

GLIMPSES OF TRADITIONAL FOOD HABITS, DRESS AND ORNAMENTS: A STUDY AMONG THE BODOS OF UDALGURI DISTRICT IN ASSAM

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ABSTRACT

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Assam is a region of rich cultural heritage and homeland of various ethnic communities along with their distinctive cultures such as dress and ornaments, food habits, fair and festivals, belief systems, material objects related to traditional economy, religious activities, rites and rituals etc. However, food is one of the basic needs of every living creature for their survival. Besides the biological importance, food habit is also a symbol of human cultural and social identity. From time immemorial food habit varies from society to society depending upon the geographical location, availability of natural resources etc. On the other hand, the dress pattern and ornaments is also an important part of material culture of any particular community and weaving culture is closely associated with it. In this context Bodo is an indigenous ethnic group of North East India, dwelling in the districts of Darrang, Udalguri, Baksa, Chirang, Kokrajhar, Goalpara, Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh etc. in Assam. Bodo is an autochthonous group of people of north east India which is well known for their colourful and artistic dress and ornaments with beautiful style and attractiveness. The present paper is an attempt to focus on the traditional food habits as well as weaving culture and ornaments of Bodos which is a significant art of Bodo tribe. Bodos have some unique ethnic dishes which are prepared by a traditional way. The Bodo traditional attire is basically hand woven and the raw materials are dependent on natural resources.

The present study is an attempt to discuss about the different traditional food items and various colourful dresses and beautiful jewellery of Bodos. The paper also tries to analyze on the traditional knowledge system related to preservation and processing of their ethnic foods. The paper has been prepared through both primary and secondary data. For primary data an intensive fieldwork was done among the concerned people.

INTRODUCTION

Food is an essential element for the survival of human being. Food getting activities, take precedence over other activities important to survival. Food getting strategies need to provide the appropriate combination of nutrients throughout varying seasons and changing environmental conditions. Food getting activities are also important because the way a society gets its food strongly predicts other aspects of a culture, from community size and permanence of settlement to type of economy and degree of inequality and type of political system and even art styles and religious beliefs and practices (Ember and Ember, 2012). On the other hand dress and ornaments is known as an integral part of material culture which can be regarded as a symbol of identity and distinctive feature of a particular community. In this civilized world, there are various types of dresses and ornaments worn by the people in different parts of the globe. It symbolizes the existence of different culture and traditions of different community and society on the basis of their geographical location and natural conditions. The material culture of people is closely dependent on the availability of natural resources in the local area and the scope of its utility. Regarding material culture Prown (1982) wrote, "Material culture as a study is based upon the obvious fact that the existence of a man-made object is concrete evidence of the presence of a human intelligence operating at the time of fabrication." Again he wrote, "The underlying premise is that objects made or modified by man reflect, consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, the beliefs of individuals who made, commissioned, purchased or used them, and by extension the beliefs of the larger society to which they belonged. The term material culture thus refers quite directly and efficiently, if not elegantly, both to the subject matter of the study, material and to its purpose, the understanding of culture."

By analysing various author's opinion regarding dress, Eicher (2000) stated that, "Throughout the writings, the concept of holism is paramount; dress is analyzed, as

part of a larger configuration of human behaviour of a specific people in a specified time and place. The culture of specific people in relation to their habits of dress is also analyzed, with cultural diversity in dress from group to group becoming readily apparent.” Food habit varies from society to society on the basis of their availability in that particular area. Food habit is a part of culture of a particular community. The tribal communities of North East India are basically agriculturists and they depend on simple economy.

Bodo is a tribe of North East India who belongs to Tibeto– Burman linguistic group of Mongoloid race. The Bodos constitute the largest ethnic group amongst the tribal population of Assam. This indigenous tribe also has a unique identity amongst the various tribes of Assam because of their multifaceted culture and distinctive traditional knowledge system of livelihood. Bodos are the largest community among the tribal populations of Assam. They have a rich and beautiful culture in regards of dresses and ornaments. Dresses and ornaments of the Bodos are the symbol of their traditional art and culture. It reflects their artistic mind and creative nature. They have the tradition of weaving and most of the dresses are hand woven with unique style and attractiveness.

