

## Bodo Women In Preserving Cultural Heritage: A Way Of Expression

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### Abstract:

*Culture is unnatural and learned behavior. The passing on of the learned practices is intangible cultural heritage. A woman doesn't reproduce only physically but also culturally through socialization. The communities be it the indigenous or non-indigenous in it women play a vital role in protecting their identity by carrying out the cultural legacy. This paper attempts to study the indigenous Bodo women in preserving intangible cultural heritage in present day bodo society.*

**Keywords:** Bodo, Women, Traditional, culture, heritage.

### INTRODUCTION

Culture is a comprehensive concept, which includes almost everything that influences individual's thought and behavior and it is not inherited. According to 19<sup>th</sup> century British anthropologist Edward Taylor, "Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society"<sup>1</sup>. Culture identifies society, without culture no society is recognized and known to have been existed. Culture is the circular life of people in a community from the food they consume to the clothes they wear, and the religion they follow, inclusive of the norms they practice that are passed on from generation to generation. This transmission of practices and cultural values is referred to as cultural heritage. The historical monuments and objects are termed as tangible cultural heritage and practices and traditions in the form of dance, singing, playing musical instruments and folklore are termed as intangible cultural heritage. Women play a vital role in protecting their identity by carrying out the cultural legacy Women though are suppressed by the uncountable household works; they don't stand backward on their community activities but a way forward than men. Today's society places a high value on the contribution that women make to the transfer of intangible cultural assets. The continuity and expression of cultural identity depend on certain components of our existence, which are referred to as intangible or immaterial legacy. For most part women uphold the main responsibilities in a child's upbringing and the mechanisms via which intergenerational transmission and there is rebirth of many of these crucial intangible heritage types. Cultural heritage suggests a connection and sense of community. It stands for our identity, history, and

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<sup>1</sup> Edward B Taylor, "Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom", Third Edition, Revised, London: John Murray, Albemarle Street 1891 <https://books.google.co.in,p-1>

connection to the past, present, and future. UNESCO defines cultural heritage as the legacy of physical artifacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generation, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of the future generations.

### **Who are Bodos?**

Bodos belong to a Mongoloid race and their language is Tibeto-Burman. The Bodos are regarded to be inhabitants of a country north of Himalayas and western belt of China a country known as Bod meaning 'land of snow'<sup>2</sup>. The Bodos are the indigenous and earliest settlers of the land northern bank of Brahmaputra river. The modern day Bodos were referred as Danavas, Asuras, Rakhshasas, Daitiyas, Mlecchas, Kiratas, etc. during the time of the epic and puranas. These titles were given to those whose way of life and culture was based on the Vedic system. It seems that various Sino-Tibetan speaking Mongoloid populations existence was documented by when Vedas were assembled in the 10<sup>th</sup> century B.C the combined Hindu culture and the northern and the north-eastern mountains and plains of the Mongolian people were colonized by civilization starting about that time.

The Bodo people live in Assam and their culture is known as Bodo. The Bodos have historically been farmers in an agrarian community with a rich tradition of fisheries, poultry, piggery with rice and jute farming and betel nut plantation. They make all of their own clothing from scratch including traditional garments. The Bodos have their own literature, culture, religion, festivals which are very distinct from the number of tribes that are from Bodo stock and are incomparably different from the Assamese group the dominant group of Assam. The Bodo culture is very rich and multifaceted. It is a part and parcel of the Kirata culture<sup>3</sup>. The culture gives identity to the people. The culture life of the Bodo is unique than any other Assamese Caste Hindus in term of the food habits, dress, ritual, custom, living standard, social set-up and to general lifestyle.

The attires of Bodos are Dokhona, Gamsa, Aronai, Regeregang, and Jwmgra are domestically woven by women. Their religion is known as Bathou, they worship the sun, air, water, soil, sky, and they are animist. Their important cuisine includes rice, pork and rice-beer. Their highlighted festival is known as Bwisagu which is a spring festival and they regard it as 'New Year'.

### **OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

1. To understand the culture and cultural heritage of Bodo society.
2. To analyze the Bodo women's role in preserving cultural heritage.
3. To discuss prospects and consequences in preserving cultural heritage.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The present study is based on descriptive and exploratory research. The research is based on both primary and secondary Sources. The primary data is collected from locality of Kokrajhar district through overt observation, questionnaire and schedules is prepared in both close ended and open ended type. The secondary data comprises of locally available books, journals, articles, and depositories like Shodhganga.

