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Research Journal*

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## DRESS AND ORNAMENTS OF THE BODOS: A BRIEF STUDY

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### ABSTRACT

**T**he greatest contribution of the Indo- Mongoloid people who made a reservoir in Assam is that they brought into N.E. India, the technique of food production by plant cultivation and domestication of animals. They are in all likelihood the first cultivators of rice in India. They had introduced for the first time in India the art of rearing silk worm as well spinning and weaving of silk clothes.<sup>3</sup> spinning and weaving was naturally practiced in Assam as well as Bodos. The Bodo people were very skillful in weaving embroidered cloth. Every evening a women had to spin a least five 'sutralahi', i.e. five conical balls of threads. Ornaments were fairly popular among the Bodo women. They adorned themselves with flowers and jewels. The ornaments were usually made of gold, silver and various precious stone. Even poor women used ornaments made generally of ivory, brass



and glass.

**KEYWORDS:** *natural practice, silkworm, thread, dokhona, ivory, ashan.*

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION:

The Bodos of Assam is a branch of great Bodo race of the Indo- Mongoloid family falling within the Assam - Burmese linguistic section. The Bodos of the Mongoloid people who are described as the inhabitants of a country lying to the north of the Himalayas and in the western belt of China. This country is known as Bod. The word Bod is supposed to mean a homeland. It is also said that there were many parts of the country known as Hor Bod, Kur Bod etc.<sup>1</sup>

Fr. Mathias Hermanns includes the Bodos and their allied tribes in the term, Indo-Tibetans, Dr. S.K. Chatterjee calls them Indo-Mongoloid in his 'Kirata-Jana-Krti' to connote at once their Indian connection and their place within the cultural milieu in which they found themselves as well as their racial affinity. According to K.L. Barua the Kocharis, Koches, Rabhas, Meches, Mikirs, Lulungs, Garos, Nagas Kukis and the Chutiyas are the present day representatives of these later Mongolians or the Indo- Mongoloid and the tribe speaking Bodo (Boro) languages seem to have occupied the plains of Assam for very long time.<sup>2</sup>

On the other, the word Kirata is also used for the silk trader Bodos. According to the R. M. Nath – the word silk is derived from the original Mongolian – Sirkek, Korean – Sir, Chinese – Ssi, Greek Ser, Latin – Sericum. The word 'Sari; wearing cloth of Indian ladies, is derived from Ser. The dealer in silk was called the Seres or the Scyrites. The word Scyritae, Cirrhadae and Kirata appears to have had originally referred to dealers in silk.

Silk was originally produced in China and it was catered by merchants of Turkistan through Tibetan intermediaries to India and Assam.<sup>4</sup>

Further he said that, it is therefore, clear that in ancient times traders from different parts of Tibet, Central Asia and China flocked to Assam through various routes, and as they traded mostly in silk, they were generally called Seres- Cirrhadoi (in modern sense serek – cloth walls) Syrites – Cirata – Kirata. The word Kirata

therefore, is a general term referring to the people of the Mongolian origin and it refers specially to the Bodos. It is they who first introduced the cultivation of Silk of different varieties in Assam in those, ancient times, and Assam has therefore, been famous for her silk from time immemorial.<sup>5</sup>

### 1.1 METHOD:

In this article, the investigator used survey method. Data are collected from Research in traditional Bodo dress was applied to art traditional studies in Bodo society during the past period. Traditionally Bodo clothing and its representation in paintings was seen as useful tools for preparing this article. One of the most valuable methodologies used to study on different types of Bodo dresses how she used it upon. For the related materials investigator collected through the door to door field investigation work. So, in such context work, I have heavily depended on interview, questionnaire and observation method which are consider as my primary source. As secondary data, investigator has taken from all kinds of existing published materials available in the forms of books on language, literature, culture, history, journals and periodicals, newspapers, and documentation in the archives in any form etc.

