



Research Article

Folklore of the Himalayan Foothills: Weaving Traditions in Bodo Folklore

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Abstract

The Bodos, inhabiting the foothills of the Himalayas in northeastern India, are considered the indigenous population of the region. They possess a unique cultural identity characterised by their language, beliefs, rituals, and traditions. The primary objective of this paper is to explore the complex interrelationship between Bodo folklore and the practice of weaving, with the intention of providing insight into the culturally significant fabric that has been influenced by women's expertise. The dynamic relationship between women's folklore and the weaving traditions of the Bodo serves as evidence of the inherent interconnectivity of art, culture, and the human experience. By acknowledging and examining this dynamic relationship, we not only commemorate the ingenuity and perseverance of women but also get a deeper understanding of the fundamental principles that govern the Bodo society. Similar to the way in which every intricately crafted textile conveys a distinct narrative, the interconnectedness between folklore and weaving traditions serves as a collective account of resilience, cultural heritage, and timeless wisdom.

Keywords: Bodo, weaving, folklore, cultural expression, cultural heritage.

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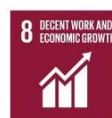
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1. Introduction

In our nation, the heritage of folk literature is quite old. It existed before the man knew how to read and write (Bakar, 2021). Folk literature encompasses diverse literary genres, such as women's songs, tales, proverbs, sayings, riddles, folk theatre, ballads, and several more. The extensive literary heritage of our society comprises a wide array of folk songs that serve as cultural expressions. These songs are sung on many ceremonial occasions, including weddings, birth ceremonies, naming rituals, cradle songs, and songs associated with agricultural activities, weaving, etc. The transmission of songs and tales between generations in society mostly relies on oral tradition, predominantly upheld by women. Bascom asserts that:

Oral tradition is a pervasive element across various phases of cultural history. Folklore persists throughout diverse cultures and societies, even in the face of industrialization and technological advancement. This phenomenon exemplifies the reflection of societal elements within folklore since they encompass various facets of culture such as the arts, customs, philosophy, economics, politics, and social ideas. (Bascom, 1965, p. 25).

Within both domestic environments and communal meetings, both men and women undertook the tasks of authoring, composing, and performing traditional songs, as well as delivering folk narratives. According to Halimah Hassan,

Folklore is a literary form that exhibits a wide range of diversity and expansiveness. In essence, folklore may be defined as a form of literature that is orally transmitted, utilizing speech as a primary means of communication. This suggests that the phenomenon under consideration is a manifestation of artistic ingenuity that has been passed down through verbal means over successive generations. Therefore, there is no copyright in folklore, and the speaker has complete freedom to modify and change the customary form. (Hassan, 1989, p. 47).

Weaving holds a significant historical and cultural significance in the foothills of the Himalayan region in northeastern India, serving as a longstanding skill deeply intertwined with the daily existence of its inhabitants. By exploring the hidden aspects of a weave, one would discover a multitude of narratives concealed within the colours, patterns, and origin. These stories revolve around human craftsmanship, mystical gods, and benevolent woodland entities (Bhuyan, 2017). These narratives further provide tangible evidence of the legends that have been transmitted orally within each tribe for centuries and render them highly meaningful in the scholarship of the region's sociocultural structure.

The folklore of each region possesses a unique trait that is exclusive to its evolutionary development. Although many other parts of the nation have practically lost their folklore, the northeast, known as 'folklorists' paradise,' contains its greatest 'living treasures' (Das, 2010). For instance, the Bhois, a subgroup of the Khasi tribe, have legends about the origin of cotton and the genesis of the loom, which is said to have been created from the remains of a monstrous creature (Bhuyan, 2017). They possess a profound affinity for nature, and there exist designs that trace their roots back to traditional songs about the cultivation of flowers. The notable folktales from Assam like *Silonir Jiyekor Sadhu* (Tale of the Kite's Daughter) (Barua, 2020) and the narrative

of *Tejimola* also allude to the significance of the craft in the lives of the local people (Singh, 2018) Furthermore, it has been noted that the predominant characteristic shared by the majority of weaves is the involvement of women as the primary creators (Bhuyan, 2017).

