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CULTURAL SYMBIOSIS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE BODO WOMEN

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From time immemorial the socio-culture of the Bodo was blessed by such virtues like honesty, truthfulness, and straight-forwardness and general trust worthiness as witness by Endle in his monumental work. But with the passage of time, things have somewhat changed bringing new complexities unknown or unheard before. The improvement of communication, general mobility and intercourse with the people all round have brought some psychological and attitudinal change of all section of people. To meet this changing situation of life, necessity has arisen to frame some local laws on the basis of customs and traditions as prevailing in the society. Thus locally codified customary usages and practices of the Boro societies came to be followed after approval from zonal council composed of adjacent villages. These local laws are known as '*Pandulipis*' as they are in manuscripts and hardly printed. Since these are not coordinated homogenous sets of laws, they differ in content and application from area to area. However the basic issues pertaining to inheritance of property, succession to office of socio-religious and socio-political nature and liability of atonement on committing unnatural and unsocial offences are more or less identical.

The traditional Boro society which came into contact with different culture and societies underwent grade changes in the middle part of 20th Century. The change in the different institutional level have been taking place from time to time and these changes are visible in the traditional institutions like religion, marriage, economy, social customs and also in their position and status of men and women, foot habit, dress and other sphere of life. The changes are found in the form of Sanskritization, modernisation and also westernisation to some extent. The prime factors of these changes are certainly the influence of Hinduism, spreading of higher education among the Boros and the development of science and technology. The upward movement in the traditional Boro society has occurred without losing their basic values, norms and identity.

The Boros are referred to as a 'tribe' by the British administrators and missionaries and designated as a scheduled tribe after independence. The written documents on their social organisation are available from the beginning of the 12th century when the European missionaries and administrators began to write on them. In this context it is worth referring to 'Bibar', the first magazine of the Bodos. The first generation of Bodo writers wrote regularly on various aspects of the community in the magazine. The articles were written in the Bodo, Assamese and the Bengali languages. These help us to understand their historical relationship with the neighbouring castes and communities.

The Bodos of entire Assam and Bengal have been in constant touch with Assamese and Bengali who are more advanced than the Bodo. The rituals, customs, living standard, food habit, dresses and other life habits of the Bodos are influenced by their neighbouring Aryans in many respects. A comparative study between pre-sanskritized Bodo society and present Bodo society shows two distinct features of the same society. So effort has been made to narrate and analyse both traditional and sanskritised form of the Bodo society.

Family Life:-

The Bodo society is primarily patriarchal with few elements of matriarchal characteristics. The family members live together at home called *Nokor* or family. A *Nokor* consists of father, mother, sons, daughters, brothers and sisters etc. Father is the head of the family, who is honoured and obeyed by other members of the family. All the male members of the family enjoy the coparcenary rights, unless one goes out of family during the life time of his father with the intention of living separately from the bonds of the joint family. The eldest son of the family assumes the charge of the household on the death of the father or in absence of father and discharges his responsibilities in consultation with his mother. There are both joint and nuclear families among the Bodos. The family debt if any is dischargeable from the income of the family and on the event of dissolution of the joint family; the unmarried brothers get double of the family property than the married brothers. The eldest male member also gets a preferential share in view of his assumption of family liability and other social responsibilities.

The mode of living of the Bodo society is in compact villages and putting barriers all around the homestead is a common sight to see. Rev. S. Endle on this account gives a vivid description—"One prominent feature in the typical Bodo village can not fail to strike the attention of any casual visitor at first sight. Each house, with its granary and other buildings is surrounded by a ditch and fence; the latter usually made of ekra reeds, jungle grass or split bamboo etc. The ditch, some three and four feet in depth surrounds the whole homestead, the earth taken from its being thrown up on the inner side, i.e., that nearest to the dwelling house; and on the earth works some two or three feet in height, so thrown up are firmly inserted the reeds or split bamboo work forming the fence itself, this later often inclining outwards at a very obtuse angle; so that the ditch and fence are not easily surmounted from the outside by the would be intruders." ('The Kocharis', PP. 11-12, reprint 1975).

