

## Traditional knowledge system of Bodo's in rearing of cocoon and weaving Indi cloths: An observation.

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### Abstract

The practice of rearing silkworms and making traditional clothing is more than just a means of subsistence for the Bodo people of Northeast India; it is a way of life. The wisdom of living in balance with nature is carried by these customs, which have been passed down through the generations. Using straightforward yet efficient techniques that demonstrate a thorough understanding of seasonal cycles, cocoon rearing is frequently carried out within the home. In addition to making cloth, weaving; particularly of clothing like the dokhona and aronai, is a means of expressing cultural values and maintaining identity. Every fabric item conveys a narrative of continuity and belonging, and every design has significance. It becomes clear from seeing these customs that they are more than just commercial endeavors; they are living legacies that demonstrate tenacity, inventiveness, and a community's pride in clinging to its legacy in the face of rapid modern change.

**Keywords:** weaving, cocoon rearing, traditional knowledge, cultural heritage, and the Bodo community.

### Introduction

Traditional knowledge systems are the basis of indigenous cultures. They are based on hundreds of years of knowledge, skills, and adaptation to local ecosystems. The Bodo community of Assam, one of India's many ethnic groups, has an exceptional history of ecological knowledge and expertise through their Indi (eri) fabric weaving and cocoon raising customs. These customs are cultural institutions that uphold identity, community, and continuity rather than just being commercial endeavours. With an emphasis on how these interrelated practices reflect ecological balance, gendered labour division, and the changing dynamics of tradition in a globalising world, this study aims to investigate the traditional knowledge systems of cocoon raising and Indi fabric making among the Bodos. The study is based on field observations as well as secondary literature.

### Historical and Cultural Background of the Bodo Community

One of the earliest Indo-Mongoloid ethnolinguistic groups, the Bodos live in northeastern India, especially Assam. Their social structure and cultural customs demonstrate a deep harmony with nature as members of the larger Bodo-Kachari family. The biological cycles of the Brahmaputra valley have historically supported the Bodos' livelihoods as weavers, farmers, and cultivators. Their subsistence economy is heavily reliant on the craft of weaving and cocoon raising, which is especially important for women.

The Bodos have been doing hand spinning and weaving since ancient times, according to the Vivekananda Kendra Institute of Culture (VKIC). Weaving is traditionally seen as a sign of womanhood and diligence, and the loom is a cultural icon seen in almost every home ("**Spinning and Weaving of the Bodos**"). Their sophisticated knowledge of the local flora and fauna is demonstrated by the use of natural fibres and dyes, which makes their methods environmentally conscious and sustainable.

### Cocoon Rearing: Ecological Knowledge and Practice

A key component of Bodo traditional knowledge is the raising of cocoons, especially Indi or Eri silk (from the *Samia ricini* silkworm). Since the silk is spun after the moth emerges, eri culture is non-violent in contrast to the mulberry silkworm. This is consistent with the community's ideal of harmony with nature. Castor and kesseru plants, which act as the worms' host plants, are first cultivated. The worms are raised indoors using traditional techniques like banana leaf insulation and bamboo-woven trays to keep them safe from predators and weather changes (**Brahma and Basumatary 1943**).

In order to maintain sanitary raising conditions and guarantee cocoon quality, Bodo families, especially women, play a critical role. Worm feeding cycles, illness prevention, and reeling techniques are all passed down orally from generation to generation. As a component of a living legacy, this intergenerational transmission maintains cultural and ecological resilience. The Sericulture Census of Assam 2023 estimates that over 40,000 Bodo households participate in eri silk rearing, contributing significantly to India's 95 percent share of national eri production (**Central Silk Board 2023**). By cultivating host plants and recycling organic waste, the activity promotes ecological care while generating additional revenue. Sustainable traditional livelihoods based on environmental principles are exemplified by such practices.

### Indi Cloth Weaving Practices

Among the Bodos, weaving is an art form that embodies identity, beauty, and ritual symbolism. The ceremonial scarf, or aronai, and the women's wrap, or dokhona, are iconic fabrics that signify social standing, cultural events, and communal pride. The process of weaving begins with the spinning of the eri silk fibers using traditional wooden spindles, followed by dyeing with natural pigments obtained from turmeric, lac, and various plants. Patterns often feature motifs inspired by nature; diamonds, flowers, and zigzags, that convey tribal identity and cosmological meanings (**Basumatary and Khawzawl 2**).

