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## THE PATTERNS AND TECHNIQUES OF WEAVING AMONG THE BODO TRIBE OF ASSAM

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### Abstract:

The Boros or Bodo-Kachari are an ethnic and linguistic aboriginal group of the Brahmaputra valley in the Northeast part of India. The Bodos speak the Tibeto-Burman languages. (Gierison, 1967: 1). The Bodos are the largest minority group in Assam and are concentrated in the northern areas of the Brahmaputra river valley. The Bodos consisted of a large number of tribes. The western tribes include- the Chutiyas, the plain Kacharis, Rabhas, Garo, Mech, Koch, Dhimal etc. The eastern tribes include- Dimacha or hill Kachari, Hojai, Lalung, Tippera and Moran. The Bodos were dominant in Assam until 1825. (Singh, 1994:431).

The Bodos were recognised as a plain tribe in the sixth schedule of the Indian Constitution. Udalguri, Chirang, Baksa, Sonitpur, Goalpara, Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Kokrajhar of Assam are considered the centre of the Bodo people. The Bodos living in West Bengal are called Mech. The Bodos used the term Bodosa, meaning the son of Bodo to describe themselves. (Anderson, 1909:753).

Through this paper an attempt is made to look into the origin of the Bodos, their traditional weaving patterns, designs and motifs woven by the Bodo women.

**Keywords:** Weaving Patterns, Techniques, Process, Designs and Motifs.

### Introduction:

According to Dr. Kameswar Brahma the term 'Bodo' has derived from the root word 'Bod' means the name of the land or country lying to the north of Himalayas and in the western belt of China. He says that the inhabitants of Bod country are known as 'Bodosa' which means "children of the Bod country". In course of time they were came to be known as 'Bodo' or 'Boro'.<sup>1</sup>

Rev. Hira Charan Narjinari has mentioned in his book that the term 'Bodo' was discovered by Brian H. Hodgson from the Meches of Darjeeling district in 1846 while he made a research about them.<sup>2</sup> It was he who applied the word as generic term to mean a group of languages. This was confirmed by G.A.Grierson in his Linguistic Survey of India, Vol.III. pt. II, 1903. The Bodo group of people includes- the Meches, the Kacharis, the Tripuris, the Koches, the Garos, the Rajbansis, the Morans, the Mataks, the Burmans, the Dimasas, theabhas, the Chutiyas, the Deuris, the Sonowals, the Dhimals and the Lepchas.<sup>3</sup>

According to Edward Gait the Bodo Kachari's were the aborigines, or the earliest known inhabitants of the Brahmaputra valley.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kameswar Brahma, *A Study in Cultural Heritage of the Bodos*, Chiranjib Brahma, Guwahati, 1998, p.1

<sup>2</sup> Hira Charan Narjinari, *Reassertiveness of the Great Bodos*, David Iswarary, Calcutta, 2000, pp. 4-5.

<sup>3</sup> G.A. Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India, Vol-III, Part-II*, Delhi, 1967, p.1.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Gait, *A History of Assam*, Calcutta, Thacker Spick & Co., 1905, p.5.



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Sidney Endle, describes the Bodos as the people who have square set faces, projecting cheek-bones, with almond-shaped eyes and scanty beard and moustache.<sup>5</sup>

In the former days the Bodos were known by different names such as Dimacha, Kochari, Mech, Mlech, Assora, Danvas, etc;

Gierson used the term Bodo to denote a group of closely allied languages of the Sino-Tibetan family. Thomas Pulloppillil gives a list of eighteen sub-groups of the Bodos. E.g. Bodo, Dimasa, Lalung, Madani, Mech, Rabha, Saraniya, Hojai, Garo, Rajbongshi or Koch, Chutia, Moran, Hajong, Tippera, Mahalia, Dhimal, Solaimai, Phulgaria. He further says that, 'out of these sub-groups, the Chutia, Moran, Soraniya and Koch or Koch Rajbongshi have become Hinduised and do not anymore identify themselves as the Bodos and that of the Bodo or cognate language speakers from Tripura, due to their long isolation from the parental stock have drifted apart and have established their separate identity.'<sup>6</sup>