A typical Bodo family builds several houses with the compound according to their necessity. The main house or '*Noma No*' stands in the north of the compounds or homestead and the granary in the east.

The main house or *Noma No* is divided into three rooms. The first room, known as *khopra*, which is used for sleeping, the second *okhong* is used for dining and the third room, *ishing* is used for cooking and alters of *Bathou Brai* (Chief deity) and *Mainao* (goddess of wealth) are placed there for worship (Dr. Sekhar Brahma pp.17 2006). The guest house, known as *chaura no* is built in front of the homestead and it is also used as dwelling house for young boys. Generally young sons and daughters do not sleep in the same room or house with their parents. When son is married the couple is provided a separate house for sleeping.

But due to the changing trends of the Bodo society such typical Bodo *Nokhor* (Family) is very rare at present, except in some interior village. With the conversion of Brahma religion among the Bodos, the use of *Noma No* and its importance has been changed as the follower of this cult neither set alter nor cook foods in the main house. They also do not build main house like traditional *Noma No*, which possess only one door and a side corridor and a side corridor running into the interior rooms without any window. Rather they build houses for their conveniences like other Indians as there is no rigid rule for constructing houses among the Bodos of Brahma religion.

Inheritance of Property:-

In Bodo traditional custom only sons are entitled to inherit the parental property, as daughters have to leave parents house after getting married. Every sons get equal share of land from their paternal property and one who looks after the parents till death may get an additional share of land. The daughters, especially if married, can claim nothing. Parents can decide with whom they are going to live in their old age. In absence of son, daughters inherit the property of parents. If the person is childless the property goes to the nearest relatives after the death of both husband and wife. But if they adopted child then he or she can inherit the property. But sometimes, a rich father can give a portion of land to his daughter even in the presence of sons. According to Endle (1911) the law of inheritance of property were patrilineal. He mentions that the eldest son inherited half of father's property and the rest was distributed among other sons. In any case the daughters were not entitled to the share of property. In absence of a son the eldest brother of the deceased would inherit the property. In such case the inheritor allots a portion of the land to the widow of his brother.

Social Organisation:-

In the Bodo society unlike other parts of India the caste system was unknown. Even the high caste Aryan living with Bodos had to become more liberal in their outlook and practice, in their religion. One of the important factors is the presence of vast majority of non-Aryan population who were ignorant about caste system. The Aryan had to give up some of their rigid customs and tried to adjust themselves with the local inhabitants. They have become more liberal in their foods, drink, dress, customs and manners.

The social division among the Bodos in ancient times could be traced according to their occupation. The Bodos are divided into a number of 'sub-tribes' (Endle 1911:24-32) or 'social group' (Brahma 1992:34-35). These groups are exogamous and referred to as '*Ari*' or '*Hari*'. There are as many as 23 '*Aris*' or '*Haris*' namely ---*Swargaiari, Basumatary, Mahilari, Mosari, Khaklari, Doimari, Narzari,*

Sibiziari, Ishari, Kahari, Ouari, Hojoari, Bibaiari, Borgayri, Ramsiari, Kherketari, Thaletari, Supramhari, Sibiugari, Gayari, Supramhari, Mao-Marari, Fadangari (Tribal Research Institute, Assam PP. 7, 1987). The clan structures of the Bodos though essentially remind us about their traditional division of class yet in the present day context such divisions are no longer recognised. Endle mentions of hierarchy within these groups and one of them called *Swargiari* is referred to as ‘heavenly folk’ (*swargo*-heaven, *ari*-folk) are entrusted with the duty of worship and they were said to be top of all groups. As mentioned there are more than two dozen sub-tribes or social groups in the society, some of this groups are totemistic in nature such as *Basumatary* (*Basumata*-earth, *ari*-folk) were the proprietor of the lands, *Narzary* (jute folk), *Mosahary* (the tiger folk), *Khaklary or Khangkhlo ari* (a certain jungles grass which is used during religion ceremonies and festivals), *Sibing ari* (sesame folk), *Gandled ari* (leach folk), *Daimari* (the river folk or fishermen folk), *Owary* (bamboo folk), *Gayari* (areca nut folk) etc. *Basumatary* the largest sub-tribes in the Bodo community, are also referred to as ‘the son of the soil’. Endle (1911: 24-32) mentions that the members of *Basumatary* clan enjoy privilege at the time of burying their dead bodies. There is a custom in the Bodo society according to which a Bodo has to purchase the land for burial with a token money from the *Bosumatary* clan. But the members of *Basumatary* clan do not have to do this. In earlier days the elderly members of this clan received a small amount of money as the revenue of that plot of land where as a diseased person would have been buried or cremated (Brahma 1992, 43-35).