### DISCUSSIONS:

**1.2:** Since the time immemorial the Bodo women were very expert in weaving. Spinning and weaving are still to be found in the villages as well as a few in town life also. The cottage industries, the hand-loom industry has always occupied an important place in every Bodo household, which probably contained as now a hand-loom, besides other articles for weaving and spinning. Hand-loom of a crude form are to be found even to-day among tribes as well as Bodos. Cotton shrubs were grown for the manufacture of cotton cloths. The art of sericulture, and the rearing of cocoons for the manufacture of various silk cloths, were known to the Assamese as early as the Ramayana and the Arthashastra.<sup>6</sup> Schoff, on the basis of the periplus, contends that the silk industry originated in China and traveled from there to Assam and other parts of India.<sup>7</sup> Silk was, however, known in China as early as the Shang period, (1523-1027 B.C.).<sup>8</sup> It is difficult to fix a date for the knowledge of silk industry in Assam, but it was known at last as early as the period of the Arthashastra and the Ramayana. As the industry was mainly confined in the past to the Tibeto-Burman elements in Assam, it is not unlikely that along with their migration to Assam they introduced some ideas from China; but the manufacture of muga silk has been confined to Assam alone, and this land, like China, had a worldwide reputation in the manufacture of varieties of silk cloths, and a profitable foreign trade in such articles.<sup>9</sup>

**1.3:** The rearing of the Muga and silk cocoons for the manufacture of various Muga and silk cloths seem to have been an indigenous culture of the Bodos, which had been being maintained since the prehistoric time. Many centuries ago that the Vedic Aryans came to the North-East India, the forefathers of the Bodos seemed to have been rearing silk-worms profoundly in this region.<sup>10</sup> Rev. S. Endle is also opines that one of the chief industries, a very profitable one among the Kacharis, is that of the culture of the silk-worm known as eri, and the manufacture of the eri cloths.<sup>11</sup> The Bodos are very much fond of the Endis (eri) and till now they use this cloth to a large extent. The rear the silk worms on the Eri plants (the castor-oil plants). It may be noted that the valley of the Brahmaputra of Assam was famous not for the silken cloths primarily, but the eri cloths by about 400 B.C.<sup>12</sup>

### 1.4 About the dress used by the Bodo:

People - The Bodo society laid special stress on the use of indigenous products. Whatever was not made and produced in the country, the people were not easily prone to accept. The mainly used cloths of the Bodos are dokhona, gamcha, jwmgra or fashra or jwmbaigra, simasi (bisinasadri), woolnisi, aronai, endisi etc.

**(a) dokhona:** It is a female dress. It is worn from the chest to lower part of legs i.e. covering down to the ankle-joints. The dokhona were also made of cotton, muga, eri and silk. At the old period the colour of thread were limited but now-a-days we have seen available colour. The yellow, red, orange and green are the main lovable colour of Bodo women. One special dokhona called 'Dokhon'aThaosi' it is used for the bride. It is called bride dress also. Generally in ancient times the colour was red and beautiful design in the edge of dokhona. It is also used for the 'Bwirathi' along with bride.

**(b) gamcha:** This is main piece of cloth worn round the waist by male persons hanging down to the knee or below it. It is generally made by cotton yarn.

**(c) jwmgra or fashra or jwmbaigra :** It is used for upper part of the body, by the women i.e. from neck to chest or sometimes it may be to waist.

**(d) simasi (bed sheet) :** It is called bed sheet in English. It may be plain or design both are used. Again it may be big or small taking bed style.

**(e) woolnisi (cloth of wool or woolen cloth) :** In Assam there is winter season. So, woolen cloths are very important. It

is generally made by cotton or silk or eri. Sufficient quantity of woollen cloths were imported every year to Assam from the neighboring hill states, particularly from Bhutan.<sup>13</sup>

**(f) aronai (maflar)**: This piece of cloth is an important demand in Bodo society as well as entire Assam. It is decorated beautifully designing. Generally, Bodo male people these kinds of dresses worn on neck. It was the custom of the Bodo women, in those days, to present a piece of cloth to their husbands at the time of going to the battle field, which she had to prepare within a night. In Assamese society we got 'kavach-kapor'; because it was the belief of the people that if a soldier goes to the battle field with such a cloth presented by his wife, he would not meet any reverse in the battle field. This cloth served as protective armour against death in the battle field and that was why it is called kavach-kapor.<sup>14</sup> No woman was allowed to make this cloth while she was in her menstruation or in sundry other impurities.<sup>15</sup> Renu Boro, a renowned Bodo writer opines that there is a saying that ancient age, at the time of Kacharis rulers, the warriors had to put 'aronai' (a kind of belt) as a sign of war like personality when set out to battle field. This aronai was woven completely in and within a night.<sup>16</sup>

**(g) endisi (eri cloth)**: It is very precious cloth among the Bodos. It is produced from silk – worm. S. Endle also said that the fabric itself (eri cloth), so produced, is one of great value, especially for use in the cold season, being at once soft and warm as well as remarkably strong and durable.<sup>17</sup>

Besides these cloths, there are various types of cloths which are used by the Bodos. For example - khonia, phalli, gandusi, drill si, mwdwngongnagdokhona, akhahugargrasi, fwisalisi (parda), jisridanaisi, thosoksi, lab si etc.