So, linguistically speaking, the Bodos include a large group of people who speak the Tibeto-Burman languages of the North and East Bengal, Assam and Burma. The group includes the Bodos or Boros of the Brahmaputra Valley, Meches of lower Assam and West Bengal, Rabhas, Garos, Dimasas and Kacharis of Cachar District, Tripas, Lalungs, Sonowals, Hajongs, Mishings, Deuris, Chutias, etc. Therefore, according to J.D. Anderson: The generic term Bodo is now, for convenience applied to all peoples speaking the Tibeto-Burman group of languages. Ethnologically, the Bodo race exists, in a more or less pure state, all over Assam proper, in Koch-Bihar and Northern Bengal, and in the valley of the Surma river, now part of the Eastern Bengal.<sup>7</sup>

According to K.S.Singh- The Bodos are now represented by the Mech in Western Assam, the Bodo in the Central Assam, the Dimasas and Hojai in the North Cachar Hills and the Sonowals and Thengal in the Eastern part of the Brahmaputra valley. In Cachar plain, the Bodos are also known as Barman.<sup>8</sup>

So according to Kameswar Brahma, the term Bodo means land or man. They are described to be the inhabitants of a country called Bod, north of the Himalayas and west of China and were known as Bodo-Ficha or Bodocha or Bodosa. 'Cha' means Children, hence children of the Bod country. In course of time, they came to be known as simply Boddo, Bodo, Boro.<sup>9</sup>

According to Bijaya Laxmi, the meaning of the word 'Kachari', the other name for Bodos is derived from the words *Khoro* and *Hari*. *Khoro* means head and *Hari* means a clan. Hence, the Kachari means the head or the chief of the ruler of the clan. The Bodos built their kingdom in the Brahmaputra valley.<sup>10</sup>

### Objectives of the study:

- 1) To look into the origin of the Bodo tribes and highlight the traditional weaving pattern of the Bodos.
- 2) To explore the traditional designs and motifs and look into the changes over a period.

### Methodology:

The study for this particular paper is based on both the primary and the secondary sources. For collecting primary source field survey has been conducted by selecting few villages under Kokrajhar District in Assam. The collection of primary

<sup>5</sup> Sidney Endle, *The Kacharis*, Delhi, L.P.P, 1997, Reprint, p.1.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Pulloppillil & Jacob Aluckal, *The Bodos: Children of Bhullumbutter*, Guwahati, Spectrum Publications, 1997, pp.1-2.

<sup>7</sup> J.D.Anderson, *Bodo in Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol-II*, Edinburgh, 1909, p.753.

<sup>8</sup> K.S. Singh, *The Scheduled Tribes*, Oxford University Press, 1994, p.431.

<sup>9</sup> Kameswar Brahma, *An Introduction to the Traditional Practices of the Bodos*, Kokrajhar, Onsumoi Library, 1999, p.1.

<sup>10</sup> Bijaya Laxmi Brahma Choudhary, *Bodo (Kacharis) at a Glance*, Bongaigaon, Tribal Cultural Institute, 1993, pp.1-2.



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sources is based on field visit, interactions with the local weavers. The secondary sources are completely based on available books, articles, journals, magazines etc.

### Weaving Patterns and Techniques:

The Bodos were mainly agriculturist. Both the men and women involve in the agricultural activity. Agriculture is the main source of income in the Bodo family. After agriculture the weaving tradition among the Bodo women are very popular. The Bodo Kachari is the largest group among the other plain tribes who gives weaving a special place in the Bodo society for their daily livelihood. Weaving among the Bodos is a way of life. The Bodo women are the expert weavers and very rich in weaving and traditional embroidery. In order to weave loom plays the important role in the entire process of producing cloth. In earlier days the traditional weaving process among the Bodos are not for the commercial purpose, the Bodo women love to weave their own cloths. The Bodo weavers can weave almost all the varieties of cloth, for both the male and female. The Bodos are maintaining their age-old traditional process of weaving from centuries and also the weaving process among the Bodo tribes has been carried down from generation to generation. Weaving is an essential part of the Bodo culture, with each and every household having a loom. Women mainly weave *Dokhna* – a traditional attire for the Bodo women and *Gamcha*- a traditional attire for the Bodo men. The Bodo women also weave Endi and Muga cloth, an indigenous silk forms of Assam.<sup>11</sup>

