciated in the society.

Traditional Attire and Designs of Bodo Weaving:

Weaving is an integral part of every Bodo household. They have their own tools and techniques to weave their own dresses. Dresses of Bodo women comprises of Dokhona, Jwmgra and blouse. Generally blouses are purchased from the market. Dokhona is of 3 meter long and 1.5 meter broad. It is worn in two folds, first one shall be wrapped around the chest and other part shall be wrapped around the waist which falls till leg to cover the whole body. Jwmgra can be said to be scarf/ dupatta that is taken around the neck and shoulder. Usually in earlier days, men wore Gamsa, which they wrapped around the waist and falls until knee length. The other variations of Bodo dresses are *'Aronai'*, which is like a muffler that is used as a garland in certain special occasions. It is also used to felicitate and honor the guests, gift as a tribute and respect the dignitaries. Hichimba is another kind of wide size cloth, used during the winter season like a shawl and also serves the purpose of a tiny blanket to stop the chilly winter wind. Each type of dresses has its own significance. Bodo women are not only an expert weaver but are also known for weaving their dreams through their cloth by giving various impressive designs to their cloth. The rich culture and tradition are reflected in the costume and textile designs. The association of the Bodos with the nature, its love for nature, has found expression in various textile designs of the Bodos. They are often glorified for giving impressive design. A species of various types of *Agor*(handy work design) which bloom in the art of Bodo weaving are as:*Agorgubwi* (Main design), *Phareomegon* (design of pigeon's eye), *DaoraiMokhreb* (Winkle of peacock), *PhulMobla*(Varieties of bloomed flowers), *Moaji Megon* (Footprint of Cat), *DaoshaMokhreb* (Winkle of Chicken), *DingkhiaMohor* (A design representing a fern), *GanguGodo* (An A design representing the shape of a kind of insect called Gangu), *SingriBibar* (A design representing the Singri flower), *BoigriBibar* (A design representing the flower plum), *Gongarthaiship* (A design representing the fruit of Nui fruit), *ThaigirBibar* (A design representing the flower of Thaigir plant),

Gandoulaagor (A design representing an insect gandoula), *KhusliDenta* (A design representing the spoon), *MuphurApha* (A design representing the footprint of bear), *daothugodo* (design of dove's neck), *paharagor* (design of hill), *moideragan* (elephant's feet design) etc.

Tools and Implements used in Bodo Weaving:

They use traditional technology for their weaving. They use a loom, which are usually made in a traditional way through local resources. They used different types of traditional technique for weaving. They construct a loom for themselves from the available local materials. Endle mentions that the looms are usually set up on a shady side of the dwelling house or where this is impracticable, a rude structure of thatch and bamboo work is provided to shield the weaver from the sun. Throw- shuttle looms are extensively used by the Bodo women than that of the loin loom. The throw shuttle loom is a loom in which the shuttle is thrown across the shed by hand. The loom is fitted to four posts fixed on the ground. The shedding is effected by a set of heals operated by the foot. The beating up of the weft is done by a bamboo reed to a sleigh. The important parts of the throw shuttle loom are:

- a) Sleigh or slay- It is a wooden frame accommodating the shuttle box, reed and swings forward and backward. In its forward motion the last pick of weft is beaten.
- b) Shuttle Box- it is a wooden case for the shuttle with the spindle and a picker. The shuttle box is grooved inside lengthwise to accommodate the picker. The top of the box is open and the shuttle rests in the box for intermediate period between the successive picks.
- c) Shuttle and Spindle- the Shuttle is placed vertical to the weft and passes through in the process of weaving. When the loom is stationary, the shuttle remains in the shuttle box. The shuttle contains the spindle on which the weft yarn is wound.
- d) Picker- It is a piece of leather placed in grooves inside a shuttle box on which the spindle is kept. The picker is used to give blow to the shuttle to drive it from one box to the other.

