

RESEARCH QUEST

A Book on Multidisciplinary Research Studies

Editors

Deep Dutta

Hiran Dutta

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RESEARCH QUEST : A Book on Social Sciences and Humanities: A collection of Research Papers and Articles written by different Faculties of colleges, Scholars and Students and edited by Deep Dutta, Asstt. Professor, Deptt. of Sociology and Hiran Dutta, Lakhimpur, Assam and Published by Naba Kalita on behalf of KIRAN PRAKASHAN, D.K. Market Complex, Dhemaji Chariali, Dhemaji-787057

Price: Rs.500.00 (Rupees Five Hundred only)

First Published : June, 2015
DTP & Layout : Akshoy Dutta
Cover Design : Akshoy Dutta

ISBN: 978-93-82746-76-8

Published By:
Naba Kalita
KIRAN PRAKASHAN
D.K. Market Complex
Dhemaji Chariali, Dhemaji-787057
and BIDYA MAHAL, Panbazar, Guwahati-1

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EDITORIAL

Research works on multidisciplinary subjects explore some of the ways which enrich human society. Multidisciplinary research works suggests socio-cultural and scientific problem solution of any society. It contributes knowledge and understanding that inform many of the 'Big Strategic Questions' facing society today. Research in these disciplines plays an essential role in enabling society to anticipate, and respond to, unexpected challenges and change.

These processes and relationships could perhaps be described as a 'knowledge sphere' or a 'knowledge ecosystem'. The process is not linear one. Research beneficiaries do not passively receive information from research producers. Rather, researchers and beneficiaries interact and will often work together to identify problems and the means of overcoming them.

Today's society is measured by the quality of its cultural life. Directly or through their students, academics in multiple disciplines have made a great contribution to our cultural and intellectual well-being as these subjects help us to understand our heritage and culture, and that of others. Research in these subjects is crucial to exploring the nature of the communities within which we live and the communities with which we might interact. Their findings are seen as central to issues such as the effective delivery of public services and the proper organisation of the welfare state, and the formation of international aid policy and foreign policy.

Multiple disciplines researchers are often involved in educational and cultural activities of benefit to the individual and critical to quality of life. Researchers in these fields have helped to change the way in which society (and the individuals within it) views itself.

It also makes significant contributions to increasingly important sectors of the economy, such as the creative and cultural industries, and heritage and tourism.

With the development of the global knowledge economy, it is essential that citizens can regularly update, and develop, new skills. Multiple disciplines research informs the development of educational policies that enable citizens to meet their full potential.

Multiple disciplines research develops our understanding of the complex social, political and cultural changes created by the growth of the global market, and draws on insights from researchers in anthropology, business, economics, geography, law, politics and international relations, and sociology. These researchers are well placed to help policy makers understand the political, economic, cultural and technological impacts of globalisation.

As per the significance of these type of research works in present time we have been bestowed with some important research works done in various subjects are enclosed in this journal and intended an aim of the benefit to our society and as well as the intellectual development of the researchers.

It is our humble and keen attempt to percolate knowledge through this limited volume with the help of multidisciplinary research studies. We are gratitude to our advisors and the members for their immense help in the process of making an edited book.

Editors

Deep Dutta

Hiran Dutta

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A Study on Dress Pattern of the Sonowal Kachari's of Lakhimpur District, Assam

Pankaja Dutta¹
Minakshi Baruah²

Abstract

The Sonowal Kacharis are one of the scheduled Bodo tribes which are predominantly concentrated in the districts of Lakhimpur, Dhemaji and Dibrugarh of Assam. Dresses are one of the important symbols of civilized societies. Every tribe has a unique dress pattern of its own. The Sonowal Kacharis too have traditional dresses like 'Tokoya'. The present paper aims to study the dress pattern of the Sonowal Kacharis of Lakhimpur district, Assam. The necessary information have been collected from four (4) villages of Lakhimpur district under Boginadi Development Block. The information have been collected by interview, observation and case study. Help has also been taken from secondary data while collecting the information.