In a theoretical framework, it is understood that most folklore pieces are the result of collaborative efforts wherein the specific identity of the particular originator remains ambiguous. In the context of ancient folk narratives, traditionally, women have been associated with domestic responsibilities, whereas males have engaged in activities such as warfare, hunting, and procuring essential resources for sustenance, including food and tools. The women attended to the household duties, which included the maintenance of the household as well as catering to their children. In addition, they engaged in culinary activities like cooking and textile-related tasks such as weaving and spinning. These remarkable skills produced utilitarian products like textiles and clothing and held cultural and symbolic significance.

2. Background

The Bodo are the largest indigenous community residing in the northeastern state of India in the foothills of the Himalayas and possess a significant cultural legacy. They are referred to as the indigenous people and native tribes of the state of Assam. Brahma (1992) states that the Bodos are an ethnic group of Mongolian descent, commonly believed to inhabit a region located north of the Himalayas and west of China. The land was called *Bod*, derived from the word 'homeland,' and its inhabitants were referred to as *Bodo-ficha*, *Bodocha*, or *Bodosa*. The suffixes '*ficha*' or '*cha*' signify 'children,' indicating that they were the children of the *Bod* land or country. Consequently, the Bodos established settlements in the northern and northeastern regions of India. They extended throughout the entire Brahmaputra valley, as well as certain areas of North Bengal and East Bengal. At present, the greater part of the population resides in the southern bank of the Brahmaputra valley, comprising the districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa, and Udalguri. The Bodo maintains a distinct linguistic, cultural identity, and folk narratives. These narratives serve as poignant reflections of the deeply rooted traditional beliefs, customs, and rituals that represent the rich tapestry of communal wisdom and practices of life of the Bodo community. However, despite possessing a rich repository of folk narratives, it remained in a state of ambiguity and uncertainty.

The folk narratives of the Bodos persisted unwaveringly until the onset of colonial rule in India. The English Missionaries have made significant contributions to the collection and documentation of Bodo folk narratives. J. D. Anderson is acknowledged as the pioneer in the field of transforming Bodo oral folk narratives into written or textual form during the pre-independence era (Baro & Narzaree, 2019), which serves as the basis for the documentation of Boro folk narratives in a book, ensuring their permanence for the first time. Anderson served as a member of the Indian Civil Service from 1873 to 1900. In 1895, he released the book titled 'A Collection of Kachari Folktales and Rhymes.' The meticulous work of J.D. Anderson served as an inspiration for Bodo nationalists and Assamese scholars to engage in similar investigations during the latter half of the 19th century. Among them, P.C. Bhattacharya, Praffula Dutta Goswami, Mohini Mohan Brahma, Sukumar Basumatary, Modaram Brahma, Rohini Kumar Brahma, and Madhuram Boro are individuals who have contributed to the collection and publication of Bodo folktales (Basumatary

& Hazowary, 2021). Books significantly augmented the wealth of Bodo literature. The elderly individuals of the Bodo community engage in storytelling, thus ensuring the continuation of a culturally significant tradition within the Bodo society. They engage in the practice of storytelling in various settings such as the workplace, the fireplace, funeral ceremonies, and numerous other occasions. The Bodos may possess a reservoir of untapped narratives that have yet to be fully examined and revealed.



Figure 1. Bodo men and women in their traditional attire (Fieldwork, 2021)

The anthropological significance of the Bodo culture lies in its distinct qualities and aspects, which serve several roles, particularly when examined from a folkloristic perspective. The Bodos have a strong commitment to the natural environment, upon which they depend for their sustenance and well-being. The effect of nature is evident in their religious beliefs, social conventions, economic practices, and cultural expressions. The Bodo adhere to *Bathouism*, a traditional religious belief, and worship *Bathou Bwrai* as the supreme deity, alongside other gods and goddesses. The *sijou* plant (*Euphorbia splendens*) is considered as the symbol of the supreme deity. *Bathouism* centres around five principles air, water, earth, sky, and fire. The Bodo performs the *Bagurumba*, a traditional dance that has its roots in nature. The dance is performed during the spring festival *Bwisagu*, in which the entire population actively participates while adorned in their vibrant traditional garments.

The Bodo women play a prominent position within their culture, as seen by their oral literature, particularly their folklore. The practice of weaving, predominantly undertaken by women, possesses significant symbolism and metaphorical parallels to several aspects of life, including emotions, interpersonal connections, and individual growth.

