



# An Analytical Study On Handloom And Weaving Culture Of Bodo Women In Kokrajhar District Of BTR, Assam, India.

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## **Abstract:**

*The Bodos are one of the major aboriginal communities that settled early in the Assam in the northeastern part of India. Their language, custom, food habits, culture, religion, faith, dresses, etc. are something different from that of other people live in that state. They are rich in tribal culture. Bodo people in Bodoland Territorial Region (Erstwhile BTC) speak the Bodo (Boro) language which has not at all similar to the Assamese language. This language has Tibeto-Burmese origins and now it has become one of the official languages of Assam. The language has also an important root with the Sino-Tibetan language family which is now recognized as one of the Twenty-two scheduled languages in the Indian constitution. Bodo Sahitya Sabha, being an important literary organization has been working hard to protect and promote the Bodo customs, culture, language, and literature, etc in a wider perspective. As a result, after many struggles and agitations now the language has been recognized as a scheduled language. Bodo is one of the plain tribes living in Assam for a long time with a separate individuality, cultural identity, and linguistic differences. The present study wants to explore the weaving culture to be an integral part of Bodos or women folk of the Bodo society. The womenfolk of the Bodo society are very expert in weaving and contributing to their livelihood very significantly. They engage in weaving their useful clothes in the loom with traditionally beautiful designs. In the present context, their livelihoods depend on weaving clothes and making a significant contribution to their family economy. The beautiful traditional and innovative design clothes of Bodo women of the society are much popular among them and their traditional cultural heritage is also being carried forwarder generation to generation. At present, the weaving activity of the Bodo women has come up with new technology which is an impact on the development of science and technology.*

**Keywords:** Aboriginal community, Official language, Scheduled language, weaving, handloom.

**Introduction:** The handloom sector, a predominantly non-farming activity is a rural-based traditional culture of a large segment of weaver populations. In agrarian Assam, this sector contributes livelihood to a large section of the rural population in Assam. It is one of the largest economic activities, after agriculture, providing a wider opportunity for income and thereby a significant way of direct and indirect employment. Thus, rural handloom weaving provides scope for economic inclusion and self-employment for rural women particularly. Different Tribal

communities like *Boro, Khasi, Rengma, Angami, Nishi, Adi, Kuki, Rava, Garo, Lalung, Sonowal Kachari, Mising, Chutia, Tips, Hajangs*, etc. of the northeastern part of India are found to be engaged in this activity and contributing very crucially in family earnings. As a basic requirement of human being dress is also an important component and this basic requirement makes people engage in such type of activities for fulfilling the needs. Like other community' women the Bodo women also play an important part in handloom and weaving culture to uplift their culture among the societies; the Bodo tribe is also using the different colorful clothes designed in their respective household weavings. Besides catering to the needs of clothing to the community, the handloom sector of the Bodo community is found to be an important contributor in present handloom and weaving market scenarios of the entire Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), as well as some Bodo, concentrated parts of the Assam. The entrepreneurial idea of Bodo women is very positively observable in the weaving products of the regions. The present study is intended to explore the problems and prospects of Bodo rural weavers and their socio-economic status in the Kokrajhar District. The study is based on primary data, collected through a field survey within the Kokrajhar district of Assam by interview method. Besides, primary data some secondary data were also used for the completion of the present study.

### **A brief introduction of Bodo:**

The 'Bodo' is one of the indigenous habitats of northeastern India mainly in the Brahmaputra valley. The Boro also Bodo, both pronounced (Boro) is the largest ethno linguistic group in Assam, India. They are an important part of the greater Bodo- Kachari family of ethnolinguistic groups and scattered across north-eastern India like Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura, West Bengal, etc. They are concentrated mainly in the BTC ( BTR) region of Assam which is in the northwest part of Assam. The Bodos were the prehistoric settlers who are believed to have migrated at least some 3000 years ago. Generally, in a wider sense, Bodo language has important etymological relation with the Sino-Tibetan language family which is now recognized as a scheduled language in India.