Regarding food habits of Bodos, Endle (1911) stated that, “as regard the food the Kachari is as a rule by no means limited and restricted, like his Hindu and Musalman neighbours. On the contrary he enjoys and practises a freedom in this respect which no doubt goes far to account for his often magnificent physique.” They use different types of traditional methods for preparation and preservation of the food items according to the available natural sources such as forest, jungle, ponds, river etc. Bodo people are fond of non vegetarian items like pork, chicken, mutton, fish etc. along with the leafy green vegetables. In earlier days they were directly dependent upon the food collecting (gathering) economy. They collected food from nearby forest, jungle or river. But as time passed, they started to do cultivation and domestication of animals like cow, pig, fowl, goat etc. as well as learned to store food stuff for a long time in order to use it during the time of scarcity. Food tradition differs widely society to society throughout the world. Even among people who share similar cultural backgrounds or some of the same food habits, the processing techniques or eating habits are not identical. The tradition and custom of food preparation, its utilization and preservation represents the socio cultural background of the society. It is a symbol of their cultural identity and age old indigenous knowledge are always applied in all aspects of culture in order to hold on the ethnic identity of a community.

Area of Study: The area of present study is Bhakatpara and Majgaon Village of Udalguri District, Assam. The village is situated about 10km. far from Udalguri town. The total number of families of village is 78. The population of male is 238(56.4%) and female is 184(43.6%) out of the total population 422. I have selected these two particular villages to study because the village is inhabited by the Bodo ethnic people and their main occupation is agriculture and they live a traditional way of life. Yet they practice their age-old culture and traditions and 70 per cent of people practice agriculture and they depend on environment and traditional knowledge system of processing food items for their subsistence. During my pilot survey I have seen the loom in their courtyard and the weaving culture is still going on and people wear their traditional attire.

Aims and Objectives: The major aims and objectives of the study are–

- (i) To study the traditional food items, its methods of preparation and preservation.
- (ii) To understand the cultural importance of ethnic food in religious and social ceremonies.
- (iii) To study the traditional dress and ornaments, its designs and use of various raw materials.
- (iv) To study the Bodo weaving culture and its significance in Bodo folk life.

Methodology: To conduct the present study appropriate anthropological methods like preliminary census schedule, case study, participant observation methods were applied. The study was conducted in different stages. In the first stage preliminary census scheduled was applied on the studied families to collect demographic data. In the second stage Participant observation was done to know about the preparation, preservation and processing of different food items and their weaving culture and its relation to the folk life of the studied people. Some individual and professional handlooms were visited and interview method was applied among the people to know about their traditional dress pattern, its design and use of different raw materials in weaving. In the third stage Case studies method was also applied and open structured interviews were also taken from the key informants and concerned people to get detailed information regarding the studied issue.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

(i) Traditional Food Habits: The Bodos have various traditional food items for their own. In this particular village the people used to prepare some special food

items during occasions and their daily diet as well as commonly taken items. Their traditional ethnic dishes and preservation techniques are as follows–

Ankham (Rice): Rice is the staple food of the studied people. They used to take rice as daily diet three times in a day as breakfast, lunch and dinner. Generally in the morning they used to take *ankhamgwzang* (cold watery rice) as breakfast and in lunch and dinner they take rice with vegetables and non vegetarian items. *Ankhamgwzang* is a kind of cooked rice which is soaked overnight and served the next day morning with *bathwnor* chutney. There are large varieties of rice found among the community such as *maibra*, *maima*, *aijong*, *mainagri* etc. They cultivate rice in two seasons and these are known as Ashu (which is cultivated in April–May) and *Maisali* (which is cultivated in the month of July–August). They keep the paddy in a store house called *bhakhri* (granary) which is built by bamboo and thatch. When the amount of rice is small then they store it in a *duli* (a kind of round shaped bamboo box). Sometimes they used to boil the crops and then grind in *dhengkei*. But nowadays they prefer to grind without boiling. The rice is kept in a large container made of bamboo and rattan cane which is called *kehrkhagwdwr* (large basket). They used to put dry chilly or cloves or some kind of leaf of medicinal plant to protect from any insects or damage. They also prepare some kind of rice cake (phitha) during the festivals or on special occasions like Bwisagu, Domashi and some other festivals. They prepare various types of rice cake like *laodumphitha*, *anasiphitha*, *asiphitha*, *hasungphitha*, *enthabphitha* etc. For the preparation of rice cake the rice powder is required which is grinded in *dhengkebi* (a kind of traditional pestle and mortar). Basically they prefer not to use oil but in *anasiphitha* the mustard oil is used. In *hasungphitha* the rice is kept in a bamboo tube and covered the mouth with straw. After that it is boiled in direct fire. The rice is boiled inside and ready to eat. The people preserve it for few days and use it as a snack with tea.