In addition to fulfilling essential clothing requirements for domestic or ceremonial purposes, it is imperative to acknowledge the substantial role of hand-woven garments in shaping the social and cultural fabric of a society. Furthermore, the process of weaving frequently carries symbolic connotations associated with feminine duties and virtues. The loom serves as a sacred area where

women exhibit their artistic ingenuity, foster their households, and interlace the social fabric of their communities. Women harness the repetitive actions of the shuttle and the sound of the loom to create textiles, while also incorporating narratives, songs, and traditional tales into the very essence of their existence. Hence, the incorporation of weaving practices is a common occurrence in Bodo folklore, serving to emphasize the cultural significance of this traditional form of artistic expression.

3. Aims and Objectives

The aims and objectives collectively attempt to deepen the understanding of the intricate relationship between Bodo folklore and weaving practices, illustrating how they collectively contribute to the cultural fabric of the Bodo and its broader societal dynamics. In addition, this paper will further explore this relationship, with the intention of providing insight into the culturally significant fabric that has been influenced by women's expertise.

4. Materials and Methods

For the present study, a narrative approach to analysis has been used employing a diverse array of resources and methodologies to provide a nuanced and multifaceted examination of tradition. To gather comprehensive and meaningful information in the field of folklore research, ethnographic field methods like observation and interview were utilised. These methods allow for the collection of detailed data that sheds light on the significance, customs, and transmission of folk traditions within their cultural settings.

In addition, through the integration of historical documents and textual analysis, the research attempts to deepen scholarly understanding of the intricate cultural tapestry inherent in Bodo folklore. The study focuses on a specific aspect of Bodo folklore, namely the oral narratives associated with weaving tradition and Bodo women, which represent a diverse range of genres within folk literature. Hence, for various secondary sources, transcripts of the four genres of Bodo folklore—folk songs, folk stories, proverbs, and riddles that are related to weaving have been assembled.

5. Findings and Discussions

Within the vast realm of folklore, storytelling, folksongs, and proverbs serve as integral components that intricately interweave the amassed wisdom and cultural essence of communities around the globe. Furthermore, these storytelling styles not only offer valuable insights into the intricacies of human values, beliefs, and experiences but also contribute unique patterns to the overarching narrative structure. Folksongs, folktales, and proverbs collectively contribute to the preservation of tradition and the reinforcement of shared values through their synergistic interaction. By integrating historical tales with futuristic objectives, they enhance the foundation of cultural identity. Analogous to the intergenerational transmission of textiles, these narratives

are orally shared throughout various occasions, such as festivities, celebrations, and informal dialogues, safeguarding the integrity of traditional ties.

In local folklore, weaving is often seen as a visual art form that metaphorically represents narratives of individuals, their communities, and their existential position within the universe. In parallel to the folklore of the Mishmi tribe inhabiting the northeastern region of South Tibet, there exists a narrative surrounding the initial practitioner of weaving, a young female named Hambrumai (Barua, 2022). She would position herself in close proximity to the riverbank, drawing inspiration from the surrounding natural elements to inspire her artistic creations. The discussion of Bodo weaving would be deemed insufficient without the inclusion of the traditional narrative surrounding the two sisters, Asagi and Bwisagi (Fieldwork, 2021). This narrative was traditionally shared by the ancestors and is still shared while gathering around the fire during the winter nights. Both sisters have exceptional weaving and design skills. Asagi and Bwisagi had a crucial role in the evolution of several classic designs. A vast array of *agor* (design) was generated by them, with each conventional Bodo *agor* exhibiting a profound association with the environment.

When it comes to the narrative, the two sisters possessed remarkable expertise in the art of *agor*, to the extent that they would extract minute elements from a passing bird, such as an eye or a fleeting movement, and utilize them as inspiration for their innovative designs. The sisters could express visual representations of butterflies in flight, birds soaring through the air, and flora in full bloom on their intricately crafted textiles. The earliest known motifs include *pharou megon* (resembling a pigeon's eye), *agor gidid* (depicting a diamond shape), *dhaorai mwkhreb* (resembling the winkle of a peacock's eye), *dhingkhia mohor* (representing a fern), *muphur apha* (depicting the footprint of a bear), *khusli denthagn* (representing a spoon), *gangu godo* (resembling the shape of a praying mantis), *bwigri bibar* (resembling a palm leaf), *phul mwbla* (depicting various bloomed flowers), *maoji aagan* (representing the footprint of a cat), etc.