Weaving has always been a gendered craft that is mostly done by women. Girls are taught warping, wefting, and motif arranging procedures starting in adolescence, which reinforces both skill and moral discipline. The loom, which is frequently placed in the courtyard or beneath a thatched shade, becomes a place for meditation and creativity. As VKIC notes, weaving in Bodo society is “a form of silent devotion, an act of maintaining harmony between hands, mind, and material” (“**Spinning and Weaving of the Bodos**”).

Minimal harm to the environment is ensured by incorporating local tools and materials like the *dwmna* frame, *bwisagu* shuttle, and *bwhwla* reed. Many rural Bodo women still make traditional hand-woven clothing that supports home economies and maintains communal identity in spite of modernisation. Weaving thus functions as both a cultural signifier and a means of asserting agency in a patriarchal context (**Basumatary and Khawzawl 5**).

#### **Socio-Economic and Cultural Dimensions**

In the Bodo community, sericulture and weaving have economic significance that goes beyond simple revenue production. These activities strengthen cultural heritage, promote communal collaboration, and strengthen women's empowerment. According to the North Eastern Region Textile Promotion Scheme (**NER-TPS**) report, traditional weaving clusters in Kokrajhar, Baksa, and Chirang districts have evolved into micro-enterprises that balance cultural preservation with market participation (**Ministry of Textiles 2024**).

Training programs funded by the government and non-governmental organisations have especially benefited women's cooperatives and self-help organisations. But rather than being based on industrial mechanisation, their involvement is still grounded on traditional ecological understanding. A model of grassroots sustainability; a system where ecology, economy, and culture coexist peacefully is embodied by the cultural continuity of weaving and raising cocoons.

Also, textiles like the *dokhona* and *aronai* are cultural texts with inherent symbols of resistance and identity, not just commodities. Traditional crafts can act as cultural anchors in the face of globalisation, as demonstrated by the rise in popularity of indigenous patterns and handwoven clothing in celebrations like *Bwisagu*. As Brahma and Basumatary observe, these practices “are repositories of ecological wisdom and social ethics” (1948).

#### **Challenges and Transformations in the Global Era**

Despite its tenacity, the Bodo traditional weaving and sericulture industry confronts difficulties because of modernisation, younger generations' losing enthusiasm, and competition from machine-made textiles. The ecological balance and cultural rhythms that formerly supported these practices have been disturbed by the growing urbanisation and flood of synthetic materials. Many young women now pursue education and employment outside the village, leading to reduced transmission of traditional techniques (**Basumatary and Khawzawl 6**).

Globalisation has, nevertheless, also created new opportunities. Bodo textiles are now more well-known both domestically and abroad thanks to digital marketing and cultural events. By experimenting with natural colours and fusion designs, designers and cooperatives are bringing classic patterns back to life in modern marketplaces. What academics refer to as “dynamic traditionalism”, the ability of indigenous knowledge systems to change while preserving cultural authenticity is shown in this adaptive creativity.

Policy frameworks must place equitable market access, ecological sustainability, and skill preservation top priority in order to guarantee the long-term sustainability of cocoon rearing and weaving. Both cultural preservation and socioeconomic progress can be facilitated by cooperation between government agencies, craftspeople, and educational institutions.

#### **Conclusion**

The Bodos' traditional knowledge systems of weaving *Indi* cloth and raising cocoons reflect a complex mix of culture, economy, and ecology. These behaviors represent women's empowerment, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and sustainable living. The adaptability of indigenous wisdom is demonstrated by the Bodo craftsmen' tenacity in the face of globalization's demands. Maintaining and advancing these ancient crafts contributes to sustainable development and identity assertion in addition to cultural conservation.

This study demonstrates that Bodo traditional practices are dynamic systems of ecological intelligence and cultural expression rather than static artifacts of the past through a combination of observation and secondary research. The Bodo style of cocoon rearing and weaving offers significant insight in living in harmony with nature while maintaining cultural pride as global society shifts more and more towards sustainable alternatives.

**Ethics:** This study is based exclusively on analysis of published scholarly sources, observational and publicly available cultural knowledge. No 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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