

6. The BODOS and Their Culture

Meghali Paul

Research Scholar,
University of Science and Technology, Meghalaya.

Abstract:

The Bodos are the largest ethnolinguistic community in India's state of Assam. They are a member of the larger Bodo-Kachari family of tribes. The Bodos are thought to have arrived in the Brahmaputra valley 3000 years ago. They are a group of people who live in the north-eastern Indian states of Assam and Meghalaya. They speak Tibeto-Burman languages and the majority of them are permanent farmers. Around 2.2 million people in India speak Bodo language. The Bodos are the first group of people to cultivate rice water. They eat a variety of green leafy vegetables, some of which they grow at home. The majority of Bodo people eat rice every day for breakfast, lunch and dinner. The tribe has beautiful traditional dress which are being wore by the males and females. Namely Aronai and Dokhona are parts of their traditional dresses. Aronai is a small scarf used to felicitate guests and warm up the body in winter. Bodo warrior used to weave Aronai as a belt in the battle field. Dokhona is the traditional dress of Bodo women.

Keywords:

Culture, traditional attires, food habits, festivals.

6.1 Objectives:

- i. To study the culture of Bodo tribes
- ii. To study the Food Habits of Bodos of Assam

6.2 Introduction:

In India's state of Assam, the Bodos are the largest ethnolinguistic community. They are dispersed throughout north-eastern India and are a member of the larger Bodo-Kachari family of ethnolinguistic tribes. Boros live in all of Assam's districts, however they are primarily concentrated in the Bodoland autonomous area.

The Bodo and other related Bodo-Kachari peoples are thought to have moved at least 3000 years ago, along with other cognate groups. The Bodo Tribe is thought to have arrived in Assam first. The Brahmaputra valleys are where this ethnic community is predominantly located. It is the state's largest minority group. This tribe is thought to have travelled from Tibet to Assam via passes in Bhutan. The Bodo community is regarded as the most traditionally and culturally rich community in the state because they were the first inhabitants in the Assam valley.

6.2.1 The Bodo Tribes:

The Bodos also known as Boros are one of the largest ethnic groups residing in Assam. They are a part of the ethnolinguistic group and are spread all over the Northeastern India. The word Boro comes from Bara-fisa, which means “son of Bara” and Bara stands for “man” or “male member” of the group. The tribe mainly belongs from the Bodoland Territorial Region of Assam, but they also reside in many districts of Assam and Meghalaya. The Bodo are a group of people who live in the north-eastern Indian states of Assam and Meghalaya who speak Tibeto-Burman languages. The Brahmaputra River Valley's northernmost regions are home to the majority of Assam's minority population, the Bodo. Although they traditionally engaged in shifting cultivation, the majority of them are permanent farmers today. There are many different tribes that make up the Bodo. Their eastern tribes are the Dimasa (or Hill Kachari), Galong (or Gallong), Hojai, Lalung, Tippera, and Moran, while their western tribes are the Cutiya, Plains Kachari, Rabha, Garo, Mech, Koch, Dhimal, and Jaijong. Up until around 1825, the Bodo were the main ethnic group in Assam. Around 2.2 million people in India speak one or more Bodo languages, according to estimates from the late 20th century.

6.4 Food Habits:

The Bodos are the first group of people to cultivate rice water, and they enjoy eating a variety of green leafy vegetables, some of which they grow at home. They have their own distinctive traditional foods. They enjoy eating fern (dingkhiya), manimuni (cantellaasiatica), masundri (hottuniacordata), thasobedor (arum beetroot), lapha (malva verticillata), panialao (bottle guard) and khumbra (white guard), among other green leafy vegetables found in jungles. The majority of Bodo people eat rice every day for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Typically, they eat cold, watery rice for breakfast and rice with veggies and non-vegetarian food for lunch. Onla, Narzi, and Oma Bedor are the main courses.

A type of rice beer called "Zumai" is one of the mouth-watering foods popular among the Bodo people. They love the traditional beverage known as Zu Mai, where Zu stands for wine and Mai for rice. When visitors enter the home, they prefer "Zumai" over tea. It is created by structuring the rice for three to four days in a "Handi" (a sizable metal pan) with jackfruit leaves. After few days, the rice began to produce beer. The beer is then prepared for serving after the rice has been extracted from it. As time goes on, it gets tastier and more alcoholic. This rice beer is specifically brewed during the harvest season so that the farmers can sip it as they work. One of the distinctive meals from the Bodo Community is napaham. The process of making it involves fermenting dried fish with "Kosu" and other vegetables in a bamboo container. It is kept for a month in an air-tied bamboo to facilitate the production of the Napaham. It is then prepared in a variety of ways. Long-term preservation is possible with this. The bodo people adore this dish a great deal. Although it doesn't have a great fragrance, once it's cooked, the stench goes away and the flavour is excellent.

Although sobai (black dal) is typically prepared with oil, bodo people don't like it. They cook black dal with homemade alkaline water (khar). They first soak the black dal in water for one to two hours, then they heat a pan, pour it into it, add khar, ginger, garlic, and salt right away.

Water is occasionally added after stirring, and rice powder is occasionally used after cooking rice to make it thick. The addition of grilled chicken or pork is optional although some people do it.

It is well favored in the neighborhood. The Bodos prefer pork more than any other protein. There are various methods for making it. Pork with Narzi is one well-known dish. This meal has a little bitter flavour.