The Bodos or Boros constitute a major ethnic group of Assam. Racially they belong to Indo Mongolian stock. However, their language belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese branch of the Sino- Tibetan family of language. They are the largest plains tribe in Assam, settled primarily in the Northern Bank of the Brahmaputra River and scattered in Southern parts of the same, adjoining States and found a few in Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh too. The 1971 census report reveals Bodos being the 8th largest scheduled-tribe (ST) group in India. The language of the community has been recognized as an associate official language in Assam in 1985 and was recently included in the 8th schedule of the constitution of India. The present study explores the basic problems and prospects of Bodo rural-based women weavers living in the Kokrajhar district in Assam. At present, the majority of Bodo people are found in BTR (Bodoland Territorial Region) which is a territorial privilege under the Assam state of India established according to the Memorandum of Settlement on February 10, 2003, under the sixth schedule of the Constitution of India.

### **Objectives of the study:**

The objectives of the present study are formulated as under:

- ❖ To explore the problems and prospects of Bodo rural women handloom weavers in the Kokrajhar district.
- ❖ To highlight the socio-economic status of Bodo rural women handloom weavers in Kokrajhar district.
- ❖ To suggest the remedial measures to overcome the problems.

### **III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

In connection with the present study, an extensive literature review was conducted to be familiar with the existing literature related to the study. Some of these may be summarized as under–

Brahma, K (1992) has mentioned the Bodo traditional dresses and their affinity with handloom and weaving. The author also attempted to trace out and bring to light the traditional customs and weaving style of the Bodos.

Baroah, B K (2003) has tried to highlight the textile materials, designs, cotton, silk, eri and muga cocoons, mulberry silkworm, and Assamese's famous muga Mejangkari (*Tetranthera polyantha*) in his book "A Cultural History of Assam" which was published by Bina Library, in 2003 (Fourth Edition). This book consists of the cultural history of Assam of an early period.

Narzi, B (2003) explores that Bodos culture, religion, and social system have a deep-rooted relationship with weaving and handloom. Especially, the book deals with the origin of the Mongoloids in the Indian background and he has tried to express his findings based on actual fieldwork as regards origin, socio-cultural, dresses, and ornaments among the Bodos.

Swargiary, B et. al(2017) analyses that women handloom weavers in Bodo society play a significant role in earning their livelihood by their handloom and weaving products as in the study it was found that if a woman is not able to do weaving works she may not be chosen for marriage. In the paper, it was observed that almost all women learn the technology of handloom and weaving as it is considered an important part of the culture.

**Methods and Methodology:** The present study was carried out to explore the problems and prospects of Bodo rural women's handloom weavers in the Kokrajhar district. The interview method was adopted for primary data collection from the functional handloom weavers in an individual manner. The present study is also based on some secondary data which are found available in form of published articles, journals, magazines, Govt. handloom handbooks, and private documents.

### The Study Site :

The present study site undertaken is the Kokrajhar district of Bodoland Territorial Region( BTR) of Assam. The district is the highest Bodo concentration and the headquarters of BTR is purposively selected as a study site to reflect and represent the whole rural-based Bodo women weavers in BTR, Assam. This district is surrounded by West Bengal to the west side, Bhutan to the north side, Dhubri district to the south side, and Chirang district to the east side. Kokrajhar district being an administrative district in Bodoland Territorial Region occupies an area of 3,169.22 km<sup>2</sup> (1,223.64 sq mi). It has two civil sub-divisions namely Parbatjhora and Gossaigaon and five revenue circles namely Kokrajhar, Dotma, Bhawraguri, Gossaigaon, and Bagribari. Kokrajhar was a part of undivided Gowalpara which came to exist as a separate district on 1<sup>st</sup> July in 1983. It is a gateway to the Seven Sister States of India.

### Bodo women handloom weavers:

Bodo handloom weavers are found to be mainly in the remote village areas that make different products in their traditional loom. Females are found to have engaged in taking a major role in this sector. They possess expert knowledge in handloom and weaving in Bodo society and thereby contributing to the economy of their family. They can make different abstract designs and figures of animals, hills, birds, creepers, flowers, diamond motifs, celestial phenomena, etc. which are used in weaving by Bodo weaver that carry a special meaning and cultural significance. As per National Handloom Census-2013, in Assam; out of a total of 14,83,864 weavers, females constitute almost 14,68,453 weavers and males constitute only 15,411 weavers (Source: Third National Handloom Census-2013).