Labra or Megong (Mixed vegetables): The people of this village love to eat various green leafy vegetables which are grow wild in jungles and some of them are cultivated in own home. There are lots of wild leafy vegetables collected from the nature and these are the favourite delicacy of people of the village. Among the favourite wild vegetables some of the most common are *sibru* (a kind of thorny plant), *dingkhiya* (fern), *manimuni* (*cantellaasiatica*), *masundri* (*hottuniacordata*), *kehutra* (*amaranthusviridis*), *zaribilai* (*acmellapaniculta*), *mezenga* (*zanthoxylumoxyphyllum*), *thunthuni* (*drymariacordata*) etc. and roots like potato, *tharun* (yam), *thasobedor* (arum beet), and spices like *narsing* leaves (*murrariyakoeningii*), *kehasidhara* (*eryngium foetidum*) etc. And

cultivated leafy vegetables are *lapha* (*malva verticillata*), *mwitba* (*hebicusabdarifolia*), *mwiphralai* (*brassica juncea*), *lai* (*spinach*) etc. Some cultivated vegetables are *shobai* (black gram), *phanthao* (brinjal), *jugun* (pumpkin), *panialao* (bottle guard), *kbumbra* (white guard), *lesra* or *sobaibima* (a kind of bean) *fanzlu* (chilly) etc.

They also have the tradition of fermentation of green vegetables as well as roots. “*Memai*” is the favourite dish of the studied people which is the fermented bamboo shoot prepared by cleaning the bamboo root, peeled off and after that cut fine in small pieces and keep it for ten or fifteen days in earthen pot. After that it is dried in sun for two or three days and keep it in an earthen or glass container. This stuff can be stored for months and it can be added with fish or pork curry. The taste of this item is bit sour and it is a great delicacy of Bodo cuisine of this village

They also have the system of fermenting some kind of wild flowers like, *gambari*, *senalibasukebi*, *metheka* etc. These stuffs are used in the time of crisis of fresh natural vegetables and in difficult times whenever they are busy in the paddy field. They also dry the jute leaves which are called *Narzi* and kept in a dry place and use whenever necessary. They also prepare *mulagundrwi* which is a semi fermented food stuff prepared from radish tap root. Radish roots are first cut into small pieces and then sun dried till they become smaller in size. The dried radish root pieces are then kept in dry container and the product can be used with black gram, potato curry etc. to add up the flavour and aroma of the food. They preserve it for a year or two and sometimes they dried in sunlight in order to protect it from rotten or damage.

Bedor (Meat): The people are very much fond of non vegetarian items. Pork (omabedor) was the most favourite delicacy of the people. Besides the pork, they also eat chicken (daobedor), mutton (bwrmbedor), pigeon (pharaw), duck (hangswbedor) etc. They do not love to eat egg so much however they prefer to feed local egg of fowl or duck to their children. They domesticated animals like pig, goat, fowl etc. for the purpose of eating and it helps them to earn money as well. To keep the fowls they built a house by bamboo called *Agrang* (poultry house). And pigs are kept in open space fastened with tree or bamboo post. Besides the domesticated animals they also eat some wild animals like deer (mwi), tortoise (khasew), rabbits (sesa), mongoose (neolai) etc. They dry the meat of deer, pork and preserve it for long time and used it later. It can be preserved for one to two weeks. They store it in bamboo made container and kept near the hearth to protect from insects. The combination of dried pork and pulse is one of the most delicious traditional dishes of them. The dry pork and dry jute curry is also a favourite delicacy. Some popular or favourite traditional dishes of non

vegetarian stuffs are *sobaijwngdaao* (chicken with black gram), *daojwngkhumra* (chicken with white guard), *bwrnabedorwngkheree* (mutton curry), *omagwran aloo* (dry pork with potato), *mwithajwngoma* (pork with green leaf) etc.

