



## **Tradition and Change of the Arts and Crafts of the Bodo Tribes of Assam: A Study**

**Nirada Baro**

*Research Scholar, Assam University, Silchar, Assam, India*

### **Abstract**

*The Bodo community of Assam is the largest group among the plain tribes of Assam. The Bodos or the Bodo-Kacharis constitute a very important section of the different ethnic groups and races settling in Assam with their distinctive cultural and linguistic traits. The paper tries to explore about the traditional arts and crafts of the Bodo tribes and highlights the tradition and change of the arts and crafts of the Bodo tribes. The Bodos are very rich in their traditional arts and crafts. It is said that, India has received the technique of weaving and embroidery from Indo-Mongoloid. In Assam, the Bodos were decidedly the pioneers in this respect. The weaving culture is significant art of the Bodo community. The Bodos are expert too in bamboo crafts. They made almost all articles required for their daily use in the society. The Bodos are maintaining their traditional artistic creativity by following some methods. There are different methods has been used in arts and crafts of them. In the crafts also they make different designs and shapes. As the develop Science and technology has spread in all over the world, the Bodos are also influenced by it.*

**Key Words:** *Bodos, Arts- Crafts, Tradition, Culture, Bamboo Crafts.*

---

**Introduction:** The Bodos are maintaining their traditional artistic creativity by following some methods. There are different methods has been used in arts and crafts of them. In their traditional cloth, they art different types of natural caricatures. In the crafts also they make different designs and shapes. The raw materials are collected by them. As the develop Science and technology has spread in all over the world, the Bodos are also influenced by it. Tradition may be oral or written. The oral practices or opinions which are transmitted to us from generation to generation are familiar to us and can be called tradition. It is the heritage of human society.

Traditional change displays significant social, cultural and linguistic variations, in which they constitute a historic pattern of society. Such traditional society traits like simple techniques, domestication of animals, use of local raw materials and barter system etc.

Social change occurs in all societies and in all periods of time, but the rate of social change differs from society to society.

No society has ever been static and socio-cultural change is a relative concept. Socially, economically, technologically and demographically, the tribal societies have passed a number of phases. Various factors determine those directions and also the rate of social change. Men adopt new things and behaviors and also forget some parts of their tradition.

After independence of India, new policies were initiated to bring about the desire of socio- economic upliftment of the vast majority of population mostly in rural areas. The new constitution of India lays down the principle of equality of all citizens which opens new chapters or the backward classes in economical, educational and social positions.

The beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century initiated the process of change and transformation among all the tribes over the entire North Eastern part of the country.

Historically, the changes among the Bodos are seen in their traditional cultivation and habitat. After the migration to Assam, considerable changes have taken places in their habitat, art of agriculture and in the other fields of material culture.

The younger generations are involved in modern occupations, cultivations and small scale industries.

There has been decline of crafts like basketry, weaving, metal works. The process of changes is visible in the forms of westernization, modernization and development among the tribe.

They are not culturally poor and they have some better dresses, houses and furniture and household utensils, weapons and better food which are same among other settled agricultural tribes or non tribes of Assam. The tribal societies of different parts of the country, particularly Assam and the North East region are undergoing a process of transformation in the sphere of social, cultural, political and economic fields.

People are going for modern housing and nontraditional mode of living. Modern furniture, utensils are becoming part and parcel of housing equipments. However, the poor and the rural families are still adhering to their traditional housing system and the mode of living.

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

1. To highlight about the traditional arts and crafts of the Bodo tribes.
2. To explore the tradition and change of the arts and crafts of the Bodo tribes.

**Methodology:** The study is based on both primary and secondary data. To collect the primary data, the field survey was conducted by selecting three representative villages by name, Bebejia, Jamuguri and Chanialpara under Udalguri District BTAD area. For the collection of primary sources field study, interviews, observation will be done at different Bodos villages of the Brahmaputra valley. Interviews will also be taken with tribal people through questionnaires and also to visit and study in the museums.

The field work includes both observation and interviews. Primary source of information includes- personal interview, field materials, observations, and questionnaire.

**Observation:** It has become possible for me to take snap of the craftsmen while they were making crafts, arts.

**Interview Method:** Interview method is also applied for collecting materials of arts and crafts. Through interview method, the field worker can obtain data about ideas or events concerned with the study by putting questions to have the authentic information. I have met a number of representatives of the villages belonging to the area under investigation. The purpose of this interview is twofold, (i) Securing certain information on the subjects under study and (ii) to obtain a picture of present position, and transition of folk material culture. Field Work: with a view to getting an in depth insight in the material culture, field study has been carried out in seven Boro villages located in the three districts of Brahmaputra valley of Assam.

The study will also be based on secondary sources like relevant books and journals which have been found in different libraries like- Assam University central library, K.K. Handique Library of Gauhati University, ICHR Library

**Change brought in Arts and Crafts:** The people are no longer dependent upon their craft skills. They have in most cases moved out of their traditional villagers to urban or sub urban location and frequently deal with the modern way of life. Now- a- days we find a few basket makers in a Bodo village. Generally they fulfill the needs of the villagers. Plastic made containers take the place of the bamboo basket.