Endle said about the traditional religion, “There is no authorised priestly caste among the Kocharis nor are Brahmans ever employed in their religious ceremonies”. A village elder, having good knowledge about the religious rites and well versed in religious hymn or mantras, performs the religious ceremonies. The office of the priesthood is not hereditary either in *Bathou* or *Brahma* religion. Any men living a pious life can become a priest in both the religion.

But at present the Bodo society has become a multi-religious society. There are followers of traditional Bathou cult, the followers of Brahma cult, the followers of Saiva cult of Guru Rupamani and the followers of Satsangha of Sri Sri Anukul Thakur and also believers of Christianity etc. All these religion cults, except that of Anukul Thakur and the saivism of guru Rupamani, did not contribute to create hierarchy in the Bodo society. The Bodo priests of Satsang cult is forming a purified class by giving up meat, fish, onion etc. Priest of high rank like Ritwit, Prati-Ritwik observed strict formalities in their dietary habit and behaviours. In the Saivism cult of Guru Rupamani the priestly class like Maha-Richis, Richis and Purahits become purely vegetarian and lead their lives like strict Brahmins and generally they do not take meal prepared by so called impure people. It seems that the Bodo society is learning towards the formation of new caste system in the days to come.

System of Marriage:-

Marriage is the social means to widen and strengthen the network of social relation in the society. It is one of the most important social institutions of all the societies of the world. Marriage is considered as sacred. Like other societies the marriage ceremony is very important ceremony in the life-cycle of the Bodos. In Bodo 'Marriage' is called '*Haba*'. The word '*ha*' means soil or earth and '*ba*' means to bear the soil or the responsibility of the earth on the back. It is quite interesting to note that the Sanskrit word for marriage '*bivaha*' also has a similar etymological meaning.

As per marriage is concerned monogamy was the prevalent system of marriage in the Bodo society. Only with some exceptional cases like when the first wife proves childless the Bodo custom sanctions the taking of a second wife mainly with a view to handing down the father's name to posterity. Marriage is held by both sexes after they have arrived at full maturity as a result of inclination of the families. The Bodos have very high regard and dignified concept of chastity and they live by it. In the words of Sydney Endle, "The standard of chastity among the Kocharis, both man and women, is by no means a low one. As a rule young people in the villages at least lead pure lives before marriage and faithful to their marriage vows (...)". Adultery is considered as sin and serious offence and inflicted severe punishment according to social rules.

Traditionally the Bodos have as many as six types of marriage. These are –1. *Swngnanwi Lainai Haba* (Arranged marriage):- This type of marriage is the most common socially accepted marriage custom of the Bodos. This type of marriage is held with mutual consent and agreement of both the parties and it is arranged by the social norms and customs. Therefore normally this type of marriage is celebrated with great solemnity and honour. Till the recent past, decision of parents or guardians was given priority than the choice of the boys and girls who were dependent on their parents.

2. *Gwrja Lakhinai Haba* (Obtaining girl by service):- This type of marriage is rather rare, however it does take place. This type of marriage is celebrated when in a family there are only daughters and there are no sons or male members to inherit the family property. Therefore to inherit the family property a man who works in the family is asked to be bride-groom with his consent. In this type of marriage the bridegroom has to work at the house of bride before marriage. But this type of marriage can rarely be seen in the present society.

