



A STUDY OF BODOS TRADITIONAL PRACTICE OF ATTIRE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO REVIVALISM DUE TO MODERNISM

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Abstract

The study explicates the topic- “A Study of Bodos Traditional Practice of Attire with Special Reference to Revivalism Due to Modernism.” It is important to note that in modern times Bodo people have become aware about how traditional attires are important for the existence of the culture of an ethnic group. This study highlights how Bodos groom varieties of design and clothes themselves.

The study analyses Bodo people’s continuous practice of wearing traditional attires like dokhona, gamsa, indishi, aronai, phali made from cocoons of domestic insects. An ethnic group can be distinguished by their own language and literature likewise, through traditional clothing it can be distinguished properly. The analysis splits on two aspects – Traditional attire practice and Modern attire practice of Bodo people. And, finally it concludes by highlighting the relevance of the traditional and cultural attire practices.

Index terms - Bodo, attire, traditional, modern, revival.

1.0. Introduction

Bodo ethnic group is enriched with profound culture and high civilization. Worldwide, each race or ethnic groups have their own culture and habituation. A race does not subsist without its culture. Various activities by the people of a race reflects their culture and tradition. The word ‘culture’ cannot be described in a narrow passage because the field of culture is indeed very broad. Bodos’ work activities, habits of attire, food habits and various rituals makes their culture rich and broad.

Traditional habits and practices are of utmost importance for the ethnic groups that provides them a distinguished identity of their culture. The way language and literature provides a distinct identity to a race it is also that traditional attire of a race provides an enormous publicity of a race.

As we discuss about the ethnic habituation of traditional attire it is important to note that we cannot overlook the ethnic habituation of rearing silkworms and spinning yarn method. Weaving or rearing silk yarns gives an outstanding looks to the clothes with different kinds of flowery and colored patterns. Art of weaving and implying patterns on the attires reflect the tradition of ethnic art and culture of a specific race. These arts are also exposed by the people through their uses.

Since seventeenth century the Bodo Ethnic group could bring an enormous publicity to their traditional attire art of weaving as well as its habituation and uses. Besides publicity, their traditional attires and habituation got a profound image worldwide. These sources can be traced from the book ‘The Background of Assam’ written by Rajmohan Nath. It says- ‘They reared silk cocoons and spun fine yarns out of them and made lustrous clothes dyed with blue, red and yellow segments. The Bodo word Halali means lustre-meeting. A Chinese traveler to Assam in the seventh century A.D. Hiuen Tsang prized very much a ‘Halali’ coat with Bodo silk and presented to him by the then king of Assam.’

In the Globalization world, although Bodo people have started to wear designed clothes they did not give away to continue the use of traditional attire which includes dokhona (female attire), aaronai phali, Indishi, muga path shi, gamsa (male attire). It doesn’t seem to extinct rather we could anticipate these traditional practices of attire reviving generation to generation.

Relying on the above stated discussions this study emphasizes the question- What were the cultural types of weaving attire in earlier period and present?

2.0. Objectives of the study

The primary objectives of the study are mentioned as follows:

- a. To study traditional and modern Bodo attire.
- b. To study revivalism of traditional attire and explicate the re-use of it in modern period.

3.0. Research Methodology

To study the respective topic a survey was conducted in nearby textile handlooms and put on questionnaires among old folks in several villages from Baksa district, Assam, India. Secondly, it includes readings of various scholars' articles, topic related books and internet encyclopedia.

4.0. Traditional Attire

In the discussion of traditional attire of Bodo people it is important to note that Bodo women with their own hand and tools (saal, gandwi, makhu) prepared various clothes, color patterns, gamsa, aaronai phali, indishi shawl, bed sheets etc. since before the era of availability of factory produced yarns Bodo women had their own domestic textile facilities. They had the practice of owning moth caterpillars and silkworm cocoons from which they could rear silk yarns and extract different types of colors to yarns, and from these they prepared clothes for their daily use.

Bodo attire can be divided into two types: men's attire and women's attire. This two can be described elaborately. If we say men's attire we have "gamsa." Gamsa can be worn by men in different ways. In different rituals and scarf could be tied on the hip or around the neck. During performing hard activities men usually tie that scarf around the hip to get more strength. Sources say that in early period man did not wear any shirt. In order to escape from the cold weather they usually wrapped around shawl on their body. In earlier period young boys used to wear small type of gamsa. And, people did not wear slippers, shoes but aged people of the folk says that earlier people from rich family wore wooden slipper called 'kharam'. In 19th century when industrialization came into existence Bodo people gradually started wearing pant, shirt and rich Bodo people worn dhoti, pajama, slippers, shoes which brought an impact of changes on Bodo people's way of dressing.

