



# THE TRADITIONAL DANCES OF THE BODOS AND IT'S IDENTITY

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## ABSTRACT:

The traditional dance of the Bodos occupied a tremendous role in the Bodo society. In connection with the dance, dresses and ornaments of the Bodos are the symbol of their traditional art and culture in the Bodo society. Most of the tribes belonging to the Mongolian races in the North Eastern Region of India deserve the same character of dresses and ornaments. Their arts of such dresses and ornaments are intrinsic reflections of the nature within which they are shaped and moulded. They weave different kinds of clothes like Dokhna women dress for covering the whole Body Jwmgra (Chadar or orna or scarf of women), Gomsha clothe for covering the lower part of the body by man. Traditionally Bodo menfolk used to wear male garment called Gamsha to cover the body from waist down to the knee. Previously Bodo old man used to wear wooden footwear known as Khorom. There was no use of shirt in the past days. They only used a type of clothe known as Jwmgra made of Eri trade and a small cloth on the shoulder during the winter and summer season respectively. But now a days they put on modern dresses available in the market.

**Keywords:** Tremendous, Dokhna, Jwmgra, Gamsha, Khorom.

## OBJECTIVE:

The objective of the study is to highlight and study the traditional dance of the Bodos. Dance is occupied the most important place in Bodo society. The main purpose of dance is to highlight the culture and identity of the Bodo community in the world. With the sole objective of understanding the transition of traditional dresses has been developed in this paper.

## METHODOLOGY:

The methodology of the study is obviously inter-disciplinary method with the combination of historical sources and field work. Both primary and secondary sources are consulted. Accordingly, the work is primarily based on field investigation for collecting first hand data as well as also based on all the literary texts. The technique of anthropological, data collection, participants, observation,

interview methods, both structure and non-structure, case study, genealogical methods are adopted. The collected data have been analyzed both quantitatively and the qualitatively whenever necessary.

## INTRODUCTION:

The earlier inhabitants of Assam were probably the various sub branches of great Tibeto-Barman group of Indo-Chinese family, whose core is said to have been along the upper courses of Yangtse-Kiang and Hawang-Ho. This sub branches include the population elements of the Bodo or the Plain Kocharis, Chutia, Dimasa, Hill Kochari, Mech, Rabha, Garos, Miris, Abors, Mishimis, Moran, Borahi and other similar population elements in the states. They are unevenly distributed over Assam. Bodos, Mech and Rabhas are majority in Kokrajhar, Goalpara Dhubri, and Northern part of Kamrup District of Assam.<sup>1</sup> (Bhattacharya, 1997: p. 16.)

The Bodos are a race of Mongolian people who are described to be the inhabitants of a country, North of Himalaya and west of the china. This land is known as the Bod. The Bod is supposed to mean a homeland. The inhabitants of Bod country were known as the Bodo-Ficha or Bodocha or Bodosa (Bodo means land and Ficha or cha means children, hence children of the Bodo country. In course of time, they came to be known as simply *Boddo-Bodo-Boro*.<sup>2</sup> (Singh, 1986: p. 48.)

The Bodos indigenous includes a large group of people who are the speakers of the Tibeto- Barman Language family mostly inhabitants of the North Bengal, Assam and Burma. They are the Bodos or Boros of the Brahmaputra valley, Meches of lower Assam and west Bengal, Rabhas, Garos, Dimasa and Kocharis of Cachar district, Trpura, Lalung, Sonowals Hajangs, Mishings, Deuris, Moran, Chutia and other.<sup>3</sup> (Endle, 1911: p. 3.)

The Bodos constitute a very important section of different group and races in Assam with their distinct culture and linguistic traits. The Bodos are also identified as the Kiratas. From the primitive age to modern traditional dresses and ornaments has played a very important role in moulding the socio-cultural life of the Bodo people. Linguistically, the Bodo language belongs to Sino-Tibetans language family. They are characteristically Mongoloids in appearances such as the strong chick bones, slit eye, slight growth of hair in the body and scant beard with distinct food habits and life style.<sup>4</sup> (Chatterji, 2007: pp. 23-24)

The Boros are one of the composite parts of the greater Assamese society and form a major tribe of Assam. Suniti Kr. Chatterjee writes the Bodos who spread over the whole Brahmaputra valley and North Bengal as well as East Bengal forming a solid block in eastern India and they form one of the main bases of the present day of population tract. Judging from the wide range extension of their culture, the Bodos appear to have settled over the entire Brahmaputra valley and extended into North Bengal.

