



WOMEN'S ROLE AND EMPOWERMENT OF THE BODO SOCIETY IN ASSAM

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Abstract:

India is a vast country with a number of communities. If we talk about tribes, generally everyone believes that the group of people is considered backward and primitive in nature. There are total 14 recognized tribal groups in Assam (Excluding Dima Hasao and Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council), among them Bodo tribe is the largest tribal group carrying 40.90% out of total tribal population and the Miri tribe is the second largest, 17.80% (Census, 2011). The role of tribal women in tribal society is very unique in nature and they hold various responsibilities as compared to other tribal women. As per the reports, tribal women are more hard-working than tribal men but their economic contribution is lesser. The level of health, nutrition and standard of living of tribal women is also inferior to that of tribal men. Thus the strategy for the development of tribal women needs improvement, betterment, development and upliftment to effect their empowerment. This study focuses on the present status and development of Bodo tribe women and livelihood skill development.

Keywords: The tribe, Empowerment of Bodo women, Socio-economic status, Livelihood skills.

Introduction:

The Bodo is the major and largest tribe of Assam. They are now scattered to neighboring states and countries of Assam. Like Meghalaya, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, and West Bengal of Indian states and countries Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh. Tribal are the group of people considered as backward, primitive, and deprived in terms of education, economic, social, political and many other aspects. The tribal population constitutes around 8.60% of the total Indian population (Census, 2011). Near about all Indian states have tribal populations, only Punjab, Haryana, Delhi Chandigarh and Pondicherry don't have official recorded tribal populations. If we talk globally, tribal are generally found in India, Africa, North America, Myanmar, Malaysia, Russia, Tibet, Australia etc. International Labour Organization (ILO) defined and described tribal as "Indigenous and tribal peoples is a common denominator for more than 370 million people, found in more than 70 countries worldwide. Indigenous and tribal peoples have their own cultures, languages, customs and institutions, which distinguish them from other parts of the societies in which they find themselves. Indigenous peoples, also known in some regions as First peoples, First Nations, Aboriginal peoples or Native peoples or/autochthonous peoples, are ethnic groups who are the original or earliest known inhabitants of an area, in contrast to groups that have settled, occupied or colonized the area more recently. India has the highest tribal population in the world i.e- 104 million and Africa is the second highest. There are a total 705 recognized tribal groups in India. Among

them, a total number of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) represents 75 tribal groups, including 15 States/Union Territory of India (Affairs,2019). There are a total 14 recognized tribal groups in Assam (Excluding Dima Hasao and Karbianglong Autonomous Council), among them Bodo tribe is the largest tribal group carrying 40.90% out of total tribal population and the Miri tribe is the second largest, 17.80% (Census, 2011). Most of the population of Bodo Tribal Women live in isolated villages or rural areas and lease percentage live in urban areas. The main reason behind this is the educational factors. Education is the only means to change human life and progress. The living standards of a family always depend on a mother or female person at home, so it clearly shows that women are the core members of society (G. Sandhya & Basumatary, 2019). The nature of family and society is highly related to women's participation including cultural reflexes. The dresses and the way of living reflect in culture of particular communities.

The role of tribal women in tribal communities is substantially very significant. The term "scheduled tribes" first appeared in the Constitution of India, to confer certain constitutional privileges and protection to a group of people who are considered disadvantaged and backward. Article 366 (25) of the Constitution of India refers to Scheduled Tribes as those communities, who are scheduled in accordance with Article 342 of the Constitution (Constitution of India). Tribal communities live, in various ecological and geo-climatic conditions ranging from plains and forests to hills and inaccessible areas. For long periods of history, they were always socially and geographically isolated and are at different stages of social, economic and educational development. Broadly the schedule tribe people inhabited the following distinct geographical areas - Central India, North-East India, South India, Sub-Himalayan Region and Western India. Their main occupations can be found in Farming, Cultivation, Weaving, Handicraft, Fishing, Hunting animals, and Gathering food and fruits. Brahma (1998), stated in his study, "That the status of women in the Bodo society is high. They can also enjoy property rights in case if there is no male child in the family. They can enjoy such property events after her marriage. But in some grounds, it is witnessed that the Bodo women are facing social problems that show the low status of women in the society." Brahma (1989) also stated that, "the status of Bodo women can be understood through different roles they play in the family as well as in the society." Talukdar (2012) also opined that "due to the suffering of various social, economic and political problems in the society Bodo women are facing low status. There is economic backwardness, educational problems, negligence of women's education, superstitious beliefs, and low infrastructural development in the area." Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru said, "If you educate a man you educate an individual, however, if you educate a woman you educate a whole family. Woman empowerment means mother India empowerment."