### Art of weaving and Bodo women:

For the weaving cloths, the Bodo women first spin the *Eri* cocoon and made the yarn from the *Eri* cocoon which is a traditional method of Bodo women and it is a very adorable process. The important tools used in this technology are *Thaokri*, *Fitwb gon*( cocoon stick), *Khurwi*(water pot), *Fomfla/Somfla*, etc. and all the essential devices required for this work are acquired and made by the weavers themselves. After spinning the Eri cocoon the Bodo women making different colours and weave a variety of cloths. e. g. Black, Green, Red, and Yellow are the most popular colour for Bodo women. The Bodo women making different colour from the fruits, trees, etc. e.g. they make black colour from a mixture of *Silikha* (myrobolan) and *Thaisri*(hog fruit), for the Yellow colour the Bodo women mixing skin of Jackfruit or Kernel of Jackfruit and *Deoa*(a kind of tree jackfruit family/ Artocarpus). After



making the different colours the weavers dry it under Sun and they weave beautiful cloths of various designs and colours.. But in the study it is found that in the present context, the traditional technique/method are not observed among them on the contrary they weave their cloths from the silkworm yarn acquired from the local market. As it is observed that the Bodo weavers adopt natural design and design inspired from the skin colours of the animals in the cloths so the names of the design also reflect the same like *Agor bwrai*(old design), *Hajw agor*(Hills design), *Thaigir bibar*, *Maoji agan*(footprint of cat), *Farwo magon*(eye of fowl), *Mufur Afa*, *Daorai mwkreb*, and *Lao begor*. The Bodo women are very fond of colourful traditional dresses so most of the cloths are designed with colourful fabrication to attract the women customers for the rapid growth of their entrepreneurial opportunity.

### **The economic opportunity of weaving and Bodo women:**

In the interview with some 60 (sixty) functional weavers of Dotma, Bhaoraguri , Gossaigaon , Kokrajhar, and Tipkai area where it is found that Bodo women weavers are engaged in contributing not only to their family needs but also in the economic activities and contributing tremendously in their family income. The respondents also have recorded their responses on women empowerment as they are now taking some important household decisions because of their economic independence and educational attainment. Although agriculture is the main means of income in the Bodo society it is also found that handloom and weaving also play a major role in their economy as the Bodo women weavers get exposure to their product in the national and international market because of the competitive quality product. With the expansion of education and technology, the women entrepreneur in handloom and weaving have been observed to grow the weaving industry faster to be at a new height. The handloom and weaving industry in Kokrajhar district also not lagging in this sector as the women weavers have got a vibrant growth in their handloom and weaving products after the formation of the BTAD and now BTR. After the BTAD accord adequate financial support was made available for training the Bodo women weavers to cope up with the latest technology in the weaving sector which has tremendously helped the industry to grow faster. The financial assistance was sanctioned for marginal Bodo women weavers in the form of IBS and that also has made them more supportive and viable for the handloom industry. The Bodo women not only co-operate in agricultural and allied activities but they also busy themselves in different economic activities like selling fruits and vegetables, running tea stalls, weaving, and handloom, etc. Weaving is the most peculiar and essential activity of Bodo women which has been contributing tremendously to their family economy and thereby in nation-building. In the early period, the Bodo women were busy weaving only to cater to their family needs but at present, they are found to be more active in contributing to uplifting the economic conditions of their family. Once they access the market, they have now realized that the handloom and weaving products have a high potentiality of commercial value and a good source of income. As the Bodo women have expertise in the art, they have now modified it to suit the needs of different classes of customers and users. The new products include **shirting, caps, Necktie, woolen shawl, towel, Aronai**, etc. with the innovative and latest design, variety, and colours. In the process, the Bodo women complete the entire works right from purchasing raw materials to selling the finished products with a little support from the male members of their family. Besides the handloom and weaving works the Bodo women are found equally active in their day-to-day normal household chores. At present, the weaving of the cloths of Bodo women has earned a high demand in the market. The "**Aronai**" weaving by the Bodo women is the most popular product at the national level too. Weaving, not only become Bodo women's domestic handworks but also today's commercial product being popularized at the national and international level. It is also observed that the Bodo women handloom and weaving industry has become more relevant in the market by being engaged in SHGs with the aid and assistance sanctioned by the government for infrastructure support in modern technology.

