

Threads of Identity: The Socio-Cultural Significance of Bodo Textiles in Framing Ethnic Narratives.

Mr. Kwrwmdao Laipanghary, Dr. Mihir Kumar Brahma, Dr. Alok Jwhlaw Daimary

¹Ph. D. Research Scholar,

Dept. of Bodo, Bodoland University.

Email: kwrwmdao1992@gmail.com

²Associate Professor & HoD,

Department of Bodo, Janata College, Serfanguri,

Email: nicevilla99@gmail.com

³Assistant Professor, Sankosh Degree College, Gossaigaon,

Email: alokdaimary4@gmail.com

Abstract

This essay explores the close connection between Northeast India's Bodo community's ethnic identity formation and weaving traditions. For the Bodos, weaving is more than just a craft; it is an intricate visual language that conveys spiritual beliefs, social order, and historical memory. This study's analysis of traditional clothing, including the *Dokhona*, *Jwmgra*, and the recognisable *Aronai*, is at its core.

The study looks at how certain motifs; like the *Hajw Agor*, act as cartographic representations of the ancestral landscape, while the *Aronai*'s transformation into a symbol of political solidarity illustrates the community's tenacity and desire for self-determination. The study makes the case that Bodo textiles serve as a "living archive" by examining the socioeconomic function of the loom and the recent installation of Geographical Indication (GI) tags. Finally, it emphasizes how these weaves, which continue to be a pillar of Bodo cultural sovereignty, manage the conflict between traditional heritage and the demands of globalised fashion.

Keywords: Bodo Ethnography, Cultural Narratives, Handloom Symbols, *Aronai*, Identity Politics, Socio-Cultural Significance, and Geographical Indication (GI).

Introduction:

Particularly in indigenous civilizations where oral and visual traditions sustain collective memory, material artifacts can function as potent bearers of cultural meaning. Weaving is an integral part of daily life and social identity for the Bodos of Northeast India. Textiles serve as symbolic texts that convey identity, gendered knowledge, and ancestral continuity in addition to being useful objects.

Material culture scholars claim that textiles serve as systems of communication that can encode intricate social meanings (Narayan 318). Clothes like the *Dokhona* and *Aronai* serve as outward symbols of camaraderie and identity in Bodo society. According to recent studies, indigenous women weavers use their craft to negotiate tradition and modernity, acting as cultural actors (Basumatary and Khawzawl 352). This study explores the ways in which Bodo textiles aid in the construction of identities and looks at how their significance has changed in the era of globalization.

Literature Review:

Weaving was identified by early ethnographic research as a characteristic of Bodo social structure. **Bordoloi** emphasizes the significance of Bodo textiles in preserving communal cohesiveness by documenting their ritual and symbolic aspects (**Bordoloi 87**). **Goswami** similarly highlights the technical intricacy of indigenous weaving techniques while placing Assamese handloom traditions within a larger cultural context (**Goswami 42**).

This basis is strengthened by recent research that emphasizes gender and identity. Handloom weaving among Bodo women is a site of identity building that connects inherited tradition and modern desires, as **Basumatary and Khawzawl** show (352). Additionally, regional studies demonstrate that through the manufacture of textiles, indigenous women in Northeast India serve as stewards of cultural continuity ("**Weaving Culture**").

Maintaining traditional craft processes enhances cultural selfhood and economic resilience, according to phenomenological research on indigenous textile groups (**Ramkumar and Dias 490**). Studies of comparative motifs, like **Bhattacharjee's** examination of Dimasa textiles, demonstrate how patterns encode symbolic meanings that are essential to ethnic narratives (375). According to sustainability studies, textile traditions can remain authentic while adjusting to contemporary ecological and fashion movements (**Das and Gupta 164**).

Together, these works frame textiles as dynamic cultural texts that mediate identity, economy, and heritage preservation.

Methodology:

This research adopts a qualitative interpretive approach grounded in cultural studies and material culture analysis. The study synthesizes ethnographic literature, recent peer-reviewed journal articles, and theoretical perspectives on indigenous craft traditions. Thematic analysis is employed to identify recurring patterns related to symbolism, gendered labor, and cultural preservation.

The study uses critical textual interpretation of documented weaving processes instead of primary field interviews. A conceptual analysis of textiles as cultural artifacts ingrained in lived experience and collective memory is made possible by this approach.

Historical Foundations of Bodo Weaving:

Traditionally, weaving has played a significant part in Bodo ceremonial and household life. Women in traditional homes made clothing on looms that were necessary for both daily and ceremonial use. Weaving proficiency was a symbol of respectability and social maturity (**Bordoloi 92**).