Na wnkheree (Fish Curry): They consume almost all kinds of fish available in their locality. They are fond of fishing and they catch fishes by using different types of traps or net. Some traditional implements of fishing *wedrejekhai*, *polo*, *sen*, *khobaije*, *bwrsi* etc. They love to eat small fishes and dry it and preserve for future use which is known as *nagwran*. To prepare the *nagwran*, the small fishes have to be cleaned and dried in sunlight first. After that it is placed on a sieve and kept upon the hearth to dry properly. After that they store it in a bamboo container and preserved for long time. Besides the fish, some of the water insects are also important delicacy of Bodo cuisine. They are fond of *khangekbrai* (crab), *samo* (snail), *ganjema*, *gaorema*, *enkehaori* etc. *Samojwng hasobai* (snail with black gram) is their favourite traditional food item. They used to cook delicious curry of these insects and these are the popular ethnic dishes prepared by them.

Some of the traditional fish curry of Bodos are *gwkehwijwngna* (fish with sour staff), *onlajwngnagwran* (dry fish with rice powder), *mwithajwngna* (fish with leafy vegetables) etc.

Narzi: *Narzi* is bitter gravy that is made from dried jute leaves. Pork or fresh water fish is cooked together to generate a distinct taste. *Narzi* gravy is a unique dish which is a very favourite ethnic food among the people of the studied area. In the processing of *narzi*, jute leaves are first dried in sunlight for six to seven days and then stored by keeping in poly bags. The curry prepared from it is bitter in taste. The bitterness is removed by boiling and adding some *keharwi* (alkali) while cooking. It has a significant role in their traditional socio-religious custom. *Narzi* is considered as a purifier and offered to the people coming from funeral.

Onlakharwi: *Onla* is a kind of rice powder which is added in different curry to make the curry thick and tasty. *Onlawnkheree* is one of the popular dishes of the tribe which is prepared with the rice powder and some special herbs, plants, edible roots or flowers. *Onlais* a kind of gravy made from rice powder and slices of bamboo shoots which is cooked lightly with *keharwi* and spices. Chicken or pork is added for more delicious or tasty.

Kharwi or alkali preparation: Traditionally *keharwi* is prepared from the burnt ashes of the bark and other parts of giant banana, mustard plant, stem of sesame. It

is kept in a small earthen pot over which water is poured and placed in a small container. Whenever the *onla* and *kharvi* is used together in a curry or dish that is called *onlakharvi*. Various kinds of delicious *onlakharvi* curries are *onlakharvidaobedor* (rice powder alkaline curry with chicken), *daobedorsobaikharvi* (lantil alkaline with chicken), *narzigwbab* (dry jute with alkaline), *onlaounvamewai* (onla with bamboo shoot), *onlamwithrubibar* (onla with papaya flower), *onlakhumragwran* (onla with dry white guard), *onlamulagwran* (onla with dry radish), *onlaomabedor* (onla with pork), *onlahangswbedor* (onla with duck meat) etc.



Plate 1: (Preparation of Kharwi)

Nafam: *Nafam* is a unique dish in Bodo cuisine. It is a product of fermented fish and some other edible plants and herbs. The raw materials used in the preparation of *nafam* are dried fish, tender shoots of Arum, hollow bamboo cylinder stem, clay paste and straw. Firstly they grind the small dry fishes with arum stem and add some *kharvi* or alkali and store it in a dry bamboo tube that is open from one side. The fish paste is then covered with the dry banana leaf (*thalirbilai*) and the opening of the bamboo container is sealed with clay paste prepared by mixing with straw very carefully so that no insect can enter into the bamboo stem. It is sealed tightly and the whole preparation is kept for two to three months for fermentation. It can be preserved for whole years or so. When fresh water fishes are not available *nafam* is

prepared with varieties of vegetables and it can be fried or used as it is. It can be used as chutney also. It has a strong smell and can be mixed with other ingredients like ginger, garlic, coriander etc. to make it more tasty and delicious. *Nafam* is a very popular and favourite dish of the people of this village.

Bathwn: *Bathwn* is an additional dish which is like chutney or pickle. It is a very popular traditional dish of Bodo people. They usually have *bathwn* with *ankhamgyjang* or watery rice. They prepare varieties of *bathwn* like *nabathwn* (pounded fish with chilli, ginger, garlic), *khangkbraibathwn* (crab chutney), *ganjema* (water bug), *gaorema* (a kind of water insect) etc. Besides these they prepare chutney from dried fish, silkworm, coriander leaf with chilly etc.