The traditional dyes or natural dyes or colorants are derived from plants, animals, insects and minerals. Most of the dyes were obtained from parts of plants, leaves, stem, barks, seeds, flowers, roots etc. The dyeing culture has been practiced by the Boros since the time immemorial. The Boros use to cultivate cotton to make yarns and weave and also silk. Spinning and Weaving both were done by the Bodo women itself.<sup>12</sup>

### Process:

The traditional loom used for weaving by the Bodo women were known as ‘Sal’. Sal is the oldest traditional loom used for weaving by the Bodo women. The male member of the family used to make loom with bamboo or else with wood for their females. The looms used for weaving by women were never brought in the markets. The Bodos are even expert in bamboo crafts. (Baro, 2016: 149).

The Sal loom is fitted to four post fixed on the ground. The post is sometimes made of wood or sometimes of bamboo. In the Sal loom we don’t find any shuttle rope or shuttle box. The shuttle in the Sal loom is made of a bamboo in which the weaver passes the shuttle with her hand from one end to the other to weave. The reed act as a comb through which the wrap passes and the reed is made of bamboo. The Sal is a wooden horizontal frame parallel to each other. It also consists of the front bar and the breast bar. The Shedding is carried out by the healds which is connected to treadle and operated on foot as pedal to weft and then the shuttle is passed from one end to the other. The bamboo shuttle contains a bobbin in which a yarn to weft is passed through the yarn fell to form a cloth. (Hazarika and Boro, 2006: 22).

### Designs and Motifs:

The Designs and Motifs woven by the Bodo women are not always same. The Bodo women knows almost all the designs to weave in their cloths. The designs and motifs are carried down from generation to generation since old age. The traditional attire *Dokhna* is of different types one is plain cloth with yellow as a base and red as a border, it is called as ‘*Sala matha*’ and the other one is called ‘*Dokhna Thawsi*’ is a cloth ornamented with flowers and used mostly on

<sup>11</sup> Dr. Jayanta Deva Sarma, *Traditional Textile Designs of Assam*, Guwahati, Mahalaxmi Print & Designs, 2018, p.58.

<sup>12</sup> Rani Kakati Hazarika & Kabita Boro, *Textile designs of the Boros of Northeast India*, Bhopal, Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangralaya, 2006, pp.18-19.



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occasional purposes. They also weave a long scarf called 'Jumgra' with a small border at the bottom. (Brahma, 2015: 20).

The commonly weaved designs in the traditional attire of the Bodo tribes were-

- 1) 'Daothugod' – designs of dove's neck.
- 2) 'Pharou Megon' – pigeon's eye.
- 3) 'Pahar Agor' – hill scenery.
- 4) 'Mwider Agor' – elephant's foot print.
- 5) 'Dingkhia Agor' – fiddlehead fern leaves.

### Conclusion:

Through this paper we could get an information on tribe specific weaving patterns and techniques among the Bodo tribe in Assam. The Bodo tribes have their own distinctive methods of weaving with wonderful spectra of designs. The traditional weaving process has been carried down from generation to generation. Every household in the Bodo tribe knows how to weave, and every house has a loom. It has also been seen that how modernity affected the traditional way of weaving living in the Brahmaputra valley with specific reference to the Kokrajhar district in Assam. And also, the changes it brought in the traditional way of weaving.

The art of dyeing yarn and weaving among the Bodo tribes in a traditional process have faded away. At present the weavers purchase the readymade yarns available in the local markets. The weavers are facing challenges as many machines made *Dokhna* in different designs and colours are made available in the market. But in some aspects the homemade Dokhnas are in demand mostly for the traditional way of marriage ceremony. Because of weaving the economic status of some family are better than before to some extent.

It can be concluded that the advent of modernization is an advantage in the Bodo weaving sector. Though there is increase and new designs in the productivity but it is a fact that the traditional process, techniques, designs and motifs are slowly losing their value.

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