Rosella blossoms are consumed with fish as mestatenga. On hot days, it is typically consumed with any fish. Due to its spice, it is best consumed in warm weather.

Dry fish chutney - Ginger, garlic, and dried chilies should be added to this chutney in an empty pan before folding for a while. Then, everything can be gathered in the pit, mixed with salt, and consumed. Eaters will enjoy this chutney very much. It has a taste of its own.

One of the staple cuisines in the Bodo culture is curry made with chicken and rice powder. At lunchtime, this creamy curry is served with rice.

The Bodo festival, known as Vaisagu, is observed during the first month of each year. Without the Green Tree Ant's Egg fry, Vaisagu is incomplete. One can fry this food item with onions and peppers. The meal has a slightly sour flavour and plenty of protein.

Both a black dal curry basis and a straightforward onion-chili curry base can be used to prepare freshwater snails. They include a lot of protein and Vitamin A while being low in fat. The semisolid texture of the snail meat compliments its wonderful flavour.

6.4 Traditional Attire:

Aronai:

Aronai is a small scarf used both by man and woman. Aronai is sign of Bodo tradition and is used to felicitate guests with honour as a gift. In winter it is wrapped around the neck to warm up the body and generally used in the performance of Bodo dance in ancient period Bodo warrior used Aronai as belt in the battle field. At the time of war Bodo woman would weave Aronai within a single night and present to the warrior as they set out for the battle field.

Dokhona:

Dokhona is the traditional dress of Bodo women. In general, the length of the Dokhona is 3 metres and width is 1.5 metre. Sometimes it depends upon the figure of the body. It is worn to cover the whole body from chest to legs by wrapping one round at a time over the waist. Varieties of Agor (design) and different types of colours are weaved for Dokhona. There are mainly twotypes of Dokhona – Plain Dokhona and designed Dokhona. It can be divided into some sub types (according to design). It depends upon designers. These are –

- Without design- (Matha Dokhona or bidon)
- Plain (only line without design)
- Design with plain border line. (Puri lomai)

With design:

- Whole body designed
- Designed in border only
- Slightly designed in body as well as border

Matha Dokhona (bidon) is actually plain without any design, used to wear while worshipping of God. It is available with different colors but Matha Dokhona with yellow colour is used as a traditional bridal attire, which is known as Dokhona thaosi (Pure-Dokhona). Along with hinjao Gwdan (bride), Buirathi (women receptionist of bride and bridegroom in Bodo marriages) wear matha Dokhona. The favourite colours are generally yellow, Green and colour of parrot's feather.

Jwmgra:

Bodo women use Jwmgra (scarf) to cover upper portion of the body (length around 2.5-meter width around 1 meter). They wear various colors of Jwmgra with varieties of design beautify themselves. The Hajw Agor (mountain design) is one of the most popular designs among all the designs.

Gamsha:

The gamsha is the Bodo male traditional attire. Gamsha is 2-meter length and 1.2-meter width. Bodo men used to cover the portion from waist to knee by tying it in the waist. Gamsha can be different colours but Green with white (in border) is the most common colour in Bodo gamsha. Gamsha is compulsory to wear while worshipping the god and for Bodo bridegroom.

6.5 Festivals:

The Kherai Festival:

Kherai festival is one of the largest festivals of the Bodos. It is divided into two levels: the community (village) level, and the family level. The Garza is situated next to it and is organized on a village level. Others are family-organized gatherings when people pray for the family's welfare. The Kherai Festival According to where each Kherai is placed, they can be categorized into the following: Songsari Kherai, was up at a handy location of the hamlet for wholesome village social life. ii) The Garza Kherai, set up in the Garzasali, a permanent community worship space.iii) Bathou Kherai, set up by a certain family for its well-being.

The Garza Festival:

The Garza may be referred to as a festival of driving out evil. Garza has two functions: first, to drive out evil spirits from the villager's minds, and second, to drive out evil forces. The Bodo people hold the view that if one person engages in a socially or morally wrong behaviour, the entire community also becomes dirty. This impureness can be cleansed by making a confession to God and following certain religious rituals.

The Bwishagu Festival:

The Bwishagu festival is the most well-known among the seasonal celebrations; in fact, it is the most well-liked festival of the Bodos. It touches everyone in the community, regardless of faith, and is therefore regarded as a national celebration. When their new calendar year (which coincides with the Assamese and Bengali calendar years) begins, this celebration is held in their territory during the beginning of spring. The coming of the monsoon, which the Bodos refer to as the arrival of Bardwiskhla, the goddess of wetness, after they had withered during the autumn, gives their natural surroundings a new look of greenery at that time, with plants and trees having new buds and leaves in their branches.

6.6 Conclusion:

Thus, it can be said that Assam is a multicultural state where people from all culture resides together with its unity in diversity. And one of its rich and ancient culture can be said as the Bodo culture. The people of this tribe are also special in their own terms. Their language, their traditional attire, their festivals, their foods have their uniqueness which is one of the matters of pride not only for the Bodo people but also for the entire North Eastern Region.

6.7 References:

1. Basumatary Chandra Bakul (2009) "Bodo Civilization in India."
2. Basumatary Alaka, Basumatary Dinanath (2019) "Festivals of the Bodos: A discourse in the light of acculturation."
3. Baro Ram Madhu (2007) "Assamese and Boro: A comparative and contrastive study."
4. Chutia Fancy (2019) "Traditional attire and ornaments of Bodos."