The Bodo Women of Assam:

The Bodos are educationally, economically, and socially underdeveloped. They are still backward in all aspects. Women are nearly half of the total population size of a society so, their participation in family development activities is very important. Particularly the

Bodo women in remote areas are maintaining the same mode of living major changes over the years. That is why the tribal women are far from taking formal education, but education is the most important factor in the development of the community. The total Literacy rate of Assam state according to the census 2011 is 72.19 percent, while female literacy is at 66.27 percent. If we talk about the female literacy rate of Bodo women it is below average. When we see the status of Bodo women, they could not occupy significant status in the society and educational field whereas opportunities were given to both the person equally (Basumatary & Sandhya, 2018).

There is no concept of discrimination between male and female children in Bodo society, but still, male individuals have been found superiority to the female child. The girl child believed that they had to depend on their husband after marriage. They only have a traditional belief system, like all girls become a mother, a housewife who needs to look after the family and the child. They are expected to do all the household work and take responsibility for child-care and therefore, they have fewer hours of free time than men. The women are deprived of better education as compared to male in the society. In order to raise women's education, adequate educational opportunities must be

provided and the existing government policy on women empowerment should be implemented properly. The most important thing is to bring awareness among the community so that women can also have equal participation in education.

Status and Role of Bodo Women in Development:

As per the data record, the tribal women are hardworking than tribal men but their economic contribution is lesser than the tribal men. "Only 6.50% of tribal women earn more than the tribal men (Census, 2011). Also, the level of health nutrition, knowledge and standard of living, of tribal women is low as compared to tribal men. Bodo women have a great role to play in the economic aspect. The role and participation of women in economic development activities will contribute to the economy of the society (Basumatary & Pathak, 2017).

The Bodo tribe women of Assam are something unique in this regard, they have been farming & cultivating various resources for their livelihood and the economic development of the family. Farming Hens, Duck, Cow, Goat, Pig, Silkworm, Fish. etc. are the major strength of the family's economic status. Selling and buying on the daily market is a preliminary factor of economic development.

Fishing activity has existed in Bodo society since the time immemorial. Bodo tribe community both men and women do fishing but generally Bodo women go for fishing with a special instrument called "Jekhai" and "Khobai". Both the instruments are made up of bamboo. It is a handmade instrument, they design and make it by themselves.

The farming hens, ducks, pigs, cow, goat, silkworm, fish etc. are the basic economic strength of the family. Family economic development and family management are highly associated with these activities. The basic needs including the educational expenses of their children are managed through farming activities.

The Bodo Women are the core members of the Bodo community. Their participation in family development is an important part that leads towards economic development. Farming hens and ducks are the basic foundation of family economics. They are skilled in all agricultural activities and other allied works. They are also skilled in weaving, plantation and arts & crafts.

The Bodo women have high dignity and respect Mainao or Lwkhi goddess in the Bodo society. In Bodo society called them (Bodo Women) as Mainao or Lwkh. As they are considered Mainao goddess, all the household works are under her supervision including worshipping their God. Generally, family worship starts with women or the head of the family. The traditional religion of Bodo is 'Bathou' which has been believed and practiced by the people since time immemorial. They also believed in nature, especially in five supernatural elements i.e. Land, Water, Air, Fire, and Sky. They don't have such idols to worship like Hinduism. Mwnsing Sing Brai founded Bathouism, he organized all the structure of Bathouism through his intuition of meditation. They started establishing, "Bathou Thansali" in every family. Here 'Ba' means five and 'Thou' means deep thoughts. Literary means 'Deep five thoughts' i.e. five supernatural elements- Land, Water, Air, Fire, and the Sky. As they lived in the jungle, they experienced nature and natural phenomena. They believe that those five supernatural elements exist in this world and nothing is beyond it. But nowadays diverse religions have also been found in the Bodo community i.e.- Hinduism, Christianity, Brahma, and others.