The crafts of blacksmith and pottery have declined.

The artisans are remain slow in service and only in the occasional festivals or marriage they create or construct some decorative art forms with the request of host. As the Bodos are coming in contact with the outside world their artistic vision is also influenced by the outsiders. But because of their conservatism towards traditional designs which have special significance and meaning the new innovation too are slow and gradual. The changes in the art of their traditional dress items are very slow. The local market provides the craftsmen opportunity to sell their products. In recent years some business men specially the shop keepers collect these products from the villagers and sell them in their road- side shops and in towns at great profit. Weaving is going on as usual, but the act of spinning has rare. The weavers utilize yarns from the market. The raw material viz. the yarn is now not widely manufactured in Assam.

**Changes in Folk Architecture:** Most villages like to have modern houses in place of traditional one. The economically sound families build their houses in new styles. Some people build their houses like other sections of non tribal Assamese people do.

It is observed in some villages that the families who build R.C.C or modern “Assam type” houses also build other traditional houses for Cowshed, “Guhali”, Piggary, “Gandra”, to keeping poultry “Ograng” and for making rice beer. Generally the piggeries, rice beer

places are by the side of the main houses or its back, which is smaller in size. This certainly proves that the emotional attraction of traditional lore and respect to the traditions has not been totally lost yet.

It is observed that the same house is used for all purposes in the villages, but it is also observed that some families build separate kitchen which is certainly the effect of the influence of the non-tribal Assamese of the state. Likewise they now construct separate rooms for sitting and entertaining guests which is often called “drawing room” or “Chorano”.

Name of the village and districts	Number of traditional houses	Number of modern houses	Total
Vill. Bebejia Dist. Udalguri	30	20	50
Vill. Punia Gaon Dist. Udalguri	20	45	65
Vill. Chalonokushi Dist. Darrang	5	25	30

Two influences have been working great change in home construction among the people. One is the trend towards modern building method and its popularity and the other is less durability of the traditional types of houses. Both trends change the structure of the Bodo housing now-a-days.

**Changes in Costumes:** People of the younger generation are adopting some new style but the older generation does not favor the idea of borrowing fashion of innovation on the traditional design and colors. Women’s dresses are almost unchanged in villages but it is natural that instead of traditional attire they have accepted different dresses.

In case of male costumes, it is easier to trace the influence of the Western dresses. The traditional Gamosha and Aronnai are gradually replaced by long pants and shirts.

Similarly, although the old style of ornaments has not lost its popularity, yet the women are seen to wear new style of jewellery or other modern fashionable ornaments which they are in fact, able to buy at low cost.

Although the old style of ornaments has not lost its popularity, yet the women are seen to wear new style of jewellery or other modern fashionable ornaments which they are in fact, able to buy at low cost. The plastic-made ornaments are growing popular. Gems enjoyed great popularity with the people. It is therefore not surprising that the Bodo also now utilize precious stones, corals and shells as their modern ornaments.

Now people realize that the weaving craft has been revived. Handicraft products can now compete with mill-made ones in the market.

**Conclusion:** The tribal's have their distinctive crafts which show not only imagination but also deep concentration. In a sense, their lie being more isolated, it functions within its own social confines. It has sometimes been defined as a tradition carried over vertically as against the folk traditions which tend to spread out in diffusion.

In the forgoing chapters I have analysed some aspects of material culture of the Bodo community living in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam. A brief survey was carried out in seven villages where the Bodo people are living. Belonging to the Mongoloid stock of the Tibeto- Burman group and before coming down to the Brahmaputra valley, there has always been socio-cultural as well as biological interaction among the tribes and nontribes as a result they are now living at different levels of modernization.

The head of the villages called Gaonburha. In the villages all the Bodo houses look more or less alike. Certain rules are still observed in building a new house. In olden days, while selecting the site, usually a magician or priest was consulted, regarding whether construction of the house in the site would bring goodluck or badluck. Now the people are more concerned whether the site is dry and sunny or not.

Crafts tradition is slowly vanishing along with their skills and folk technologies. With the coming of the British rule in India, the crafts of this land were thrown off and industrial capitalism was projected into India. It came into conflict with the age-old economy of the country. This rich classes preferred articles of foreign make to native products.

The breaking up of joint family system also affected many crafts. Collective labourer on their traditional craft is impossible under new nuclear family system. Hence their traditional income sources are stopped and new ways of earnings are found.

For the economic development and employment opportunities of the people, the craft should be revived and developed. The problem of the crafts and craftsmen should be solved by revival and re-orientation of craft tradition. This can be done by suitable schemes of self employment for the youth by improvement of designs, promotion of exports and internal marketing.