Silkworm: Silkworm is also one of their favourite delicacies and they reared silkworm (endiemphou and mugalatha) in their house in order to get threads from them. After producing the thread for weaving purpose, the rest of the *emphou* (silkworm) were used as a food staff and it is their favourite delicacy. It can be fried or prepared as chutney.

Zau or Jumai: *Zau* or *jumai* carried a significant place in the socio-cultural life of the Bodos of this village. *Zau* or *jumai* is their favourite beverage and it is prepared by steeping rice in water for two or three days. For the preparation of *zau*, a homemade medicine is essential which is known as *amao*. The *amao* is prepared from rice powder, a kind of wild plant called *mokhna* (*clerodendrumviscosum*), some leaves of jackfruit,



Plate 2: (Amao)

sugar cane, pineapple and roots of *agsrchita (plumbagozeylenica)*. All these things are mixed and grind together along with two or three old *amao* which is called *amaomwkebang*. After that some balls (larus) are made and kept for three to four days and dried in sunlight and make ready for use.

After preparation of *amao* the rice is cooked and placed on a winnowing fan and the *amao* according to need is grinded and mixed with it. Then it is kept safely in an earthen pot (*maldang*) or silver pot and covers the mouth carefully. It is stored for three to four days in summer and seven to eight days in winter season. When a delicious smell come out then it is known that the beverage is ready for use. It can be kept maximum seven to eight days. The *zau* prepared from *maibra* (bara rice) is more tasty as sweet as honey and it has a very strong flavour. The *zau* made of *maibra* is regarded as good quality of rice beer and it carries a social status and prestige in front of the guests and society.

Traditional Knowledge System of Preservation and Processing of Food Items: The people of this village follow some traditional methods for preservation of their food items. For instance, to store dry jute leaves or dry fish they use traditional bamboo container instead of any plastic objects. They prefer to use natural material objects because they think the natural things are scientific and more hygienic. On the other hand they use natural spices to prepare food items like meat, fish curry etc. In earlier days they used to take only boiled vegetables but in present days they loved to cook with mustard oil or refined oil as well.

Besides the above mentioned food items they also store their daily useful food stuffs like salt, sugar, turmeric etc. In earlier times people cultivated turmeric in own home and made turmeric powder by own. But now they sell turmeric and purchase turmeric powder from the market. They consume these items in large amount for future use and to preserve for long time they kept these stuffs in tightly closed container.

They use some traditional medicinal plant or seeds such as cloves, dry red chilly etc. to protect the food stuffs from the insects or damage. Presently due to the impact of urbanization and scarcity of natural resources they use some modern material objects like plastic, silver or glass container etc. along with the traditional bamboo container.

Socio-cultural Importance: In every society traditional food habit carries a social importance and unique identity of a particular culture. It plays a significant

role in every aspects of cultural life of the people. In Bodo society the ethnic food items like, *laodumphitha*, *anasiphitha*, *hasungphitha* (some sort of rice cakes) etc. are prepared in occasion and festival time. In earlier days they offered it to the guests as snack. Likewise the meat is also a significant item for Bodos as an offering for their Supreme deity. They offered pork or chicken along with the *ꠘau* or *jumai* to their ancestors while they celebrate any function at their home. Besides this they preferred to offer meat to their guests and relatives as well. One of the most important ethnic dishes of Bodos is *narꠘi* which has an important place in socio-cultural life of the traditional Bodo society. Without *narꠘi* the death ritual is considered as incomplete and everyone of the village should taste the *narꠘi* to keep away the evil force of the deceased. *Zau* or *jumai* also has a great importance in social life of the Bodo people. They use this country liquor in various occasions and festivals of their socio-cultural life. In *bwisagu* (Bohagbihu) and *domasbi* (maghbihu) people used to drink *ꠘau* together and it makes them happy and joyful. Every household made *ꠘau* in festive season and offer to elderly people to get blessings from them. It shows their respect to seniors and symbol of their traditional custom. Besides the merry making *ꠘau* has another traditional value in this Bodo society. They offer *ꠘau* or *jumai* to their Supreme God Bathowbwrai or Sibrai in any kind religious activities and especially in ancestor worship. It is their religious custom and the people of this village practice it since the time immemorial. Besides the religious purpose *ꠘau* is used as their traditional beverage to offer their guests for greetings. They offer it to their guests with very respect, love and affection. They believe that it is the symbol of great status and prestige. To their special guests they prefer to offer *ꠘau* made of maibra or bara rice.