Key words : Sonowal Kacharis, Dress pattern, Tokoya, Lakhimpur.

Introduction

The state of Assam is a meeting place of many races, cultures, languages and religions which have largely moulded a unified cohesive cultural identity known as Assamese culture. Due to constant interaction and cultural adaptation of multiple ethnic groups a symbolic culture was developed in Assam (Sharma, 2012). Dresses of different communities are one of the important part of Assamese culture.

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Dresses vary from community to community and from society to society. Almost all communities have some traditional dresses of their own from which they can be recognized.

Dresses are the indication of civilized societies. Due to climatic influence, dresses differ from place to place. The garments can also act as an indication of whether the user is a rich or poor, whether he is a respectable person or an ordinary person. According to Lowie, there are three main motives for dresses such as (i) modesty, (ii) protection and (iii) improving one's appearance. In addition, it makes (iv) status or identification in the community to recognize one's sex, tribe, married or single condition and rank (Das, 1996).

In India, we have various types of dresses. In the north east region of India we find different types of colourful dresses among different communities. Each and every community differs from each other in their dressing style. The Sonowal Kacharis also have their traditional dresses. However since they live in contact with the modern Assamese people they generally wear dresses what the modern Assamese people use in their daily life.

Objectives

The objectives of the present paper are as follows:

1. To discuss about the dress pattern of the Sonowal Kachari people of Lakhimpur district.
2. To take a look on the colour combination and the raw materials used in the dresses.
3. To study briefly about the process of weaving, preservation and marketing of the dresses.
4. The paper also attempts to study the current changes in the design and demand of the traditional dresses as well as it shows the dominance of western dresses over the traditional dresses in daily life of the Sonowal Kachari people.

Field of study

The field work for the study was carried out in four villages of Lakhimpur district, Assam under Boginadi Development Block. The Lakhimpur district was situated in the north bank of the river

Brahmaputra and it is one of the major centre of population concentration of the Sonowal Kachari people.

The Sonowal Kacharis are one of the Bodo tribes which are predominantly concentrated in the districts of Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh and Dhemaji. They are scattered in the districts of Golaghat, Tinsukia and Jorhat. It is said that during the reign of the Ahom kings, some Kacharis were engaged in the work of washing the gold particles from the sand of the rivers and therefore the prefix 'Sonowal' was added to signify them. (Bordoloi et al., 1988). According to 2011 census, the Sonowal Kachari constitute 7.1% of the total Scheduled Tribes population of Assam with a population of 2,35,881.

Methodology

The data required for the study have been collected from the field by applying interview, observation as well as case study method. Help of secondary data have also been taken whenever necessary.

Results and Discussions

Different dresses

The dresses of Sonowal Kacharis are more or less similar to those of the modern Assamese people. However their traditional dresses are woven by the **womenfolk** of the community in their looms. Traditionally the female members of the community wear the 'mekhela-chadar' while the male members wear the 'dhoti-kurta'. Occasionally the Sonowal Kachari people wear the colourful traditional outfits. The traditional outfits of the womenfolk include the 'mekhela' (a kind of closed wrapper of ankle length worn at the waist by giving pleats in the front part), the 'chadar' (a piece of cloth whose length is more than the breadth, worn to cover the upper part of the body), the 'riha' (a piece of cloth like the 'chadar' and is worn occasionally). The traditional dresses of men folk include the 'dhoti' (a rectangular piece of cloth worn at the waist), the 'kurta' (a kind of shirt) and the 'challeng chadar' (a piece of cloth like the 'chadar' generally white or cream in colour to be worn occasionally). The people wear these clothes during religious ceremonies, wedding etc. 'Phulam Gamocha' is another important part of their traditional

dresses. The traditional dresses of Sonowal Kacharis also include the 'Eri Chadar' (a shawl made of endi silk), the 'mugar mekhela chadar' (mekhela chadar made of muga silk), the 'kopahi mekhela chadar' (mekhela chadar made of cotton yarn) etc. The married Sonowal Kachari women occasionally wear a 'tokoya' (a kind of head gear) over their head.