The Bodos also known as Boro is one of the Major communities of Assam belonging to Indo-Mongoloid ethnic group of Tibeto-Barman language family. The generic name of Bodo was first given by Hudgson to this group of languages. The Mech or the kocharies call themselves as Bodo or Boro. The neighbouring Assamese speakers call these people and their speech as kochari or Kosari.

Bodo who lived in Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal are known to their neighbours as Mech. This word is probably a corruption of the Sanskrit word Mlechcha.

The Bodos have their own language and literature, which are known as Boro language and literature. The women still wear their traditional dress known as *Dokhna*, *Gamacha*, *Jwmgra Phali* and *Aronai* and *Sadri*. They have their own culture, tradition, belief and customs.<sup>5</sup> (Brahma, 2015: pp. 20-21.)

#### ANYLYSIS:

#### CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE BODOS:

The Bodo people have affluent cultural inheritance since early civilization. The colourful life style makes the Bodo culture attraction. The Bodo culture and tradition are the manuscript of Bodo nature, habits, character and daily lifestyle. A Community cannot be expressed themselves without a language and culture. But it is great regret that Bodo have rich cultural heritage such as dress, ornaments, dances and food habits etc. Could not be expresses proportionately in both inside and outside of the state. Bodos are losing their own identity due to cultural globalization.

The Bodo people weave traditional hand-woven dresses such as *Dokhna*, *Sadri*, *Gamcha*, and *Aronai*, Bodo women are bestowed with expertise in weaving their own traditional dresses. Bodo women wear *Dokhna* and *Sadri*, while men wear *Gamcha* and *Aronai*. The people are though not much fond of a heavy ornament but women wear light ornaments mostly necklace, bracelets, ear ring and nose ring made of gold and silver. Bodo men do not use any kind of ornaments but some of the traditional Bodo societies do.

The study of human being involves the study of cultures. It records the delicate contour of human emotions. There is no other better way of expressing one's own culture. It includes art, music, dress, architecture, literature, science & technology, philosophy, religion, and a million of things. The word culture is interictally related to all the branches of knowledge. In our day-to-day life also we speak about it, like family culture, study culture devotional culture, food culture, religious culture and spiritual culture etc., but the present study intends to deal with the culture relating to social life that throws light on the traditional dresses and ornaments of the Bodos.

The Bodo Kocharis have rich cultural heritage since early civilization. The colourful life style makes the Bodo culture charming. The Bodo culture is the manuscript of Bodo nature, habits, character and daily life style. A community cannot be expressed themselves without their language and culture. But it is great regret that though Bodos have rich cultural heritage such as dress, ornaments dance and food habits etc. they could not express proportionately in both inside and outside of the state. Bodos are losing their own identity due to cultural globalization.

The traditional Bodo culture which was introvert in nature came under external impact through historical contact and cultural domination of the great Indian tradition and inclined towards common cultural consciousness that has been formed among the Hindus of the sub-continent.

The process of conversion into different cultures of the Indians like dresses, ornaments food habits westernization etc. brought many reforms in the traditional Bodo society. Changes were brought in economic organization, rites ritual and customs of the Bodos. These changes and reforms have brought upward social mobility among the Bodos

The interlacement of two series of threads, warp and weft is termed as weaving by a Bodo woman and it creates beautiful ornamental fabrics on looms applying their own techniques and design. Since time immemorial this craft has been practiced by Bodo woman meeting the necessities of herself and her family members. The art of weaving is inherited from generation to generation and it plays an important role in the socio-economic life of the Bodo people.

The dresses of Bodo women wear are a distinguishable feature of Bodo culture. A man can identify a Bodo women folk seeing dresses. Bodo women wears her *Dokhna* or *Dokhona* covering the body from the chest down to the ankle. Its length and breadth are made in such a way that it can be tied one round at a time in the waist. *Dokhna* is made of varied colours and *Agor* or *Phul*. The *Dokhna* without *Agor* or *Phul* is called *Salamatha* or *Matha Dokhna Thaosi* (pure *Dokhona*) is generally used as bridal attire, *Bwirathi* (women receptionist of bride and bridegroom in Bodo marriage).

