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## Traditional Skills of Bodo Women: A Discussion

**Manika Goyary**

Assistant Professor

Deptt. of Bodo

Girls' College, Kokrajhar

Kokrajhar, Assam, India

### Abstract:

Bodos are the indigenous tribe of Assam in the North Eastern part of India. With its own unique language, religion, culture and customs and beliefs, the Bodos settled on the bank of the Brahmaputra and lived in the society since the time immemorial. Bodo society is a patriarchal society. But, though it is a patriarchal society, there cannot be witnessed a large differentiation between men and women. This is because Bodo women have contributed equally to men in building the society from the past. For this, women in Bodo society are considered as the goddess of wealth. Bodo women have been expertise since the early settlement in various skills like – family building, weaving, cultivation, songs and dances, worship, celebrations, animal rearing, maintenance of cleanliness, hospitality, fishing, collecting vegetables, preparing recipes and dishes etc. These traditional skills of Bodo women have helped immensely to enrich and preserve the Bodo society, its culture and customs throughout the world. Therefore, it is necessary to take a look and discuss on the traditional skills of Bodo women and its influence in the Bodo society. So, this research study aims to discuss on the traditional skills of Bodo women and its influence on the society.

**Keywords:** Women, Bodo, Social life, Traditional, Skill, Research

### 1.0 Introduction

The Bodos are the Indigenous People of Assam in the North eastern India. The Bodos with its own unique language, religion, culture and customs settled and lived forming societies in Assam on the bank of Brahmaputra since the time immemorial. The Bodo society is a patriarchal society. Therefore the father or the eldest male member of the family is considered to be the head of the family in the Bodo society. But, though the father is the head of the family, most of the household chores and responsibilities are also being born by women. This can be witnessed by observing through the various duties and role taken by women in household maintenance since the past till today. Women can be characterised as soft, pure, hardworking, wise, loving and caring. From the dawn to dusk, they get stick up to with their household chores. They play significant roles in leading their family, and get engage in activities like weaving traditional attires, plantation and agriculture, cooking, cleaning, receiving guests, singing, dancing, worshipping, celebrating festivals, rearing domestic animals, fishing etc. in all of which the Bodo women are well

expertise since time immemorial. This knowledge and skills of traditional arts by Bodo women has, along with the maintenance of Bodos' family has brought immense contribution in the preservation and promotion of culture and customs of the society throughout the world. Since women played immense role in maintenance of the family, they are considered as the goddess of wealth in the Bodo society.

### 1.1 Objectives

1. To study on knowledge of traditional arts of Bodo women.
2. To discuss about the contribution of the knowledge of traditional arts of Bodo women in upbringing of oneself, their families and the culture and customary laws of the society.

### 1.2 Methodology

In this research study, the primary source has been collected from experienced women of Bodo society through the interview method, and as a secondary sources, it has been collected from various books and Journals.

### 2.0 Discussion

For the better study on the topic, some of the major traditional skills that are performed by Bodo women are mentioned and discussed.

#### 2.1 Child Birth

Woman is the base of creation. Giving birth to a child is the nature of every married woman which is gifted since the time of her birth. This law of creation has been practised by Bodo women since the past. The illiterate and not able to felt the impact of science, the Bodo women had helped each other without the presence of physician in using their knowledge of traditional methods in giving birth to their children, bringing them up and making them grow. During the time of child birth, the elderly women, expert in the traditional method stay and assist in the process of childbirth. During the process, the mother who is going to give birth should let her hair loose and using her full strength and energy, should stay kneeling down, holding and supported by Ual (wooden tool used for grinding rice). The elderly women will touch the mother's loosen hair and keeps on adjusting it softly. Soon after the baby is born, the women will wash the infant and the mother with mild hot water and sprinkles holy water on them. The family then invites the women who helped in the process for meal after the seventh day of the birth, which is called "Dwi Sarnai" by the Bodos.

#### 2.2 Agriculture

The Bodo people have been maintaining their livelihood, dependent on Agriculture since the ancient days. Though, basically, they have cultivated vegetables, herbs, fruits, plants and trees, rice cultivation is noteworthy. In the rice cultivation, the Bodo women have been fully involved along with men since ancient times. All the traditional procedures and rites that are related to the

cultivation of rice like seeding the rice seeds, uprooting of the saplings, transplantation, construction of storehouse for rice, receiving of goddess of wealth (ritual) etc. are not new things and need not be taught for Bodo women. Bodo women have the traditional knowledge and are well expertise in these spheres. Apart from this rice cultivation, they are also well expert in cultivation of necessary food items or herbs and vegetables like pumpkin, cucumber, ginger, chilly, turmeric and many other green vegetables and herbs etc. which are cultivated to their nearby yards by cleaning some areas and making the mud soft and fertile with spade without waiting and looking forward for their men. With the help of this traditional knowledge, the Bodo women used to play a major role in making their family financially sound.