3. *Kharsonnai Haba* (Girls flee away to boy's house):- This marriage takes place when there is a delay in the arrangement of the marriage or the parents are not happy with the bride. In this uncertain situation after a mutual agreement between the young boy and girl enters into the house of the boy. The consent of the parents is not taken into consideration. The formal marriage takes place after the bride price is settled. This is an irregular form of marriage.

4. *Bwnanwi Lainai Haba* (Marriage by capture):- In this type of marriage the bride is forcefully taken away from the house of bride to the house of bridegroom and then the marriage takes place. This marriage is called marriage by capture or *Bwnanwi Lainai Haba*. This type of marriage was prevalent in the earlier days. But at present this type of marriage was completely discarded from the Bodo society. This marriage is almost similar to the Rakhasa marriage of Aryans.

5. *Dwnkharlangnai Haba* (Elopement marriage):-This type of marriage was not socially recognised and yet it takes place in the Bodo society. This is the marriage by elopement of both bride and bridegroom. This type of marriage is akin to the Gandharva system of marriage of the Aryans. The mutual understanding between the bride and bridegroom is enough for this type of marriage. It is also regarded as an irregular marriage by the Bodo society.

6. *Dongkha Habnai Haba* (Co-habitation marriage):- This system of marriage is approved by the Bodo society. If a man comes and live with a widow and the society recognised this co-habitation, then the man and woman should regularised the marriage according to the social custom called *Dongkha Habnai*. This system of marriage is very rare in the Bodo society.

Widow Re-Marriage:-

In the Bodo society re-marriage is socially recognised as regular marriage. A widow can re-marry any person who is not related to her. However, she loses the authority on the property of her deceased husband. The male child is always entitled to get the property of his father. Sometimes, it is seen that the widow is allowed to take the female child of her deceased husband along with her new husband.

There are some other restrictions which are followed strictly in re-marriage either by a widower or widow. A widower may remarry his deceased wife's younger sister, but not the elder, whom he is obliged conventionally to guard as mother. Similarly, a widow may re-marry her deceased husband's younger brother, but she is not allowed to marry the elder brother of her deceased husband.

Divorce:-

In the Bodo society divorce is allowed. But there must be valid ground to satisfy the society. As per Bodo society is concerned divorce or separation is very rare. If both husband and wife desire to get divorce, they have to appear before the '*Bodo Samaj*' or *village headman* for their settlement. If both the couple desires to separate each other then it is performed by tearing a betel leaf. This is called *Pathoi-lai bisinai* in Bodo society. The betel-leaf is kept in the presence of the village elders in the house of the '*Gaoburah*' (village head man) and then betel-leaf is torn into two pieces. By this act the marriage bond of the couple comes to an end. It is a symbolic act which indicates that the torn leaf can never reunite, so there married life is severed for ever. But if the husband divorce his wife without valid ground the husband has to bear the responsibility of her livelihood for a certain period of time and he must also pay certain amount of fine for his freedom of the fine being shared by the divorce women and the village committee. On the other hand, if divorced occurs due to unfaithfulness of the wife, the husband is entitled to recover the amount of many he spent for the marriage from the parents of the bride. When the amount is paid to the man, the woman is at liberty to live with a new husband.

The *Boro Samajni Pandulipi* (social codes of the Bodos), in its recently modified social laws of Kokrajhar district, sanctions divorce on the following grounds.

1. When, one of them is suffering from incurable disease like leprosy etc. and the home affairs become unmanageable.
2. If one become mad or one of them does not have sex potency.
3. If a husband is cruel or always tortures his wife without any reason.
4. If either of the husband or wife is proved to be a man or women of bad character like-thief, dacoit, prostitute, etc.
5. If, the husband and wife are uncompromising or they always quarrel and deceive each other or they have no mutual faith etc.

