

EMPOWERMENT OF BODO WOMEN: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

Economy is the main way of sustaining our life. Without economic development, it is impossible to think of women empowerment and development of a particular society. In India, the ratio of female population is fifty percent of the total population. The Bodo community in the State of Assam, which is traditionally involved in agriculture and allied activities, has immense capacity in contributing towards national economic activities and generating income. The role and participation of Bodo women in economic activities have a great significance. In this present paper, the theoretical aspects of the empowerment of Bodo women have been drawn to study and emphasize systemically.

Key words: Bodo, economy, women, traditional and development

1. INTRODUCTION:

Women constitute nearly about 50 (fifty) percent of India's total population. The Census of India 2011 indicates that the total population is 121 crores out of which total male population is 62.31 crores and female population is 58.74 crores.

As women constitute nearly about half percent of total human resource of the country, therefore it is not possible for a country like India to make progress without the overall progress and development of women. As a matter of fact, the question of empowerment of women and understanding their difficulties has become a very important issue in the present context.

In the long history of traditional belief and male dominance in the human society, women were given least importance in every sphere of our socio-economic and political life. Women were not only physically and mentally abused but they were also denied other aspects of social and economic development. They were denied equal social status, political role, equal wages and were treated as an appendages of men.

In this context, an importance has been drawn to the understanding of the economic role of Bodo women in theoretical perspective. The Bodo people are an ethnic and linguistic aboriginal group found in the northern bank of Brahmaputra valley of Assam in India, as defined by E.A. Gait and Rev. Sidney Endle. Generally, the language stock of the Bodo people belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language family. The Bodo people are now recognized as plains tribes in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

The Bodos, who are basically an agricultural community, rely mainly on the agricultural economy. The Bodo women also have an active involvement in contributing towards economic activities. They are skilled in agricultural and other allied activities and are also skilled weavers. However, the mode of operation of their economic activities is primitive in nature. The reason may be because of low rate of literacy of the Bodo women as well as low rate of capital formation of the community in general. The education of Bodo women and their dominant and active role in economic developmental activities assumes importance so that they can participate in the upliftment of the economic status of their community.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES:

1. To highlight the economic role of Bodo women.
2. To understand the source of economy generated by Bodo women.
3. To understand the economic importance of Bodo women.
4. To understand the economic awareness and activities of Bodo women.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY:

The present study is based on secondary sources. The secondary sources and data have been collected from different journals, magazines, articles and also from printed materials along with reviewing the books of different writers. The present paper has been applied in descriptive method.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW:

The Bodos are one of the important indigenous tribes of North East India. The Bodos are now scattered all over Assam, North and East Bengal and some parts of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Nepal and Bangladesh. *Sekhar Brahma (2006)* has mentioned that the economy of the traditional Boro society is basically dependent on the land and agricultural products. They were satisfied having possessed cultivable land and arrangement of cultivation. All the members of a family could not think of anything other than participating in agricultural process. *Seema Bhattacharya (2011)* has discussed the underlying causes of gender inequality as related to social and economic structure, which is based on informal and formal norms and practices. Consequently, the access of women particularly those belonging to weaker sections including Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes and minorities, majority of whom remain marginalized, poor and socially excluded. *Kameswar Brahma (1995)* in his writings has mentioned that the *maigainai* or paddy plantation is performed with some rites. The guardian of the family, generally the elderly female member, offers a pair of areca nuts and betel leaves (*goijora-pathoijora*) in the name of *Mainao* or the Goddess of Wealth; and applying a little mustard oil on small quantity of seedlings, the elderly female member salutes towards the east and then starts plantation, then only other members of the family start plantation all saluting to the east. Thus this clearly shows how important women are in contributing towards household economic activities of the family in the Bodo society and this need to be identified.

5. ECONOMIC ROLE OF BODO WOMEN:

5.1 Family Economy:

As Bodo people in the rural areas are mainly dependent on agriculture, their primary source of economy is based on the agricultural activities. In a traditional Bodo family, women contribute equally in their agricultural and allied activities and provide support in all other domestic economic affairs of the family. Their involvement includes providing natural fertilizers to their crops field, paddy plantation, vegetable production, cloth weaving, piggery, fishery, cattle farm etc. Through these activities, Bodo women proffer a significant involvement in their family economy.

5.2 Livestock farming:

Livestock farming in a traditional Bodo family involve rearing of domestic animals to provide additional support to the economic condition of the family. Cattle, pigs and poultry are the common domesticated livestock bred in almost every family of Bodo community. These animals are mostly looked after by the women folk of a family. In the past, rearing of pigs and poultry farming were meant for use as food items during seasonal festival, religious ceremonies as well as family ceremonial programmes like marriage, puja, *Bwisagu* (Bihu) and *Magw Domasi* (Magh Bihu), etc. and were rarely meant for commercial purposes. However, these are now mostly used and sold for commercial purposes; and the women folk, who mainly stayed at home to attend to domestic chores, have now started venturing out to help their men to enhance their family economy. The women help by selling poultry and eggs in the market and contribute to the family economy by generating individual income. Cattle breeding, which is mainly for purpose of agricultural farming, is also one of the ways of earning income. In a family while there is

dire need of money, cattle is sold in the market. The women folk assist in contributing to their family income by selling cow's milk in the market.