### 2.3 Weaving

One of the traditional knowledge of the Bodo women is weaving or handloom. Since time immemorial, the Bodo women have been well expert in weaving their traditional attires with the help of traditional technique or art. Since the clothes that would be used in their household should be weaved by their own, so a girl who doesn't have the knowledge of weaving were considered Akuji and no one would marry her. Therefore once a girl grew up to her age of learning, mother would start teaching her or giving her the knowledge of weaving. Moreover, the young girls would have the eagerness for weaving. That is why from their early period, small girls used to play the game of weaving and try to portray their philosophical ideas on weaving. Among the clothes woven by Bodo women are - Dokhona and Pashra, which is for their use and Gamosa which are used by men and also clothes like bed sheets, aronai, handkerchiefs etc. Women like to weave and wear dokhonas of varieties of colours like yellow, red, green, purple, violet etc. along with various forms of design suited with colours. The name of some of the designs are – Daorai mwkreb, Parow megon, Daosa mekreb, Dingkia agor, Bwigri bibar, Gorka gongbrwi, Hajw agor, Maoji agan, Sikiri bidwi etc.

It is to be mentioned that the weaving of Bodo women is not an easy or a single day affair. Prior to that bamboo and wooden articles which are used for weaving like – Swrki, Pogai, Danganata, Sal, Gandwi gongnwi, Baleb, Gorka, Nw, Nw hasung, Kaita, Rasw, Maku, Gonsi, Salkunta, Ban gwja and Putul, all these are to be kept ready. After all these are ready, they first produce thread from the silk worm through the tool called Taokri. If the thread is bought from market, then it should be arranged properly through the tool called Swrki and Danganata and after it is arranged it is boiled along with crushed rice to make the thread stronger and later on it is keep to dry up. After it gets dried then again it is arranged orderly for the final weave. So it is not a single day affair. It can take upto two or three days. After it starts the final weaving, the product Gamosa may take a full one day and it takes two days to make the final product Dokhona. So all these untiring activities performed by Bodo women with full efforts to provide clothes for oneself and others and to preserve the culture and tradition of the society is worth mentionable and praiseworthy.

### 2.4 Cooking

The Bodo women are also very expert in preparing traditional dishes. The traditional techniques of preparation have been in used since ancient times. The chief food for Bodos is rice. Along with rice, they also consume varieties of vegetables, fishes, meat etc. The different types of dish prepared by Bodo women may be mentioned as – 1. Eoprannai 2. Pram gwan eonai 3. Teb teb 4.

Bidwi dwnnanwi songnai, 5. Lao lao songnai 6. Batwn or Menai. Women collect different types of seasonal vegetables like – leafy vegetables, flowery and buds vegetables and various vegetables which are unrooted from the earth are prepared along with either meat or fishes according to their suitability. The name of some of the traditional recipes which have been prepared since the past are lentil seeds prepared along with snail, rice powder prepared along with chicken, dried jute leaves with pork, fish with roselle leaves, arum root with chicken, bamboo soothe with rice powder and varied forms of chutneys made of crabs and different types of fishes, prepared by smoked and grinded along with chilly. Besides all these, Bodo women also collect various herbs and leafy vegetables grown naturally in the fields and jungles and prepare them making it to good recipe. Bodos are also in the habit of preparing food recipe with baked soda powder. This soda powder is made by burning the leaves or stems of banana and the ash of this is mixed with little amount of water and baked. The Bodos are also very fond of rice beer. Since time immemorial, Bodo women have prepared rice beer and fed their men. It is one of the most important items of the Bodos, especially during festivals. Bodo women are also expert in making traditional cakes like – pita, laru, sitao etc. which are made of rice powder.

### 2.5 Maintaining Cleanliness

Bodo women have a traditional knowledge of maintaining cleanliness. Among these, sweeping and cleaning their courtyard. The household chores of women of the day starts with sweeping the courtyard which is performed early in the morning before the rest of the family members wake up. There is a belief from the past that men should not be allowed to put his feet in the courtyard which is not cleaned. It is because of this belief that at the very early dawn, they start their chores sweeping the courtyard. Bodo women use two types of traditional brooms. They are called – Hasib Gubwi (Broom made of a kind of straw) and Hasib Gidir (Broom made either with strip bamboo or coconut leaf stick). Hasib Gubwi is used to clean the inside of the house and front side of the courtyard and Hasib Gidir is used to sweep to the backside of the house or the bordering of courtyard. Along with the cleanliness of their house where they live, they also maintain cleanliness the cowsheds as well. The cow dung are collected and kept together in one corner aside and the cowshed is swept and cleaned. Bodo women also like to plaster their fosse walls and floors through traditional method using mud mixed with cow dung. They clean their utensils using ashes. In maintaining cleanliness in their body and washing their heads, Bodo women used mustard seeds and baked soda.