In this Bodo society *ꠘau* or *jumai* is used as daily liquor too. The people are really hard working and maximum time they spend in agricultural field. They used to take rice beer to get energy and refreshment. Besides this they use it for their medicinal purpose as well. If one feels ill and stomach pain or any difficulties related to the stomach or gastroenteritis problems they drink this traditional liquor to get relief from the illness.

(ii) Traditional Dress, Design and Raw Materials: Dokbona: *Dokbona* is the main traditional dress of Bodo woman is of length 2.5 mt and width 1.5 mt and it is wore to cover the whole body from chest to ankle by tied one round at a time in the waist. According to Siiger (2015), “It is a garment of red silk mixed with yellow, pink and mauve. Along the sides there are ribbons of brocade pattern woven in brown on yellow or red. The cloth is woven in coarse yellow silk in stripes (silk or

cotton) of red, orange, yellow and nuances of red woven in two warps with red, green patterns along some of the ribbons. The garb ends in fringes. The weaving technique is very complicated, perhaps brocade. Length 241 cm, width 121 cm.” Different *agor* (design or flower) and colours are weaved for *dokhona*. *Dokhona thaosi* (pure dokhona) is generally used as bridal attire, *bwirathi* (woman receptionist of Bride and bridegroom in marriage) or during the festivals or other ceremonies. *Dokhona* without *agor* is popular among the Bodo people and used to wear in worshipping God. Yellow is the popular colour among them. Besides yellow, they used to weave *dokhona* in a variety of colours like green, red, blue etc.

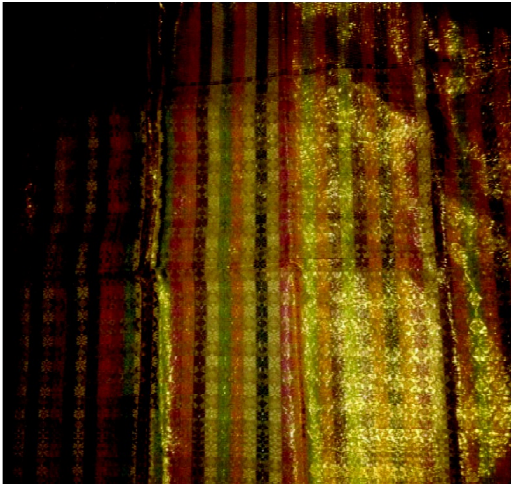


Plate 3: Dokhona

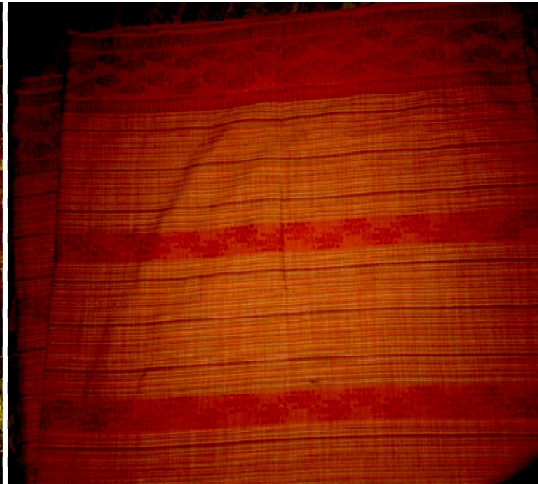


Plate 4: Dokhona

The different *agors* which Bodo people used to weave *dokhona* are–

- (i) Agorgubwi
- (ii) Parrawmegon
- (iii) Makriagor
- (iv) Taigirbibar
- (v) Maojiagan
- (vi) Dokanagor
- (vii) Laosungagor etc.