If all these case the *Boro samaj* has the right to pass the verdict supporting divorce and inflicting punishment.

Female Chastity in the Bodo Society:-

Pre-martial relationship is strictly prohibited in the Bodo society female chastity is considered to be the major qualification for marriage. If one does indulge in such affairs, he is subjected to physical punishment at the time of trial, in the village court. Then he is required to undergo ritual purification along with religious function. As such the young people of the society lead pure lives before the marriage.

In some cases where the parents are unwilling to parts with their daughter to a prospective son-in-law of some what objectionable character, the matter is referred for decision to the village elders, who impose a fine of Rs.20.00 to Rs.25.00 on the offender. But whenever pregnancy occurs against the law of chastity, marriage becomes absolutely compulsory. In this way a wholesome respect for chastity is maintained in the Bodo society. Generally Bodo girls are given marriage only when they become physically fit to be married. The practice of child marriage is not prevalent in the Bodo society.

Spinning and Weaving: -

Spanning and weaving is women activity among the Bodos. Weaving is compulsory for young Bodo girls. Endle remarked, "...a Kochari women if not greatly or frequently interrupted in her work can weave half a yard each day." The Bodo women are expert weavers. They learn the techniques of weaving early in life .Traditionally they wove all the clothes required for a family like- *dokhana*, *aronai*, *gamocha*, bed cover, etc. By themselves Apart from that they also wove cloths for marriage. A Bodo woman who does not the art of spinning and weaving is regarded as aouluri (good for nothing) and neglected by the society. The Bodo women weave on the frame loom and produced their own requirement of fabrics in their spare of time. These hand woven fabrics are used by women, men and children in religious occasion or festivals, at the funeral for covering death body and also as bed sheet, furniture cover etc. They can depict different floral and geometrical design on the fabrics. The Bodo women still wear the hand woven traditional *dokhona* and *sadwr* of different colour and design.

Nowadays the governments have various schemes to provide free grants loans to tribal weaver in cash or kinds, to open weaving centre or industry, through the Tribal Development Corporation, District

Rural Development Agency, Bank, etc. Taking such assistance from the government some Bodo women have opened weaving industry in various places of the district and supply their product to the markets. Thus quite a few Bodo women have become economically independent in the present Bodo society.

Fishing is another important activity of the Bodo women. During the rainy season they got for fishing regularly. They catch fish with help of *Jekai* (conical shaped artefact made of split bamboo) and keep the fish in the *Kobai* (pot made of split bamboo). These instruments of fishing are very handy. *Jekai* is a bamboo pot which is hung on their waist during fishing.

The Bodo women rear domestic animal on *adhi* system, i.e., the owner gets half of the income from the animals/birds. In case of cows the person who looks after these gets the calf or heifer as the case may be whereas the owner gets a greater share of the milk. Like other women of hill tribal communities, the Bodo women are not usually fond of trade and commerce. But they got to the local hats or markets to sell their home grown vegetables and other domestic products.

Role of Bodo Women in the Family: - The Bodo social structure is strictly patriarchal though the women in the house are always accorded their due status and respect. In a Bodo house the master and the servant sit together at the same level and place to take meals or to share other occasions. Their mode of mutual addressing is also based on some social or blood relation, assumed as real. In the Bodos society nuclear families are common but joint family are also noticed. Nuclear family consists usually of parents and 4 to 6 children. Number of children is less in educated families. Most of the women educated have more than three children in the family. Generally the Bodos have no clear sex preference in case of new born babies but gender differences can be traced in child rearing.

Bibar published a number of articles on education, health and hygiene in which some of their old customs were criticised. To be more specific, some of their traditional practices like early marriage, addiction of alcohol etc. had received severe criticism. The writers' like- Karendera Narayan Brahma, Namol Chandra Boro, Rupnath Brahma and others gave special attention to education and national character formation. The early marriage of young boys was criticised by them vehemently and such practices were identified as causes of their backwardness. So, 'education' as a factor for the development had received top priority from those writers. They were conscious about women's education also. The Bodo writers of early 20th century suggested that mother's education was necessary for the benefit of the children. So women education received attention of those Bodo educationists' writers.