**1.5 Ornaments**: The Bodo ladies had great fancy for ornaments. They adorned themselves with various ornaments to look more charming and attractive. The different metals and other materials used for the making of ornaments were gold, silver, copper, brass, bronze, amber, rhinoceros horns, ivory etc. Different kinds of valuable jewels and stones were also used as ornaments. The ornaments of gold, silver, amber, ivory etc. were made precious and beautiful to look at by setting precious stones and jewels, such as emerald, diamond etc., and them. Bodo women use variety of ornaments. Most of them are made of gold and silver. They are usually thick and heavy. With the advent of new civilization the ornaments have become smaller and thinner. Gold ornaments are now being used by the well-to-do but the general mass use silver probably due to the loss of economic stability.

The ornaments are not always worn. Many of them are reserved for ceremonial occasions. Bodo male persons usually do not wear ornaments.

A vermilion mark at the parting of front hair and on the fore-head is found amongst the married women.

The following are a few ornaments worn by the Bodo women.

#### For the ear:

- + Enti – plain round earring worn on lower part of the ear. Generally it is used for the kids and girls.
- + khera or kheru
- + Jabkhring (ear-ring)
- + talinglura or dul
- + boula (for the upper ear)
- + Puthi or puti – It is a small flower attached to the ear lobe.
- + Makiri or makhri – earring of gold or silver, ornamented, worn on the lower part of the ear.

#### For the nose:

- + Nak – Phul or Nakaphul – It is a small flower or a knob struck to the nostril or to the outer skin of the nose through a hole made earlier.
- + Bulaki – Nose pendent.
- + Nolod – a bead suspended from the lower nasal septum.
- + Noth and Bali – a gold or silver ring worn through the hole in the lower nasal septum.
- + Phul – Gold or silver nose flower.

#### For the neck:

- + Chandra har – It is a heavy necklace of the five layers hung on the chest from the neck. Generally it is worn by the very rich families.
- + Bisaher – A necklace
- + Thanka – siri – It is a necklace worn round the neck.

- ✦ Jibou – Zin – Ziri – It is a necklace with a silver oval unornamented piece for the back of the neck from which hangs on two sides two snake-like chains biting into two sides of another plain silver oval plate resting at the junction of the chest and the abdomen.
- ✦ Poal– It is a necklace made of silver pieces and costly sea – shell.
- ✦ Rongborsa– It is a necklace of silver coins.
- ✦ Jongsama– Necklace made of different kinds of beads.

#### For the hand:

- ✦ Mutha– It is an ornamented bangle about 2 ½ inch wide.
- ✦ Ashansuri – A small bangle. In Bodo any bangle is called ashan.
- ✦ Sangkha – Conch – shell bangle. It is worn when she married. A married woman is worn it. But if the husband is death then she could not wear it, it is worn whose husband is living.
- ✦ Gongkhon– It is like muthaashan. It is a very heavy. At the ancient time this type of bracelet was very important for the marriage system in the Bodo society.
- ✦ Astham – It is worn in finger. It is may be plain ring or may be decorated with attractive design.

These ornaments are made of gold and silver. Poor women, who could not afford gold or silver, made use of seeds, shells and flowers. Sometimes copper and brass ornaments were also used by them.

#### 1.6 CONCLUSIONS:

It is also seen that the rich ladies are very fond of showing their jewelry to others. Anyway the ornaments are very important in the life of women being. It is say that with the ornaments one woman is looks beautiful, without ornaments looks her odd. Every Bodo women have small or big, a few or a large ornaments. In our Bodo society, without a single ornaments of a women, we cannot think that, everybody have ornaments. It is said that, the mother's property is the ornaments, and we should take responsibilities of mother's ornaments for living generation to generation. It is the symbol of our mothers, who gives birth to her in this world.

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