The Enchanted Weavers

In his scholarly work, M.M Brahma stated:

“The folk songs of the Bodo community and its performers demonstrate an inherent ability to create songs and verses. The auditory landscape of the corn fields, river bank, grass, and meadows are enriched by the harmonious melodies delivered by the Bodo girls. The individuals partake in vocalization inside serene and pristine environs marked by mild winds, blossoming vegetation, fluttering insects, and bird fauna” (Brahma, 1960, p. 5).

Similar to the process of composing songs, the weavers employ their artistic skills to create intricate designs, drawing inspiration from their immediate surroundings. The art of weaving is a craft in which Bodo women exhibit a high level of expertise, and it is a key motif in several songs.

Besides songs, proverbs show significant relevance in terms of weaving:

‘Bwisagi sikhwlaya khun lunanwi khundung dwmse jwngnw gamsa zora dihungba’ (Chainary, 2011, p. 216).

Meaning: *Bwisagi* (collective Bodo women) has woven cloth with a single thread of cotton).

This proverb has significant popularity and serves to assess the level of skill possessed by Bodo women within their societal context. Therefore, *Bwisagi* serves as a symbolic representation of the

collective Bodo women. The Bodo women have a high level of proficiency in the domains of weaving and domestic tasks, which enables them to engage in the production of cotton thread and the subsequent weaving of textiles. The term 'a single thread' as stated in the proverb highlights the exceptional skill possessed by Bodo women in the art of weaving.

Concerning the above narratives, some songs honour the skills of women in weaving. The following song expresses the Bodo women's expertise in spinning and weaving which is the primary skill of the women:

dwi ziri ziri samo khingkiri
shona ni zinziri
o' lwi agwi danw rwnga rwnga hwnnaiya
lunw rwnga rwnga hwnnaiya
mushra gongse jwngnw dalaibai
endi si gangseya (Brahma, 1960, p. 39).

Meaning: (People think you are useless, you cannot weave or spin threads, but I have seen you weave an entire *endi* (eri) cloth without breaking a thread like a stream of golden necklace).

Besides songs that sing praises of the women folk, there are indications of how men and women play their respective roles in weaving. A folk song, called *Porbatjora*, centers around the relationship between a brother-in-law and his younger sister-in-law. As the brother-in-law prepares himself to engage in the act of harvesting sal trees (*Shorea robusta*) inside the forest, the sister-in-law proceeds to communicate her needs for weaving tools and requirements to him through the medium of melodic composition. The musical composition is structured in the following manner:

Sister-in-law:

Porbatjora Porbotjhora
Dongphang dannw thangwbwla thangwbwla
Sal jhora makhu jhora
Labw labw gumwi laru bandaru (Filedwork, 2021).

Meaning: [Greetings brother-in-law, when you go for tree felling, please provide me a set of *sal-makhu* (weaving shuttle)]

Brother-in-law:

De labwgwn agwi dodere mainao
maibrani jouwa jwsani mairong
songkha songkha agwi dodere mainao (Fieldwork, 2021).

Meaning: (I am willing to procure any desired item, but I kindly request that you prepare a substantial meal in anticipation of my arrival. The offering consists of a delightful combination of traditional fermented rice beverage and fragrant rice).

Narratives of Love and Longing

Weaving is often associated with love and longing in folksongs. The process of weaving clothes for loved ones—whether spouses, kids, or distant partners—becomes a metaphor for affection and bonding. Songs about weaving can express longing for lost loved ones by making use of the rhythmic motion of weaving as a metaphor for the singer's longing to be reunited with their lover.