Empowerment of Bodo Women:

Education should enable a girl to become a better daughter, wife and mother. An educated woman has the skills, information and self-confidence that she needs to be a better parent, worker and citizen. Education is a very important agent of social change and development.

Without education society is blind. Education helps an individual to understand all aspects rationally. It also builds a balanced emotion. The state of mind of every woman is very dynamic. We

received thousands of information from various sources which gives diverse thinking (Basumatary & Kumar, 2020). All the information has its own philosophy having positive and negative values. The information that is available on social media is always not authentic. So we must be very selective while using it. A piece of fake information and irrelevant news can lead an individual toward the darkness of life. We should have great emotional control and patience to be more aware of the misguide of the people around us.

Emotional balance and stability are important in student life. And this can be only possible through proper education. The status of Bodo tribe women's education is comparatively below average. Most of the girl child is the first generation learners. Their parents are illiterate and they do not have much knowledge about the formal education system. The women who are not highly educated are generally involved in household work, farming and agriculture activities. Highly educated women are working Govt. and private sector jobs. They have also their own business like fashion designing, Beauty parlour, Sewing and cutting, tailoring, weaving etc. Income earned from such activities are impressively higher than traditional primitive economic activities. To create the goal an empowering women for rural development, the following strategically needs to be implemented by the Government in partnership with NGO and social organizations of the Community. Creating community demand for girls' education not only elementary level but also at all levels of education.

Gender and poverty sensation programs should be developed to create an environment where all will work together to remove all the disparities - physical, social and economic.

Technical and Vocational education should be made available for girls. A number of Bodo medium schools need to extend up to all villages of the community. The adult education program in rural areas is essential. Efforts should made to solve the dropout problem of girls' education in rural areas of the community. At present, Politics as an art of acquiring and exercising power- the power to effectively influence the decision-making process and policies, must have a share of women. Bodo women can be found participating in politics now. Again there is complexity in the mind of common people whether women's participation in politics is good or bad. If it is considered to be bad, then how we can empower tribal women in all dimensions? We should not only say, that women are equal to men, but we should provide them a space to feel as if all are really the same. We should not let negative classification in terms of gender. Positive distribution and positive cooperation from a different dimensions in required.

Conclusion:

Identifying women through education is not a new one. Women should be educationally aware so that they can maintain their livelihood compared to that of their male counterparts. Equal rights and opportunities should be given to them. The students both male and female must have equal access to education, employment, and technical knowledge. They must be encouraged by the intellectuals to follow and use innovativeness in their teaching-learning process. Overall development of a pupil is possible in three ways- i.e. school, teachers, and the parents. All these three factors are the major to build the equal responsibilities and overall development of the child (Kumar, Basumatary, Kumar & Dev, 2019). As per all know women are half of the total population in the world and must possess every work of their life along with the male population. Women must have good and quality education if not entire world will be miserable. It is the world of an educationally aware population. Only educated and civilized people can keep their eye on the surroundings of the environment.

Likewise, women must identify themselves by acquiring better and quality education. The Bodo women must follow the world of education. Various thinkers also made his/her contribution to society on the path of liberty, equality and fraternity towards women. In the current situation, there is an in crime against women and children, violence, homicides, terrorism, moral crisis etc. It is important to bring consciousness and awareness of the importance of character education, spiritual and moral renewal in human society (Basumatary & Thiumai, E, 2019). Besides this, the education level of Bodo tribal women should also be increased. Thus the strategy for empowering Bodo tribal women needs improvement, betterment and development.

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