Jwmgra: *Jwmgra* is an upper garment used by women in yellow silk or cotton interwoven with ribbons in red, green, orange and blue. The length of *jwmgra* is

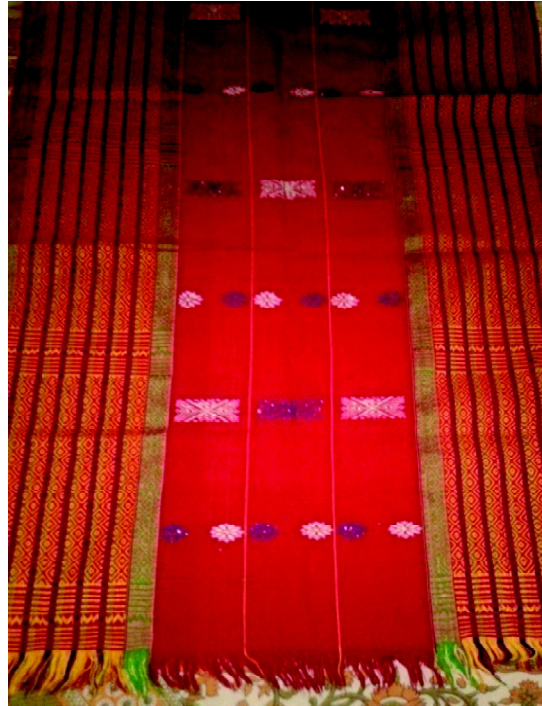


Plate 5: Jwmgra

about 264 cm. and breadth 107 cm. The cloth is used as shawl or scarf with *dokhona*. The *jwmgra* is woven of red, yellow and white with minor patterns of orange and black. The main pattern is goose eye but some of the vertical stripes are just the red and white thread left open for about 8 threads. The red thread is silk, while the yellow and other colours seem to be cotton.

Aronai: *Aronai* (small scarf) is the most beautiful cloth woven by the Bodo women. It is the sign of their tradition and it is used for various purposes such as felicitate people with honour and also in all Bodo dances. The Bodo girls used to present *aronai* as a token of love and affection to their loved ones. *Aronai* is their traditional symbol of love and respect. The women make it with various designs of *agor* (design or flower) in different colours like red, green, yellow etc.

Gamsba: *Gamsa* is the male garment which is worn as household attire and in dance as well. The length of *gamsba* is of 1.5 mt and width is 1.2 mt. It is used to cover the portion from waist to knee by tying it in the waist. The *gamsba* is weaved of different colours like green, yellow, and sometimes mixture of different colours like



Plate 6: Aronai

white and white and green, white and blue etc. specially the *gamsba* of green colour is used as wedding dress of the concerned people. Besides these traditional clothing, another piece of cloth, the locally woven shawl is of white cotton with interwoven thin lines of black and yellow is also used by the people of the village. The shawl has fringes at the ends. It is used by both men and women for covering the shoulders for keeping warm.

Raw Materials: Since time immemorial, the indigenous people of this village are accustomed with the production of clothes from the tread of *Eri* and *Muga*. The *eri* cloth is of dub colour and is durable. The women of this village are expert in rearing the *Endi Emphow* (Eri worm) and *mugalatha* (muga worm) and find out the threads from them. For the raw materials the women of the village have been practiced sericulture such as harvesting of leaves, rearing of silkworm, spinning or reeling of silk yarn etc. Regarding the *erisilk* culture of Bodos, in the “The Kachari” Endle (1911) mentioned, “One of the chief industries, a very profitable one among the kacharis, is that of the culture of the silk-worm known as *eri*, and the manufacture of *ericloth*.” He again said, “The loom employed for weaving the *eri* silk is of very

simple construction, and most, if not all, the material needed for the purpose can be provided by the villagers themselves from local resources.”

(iii) Traditional Ornaments and its Use: The Bodo women use very few ornaments made of silver and gold. The male members of the society usually do not use any ornaments. Some ornaments used by the women of studied village are:

- For the ear: (a) kheru, (b) japkhring (ear–ring), (c) dul, (d) puti etc.
- For the nose: (a) nak–phul (it is a small flower or knob stuck to the nostril or to the outer skin of the nose through a hole made earlier), (b) bulaki (nose pendent).
- For the neck: (a) Chandra haar, (b) bisaa–haar, (c) jibou–zin–siri etc.
- For the hand: (a) mutha (big ornamented bangle), (b) asaan–suri (small bangle).



Plate 7: (Mutha)

These ornaments are basically made of silver and gold. The women prefer to wear gold jewellery in festivals and occasions. Basically they prefer to wear simple silver jewellery at home. Only a few families have preserved the gold made ornaments and most of the women have only silver ornaments.