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<sup>2</sup> Dr. Kameswar Brahma, "A Study in Cultural Heritage of the Boros" Reprinted Edition 2009(Bina Library)p.13

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Anil Boro "Folk Literature of the Bodos" 1<sup>st</sup> edition 2001 N.L.Publications p.12

## **1. The Bodo Culture and Heritage**

The culture of the Bodos is known as bodo culture. They have distinctive culture and linguistic traits. The Bodos adore towards their inherent cultural practices which is passed on from generation to generation. Their customs are expressed on day to day life and their performances in special occasions like singing, dancing, rites and the consumption of food or their food habits and dresses etc. They have love towards their traditions and they aim to preserve it. The cultures of the bodos are entirely associated with nature. They live by consuming forest herbs, worshipping the nature to extracting from nature in dyeing their clothes. The traditions of Bodos are all related with nature be it in the form of dancing, playing musical instruments, telling stories and practices of weaving attire, ploughing and planting paddy, fishing using traditional tools is a legacy left behind by our ancestors. The Social customs and traditions play a very important role in the cultural life of the bodos or ethnic group. There are customs and traditions with core values which a tradition bound society can hardly afford but bodo richly has it. In bodo society the consuming items like rice is the highlighted food which is used at variable grounds in the form of phitha, wngkam, zau(snacks, rice, rice-beer). The meat like pork, chicken, fish which is (oma, dao, na) in bodo language is preferably used in special occasions like bwisagu(New Year), haba(marriage), domashi(Harvest Festival) etc. The dish of bodos like narji oma, dao onla, sobai dao, napham( jute with pork, chicken with rice-flour, black lentils with chicken, bamboo stored fish) are some of the delicacies of bodo that are mostly prepared by women in special occasions or when visitor comes.

In the sector of art, bodo people have the tradition of raising silkworms by Bodo women. Silk is spun from the silkworms' cocoons. From an early age, Bodo women teach their daughters the craft of weaving. Dokhonas, the traditional clothing of the Bodo women, are woven and worn by women. The types of dokhona are- Indi Dokhona(silk dokhona), Dokona Thaosi, Gmw matha Dokhona and many more with the artistic traditional designs like-hajw agor, phareo megon, bwigri bibar, agor gidir, daorai mwkreb etc.

## **2. Role of Bodo Women in Preserving Cultural Heritage**

Women can be said as pillar in preserving culture. Without women no intangible heritage would be surviving. In every society, women are the protectors, producers, and consumers of culture, but they continue to encounter obstacles that prohibit them from participating equally in the cultural realm. In day to day life almost all activities of women are related to culture. They are engaged in weaving, socializing, dancing, performing some rituals all these aspects in one way or the other related to culture. The greatest way through which women is preserving culture is through the process of socialization by passing down it to the next generation. In Bodo society the cultural activities from dancing to weaving with addition to preparing cuisine inclusive of preparing altar for the worship all are carried out by women and this practices are passing on it to the next generation is done by women through the process of socialization. However the cultural activities by Bodo women can be described specifically in the following manner.

### **a) Bodo women in weaving and carving**

Weaving and carving are part and parcel of bodo women in everyday life. Women in the olden days were given the credit of being good and excellent based on their expertise in handloom works. The bodo woman's preferred home and cottage industry in weaving. They are natural weaver, and nearly every home has a loom. It is assumed that women weave almost half of the garments that people wear on daily basis. Given that all bodo females learn the art of weaving,

spinning and weaving are seen as only reserved for women. The bodo people raise silkworms. From the silk worm's cocoon, they make a variety of clothing for both personal use and eventually for sale. The bodos frequently raise mugas, which is regarded as one of the most significant economic things to do for them. For the benefit of the family the women make the clothing, this demonstrated that women made significant contributions to society and the household which reduce the unnecessary spending. The bodo women use some gadget in weaving. Some of the important ones are: **Saal Khunta, Thaokri, Saal Gandwi, Makhu, Jenther, Mushra, Rashw.**

The costumes or clothing of the bodos are woven by women. The costumes like Aronai, Gamsa, Dokhona has certain designs carved by bodo women known as Agor. The Aronai is traditionally red in color, Gamsa is green with three line border stripes which is of white color and Dokhona is yellow in color and is known as Agor gubwi. However this traditional costume has gradually evolved into different colors with the changes of time. There is different kind of agor or carving which are closely associated with nature. Some of these names are hajw agor(mountain design), daorai mwkreb( peacock winkled), pharow megon( pegin eye), bwigri bibar(jujube flower), thaigir bibar agor(elephant-apple flower) ,khasi-hatai(sickle teeth), dingkhiya agor(design of fern) daothu godo (spotted dove neck design), maoji agan agor (cat footprint), mwider agan agor (elephant footprint design), hathorkin agan agor( star footprint design) , agor gubwi(pure bodo design). The mostly preferred one among the agor in dokhona is agor gubwi and hajw agor . .

#### **b) Bodo women and traditional dances**

Folk dance is akin to the secret languages of the souls that reflect the way of life, culture and traditions of the average person. A folk dance is a state or national dance from any country. Folk dance is a style of dancing which the many organizations began in the Middle Ages when peasants came together to celebrate and take part in religious ceremonies in sanctuaries, social gatherings and specific locations, such as the riverbank and performed the group dances. These traditional dances are transmitted from one generation to the next with no special training which started in the ancient old days and are still going on preserving their cultural life in the form of dance. These traditional dances serve as reminders of the need of fostering a culture of peace, family unity, intergenerational harmony and friendliness. These traditional dances promote cultural variety and goodwill in these way different castes and creeds are represented among the people.