So, speaking about women's attire we could mention about dokhona, fali. There are two types of dokhona called langa (long cloth), and ogrong (round-sewed). Langa dokhona is about 9-10 foot-long and 4-4.5 wide breadth. This could be worn by tying on chest and wrapped around the hip. Ogrong dokhona is about 4 foot-long and 2.5 wide or 3 foot-wide. In the past decades Bodo women from Kamrup, Darrang, Sanitpur, and Dhudnoi districts could be found wearing Ogrong dokhona at home as well as going outside. But some older women from these regions still wear ogrong dokhona while visiting guest's home.

Along wearing dokhona Bodo women have the habit of taking various types of fali (long type of scarf). And also earlier women did not wear blouse (loose-fitting garment covering the body from the neck or shoulders or less to the waistline). They themselves groomed dokhona with variety of colors like yellow, green, neon green etc. Among Bodos, out of different clothes and scarf 'aronai' is very famous cloth. Earlier Bodo women offered aronai to their husbands, and young women offered it as a token to love ones. During war Bodo women used to weave aronai in one night in order to tie around the hip and head of the warriors as to praise them before they go to war field. Even in the present day the reflection of these traditions could found in the folk song as given below-

'Danhang-suhang ada Basiram sanmwkhang

Akhra barini akhra bugdao ada akhra bugdao

Hajw khoroni daoha nangnw

Goraia mabar jwgdao'.

The Eri clothes made from eri silk are the most famous among Bodos. Fali (a type of scarf) and shawls can be woven from eri silk. During winter indi clothes (shawl weaved from eri silk) was wrapped around the body in order to get rid from the harsh cold weather. Bodo women were very expert in weaving clothes. Beautiful pictures of nature, flower, birds were designed and woven by Bodo womens' hands. Variety of design, flower patterns (agor) includes namely design of hills, cat's footprint, pigeons' eye, daothu godo, daorai mwkhreb, berry flower, bear-footprint, singri bilai, elephant's footprint, hathorki agor, khangkri khola, gorkha gongbrwi, etc.

Earlier, Bodo people habitat and civilized near hilly areas, near forest, near river bank etc. Bodo people since their civilization in this world they had bonding with nature. It may be the reason why Bodo women's designs, color patterns were collected from natural things and weaved on their clothes.

Again, 'Dokhona thaoshi' (women's special attire) was also a very famous attire among Bodos. Earlier, dokhona thaoshi was worn by bride and bridesmaid on weddings. Dokhona thaoshi were made of red color, pigeon eye designed on it and the design was made of different colours. The bright and colorful dokhona thaoshi also made the bride look gorgeous on her wedding. Because of bride's gorgeous looks by dokhona thaoshi the bride were also teased by their in-laws with a bwisagu song which goes in this way-

"Kham damwi, shifung suwi, borainanwi labwnai

Bajwi gwdana, beseba somaina bajwi gwdana.

Jarwo-mawro dokhona ganna, ganfob jwmfob gohena ganna

Besebangba somaina bajwi gwdana."

But, besides the use of dokhona thaoshi by bride and bridesmaid it was also worn by deudini (priestess) during Kherai festival. Since the earlier period Bodo women besides wearing variety of attire, also did wear ornaments on nose, ears, neck and hands to add more beauty to their looks. This could be clearly seen in match making ceremony, where Bodos used to give bride asan sankha (a type of bangles), earrings such as phulkhuri, khanfasa, etc. including nose ring such as bali sanda, nakhaphul, bwola and Chandra har (necklace) etc. and also bangles like asan sankha, asan muthi, bala asan.

5.0. Modern attire

If we discuss about wearing attires in the present period, I think it's important to state about the 19th century. This period was ruled by British. During those period Bodos were undeveloped and also were very slow at developing track. They were looked down upon by many community or people, some suppressed the Bodos and due to these reasons they started to leave their culture for the sake of social acceptance. Because of these reason and shyness some of them left their own language, culture, religion and transformed themselves into Christian, Islam, etc. Avoiding their own identity they started to take other surnames like Sarania. In places like school, colleges or institutions they shyed away to speak in their own mother tongue or put on their traditional outfit. Instead they spoke in others languages and put on other communities' attires.

Seeing all those circumstances Bodo Saint Kalicharan Brahma was very disheartened and in order to save from those circumstances he founded a way to save the Bodo race. He founded Brahma religion in order to revive Bodo race, culture and to give a new life to Bodo tradition, language, rituals, etc. Brahma religion's Saint Fwrlang Babaji created rules and regulations to worship Brahma religion and he also said, "Along with maintaining particular rules and regulations to revive Bodo culture it was also important to maintain the traditions and practices that Bodo people used to have; it is of utmost importance to keep a race's culture alive." After them, Bodo people slowly became aware and started to revive the old rules and regulations, culture and language whole heartedly. In this way various organizations were formed and those organizations worked to keep alive the Bodo language, literature and culture.

On the other hand during 19th century, after the emerging of industrializations the developed countries in the world tried to invade different areas. Bodo people feared of losing their own language, literature, tradition and identity in the hands of the invaders. So they made each Bodo to be wary of their own race and start to work wholeheartedly for their race.