Textile production was influenced by agrarian cycles, which connected handicrafts to environmental consciousness. While ceremonial scarves like the *Aronai* denoted welcome and dignity, clothing like the *Dokhona* reflected feminine identity. These fabrics served as symbols of continuity and social membership.

Regional production systems and identity construction were impacted by historical changes, such as colonial economic developments covered in *Empire's Garden: Assam and the Making of India* (**Sharma 203**). Weaving continued to be a sustaining cultural institution that conserved indigenous knowledge in spite of these developments.

Symbolism and Semiotics of Textile Motifs:

The intricate visual language of Bodo textile designs encodes cosmic values and ecological memory. Geography is transformed into patterned abstraction by patterns like *Hajw Agor*, which are viewed as symbolic representations of ancestral landscapes (**Narayan 324**).

This semiotic system is further enhanced by color symbolism. Contrasting tones create harmony, while red represents life and rebirth. Motifs serve as memory devices that preserve cultural narratives, according to comparative studies on Northeast Indian textiles (**Bhattacharjee 377**).

The *Aronai* holds a special place in symbolism. It began as a ritual but has now developed into a symbol of ethnic unity. During times of social mobilization, cultural symbols frequently serve as focal points of communal identity (**Baruah 162**). The *Aronai* is a wonderful example of how textiles represent cultural and political aspirations beyond aesthetics.

Gender, Agency, and the Loom:

In Bodo culture, weaving is typically associated with a certain gender, but it also symbolizes intricate intellectual work. Through embodied practice, technical expertise is passed down from one generation to the next (**Goswami 55**). According to recent research, Bodo women actively create their identities through weaving, establishing the loom as a site of cultural agency (**Basumatary and Khawzawl 355**).

Indigenous women in Northeast India serve as cultural ambassadors, reinterpreting the significance of textiles in shifting social circumstances ("Weaving Culture"). According to phenomenological analysis, maintaining craft traditions improves community resilience and individual identity (**Ramkumar and Dias 498**).

Thus, the loom operates not only as a production tool but as a social institution that fosters dialogue between tradition and innovation.

Globalization and Cultural Preservation:

For indigenous textiles, globalization offers both opportunity and challenges. Growing markets boost the economy, but they can also put pressure on craftspeople to alter established aesthetics. According to studies on sustainability, adaptable techniques like upcycling textiles can harmonize legacy with modern ecological principles (**Das and Gupta 168**).

By protecting symbolic information, recording traditional themes helps to preserve culture (**Bhattacharjee 380**). New approaches to digital preservation offer further opportunities for safeguarding intangible textile history.

Recognizing Geographical Indications (GIs) is a crucial framework for connecting goods to their cultural roots. Commercialization and ethical respect for artisan knowledge and community involvement must be balanced for effective preservation.

Textiles as Living Archives:

Through embodied practice, Bodo textiles serve as living archives that maintain historical consciousness. These clothing continue to be used in ceremonial and everyday life, unlike static museum exhibits. Donning traditional clothing turns into a way to confirm one's identity and remember.

According to **Narayan (329)**, textiles function as narrative media that constantly reinterpret cultural meaning. By placing clothing in performance situations, festivals and rituals bring these archives to life. Weaving maintains the conversation between the past and present through continuous use and reinterpretation.

Discussion:

Bodo textiles function at the nexus of art, identity, and socio-political expression, as the investigation shows. Because of their rich symbolic content, common clothing becomes a vehicle for shared meaning. The changing importance of weaving traditions is influenced by globalization, gendered labor, and ecological initiatives.

The data points to adaptive resilience based on community agency rather than modernization as a loss of culture. Bodo textiles are a wonderful example of how traditional customs can change while preserving essential symbolic elements.

Conclusion:

Bodo textiles are a combination of artistic expression, social identity, and cultural memory. They serve as timeless representations of community that unite generations via a common visual language. Understanding their importance is crucial for preserving intangible heritage in a time of growing globalization.

Collaborative frameworks that honor artisan expertise and encourage moral interaction with international markets are essential for sustainable preservation. Textiles' ongoing significance as dynamic manifestations of cultural sovereignty is highlighted by the idea that they are living archives.

Ethics Statement:

This study is based exclusively on analysis of published scholarly sources and publicly available cultural knowledge. No human participants or private data were involved. All sources are acknowledged in accordance with MLA academic standards. The author affirms the originality of the work and expresses respect for the cultural heritage and intellectual traditions of the Bodo community.

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