According to a commonly held belief, genuine love encounters several obstacles and challenges. The dreams and goals of both the lover and the beloved are sometimes left unfulfilled. The Bodo damsel, who faced an impediment in marrying her beloved, crafted a piece of hand-woven textile known as an *anthwb* (handkerchief), using a remnant thread sourced from the loom. This act served as a heartfelt expression of affection, as she presented the handkerchief to her cherished individual. A lady with unwavering principles formerly had the belief in openly expressing affection and sorrow, as well as maintaining optimism in the prospect of reuniting and perpetuating love. The young woman, disappointed with her romantic involvement and emotional connection with a male companion, recites the lyrical composition. The song highlights the significance of love's attraction, the emotional pain experienced, and the cathartic release of dissatisfaction resulting from separation or the unattained romantic connection with the sought youthful companion. The song exemplifies a common scenario in which a youthful lady expresses the intensity of her affection, frustration, and emotional distress. She conveys her sentiments by proposing to present him with a handkerchief crafted by her own hands, on the condition that she encounters him during the forthcoming *Bwisagu* (Spring festival) celebration. The song also alludes to a conventional Bodo method of conveying affection and an unwavering want for harmony, as the lover proposes that if their union is unattainable in this lifetime, it should be sought in the subsequent one. Within the realm of folk songs, the forlorn girl vocalizes her sentiments, making allusions to her cherished individual.

boro muu jwng muu'se hangma thabai aada

harsa muu jwng muu'se hangma thabai

bikha'ao daodab thabai

jampwi seraoni aada sayaram

mandaar bibar

deglai Bwisagu'ao hangma hangsani

phali gangsekoulo langpwisradw aada

be jwnwm'ao mwnablabw aada

bwi jwnwm'ao mwnhwithwngswi (Narzi, 2003, p. 17-18).

Meaning: (If you cannot be mine in this life, may you certainly be the one in my next, my beloved Sayaram, the courageous. During *Bwisagu*, please pay me a visit and take away a gift, a handkerchief woven with love).



Figure 2. *Bwisagu* celebration (Fieldwork, 2021)

The handkerchief holds significant cultural significance in Bodo folklore since it is believed that gifting a handkerchief may create an everlasting memory for a loved one. The objective of a Bodo female is to secure the affection of her beloved, leading them to express their emotions through songs.

gsw thwywbwla

kushi jaywbwla

gwrjiya thapwi ada

gwrjiya thapwi

nwnw swithwbwla gwrjiya thapwi (Boro, 2014, p. 107).

Meaning: (If you love me, adorned me, and have affection then come and stay at my house. The Bodo maiden sings in remembrance of their loved one in their loom).

There are melodies that a lover may sing out of sheer delight upon receiving a beautifully adorned handkerchief from their sweetheart as a gesture of affection.

Agwilwi Sewali...

gorkha gongbwri ni agor phalini agor kou

hordwli angnw, khorowao khana lani

Rohai ada...

Wngkham songnaiyaonw, dwi lainaniyaonw

Phalikou hasonw hathoakwi (Fieldwork, 2021).

Meaning: (This excerpt pertains to a romantic composition wherein the protagonist expresses a desire for a handcrafted scarf from their significant other, serving as a symbolic gesture of affection, with the intention of adorning it upon their head. The respondent explains that because

of her numerous responsibilities in managing home tasks, such as cooking and collecting water, she was unable to allocate sufficient time to remove the scarf from the loom).

A feeling of love can be described as a persistent and intense emotional feeling of warmth. According to popular belief, when a girl experiences romantic love, she frequently envisions her cherished individual in her thoughts. A musical composition pertaining to the mentioned subject is provided below:

Sal gabnaikhou khwnaywbwla
nwngkou gswkhangw anglai
makhu gabnaikhou khwnaywbwla
nwngkhounw phwidwng nongswi
agwi bibar sari sari, goi bibar sari sari (Brahma, 2017, p. 128).

Meaning: (The vocalist exhibits feelings of yearning as she sings her emotions over the association between the act of weaving and her beloved. The rhythmic sound of weaving always makes her think of her beloved as though he is approaching her).

Thang kalthang sal gabnai
habab ada nwngkhou gsw khangnanwi
agor emaiyasw khana nangbai (Boro, 2014, p. 104).

Meaning: (The female vocalist conveys to her romantic partner, through the language of song, that during the process of weaving, her thoughts become diverted towards him, resulting in a disruption of her intricate pattern formation).