Now-a-days Bodo women wear blouse to cover her upper bosom and adorns with *Jwmgra* (scarf) on it. The *Jwmgra* cover the upper portion of the body. Bodo women wear various colours of scarf with full of *Agor* (handy work designs) beautiful themselves.

A species of various types of *Agor* (handy work designs which bloom in the art of Bodo women are given below:

1. *Phareo Megon* (pigeon eye)
2. *Daorai Mwxhreb* (winkle of peacock)
3. *Phul Mwbla* (verities of bloomed flowers)
4. *Daosa Mwxhreb* (winkle of chicken)
5. *Dingkhia Mohor* (A design representing fern of Dhekia)
6. *Gangu Godo* (A design representing the shape of a kind of insect called gangu)
7. *Singri Bibar* (A design representing the singri bibar)
8. *Bwigri Bibar* (A design representing the flowers of plum)
9. *Gongar Thaiship* (A design representing the fruit of Nuni tree)
10. *Thaigir Bibar* (A design representing Thaigir plant)
11. *Gondola Agor* (A design representing the insect of Gandola (dragonfly))
12. *Khusli Denta* (A design representing the Spoon)
13. *Laosong Agor* (A design invented by a Bodo girl called Laosong)
14. *Mokhordoma Agor* (A design representing a litigation or zig zag)

15. *Bandhuras Agor* (A design first crafted by Bandhuras Kochari)
16. *Agor Gidit* (A design representing Diamond shape)
17. *Gorkha Gongbrwi Agor* (A design representing twill)
18. *Hajw Agor* (A design of Hills)
19. *Baksu Agor* (A design like a Box)

The favourite colours of the Bodos are generally *Gwmw* (Yellow), *Gwthang* (Green), and *Bathogang* (Colour of parrot's feathers). So Bodos most popularly used words *Gwmw-Gwthang-Bathaogang* represents it. Now-a-days they do not want to stick to old styles and fashion. And again, various types of treads or yarns for *Dokhna* are used that suited for their use.<sup>6</sup> (Narzi, 2006: p. 138)

The Bodo people weave traditional hand-woven dresses such as *Dokhna*, *Sadri*, *Gamcha* and *Aronai*. Bodo women are bestowed with expertise in weaving their own traditional dresses. Bodo women wear *Dokhna* and Sadri men wear *Gamcha* and *Aronai*. But Changes have shown their impact on all sphere of Bodo Traditional life from dress to food and customs to religion. Traditional dresses and ornaments of the Bodos are symbol of creativity and identity. They are unique in designs, style and attractiveness. Bodo have rich in cultural heritage since early civilization. The unique dress and ornaments are integral part of Bodo culture. These traditional dresses and ornaments of the Bodos are convey the culture and tradition from one generation to next generation. Bodo women are expert in rearing the *Endhi Emhou* and Muga Latha. Bodo women weaves various kinds cloths like *Dokhna*, *Jwmgra*, *Aronai Gamsha* etc. Bodo women wear *Dokhna* in varied colour and *Agors* (deigns) and men wear *Gamasha* and *Aronai*. The arts of weaving are inherited from generation to generation and it also plays an important role in socio-economic life of the Bodo people. Bodo weavers are charmed by the scenic beauty of the nature and expresses their pleasure and bliss by setting *Agors* (designs) of leaves, flowers, trees and hills etc. such dress and ornaments are intrinsic reflections of nature within which are shaped and moulded. The women are expert in weaving activities like *Ishan* (loom). Bodo used varied types of ornaments for nose, ears, neck and hands etc. they wore *Phulkhuri*, *Japkhiring*, *Dul Boula*, etc. This traditional attire is use by specific individual for specific occasion.

#### **DRESS USES IN BODO DANCE:**

Dance is called *Mwchanai* by the Bodos. The word *Mwchanai* is composed of word e.g. *Mwdwm* + *Chanai*= *Mwchanai* *Mwdwm* means Body and *Chanai* means to be twisted. Thus, the word *Mwchanai* means the twisting of body in bewitching motions and waves. Bodo dances are exceptional and scientifically set to characteristics chorographical forms and rhythmic patterns. The Bodo dances are inherited from one generation to another since immemorial.