### **Problems faced by the weavers:**

The numerous problems are associated with the handloom and weaving culture like right from production up to the sale of the finished products. Certain problems in this respect are supply of raw materials, obsolete traditional loom, health problems (eye problems, back pain, others), financial incentives, etc. are occurred during the production process. In the case of selling the product lack of availability of sufficient consumers is the significant factor. These problems arise because of the other subsidiary problems which include lack of advertising, lack of awareness among consumers regarding product features, constant competition, limited cultural products, lack of proper exhibition, Expo cum sale programs, etc. Other factors include lack of organized marketing system, less public involvement, lack of e-commerce facility, dilemma of govt. involvement, etc. So, required remedial measures should be provided in overcoming such drawbacks.

### **Limitations of the study:**

- The present study is confined only to a single Bodo community ignoring the other tribal communities engaged in handloom and weaving activities.
- The analyses and observations may vary with other districts or states.

### Suggestions and recommendations:

For sustaining and advancement of the handloom weaving markets along with the harmony of weaver communities, the following suggestions and recommendations can be provided:-

- The handloom products are found to get less exposure in national markets due to a lack of varieties suitable for all types of consumers beyond Bodo cultural needs. The handloom entrepreneur should emphasize market survey and produce the items having high demand both in the local and national market.
- The women weavers should work on advertisement and techniques required for promoting their products on a large scale so that the products information are circulated in a wider way.
- Since the weaver have no organized form of marketing system of their own, they are often forced to sell their products in local markets with a very low profit margin as they cannot hold their sale either because of their urgent need of cash to purchase the raw materials. So, proper marketing organizations should be implemented based on the supply of products, price fixation, stock of products, etc.
- The Bodo handloom weavers should participate in the exhibition, expo , *mela*, etc. organized by different organizations to get exposure of their products to new consumers.
- In this globalized world E-Commerce plays a vital role in every aspect of marketing. Marketing through online mode should be implemented in the region. Training should be imparted to the women weavers to enhance the skills of a weaver in manufacturing and marketing aspects to cope up with the changing business scenario.
- Skill and design development exercises should also be conducted for the weavers which will help them to understand and develop a new product range as well as improve their design sensibility.
- There should be an adequate medical facility provided for the weaver section for minimization of their health problems during the loom period.
- Innovative and faster technical weaving process and methods to increase the efficiency of the weaver as well as loom will make handloom more competitive and profitable.
- Proper government schemes should be implemented in the weaver section to appreciate them in producing more products.
- In competitive market conditions, not only the illiterate should participate but also the literate section should also be involved.
- Handloom and weaving industry should be protected from the impact of migration of marginalized sections of people as there is an increase of rural to urban migration.
- Exporting of handloom products to other districts as well as states should be given priority.
- It is also observed that educated women are found to be less interested in handloom and weaving and that has an adverse effect in the industry as in prevailing competitive market condition, not only illiterate should be encouraged to participate but also literate women are to be encouraged to be engaged to boost the industry.
- Though the increase in migration to urban areas or town areas, handloom practice should not be ignored.
- Exporting of handloom products to other districts as well as states should be given priority.

### Conclusions:

The weaving art of Bodo women is observed in their culture and society from time immemorial. So there is no exact duration and process through which we can claim that the handloom and weaving culture has traveled to the community. From different sources, it is stated that with the passage of time and demand of the situation the art has been adopted in their culture gradually. Every women folk of Bodo society is expected to be familiar with techniques of handloom and weaving art. So, those who are not familiar with this are considered inefficient and called in their society '*Aoluri*'. In Bodo literature traditionally phrase -"Don't cry for the loss of crops in a year, cry if women don't know how to work."

The women of the Bodo society have been found adopting certain traditional economic activities in a business manner so their economic status is bound to get improved. Besides, weaving is accepted to be one of the important sources of earning their livelihood with the new technology and innovative techniques that are found to be adopted in

the handloom and weaving culture by the Bodo women in the Kokrajhar district. The Bodo women have started the weaving activities in a commercial manner and in addition to these, a very few of them have come forward to open their shops in market areas to attract more customers. To assess the economic role of Bodo women in a changing perspective the Bodo women have adopted these avenues of income generation so that women's dependency factor can be reduced and at the same time financial solvency can be brought for the whole family. The present paper has found that with the expansion of their handloom and weaving business the economic dependency has also decreased to a certain level and women empowerment is observed in a very substantial manner. To boost the cottage industry the adequate financial and technical training support from the government is the need of the hour to generate economic opportunity for the women entrepreneur in the area.

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