Weaving as a Test of a Character

Weaving is occasionally used in folklore as a task or a test of character. Characters, especially heroines, may be required to perform activities like weaving incredibly intricate clothing or spinning straw into riches. The Bodo maiden who is unable to weave is characterized as *aoluri* (good for nothing) and the men who marry them are considered unfortunate ones. Similar remarks were directed toward the maiden who are not excellent weavers at weddings and become a subject of *Bwisagu* songs. In the past when *dokhona-jwmgra* (women's traditional attire) were not easily available in the market, unskilled maidens used to buy saree and wore them instead of *dokhona*. The subsequent verses were used by the male individuals to vocalize their dislikes towards their female counterparts:

si danw rwngywi
wngkham songnw rwngywi
saldang sikhwla
bangal saree ganna
delai delai thabaidwng honwi
gamiyao beraidwng (Fieldwork, 2021).

Meaning: (A clumsy saree-clad inept maiden, who does not know how to weave and cook, look at her strolling around the village dressed in nines).

In response to the above verses, the female would engage in vocalization by performing these lyrical lines:

ang agor rwngababw salamatha kounw
phali hwrlang dananwi hwgwn ang ada
habab angbw agor rwnga
nwngbw lekha rwnga (Fieldwork, 2021).

Meaning: [(Despite my lack of knowledge in weaving motifs, I am determined to create a handkerchief of *salamatha*, (a textile piece devoid of any design). Regrettably, neither do I possess expertise in the art of weaving motifs, nor do you possess literacy skills)]

In order to be deemed eligible for marriage, it is imperative for a young woman to possess proficient weaving abilities. There is a general aversion towards entering into matrimony with a lady who lacks the ability to engage in the art of weaving or the skill to create intricate designs on clothes. The saying below serve to exemplify the profound importance of weaving within the cultural practices and daily existence of Bodo women:

Thaokri lunw rwngabwla
si dabw rwngabwla
ma houya nangou
ma houya nangou...? (Brahma, 2017, p. 129).

Meaning: [The vocalist provokingly questions the young woman's prospects of securing a marital partner, highlighting her lack of proficiency in the traditional crafts of weaving, and creating a thread using *Thaokri* (a drop spindle)].



Figure 3. Bodo woman using *thaokri* to spin an *eri* thread (Fieldwork, 2021)

The achievement of Bodo women is closely associated with their ability to attain expertise in weaving while simultaneously managing other domestic chores. However, there are certain female individuals within the group or social circle who lack an inherent interest in the art of weaving or its related activities. The following lyrics were composed for females who express a lack of enthusiasm for the craft of weaving:

musra sanw rwngywi
khundung sujubnw rwngywi
agor akhai sinainw rwngywi
bobeao dergwma baikhw
bobeao laogwma baikhw
gaoni gannai kou danw rwngywi (Fieldwork, 2021).

Meaning: (Which part of the world did you grow up in? Where were you raised? Why can't you spin, join a thread, recognize the pattern, or weave your own clothes?)

In a comparable scenario, Bodo youth tease females for their lack of weaving talents.

Ayo agwilai
Salamatha kounw khukhrao rwnga
agwilai dwisa barnaini
gwmw rago langnai (Brahma, 2017, p.130).

Meaning: (Hey girl, from across the river, you do not know how to weave a simple design, you are going to stay unmarried)

Moreover, the girls are not the only ones who are subjected to mockery, the mothers of the inept weavers are also targeted. The song listed below is one example:

Sele le le lama hogar
Ayo habab,
nwngni nwngsajwa
Salamathakounw danw bw udaithara
Ouwasung-basung daokha donda
Ayo habab,
nwngni nwngsajwa
Dingkhiya agorkounw ernwbw udaithara (Brahma, 2017, p. 132).

Meaning: [The individual's daughter lacks the skill to engage in the art of weaving, particularly unable to produce an intricate motif or design. She is also unable to produce a *salamatha* (attire devoid of any design elements)]

Therefore, below are the concerns raised by the elderly women cautioning the younger female individuals about the consequences of neglecting to learn the skill:

Dangnai dangnai danw rwngabwla
dangnai dangnai lunw rwngabwla
thikiniyao sabjagwn salipwr
thikiniyao sabjagwn (Brahma, 2017, p. 130).