They conceived of women's education as follows: activities like home management, child care, care of the aged, cooking, entertainment of guests, weaving, embroidery etc. received top priorities from them. They thought that the women must know all this and they must teach the same to the girls before marriage (Brahma 1992: 24-45).

Status of Bodo Women in the Society: -

Though the processes of Indensisation of the Bodos started long back under the patronage of the Bodo ruler like, Krishna Chandra and Gabinda Chandra of Cachar, Siva Singha and Nara Narayan of Koch kingdom, yet the Bodo society was free from social evils of the Hindu society. Towards the last part

of 19th century, Hindu society was engulfed by many social evils and practices. Though the Bodo society was intermingled with the mainstream of the Hindu Society, yet the system like *satee*, *dowry*, *child marriage*, *purdha system*, *child infanticide* etc. were completely unknown to the Bodo society. The Bodo women have been playing very significant role in the family, socio-economic life and also in religious function. Though the overall condition of Bodo women till the beginning of this century was not worth mentioning, yet from the time of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma a gradual change has been taking place as a result of the reformation movement let by him. Thus their condition must have been better than that of high caste Hindu women in some parts of India.

Stating the freedom enjoyed by the women in Assam, W. Robinson stated that, the women of Assam were beautiful to look at and they go about in public without any artificial modesty unlike the women of other parts of India. Definitely Robinson indicated to the women folk beyond the caste-structured society of Assam. Her role to the father and mother in laws is of love, respect, obedience and servitude. She is subordinated to mother in-law in the management of household affairs. In the absence of mother in-law she manages the household affairs. She maintains avoidance relationship with the elder brother of her husband. Her relation to younger brother member of the family is love, affection, master and guide. Women in the family are regarded as '*Noni Mainao*' or *Lakshmi*. These are the 'ideally set roles', normally expected to be performed by a woman after marriage in husband's family.

Employed women on the other hand put rational domination on the family. Due to her education and economic position she enjoys comfortable position in the family as well as in the society. A few women with irresponsible, mischievous, quarrelsome, jealous, and envious cruel in nature create tensions not only in the family but also outside the family. Such type of women is referred as '*Rankhini*, *Khangkhini*, *Mwmsari*, *Fansari*, etc. Such type of women's is generally avoided by the people in the society. Society give due value to the quality of women but not on beauty which is reflected by the Bodo proverb, "*Mohora mwjang akhola angjang*, the meaning is *beautiful in form but ugly in characters*.

In the words of Desai and Thakkar, "women's works is of tremendous value to family, society and state but it was always remained invisible." According to them, "Women contributions to economy remained hidden because their work especially in agriculture and in the unorganised sector remained unanimated." The roles of Bodo women perform in the economic domain are in no way less than male counterparts. The Bodo society is a patriarchal society and so the contributions of the women are not duly recognised. Leaving aside ploughing, they worked in the agricultural land along with men. A woman produces her dresses and necessary cloths in the family by weaving. She helps the family economy by poultry farming, animal husbandry etc. Earlier, it was stated that from her minor age Bodo women play vital, effective and contributory roles to the family economy. According to Upala Baruah in her work on the economic life of the Karbi women remark as, "Daughter begins as soon as their strength permits to help their mother in all her works. The poorer the household, the greater dependency on women work for survival." Same as is in the case Bodo women in poor families in rural areas. Newly settled poor families

in reserved forest areas particularly in Bodoland, the women play similar roles in survival and continuity of the families. In traditional Bodo society agriculture was the primary and common occupation to all the families. There were instances of specialized occupations i.e. carpentry, bamboo crafts, pottery, weaving etc. In all the poor Bodo families of the society women play equal roles to male counterpart to the family economy. When a girl attain five or six year of age, he begins to play her roles as a baby seer in the family. It is exception to only the families with wealth and property. She helps the families by moving light households articles from where and there as desired by the elder members of the families. With the increased of her ability and strength she begins to help her mother in all kinds of household works. Washing of pots and utensils, fetching of water from stream and well, booming of flour and courtyard of the house, are her regular works. Her intention is towards becoming a 'good household worker'. Mother and other members of the family help her in the construction of ideas and experience through socialization and training.