### 2.6 Rearing cattle

In the Bodo society, the head of the family is the father. But Bodo women, in order to meet their needs and wants have no waited and longed from the head of the family, rather they have been independent in earning money by themselves using their traditional techniques of acquiring money. They rear silkworms, chicks, pig, goat etc. In silk worm rearing, the Bodo women are well expert and skilled since time immemorial. They rear silkworm for three purpose– consumption, sell to earn money and to extract thread to make clothes. In case of pig rearing, if the pig is female, then it is made to reproduce, thus selling the piglets for money and if it is male, it is castrated and kept to be bigger to attain more money. In this way, Bodo women, through rearing of silk worms and cattle, meet the food items in the family as well as boost the family's income and also through their own earnings decorates themselves with ornaments and clothes.

## 2.7 Preserving Items

Preservation helps in attaining food for long time as well as food can be attain during off-season time. In Bodo, it goes saying – “Tinanwi dwnwbla binanwi janaga” (If you preserve, then you don’t need to ask from someone). The tradition of preservation method exists among Bodos since the past and this art or the culture has been practised and preserved by the traditional knowledge of Bodo women. Some of the preserved food items of Bodos are – Preservation of fish, where dried fish is grind and kept in hollow container, Jute leaves are dried up and kept for future consumption, dried meat and fishes, vegetables like carrot and bamboo soothe are dried up and kept for future consumption etc. Bodos have the habit of eating areca nut and leaves and it is the tradition to for the guests to be received and honoured with areca nut and leaves. Therefore, the Bodo women have the tradition of splitting the areca fruit and drying them for future use. Also the Bodo women have the habit of grinding the rice to be use during the rainy season as the rainy season is the time for plantation and thus they don’t get sufficient time for grinding.

## 2.8 Fishing

Fishing is another traditional knowledge of the Bodo women. To go in groups for catching fishes and crabs and collecting vegetables has been the habit of Bodo women since the early days. They catch fish using a kind of fish trap called Jekai and also using their barehands. They are so expert in catching fish that from smallest prawn to the largest fish in the river could not escape from their hands. In the same way they also collect or pluck wild herbs, roots and vegetables from jungles by passing through the deep jungles and forests. While going for such kind of fishing, collecting vegetables, they also take the chance to share their feelings and emotions to each other and sometimes enjoy singing and dancing together. Through this way they have kept up the love and unity in between of themselves.

## 2.9 Celebration of Festivals

There are two types of festivals in Bodo society. One is seasonal festival and the other is religious festival. The Bodo women have the traditional knowledge of celebrating all these festivals. The Magw (Magh Bihu) festival is one of the seasonal festivals. In This festival, people eat pita (rice cake), laru etc. And cowherds burn Belaghars and Mejis. In this festival, Bodo women grind rice into powder and made eatable items like pita, laru etc. and during the time of Sankranti, the head of the women of the family at the early dawn plasters the rice storeroom (Bakri) with cowdung. In the Bwisagu festival, which is also the seasonal festival, women prepare eatables with sticky rice, make receipe including varied types of vegetables which is the mixture of bitter and sour and also prepare rice beer and feed to others. The young damsels offer their handmade woven clothes as gift to their loved ones and they in group go for singing and dancing from house to house. In the religious festivals like Kherai and Garja, women clean and plaster their households. In Kherai worship, the main role is being played by Dhoudini who is a woman.

### 2.10 Nursing the sick

Bodo women are well expert in the traditional knowledge of treating the sickness, prior to the time of illiteracy. When a person is caught with a disease that feels drowsiness, they use to burn the star fruit and make it chutney and feed him or a vegetable called Kera Dapini is boiled with crab and given him to consume. Oil and turmeric is prohibited for persons caught with such disease. In case of dysentery a banana fruit with seed inside is made to eat. In case of bleeding nose, a small bitter plant called Kangsingsia is grind and its watery substance is put in the nose. In cold and cough, meat of small chicken is boiled with more chilly and made to consume. So, apart from these, there are many types of treatments given to various types of diseases using these traditional methods and techniques. In all these Bodo women are well expert since the past.

### 3.0 Conclusion

Apart from the above mentioned traditional skills, the Bodo women have also played a significant role along with men in the customary laws of the Bodo society. During the time of a marriage or wedding ceremony, the Bodo women used to help in different ways like cutting vegetables, splitting areca nuts, cooking etc. and also participate in taking the role of Bwirathi in making the marriage ceremony successful. According to the traditional custom of the Bodos, two pairs of Bwirathi is present: a pair who are married and an unmarried pair. Married pair assists the bride giving advices and suggestions and unmarried pair receives guests with areca nuts and leaves. Not only that, in case a family is saddened by the demise of its family member, Bodo women go to its house to bear the sorrow along with the family and to give strength to the family.

From this viewpoint, we can say that Bodo women also played equally important role along with men in leading the Bodo society. But sometimes, it can be seen that Bodo men are using women as their objects and they want women to stay under them being dominated. But it can be said that women has the ability to create and to destroy. Women can build a good family as well as they can destroy the family. Therefore, the ideology that women are soft and weak and should not let them free should be removed and helped them to use their talent and skill independently for better prospect in various aspects in the society. This will bring better prospect and fortune in men, family and in society.

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