(iv) Weaving as Folk Culture and Folk Industry: Weaving is one of the great folk cultures of the Bodo which plays a significant role in their socio–economic and village folk life. Mainly two types of weaving culture are practiced in this particular village. One is the individual handloom in the household and another is professional

handloom for the business purpose. Weaving is a kind of folk industry for the village people which supports in their economic life. The women make their own traditional attire *dokhona* in their handlooms. Besides *dokhona*, they weave *gamsba*, *juwgra*, *aronai*, *shawl* etc. The tools and implements of weaving consist of yarns (acrylic, cotton or silk), spindle, spinning machine, warp drum, or pegs and a loom. Most of these tools are made of bamboo and sometimes wood. The people of the village considered weaving as their part and parcel of the society and most of the houses have their own loom. Though agriculture is their main occupation however the women are mostly fond of weaving and it reflects their higher socio-economic status and artistic and creative skill as well. They believe that their courtyard is incomplete without a loom. The complete loom consists of weaving area and poles for the frames and weaving. Regarding the loom, Endle (1975) stated that “the loom is usually set up on a shady side of the dwelling house, or where that is impracticable, a rude structure of thatch and bamboo work is provided to shield the weaver from the sun.”

Significance of Various Dresses in Different Occasions: The people of this village used to wear different dresses in different occasions and festivals. For example, the *dokhona thaosi* is worn in wedding ceremony and especially it is regarded as the bridal attire. It is known as the pure *dokhona* among them. Likewise in any religious ceremony or during the time of worshipping God or ancestor they preferred to



Plate 8: Handloom

wear plain *dokbona* or *dokbona* without *agor* or design. In religious activities they usually wear white cloth and they do not prefer colourful dresses in this time. During the festival of *Bwisagu* or other seasonal festival they like to wear colourful *dokbona* with colourful and designable *jwmgra*. In their traditional dress *bagrumba* the dancer girls use *aronai* also along with the *jwmgra*. The male also prefer to wear their traditional dress *gamsba* in various traditional festivals of the community though nowadays they wear modern pant shirt, coat, pyjama etc. Simple *gamsba* (without design or colour combination) is generally use as household attire and sometimes it is used as bathing towel as well. In wedding ceremony they usually wear *gamsba* of green or yellow colour. The *aronai* is also used which is woven with different designs and motifs. The groom has to tie round an *aronai* in his head and another one has to hang on his neck or shoulder. This is their traditional attire of marriage ceremony. Depending on the occasion the *aronai* is worn in different ways— 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.

General Observation

It has been observed that the studied Bodos of these two particular villages have distinctive food habits of their own. They practice their traditional knowledge system for processing and preserving the food items. They live on simple economy and basically they depend upon the agriculture and domestication for their livelihood. They try to preserve the jungles and natural water bodies to acquire wild plant and fish from them. They also try to maintain their traditional knowledge system to prepare and preserving the food items. Moreover, they prepare ethnic dishes in any public event like mass gathering, meetings, marriage reception ceremonies etc. in order to persist and spread their traditional food culture.

Besides the indigenous food habits and indigenous methods of food preservation it is found that the women of this region are expert weaver and they show their talent and artistic nature through their weaving skill. They are expert in rearing silkworm as well and it helps in their economic development of the entire family and community of this particular village. Though in present context, they purchase clothes from the market or they like to wear modern clothes but still they are continuing their traditional costumes and they are not willing to give up their traditional weaving culture which reflects their rich and remarkable folk culture and age old folk life as the aboriginal ethnic group of north east India.

Due to the impact of modernization and globalization, their indigenous age-old culture and tradition is getting changed day by day and it has become a threatening to get extinct the rich tradition which is transmitted throughout the generations. Besides, due to the impact of neighbouring communities some new food items have also been introduced to their kitchen. Now the young girls wear the western dresses and even they are not interested to wear their traditional ornaments as well. The people should be responsible to maintain their traditional culture and thus they need to practice their traditional knowledge system in order to preserve their indigenous culture for further generation.

To conclude, it can be said that, the Bodos of this particular region have different multifaceted and distinctive cultures of their own including the beautiful and skilful weaving culture and traditional dress pattern and ornaments along with the delicious ethnic cuisine which make them unique and special among the various communities of the said region.

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