In the Kachari History of Kachar, the role of queen Induprobha of raja Gabinda Chandra indicated the roles of women in public affairs. Women played a very critical role as a spy in the Kings' court. *Birgwhshri* was an efficient woman who was appointed as a tax collector by *Jaolia Dewam* and she collected revenues from the people and paid to the British government on behalf of the *Dewan*. *Gambari Shikla*, *Theng Pakri* and *Birgwhshri* participated in the war against the British where they sacrificed their lives for the interest of the country, i.e., *Shikhnajhar*. *Bhaben Narzee*, mention two types of Councils i.e., first one is '*Haden*' regional council consisting of twelve villages and '*Hasong*' the council of single village. The head of '*Haden*' is known as '*Gadung Gwra*' and the head of the village council '*Hasong*' is known as '*Hasung Gwra*'. No mention has been made about the participation of women in the affairs of the council. In the present village committee system also Bodo women have equal scope to play roles along with their male counterparts. In the real sense, women's' participation in the public affairs was facilitated by the introduction of modern education. Educated Bodo women started to play their roles as well as a government employees i.e., teachers, clerks, officers, etc. Employment is indicative of one's education, economic position as well as of status and roles. Higher the education better the job, income and status.

The societies of the Bodo have been relatively free from many inhibitions' as found in many parts of India. The evils of dowry system have not plagued the society, however recently the practice is slowly trying to creep in the society. In Bodo society divorce is allowed and there is no restriction on widows as far as their food, dress, etc. as it is found in Hindu families in other parts of India. Women in Bodoland enjoy a higher status as compared to the greater Indian society, considering that the caste-society of this region is devoid of practices like dowry, child-marriage and bride burning, that are rampant in most parts of India. The economic dependence of women on men is an acknowledged reason for the low status of women. Even though the illiterate women have to work hard for a longer period, their work remains invisible and marginal. Women's physical labour which remains invisible is not counted as work. A majority of women work force is in rural and urban unorganised sector. Education is considered as a potent instrument through which the process of modernisation of the society could be affected. As most of

women are illiterate and unskilled so they have options only to join informal sectors like handloom, handicrafts, bidi factory, construction works, garments and domestic work. Consequently they have to remain stagnant in their jobs and they are always uncertain of their services. The impact of education is seen in the life style and the size of the family. Generally working parents prefer single family, willing to enjoy greater freedom of association and movement. Educated girls exposed to wider worlds changing their view as regards to marriage and life style. The effect of modernisation has been evidenced in Bodo families also. Girls are generally married at a mature age and sizeable numbers of educated girls are against arranged marriage and prefer to select their spouses.

With the gradual spread of education, the women of Bodoland and Assam in particular urban areas have learned effectively to overcome the inhibitions they had so long and are now participating in all kind of activities and competitions with their counter parts of other states and even countries. This is not only boosting up their self-confidence and moral but also inspiring a number of unemployed women of the state. Until and unless economic status of the rural women who constitute half of the population can be raised by providing more additional employment and income, it would be difficult to eliminate rural poverty in Bodoland (BTC). The rural woman of Bodos should be brought to participate into main streams of development activities by initiating of extension of education and training facilities in rural areas. As mentioned by Dr. Radhakrishnan, “the most important role of a women plays and will continue to play is that home-maker, but this be done best only when she is educated”. If these women are educated, they will be able to manage the economy of the family, educate and inculcate good morals in her children and maintain a healthy balance in all her relations in the society. Therefore all round development in BTC (Bodoland) will only be possible if the income and standard of living of women, particularly in rural areas is developed.

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