In the bodo society there are different form of dance which are related to the season or change in weather, religion and social life. They are: **Bagurumba, Kherai mwsanai, Mwsaglangnai, Thaokri lunai, Bardwi sikla mwsanai, Na gurnai, Raijw janai, Habajanai mwsanai, Dahal thungri mwsanai, Bwisagu mwsanai**

The Bodo women performing such kinds of traditional dances have kept alive the cultural distinctiveness and even performing on auspicious occasions in the area where the bodo doesn't reside make the other communities than bodo learn about the existence and beauty of bodo culture.

#### **c) Preparing Cuisine**

The food habits of a community are one of the specialties that a community's past is reflected. In every community food is prepared by the women and in less number by men because most of the communities having been patriarchal in its social structure the household responsibilities is expected to be women's job. Cooking the food is a much expected to be done by girl/women whom we can termed as gender roles. In Bodo community the food is prepared by women be it on daily basis or in preparation of special cuisines during festivals. The foods like rice, herbs,

meats like pork, chicken in mixture with black lentils and alkaline or any home grown veggies like pumpkin are all seasoned by women. The special beverage known as zau which is used on festivals, marriage or on any other auspicious occasions are readied by women. Since it s women all the time in preparing all the dishes from the early times and till today it projects how women have passed their practices and cultural activities from generation to generation that have preserved the culture of a community.

#### **d) Bodo women socializing their children**

Family is though made by husband and wife together and society is run by the wishes and directions of the male, it is women who socialize their children in matters of social and cultural sectors, it is women who preserve the rich traditions of the society and the community. Women from the early days are seen as the care taker of the family and household work while husband is always at work outside, who is observed as the bread earner of the family by society. So, it is women who are always around their children from pre-birth to birth, from childhood to adulthood. The whole scenario of the development of the child his/her learning, is good or bad all depends upon the parents but utmost onto women.

It is the women who have close affinities to culture. She shapes and molds their children unto culture the way she sees and deals with it. In the context of bodo women they are seen to have very many attachments towards culture from dancing to weaving to preparing traditional cuisines. In the bodo society the dominant role in culture is played by women. When a female infant is born from her childhood she is taught to learn about what bodo is. When she is grown up she is taught to wear the traditional attires, customs not only that along with it they are taught about weaving and carving from their mothers as bodo women used to be an expert weaver. As mostly in patriarchal society household work is handed to women, in bodo society too it is the same so the girls from their early age are made to learn about cooking and when they grew older they are made to perfectly learn the special highlighted bodo cuisines as in bodo society the ideal girl is the one who is expert in cooking, weaving awell as in dancing. And an ideal woman is projected to be a good mother who socializes their children in a good way making them learn all the cultural stuffs. This way women in bodo are made to learn about culture from their childhood and through this process bodo women is playing a vital role in preserving cultural heritage of the bodo society as through socialization the next generation is taught or are made to learn.

### **3. Prospects and Consequences in Preserving Cultural Heritage**

The coming up of globalization has extremely put negative impact on the indigenous or local cultures. The societies that protected their cultures from being washed away in the period of colonialism have failed miserably by the storm of popular culture, the nerve of globalization. The effect of globalization can also be seen in the indigenous bodo culture where in, the bodo tribe in the early days were very much attached to their cultural activities on that especially women were seen as weavers, dancers, food delicacies were prepared in a pure way. Today the bodo women are also seen as a part of preserving those practices by socializing to their children, but however as compared to the past generation the bodo women as well as youth as engaged in their life a quite different way than the earlier days. In the early days less number of the population of the bodo community used to get engaged in education and business sector, but now-a-days the change in the lifestyle or the way of living has changed the ongoing process of socialization in cultural sectors by women. Women now socialize their children only about folk dance, playing of musical instruments, preparing food delicacies, practices and beliefs in religion, wearing their attire but very less number of youth know how to weave and carve the bodo dokhonas and its designs.

The coming up of new things and change in its pure culture like in weaving a tool named danga natha is changed to jothor. The bodo men also play important role in preserving culture, the bodo society procured their livelihood through agricultural practices by planting paddy which is its fundamental food in its process of cultivation in the phase of harrowing the pure tool used was nangal (plough) and jungal which is yoke was placed on the neck of the two ox which is now replaced to ploughing tractor. Not only that even in the phase of harvesting the ripe paddy the tool named khasi Sickle of 'C' shaped was used but now with the advancement in technology it is replaced by rice harvester which performs a dual work of harvesting as well as straining and separating the paddy and the straw which has again replaced the traditional practice and tools like Hukhen.

### **Conclusion:**

Cultural Heritage is the essence of any community or tribe that projects their civilization. The Bodo culture also reveals the existence of the bodos since the early days by their way of life. In bodo community women are neither given superior position neither inferior but they share some aspects of work like culture to female and religious kind of thing to male mostly. The women handling the activities on culture by weaving, preparing cuisine, performing the traditional dances, preparing altar for worship by sweeping cleaning such practices are passed on to the next generation by process of socialization. However the effectiveness that women had been performing cultural activities and practices in the early days has been changed up to some extent in the present day which is easily viewed as an impact of globalization and new inventions, but the change in the global sphere shouldn't be taken as to be rooted in the traditional spheres like culture rather than focusing on to keep culture to its purity that has been carried out by the ancestors.

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