- a) *Haba Janai* Dance: This class of dance is the Bodo marriage making dance. *Haba* means marriage or work while *Janai* means to eat to be. So, the word *Habajanai Mwchanai* bears the meaning of Bodo dances associated with marriage making ceremony. This class of

dance is consisted of i) *Habajanai* ii) *Bwirathi Dor Khengnai* iii) *Bwirathi Kaojrum Chanai* iv) *Barlanpha Mwchanai* and v) *Bangsial* or *Sifung Dariya Mwchanai*. *Haba Janai Mwchanai* is a natural talent of the Bodo people acquired from the nature who plays an important role in socio-cultural life of the Bodos.

- b) *Bagurumba* Dance: It is the most beautiful and attractive dance of the Bodos culture and associated with merry making and gossips exclusively by the fair sex. Taking both the ends of the hand-woven colourful scarf called *Rege-Regang* spread around the neck in their hands, the dancers move like flightily butterflies. The dancer's steps forward with alternate foot and the dance begins in horizontal lines, takes a circular pattern with rising tempo.

Dresses

- a) *Gwmw Gabni Dokhna* with *Agor Gubwi* (yellow colour of *Dokhna* with embroidery).
- c) *Gwja Gabni Fahar Agor Gwnang Fasra* (Red colour scarf with hill embroidery)
- d) *Gwja Gabni* blouse (Red colour blouse)
- e) Two *Aronai* (neck tie but wider and length)
- f) *Khwmayao khithlang Khatobnai* (hair remain free and looms)
- g) *Kwmayao Kheru* (Ear ring)
- h) *Bwirathi Goi Rannai Mwsanai*

In Bodo society there is a dance that performed by the *Bwirathi* distributing the betel nut during the wedding ceremony is called dance. Now-a-days this dance is performed on the stage.

b) *Raijw Janai Mwsanai*

The ways of daily social life of the Bodos are the root causes of these types of dance. *Raijw* means society, the state or country, the people and *Janai* means "to eat' to be" and therefore *Raijw Janai Mwsanai* means a type of Bodo dance which is based upon their daily life style.

**DRESSES AND ORNAMENTS:**

1. *Gwmw Gabni Dokhna* (yellow colour of Dokhna).
2. *Gwja Gabni* blouse (Red colour Blouse)
3. *Gangnwi Aronai Gwthang Gabni Aronai* (Green colour *Aronai* and *Gwja Gabni Aronai* (Red colour *Aronai*)
4. *Gwja Gabni Pwtha* (Red colour tip)
5. *Gwdwnayao Jinjiri* (Neck-Chain)
6. *Kwmayao Kheru* (Ear ring)
7. *Akhayao Ashan* (Hand Bangles)
8. *Gongse Jekhai*

9. *Gongse Khobai* (Traditional fishing basket of ornament)

## USE OF ORNAMENTS

Bodo used varied types of ornaments for nose, ears, neck and hands. They wore or/and stil wear *Phulkhuri*, *Japkhiring*, *Dul*, *Boula*, ( For upper ear), *Phuti* (A design of flower attached to earlobe) in ear.

The ornament of the nose is *Nakhaphul* (A hole is made on the skin of upper side of the nose for holding the *Nakhapul*. *Nolot* (Holding from the middle of two nostrils), *Buluki* (Nose pendent) etc.

Bodo women wear ornaments in the neck also. The popular ornaments are:

1. Chandra Har (A heavy neckless)
2. Bisa Har (A Neckless).
3. Thanka Siri (A round neck ornament).

## CONCLUSION:

The popular ornaments of the hands are Ashan or bangles both big or small. Small bangle is called *Ashan Suri* and big bangle is called *Ashan Shankha*. The dresses and ornaments of the Bodo men and women have changed except *Dokhna* and *Chadar* or *Orna* of Women. All Bodo women still put on *Dokhna* and *Jwmgra* or Orna to symbolized their culture. The ornaments of ear, nose, neck, hair style is now modified with modern designed accessories. Now-a-days they do not want to stick to old styles and fashions.

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