Among the young boys and the girls of the Sonowal Kachari people modern dresses are fast becoming a fashion. The young boys put on shirts, tee shirts, pair of trousers, jackets, half pants etc. while the young girls wear skirts, frocks, salwar - kameez, tops, jeans pants etc. in their daily life.

In winter season the Sonowal Kachari people cover their body with *endi chadar*, woolen shawls, sweaters, etc. which they bought from the market. However sometimes the womenfolk prefer to prepare the shawls and the sweaters by themselves.

Religious or social life is also related with dresses. In religious performances not only the priest but all the devotees wear new and clean cloths. A priest wears ordinary dresses but occasionally he wears special dresses.

A brief description of some of the traditional dresses of the Sonowal Kachari people :

(i) *Mekhela* : the *mekhela* is a kind of gown worn by the womenfolk. It is draped from the waist downwards and is folded into pleats to fit around the waist and tucked in. The *mekhela* is generally worn by the married women, the unmarried girls wear the *Mekhela* occasionally.

Raw material: yarns of different shades are used as raw material in making *mekhelas* of different styles. Occasionally the Sonowal Kachari people use cotton yarns, Assam silk, tassar silk and muga silk yarns to weave different kinds of *mekhelas*.

Colour combination: the Sonowal Kachari people wear colourful *mekhelas*. They prefer to wear *mekhelas* of yellow and green colour very often. However in the first day of the month of 'Bohag' (14th/15th April) and in any other religious ceremonies organized at home or in the 'Namghar' (a place of worshipping God) the womenfolk

prefer to wear white coloured *mekhelas* as they consider the white colour as a symbol of purity and cleanliness.

(ii) *Chadar*: the *chadar* is a long piece of cloth which couples with the *mekhela* to make a complete dress. The length of a *chadar* is almost 2m and 70 cm and the breadth is 90 cm. The *chadar* has its one end tucked into the waist and the rest draped over and around the rest of the body. However, traditionally they wear the *chadar* in a different style. They use the *chadar* to cover the body from breast to somewhat below the knee. They prefer to wear the *chadar* in this way only in some special occasions.

Raw materials: The raw materials used for the preparation of a *chadar* is same as that of the *mekhelas*. Yarns of different colours and kinds are purchased from the market to weave the *chadars*.

Colour combination: The colour combination is also same as that of the *mekhelas*. However the widows generally wear *chadars* of lighter shades.

(iii) *Riha*: The *riha* is a kind of *chadar* but the breadth of the *riha* is less than the normal *chadar* and the length is more than the *chadar*. The breadth of a *riha* is about 60 cm and the length is almost 3m. In the past *riha* was used by the womenfolk but at present *riha* is used as a part of the bridal attire, over a fitted blouse.

Raw materials: in order to prepare a *riha* cotton yarn as well as yarns of Assam silk, muga silk and tassar silk are used as the raw material.

Colour combination: The *rihas* are generally white and cream in colour with maroon or magenta coloured borders.

(iv) *Dhoti*: The *dhoti* is the man's garment used traditionally by the Sonowal Kachari people. It's a rectangular piece of cloth worn to cover the lower part of the body. Generally it is white in colour with black or brown thin border. *Dhotis* are usually worn by the aged member of the society in their daily life. The young men use the *dhoti* only occasionally. *Dhotis* are the integral part of the marriage ceremony as it is worn by the groom. The *dhotis* are, however, not weaved by the people. These are machine made and are purchased from the market.

(v) *Gamocha*: The *gamocha* generally indicate the Assamese towel. It's a rectangular piece of cloth made of cotton yarn. The *gamochas* are used by the Sonowal Kachari people in their day to day life. Different types of *gamochas* are used in different occasions. The *gamochas* used in special occasions are longer than the *gamochas* of daily use.

