



Cover Page



ROLE OF BODO WOMEN IN THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPMENT ESPECIALLY IN ECONOMIC ASPECT: AN ANALYSIS

Dr. Tarali Boro

Associate Professor, Barama College

Abstract

Women have been made significant contributors towards the growth, development and sustainability of human society as a whole. Women constitute half of the population in the world. In every society from ancient to modern times, women are considered less competent with men in all the aspects of socio-cultural and economic life. So to say in the Economic aspects the position of women always plays a significant role in the society. Assam is a land of numerous tribes having different ethnic and linguistic background since the time immemorial. Among them, the Bodo/Boro are numerically and sociologically one of the most aboriginal tribes in Assam. Role of Bodo women in economic activities is not much discussed in her society and there is a lacking space to deal it. Therefore, this paper is made a humble attempt to highlight the importance in the society, traditionally and the way forward.

Keywords: Bodo, Women, Status, Social, Agriculture, Economic, Rights, Position, Role, Domestic.

Introduction:

Women constitute an integral part of the society and actively participate in the socio-economic development process of the society. However, the role played by women is almost always underestimated and has not been assigned sufficient importance. Nowhere in the world woman receive the equal treatment with man. Therefore, the problem of gender inequality has been urgently felt.

Throughout the centuries, the Bodo settlements are predominantly in the rural areas and their economy is mainly based on the typical agriculture and allied activities. The Bodo women have a big contribution to the family economy. They work both with and outside the family in all areas of family's economic interest. Along with normal household work as housewife, they work almost equally with the male members in all agricultural and allied activities attached to the family. Thus, their contribution to family economy is enormous, although it is always as family income. The recent Bodoland Movement, which has given them a political identity of statehood for the Bodos in Assam, had also equally developed a motivation for economic self-reliance amongst the community members, particularly the women.

To assess the economic role of the Bodo women on a changing perspective during the pre and post Bodoland Movement period, certain areas of domestic activities have been considered, which are otherwise very much a part of their day-to-day activities but with changing time frame they have adopted these as avenues of income generation so that women's dependency factor can be reduced and at the same time financial solvency can be brought for the whole family. Such a situation has brought the women to the forefront, that is, the public domain and society has now felt their presence in a changing status with a new role. To be more precise, in the present work the following areas have been considered which are normally part of a traditional Bodo family but now these have been started by the women folk in a commercial manner.



Cover Page



1. Aims and objectives:

- (i) To highlight the economic role of Bodo women.
- (ii) To understand the source of economy generated by Bodo women.
- (iii) To understand the economic importance of Bodo women.
- (iv) To understand the economic awareness and activities of Bodo women.

2. 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.

3. 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. 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.

4. Economic Role of Bodo women:

4.1 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.

4.2 Livestock farming:

Livestock farming in a traditional Bodo family involves rearing of domestic animals to provide additional support to the economic condition of the family. Cattle, pigs and poultry are the common domesticated



Cover Page



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 are sold in the market. The women folk assist in contributing to their family income by selling cow's milk in the market.

4.3 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’, ‘endichadar’, ‘mugachadar’, ‘seemachadar’ (bed-sheet) etc., which may either be for family use or for commercial purpose. The hand-woven ‘endiji’ 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.

4.4 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 worshiping of God, social and religious functions, reception of guests and also used as medicine for urinary 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 some enlightened sections 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.



Cover Page



4.5 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 have been emerged in the mind and capacity of every woman in the present society. Beginning from the weaving of cloths, 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 aspect 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.

4.6 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 counselling 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.

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.

References:

1. Bhattacharya Seema (2011): Rural Women, Panchayati Raj and Development, Mohit Publications, 4675/21-Ganpati Bhawan, Ansari Road, New Delhi -110002.
2. Brahma, Kameswar (1995): Aspects of Social Customs of the Bodos, Bina Library, Guwahati-781001.
3. Brahma, Sekhar (2006): Religion of the Boros and their Socio-Cultural Transition, A Historical Perspective, DVS Publishers, Guwahati-781001.