Weaving is one of the great folk industries that support the economy of the Bodos. It has been decline although the industry made clothes occupy the market in every nook and corner of the state. Observing the working spirit of the young weavers it can be expected that this handicraft industry will remain in its proud position in future. Every Bodo house has a loom and this enables the women, both young and old, to give love for this craft. The craftsmn of other parts of India have improved their techniques while the Bodo craftsmen have failed to keep pace with them.

The Bodo folk art on various forms of costumes is fully appreciated by society at large. Their textile designs with distinctive motifs and varieties of colour are associated with some meanings which have sociological significance and mystic ideology knitted with religious belief. The motifs on their clothes also indicate the high degree of craftsman ship and artistic excellence.

At present the interest in folk arts and crafts are growing Modern artist often find inspiration in old art, and lot of people execute old skill or a hobby.

Majority of the cultivators still use indigenous implements manufactured by village carpenters. A number of improved tools and implements are gradually being adopted by the cultivators, artisans and craftsmen. Factory produced implements influenced the carpenters. The implements made of iron are not indigenously made but are purchased from the urban markets.

In an independent and rapidly developing India, all the people come forward into the stream of modern life. But this can be perfect only if it flourishes without harming the fine qualities of our age old culture which can contribute to the rich Indian aggregate culture.

A movement for preservation and re practices of folklore material has been launched today in almost all parts of Assam. The Bodos of Assam also show their attention to preservation of their racial, religious and tribal identities. Their art and craft hidden the old heritage. Their costumes and ornaments reflect their aesthetic values.

The young blood always seeks change. The traditional Bodo culture is in a transitional phase and its passing through the process of acculturation in many aspects. There is a change in family structure, social institutions and the caste system.

Examining all, it can be concluded that the Bodo people are still maintaining their traditional identity and can be considered a chief component of the Assamese culture.

## **Reference:**

1. Bardoloi, B.N. (1987) .Tribes of Assam Part-I. Tribal Research Institute: Guwahati, Assam.
2. Boro, Anil. (2001). Folk Literature of the Bodos. N. L. Publications: Panbazar, Guwahati, Assam.
3. Boro, Anil. (2004).Serja Siphun., G.B.D. Publishers: Kolkata/Guwahati.
4. Basumatary, Keshab. (2012). Political Economic of Bodo Movement. Akansha Pub house: New Delhi.
5. Bhattacharya, P.C. (1977). A Descriptive Analysis of the Boro Language. Gauhati University Department of Publications: Guwahati.
6. Borgohain, Jatindra Kumar. (2004). Asomor Ustav aru Puja. Published by Monoj Kr. Ladia: Jorhat.
7. Brahma, K. (1989). Aspects of Social customs of the Bodos. Bina Library: Guwahati.
8. Brahma, Kameswar. (1998).A Study in Cultural Heritage of the Boros.Bina Library: Guwahati.

9. Brahma, Liladhar. (2011). Boro Mwsanai. The Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes: Guwahati, Assam.
10. Brahma, Nilkamal (edited). (2000). Ransai Bithun. N. L. Publications: Guwahati.
11. Chattopadhyaya, Kamaladevi. (1978). Tribalism in India. Vikas Publishing House: New Delhi.
12. Chaudhuri, Sucheta Sen. (2004). The Bodo movement and women participation. Mittal publication: New Delhi.
13. Chattopadhyaya, Kamaladevi. (1978). Tribalism in India. Vikash Publishing house: New Delhi.
14. Das, B.N. (2003). The people of Assam origin and composition. Gyan Pub house: New Delhi.
15. Das, S.T. (2006). Tribal Life of North–Eastern India, Habitat Economy Customs Tradition. Gyan Publishing House: New Delhi.
16. Deori, Indibar. (2001). Janagusthiya Samasya, Atit Bartaman Bhabisyat. Published by Surendra Chandra Baishya: Journal Emporium, Nalbari, Assam.
17. Duarah, Dharmeswar. (2005). Asomor Badya Jantra. Labnya Prakashan: Guwahati.
18. Endle, S. (1911). The Kachari. Cosmo Publication: New Delhi.
19. Gait, E. (2008). Reprinted, A History of Assam. EBH Publishers: Guwahati.
20. Narzaree, Indramalati. (2005). Boro Harimu arw Thunlai Bijirnai. Narzaree Publications: Guwahati.
21. Narzaree, Indramalati. (2006). Mainaw Borainai. Narzaree Publications: Guwahati.
22. Narzi, Bhaben. (2003). Boro Kacharir Somaj aru Songskriti. Chirang Publication: Board, BTAD, Assam.
23. Patar, Padma (edited). (2008). Janajati Samaj Sanskriti. Ringchang Publications: Guwahati.
24. Paul, A.K. & Narzary, B. (2005). —Let the World know about Bodoland. Good Book Distributers Publishers: Guwahati.
25. Phukan, Sunil (edited). (2007). Raithai Bihung. Publication Board: Bodo Sahitya Sabha, Kokrajhar, BTC, Assam.