- e) Reed- the reed is the comb through which the wrap passes.
- f) Heald- Healds are required to form a shed, which contains a series of twin loops.
- g) Treadle- it is a pedal or lever to which a heald is connected by means of cards.
- h) Lease rods- the division of wrap threads into one, two and two, and so on is termed as base. Two rods pass between these two divisions of wrap and are known as the lease rods.
- i) Wrap beam- the roller up[on which the wrap yarn is wound and fitted on the bottom at the back of the loom is termed as wrap-beam or weaver's beam.
- j) Fabric beam- the roller fitted in front of the loom, upon which the cloth is wound while weaving is the fabric beam.

All the above mentioned tools are made from either bamboo or wood. These are used extensively in Bodo weaving.

Modernity And Future Prospect:

Effects of modernity and globalization can be seen in every field of human life. One's culture and traditions are also to a greater space touched by the globalization. Likewise, the Bodo women's dresses have been witnessing change in present times like every other aspect of lifestyle and art. This is being facilitated by the changes in textile, motif and technological innovations. Modernization has led to substantial changes to Bodo attire. People at present had access to the new world changes in motif. This ranges from 'Phareomegonagor to Anarkuliagor', and their most adorn color "Gwmw- Gwthang-Batho gang" has now been replaced by a different mixture of colour. Along with it, in respect to the comparison of old motifs with new motifs, fashion experts are of the view that old motifs that were symbolic in nature are now replaced with the recent designs, influenced by current fashion trend. With the development of technologies and arrival of new technology and machines, a new mode of growth and production has found its way in Bodo weave. Women can now weave more clothes using the new weaving machines that have arrived. They could now weave more clothes within a limited time. At the same time, with the

arrival of machines, the dresses had become much more finished than it used to be while weaving with hand. One can in no way deny the impact of modernity that had brought on Bodo weaving. Positive results can be seen in the field of weaving. However, the positive impact of modernity could no longer hold back its negative aspects in its field. With its new ideas and techniques of modernity Bodo weaving can be seen losing its traditional essence that were once preserved. Weaving can be seen declining to a large extent among the Bodos. Many women of the community are not associated with weaving and spinning as glorified in many sources. Today, most of the Bodo women lack the skill of weaving, spinning and giving impressive designs in their attire. The essence of Dokhona has in many ways been lost. Many are seen wearing Dokhona which in no sense represent the essence of Bodo attire Dokhona. The new generation can be seen not fond of wearing the traditional Dokhona as the other western and other Indian attire are much more comfortable than Dokhona. At the same time with the invention of machines, Bodo weavers have opted to weave their attires in machines. Like the Indian textile industry, Bodo weaving is now in an era of threats and opportunities. While it enjoys opportunities to gain access to unrestricted markets, it also sees unexpected treats with the invention of modern machines and other comfortable garments. Due to modernization, many Bodo women had abandoned weaving. They did not regard it as a work must to do at home. At the same time, they are now much accustomed to changes around and are much comfortable with the other western clothes found in the markets. The demand for hand-woven fabrics has found hard to exist in the market. Machine made Dokhona made from other non-Bodo weavers had flooded the market. It has also set a hard blow to the Bodo weavers who work hard to produce Dokhona or other Bodo garment without losing its essence. The new generation is not fond of wearing the traditional Bodo attire as the western and other Indian wear are a comfortable option. As the demand for hand woven attire falls, the looms are threatened with losing their own traditional dress in near future. Today's generation youth had not only abandoned the wear of Bodo attire, but had also kept

themselves away from spinning and weaving. Once glorified as an expert weaver has to a large extent, lost its real identity today. Many young Bodo girls today lack the skill of giving impressive designs to their clothes even though they knew the art of weaving. The impressive design is on its way to be lost as they are not learnt and preserved by today's generation Bodo youth.

Conclusion:

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that, the Bodos had practiced and preserved their own technique, ideas and tradition of weaving from their earlier generation. They are indeed an expert weaver and are known to weave impressive designs in their clothes. However, it had also been observed that with the advent of modernity, Bodo women had abandoned the significance and tradition of their weaving culture. Once glorified to be a skilled weaver looking on to the present scenario of the Bodo weaving and its weavers, it is found that preservation of their traditional weaving technology lies in the hands of Bodo women in particular and the Bodo community as a whole. It has also become important to emphasize to develop means and innovative methods for motivating young minds through skill practices to bring about sustainability in preserving their old traditional weaving.

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