On the other hand, even in the present time Bodo people still did not forget to put on their traditional outfit: dokhona, gamsa, aronai, indishi. In today's date a large number of the Bodo women still wear their own hand woven clothes. But along with the changing of lifestyle Bodo people also wear other cultures' attire from time to time.

In the ancient period Bodo women had to weave clothes by pushing makhu (one type of tool use for weaving) with their hand. They used to design clothes with utmost care. They reared silk from eri cocoons and obtained fine yarns. Those processes required lots of time and hard work. But now making clothes like gamsa, dokhona, fali, shawl, indishi, muga became easier. Today these traditional clothes are designed in more fine way to look more beautiful. For instance - Blouses are worn along with dokhonas. So blouses are made of similar colour and designed such as of the dokhonas. Moreover, different types of fali (scarf) and indishi are used besides aronai. We could also see people using Indishi fali with different coloured woven designs like they use on dokhonas.

In the present time Bodo man also wears gamsa without a tuck on backside of the hip or with a tuck and besides this they also wear T-shirt, jacket, coat, etc. Nowadays, Bodo man also wears coat made of indishi and aronai. Those designs became possible due to establishment of textile handloom, factory, mills, industry, etc. With those outcomes of factories traditional designed dokhona, pigeon eye designed dokhona, daosa mwkhreb could possibly be made available in large numbers. Due to shortage of time nowadays Bodo women buy and wear dokhona from the market. But if we say Bodo women only wears dokhona made from factory then it would be totally wrong, because in village areas Bodo women still prefer wearing hand-made dokhonas. On the other hand Bodo women forms self-help groups and weave indishi, aronai, gamsa, dokhona, shawl, fali in order to wear as well as to sell in the market for financial assistance.

Today, we see Bodo women mainly wearing langa dokhona, but Ogrong dokhona is mainly worn at home. But older women prefer wearing ogrong dokhona while visiting guests and various places. In olden days, it was necessary for the bride and bridesmaid to wear dokhona thaoshi on weddings. At the present time, also in some regions brides and bridesmaids wear dokhona thaoshi while visiting their parents' home after wedding. But nowadays if we say wearing of dokhona thaoshi is necessary then it would be wrong. Today, we can see brides and bridesmaids wearing dokhona made of paat silk and clothes of different designs and colors. Earlier, the names of design on the clothes were given based on the way of weaving but now it is given based on names of actresses and actors whatever they may wear. Bodo men's gamsa was also given the name "Bodoland gamsa". It is woven applying green and yellow stripes side by side. Nowadays, women wear ornaments on hand, neck, ears, nose along with clothing in order to add shine to their beauty. In spite of that, Bodo women does not forget to wear ancient ornaments. Along with traditional attire men and women wear various types of footwear like slippers, mojaris, pump shoes, etc.

Among Bodos aronai fali is still the most famous attire worldwide. In meetings and most formal or non-formal occasions Bodo people present beautifully designed aronai fali of different colours as a token of respect to guests and are able to publicise their culture. It is proud to say that in today's world along with Bodos, people from different communities also take aronai fali around their neck. Today Bodos' different colored beautiful traditional attires like aronai, fali, indishi, dokhona, gamsa shawl, muga paah etc. are able to take part in International Trade fairs. Besides these, with the help of Indian handloom and textile organizations Bodos could sell their traditional clothes beyond boundaries such as in America and England; which gave an ample boost in publicity of Bodo tradition and also earned respect all over the globe.

Again, Bodo men wear traditional gamsa and wrap aronai fali around their neck on various meetings and programmes which gave a good publicity in their tradition. On the other hand, Bodo women exhibit their colourful traditional attires through different dance forms on various occasions.

In this way Bodo people wear and make use of their traditional attire on various formal and non-formal programmes in institutions such as schools, colleges, offices, etc. The present scenario shows there are no more barriers for uses of traditional attires and practices worldwide. All these were possible due to the constant hard work and motivation of the Bodo people.

6.0. Conclusion

From the analysis of the study we find that the Bodo people's traditional practices of attire are still relevant in modern days. The awareness among the people have given a good result in reviving the culture and traditions. Though it seems like they have stopped some traditional practices but the modern deeds and works of the Bodo people have fruitfully resulted in reviving their culture and traditions. In modern days moreover we find Bodo people using their traditional attire such as the gamsa, dokhona, fali, shawl, indishi, muga, and many.

Study of Bodo attire revivalism has broad significance for the academicians and general public. In the field of literature, it is helpful for the study of academicians in differentiating the Bodo community's identity from other communities because of the intricate and delicate artwork represented by the Bodos in the attires.

The study of this topic also sheds light to how the traditional attire of the Bodo tribe has been evolving since time immemorial and makes aware the specific community as for how the attire is an integral part of identification of tradition and culture.

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