5.3 Weaving and sericulture:

Bodo women traditionally have their folk activities like weaving of cloths in handlooms with their own hands. Weaving and sericulture is an integral part of the women folk of the Bodo community. The young Bodo women learn the idea and techniques of weaving from the elder women in their family. They weave their cloths themselves in their handlooms. It is a general belief in the Bodo society that if a girl does not know the art of weaving then it will be difficult to get her married because she is said to fall short of traditional skills. So, it is bound upon them to learn the art of weaving. The hand-woven cloths traditionally include 'dokhona', 'aronai', 'gamcha', 'endi chadar', 'muga chadar', 'seema chadar' (bed-sheet) etc. which may either be for family use or for commercial purpose. The hand-woven 'endi ji' i.e. *eri* cloth is a popular warm cloth useful during cold seasons in the tradition of Bodo society. Bodo women raise *eri* silkworm which spin cocoons which are later harvested to be spun into yarn for weaving *eri* clothes. *Eri* silkworm and their cocoons are also sold for livelihood by some. The hand woven clothes are sold for considerable price in the market. With the emergence of technology and technical know-how, several small scale industries have been set up by Bodo women entrepreneurs as well as by Self Help Groups for weaving cloths for commercial purposes. With the commercialization of woven products and their high demand in the market, women engaged in the cloth-weaving industries are now empowered for income generation for their family thus resulting in economic development of the society.

5.4 Production of rice beer and distilled liquor:

The preparation of rice beer and distilled liquor is a part of social and cultural life of Bodo community. In a traditional Bodo society, preparing and consuming of rice beer is considered a normal phenomenon. The women prepare rice beer by a concoction of different natural plants along with rice. This preparation is ordinarily only made by the women of a family. Earlier rice beer was prepared for worshipping of God, social and religious functions, reception of guests and also used as medicine for urinal problems and others. Some of the women who prepared rice beer and distilled liquor for family consumption have gradually shifted to production for commercial purpose. Many women are earning money by selling rice beer and distilled liquor to run their family life. They are not depending upon their husband too much. The widowed women who have lost their guardians are also adopting the selling of rice beer as well as distilled liquor to run their family life and are trying to become economically self-dependent. It is to be mentioned the some enlightened section of the society are opposed to preparation of rice beer and its sale. However, many women of the marginalized section are dependent on this business to run their family as well as to generate income to become economically empowered.

5.5 Participation in commercial and small business activities:

Women in present time have changed their traditional style of livelihood and they do not depend on their husband or guardian alone, rather they have been actively participating in male activities too. Women are now gradually taking part in the commercial and business activities in day to day life. Economic awareness and self dependency has been emerged in the mind and capacity of every woman in the present society. Beginning from the weaving of clothes, Bodo women are largely engaged in different business sectors including vegetable vendors and others. It has been witnessed that Bodo women are venturing out from their homes and selling vegetables in the market without letting it affect their normal household chores. With the changing attitude from traditional economic activities towards developed professional attitude, women's economic dependency factor has been reduced gradually. Women are now necessarily coming forward to participate in every economic aspects of their daily life. Thus, it is to be extolled that Bodo women are gradually strengthening their domestic economy as well as empowering their economic role in the society.

5.6 Participation in Self Help Group (SHG):

Self Help Group or SHG is now a well known concept and accepted as a tool for women empowerment by making them economically self-dependent. Self Help Group evolved as a social movement in the society for empowering economic activities of women. The Bodo women mostly in rural areas form Self Help Groups ordinarily with 15-20 members and through this Self Help Group they acquire government schemes for work in the field of weaving, poultry farming, piggery, etc. They also lend small amount of loan from their common fund to others with nominal interest rate by way of mutual support. They give skill training, capacity building and counseling to the women to some extent. At present, many Bodo women have become economically self-dependent and contributed in the domestic economy with the help of SHGs. SHGs have brought significant changes in the economic aspects of the society. Such groups have helped Bodo women participate in the decision making process of the society by empowering them to be equal with men.

6. CONCLUSION:

In the conclusion, it can be stated that in a traditional Bodo society in present day, 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. Women's economic dependency factor will be reduced gradually if they fully participate in all economic development activities. Lack of education deprives women's opportunity to be a part of the progress and development of the society. Without providing education to women, the rate of development of the society will be slow and not in the desired pace. Providing women with fair representation in different decision-making levels will help protect the interests of women and empower them to participate in the developmental activities of the society.

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