Raw materials: The *gamochas* are predominantly prepared from cotton yarns but occasionally Assam silk yarn is used as the raw material.

Colour combination: The *gamochas* are white in colour with a combination of red borders i.e. same as that of the Assamese *gamochas*. However traditionally they use yellow coloured *gamochas* and sometimes green coloured.

(vi) *Kurta*: The *kurta* is a kind of shirt which is popular among the Sonowal Kachari as '*Punjabi sola*'. The *kurtas* are available in the market and the people buy them from the market. The men folk couple it with the *dhoti*. It is generally white or cream in colour.

(vii) *Tokoya*: The *tokoya* is a kind of head gear worn by the married women of the Sonowal Kachari tribe. It is generally white or yellow in colour. Cotton yarns are used as the raw material to prepare a *tokoya*.

Weaving

The womenfolk of the Sonowal Kachari people are expert in weaving and most of the domestic requirements of clothes come from the family loom. Almost every household possesses a loom of its own. Weaving is considered as an art among the Sonowal Kachari people. Every household has a loom of their own and thus every daughter-in-law inherits a loom from her mother-in-law. The women weave the clothes from very simple design for daily use to very fine artistic design to wear occasionally. It is important to know the art of weaving for every girl of the Sonowal Kachari people and thus every woman can weave their traditional dresses with beautiful design.

Loom

The Sonowal Kachari people generally weave their dresses in their looms. A handloom is generally composed of the following implements:

- (i) Ugha
- (ii) Chereki
- (iii) Maku
- (iv) Tulutha
- (v) Chali-Mari
- (vi) Nachani
- (vii) Nachani-Jori
- (viii) Jatar
- (ix) Letai
- (x) Muhura etc.

All these together form an indispensable part of a loom.

Preservation

The Sonowal Kachari people always preserve their dresses with great care. They keep the dresses in wooden boxes or trunks or suitcases or in wardrobes. They put some naphthalene balls there which save the dresses from insects. Usually the womenfolk are engaged in this work. They take out the dresses from the boxes from time to time and pat them dry in the sunlight and fresh air. This is done once in a month. This keeps the dresses in good condition and the dresses will last for years after years. After wearing the dresses they pat them dry in light and only after the dresses are completely dried they keep them in the boxes properly.

Marketing

The Sonowal Kachari people weave the clothes for daily use. The idea of selling the clothes is not popular among them. Only a small section of the population is engaged in the process of selling their products. However they do not sell the clothes in the market. If people from outside give the weavers the yarns then the weavers weave the clothes for them and sell the clothes to them. The buyers thus, can get the dresses of the required designs. A set of simple

designed 'mekhela chadar' is sold at rs.1000-1500 if the yarns are provided to the weavers.

Changes : Design and Demand

Some changes have been noticed in the design of the traditional dresses of Sonowal Kacharis as well as in the demand of those dresses. Designs and motifs in the dresses may create attraction to the local weavers and designs and thus it is diffused from one group to another (Mahan, 2012). The weavers of the Sonowal Kachari community now-a-days weave the dresses with some new designs popular in the market. Sometimes they buy dresses with new designs from the market also. The demand for traditional dresses is decreasing among the young generation. They usually prefer to wear modern dresses in their daily life. The traditional dresses are worn only occasionally. It can, in fact, be said that only the married women of the Sonowal Kachari community are keeping the tradition of wearing their traditional outfits.

Conclusion

The paper is based on the primary data collected from nine villages of Lakhimpur district, Assam which tries to put some light on the traditional dress pattern of the Sonowal Kachari people residing in Assam. It has been observed that the people of Sonowal Kachari community generally wear the dresses that are worn by the neighbouring Assamese community. Only on some special occasions they wear their traditional dresses in the traditional way.

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ISBN 978-93-82746-76-8



9 789382 746768