Meaning: (If you do not learn how to spin and weave properly, I will yank a strand of your hair)



Figure 3. Bodo woman multitasking, spinning thread while cooking (Fieldwork, 2021)

Women as the Keepers of Tradition

The act of weaving functions as a method for safeguarding and upholding cultural heritage. In a similar way, it is noteworthy that Bodo women play a substantial role in the preservation and transmission of their distinct traditions. The intergenerational transmission of folklore often places a strong focus on the importance of the craft of weaving as a means of preserving cultural traditions. Textiles have the capacity to encapsulate narratives, symbols, and motifs that establish a profound connection with the historical, spiritual, and cultural values of a community. The narratives are intricately integrated within the textiles and hold a significant place in the collective memory of the community.

Folklore has a crucial role in establishing a cohesive link between past events and the present day, effectively recounting the evolution of a society's cultural advancement. The act of weaving is imbued with narratives of perseverance, expertise, and cultural heritage as passed down by older generations who recount the stories of ancestors who excelled in this traditional practice. The narratives shown in these stories exemplify how the practice of weaving functions as a symbolic link between several generations, functioning as a concrete manifestation of continuity. The following lyrics were sung by the Bodo women with the intention of motivating one another to acquire proficiency in the craft of weaving. This was done in order to exhibit their skills and perpetuate the cultural heritage associated with this practice.

dehai lggw bima burwi ni
danai lunai agor ernaikou swlwngdini
sikhiri bidwi swbnai
okhwrang ao dao birnai
agor erwi erwi boinibw sigangao
khinthani lggw khinthani
mulug bikhayao dинthilangni (Brahma, 2017, p. 128).

Meaning: (Friends, let us learn how to weave together, from our grandmothers, and mothers who weave intricate designs of butterflies collecting floral nectar and of birds flying in the sky. Let us show and tell everyone about the designs we weave).

The cultural practice of weaving has fostered a resilient and captivating connection among Bodo women. It has been observed from the field that women used to accompany each other during the different stages of the weaving process. They collaborate to untangle any yarn knots collectively a process known as threading, while the experienced weavers provide hands-on training to the novice weavers on various techniques, skills, and weaving patterns. This collaboration not only helps complete labour-intensive tasks but also promotes camaraderie and solidarity among the weavers which further ensures the transmission of traditions from generation to the next.



Figure 4. Women engaged in untangling yarn-knots (Fieldwork, 2021)

Similarly, the contemplations and nostalgic reflections on participating in the art of weaving and preserving the longstanding cultural heritage are equally captivating. The act of singing among Bodo women is accompanied by a profound sense of fulfillment and enjoyment, as they engage in communal pursuits like spinning and weaving. In connection to this subject, an excerpt of a traditional song has been provided below.

Swrgiding

hajase lugwn jwng

be indi thaokri jwngni (Brahma, 2017, p. 131).

Meaning: Repetitively, to our hearts content, we will spin and weave with *Thaokri* (**Figure 3**)



Figure 4. Mother instructing her daughter in the skill of warping (Fieldwork, 2021)

6. Conclusion

The above narratives present an account that highlights the Bodo women's adherence to long-standing traditions, attempt to enhance the welfare of society, profound love, and compassion for their beloved, and influential role in building the cultural fabric of their community. On the contrary, the depiction of the harshness of heart and warped thinking has been presented in a bleak fashion. Bodo traditional folklore portrays women in two contrasting manners, on one side, they have been shown as symbols of a refined character, representation of resilience and creativity, and keepers of the cultural heritage while on the other hand, they have been portrayed as embodiments of negative aspects and incompetence.

The humorous folksongs and satirical proverbs mentioned above that exist within the realm of Bodo folk narratives, serve as vehicles to underscore the intellectual acumen, wit, and aptitude of women. These narratives sometimes employ clever linguistic devices, such as wordplay, sarcasm, or irony, to convey amusing but insightful meanings. It is crucial to remember that these amusing adages should not be applied to reinforce stereotypes or denigrate someone; rather, they should be embraced in the spirit of good-natured humour. In a light-hearted and joking way, they serve as a cultural statement that honours the wit and experience of women. Our attention should be directed towards acknowledging and valuing the ways in which women have utilized the practice of weaving to create textiles that serve both functional purposes and convey narratives that reflect their roles, experiences, and aspirations. Folklore, in turn, has celebrated these women by immortalizing their skills, wisdom, and accomplishments through narratives that persist beyond generations.

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