

Woman Empowerment in Tribal Society of Assam: A Case Study with Special Reference to Bodo

Dr. Simani Boro

Dept. of Bodo, Gossaigaon College

Abstract

Society means the existence of both male and female being. The development of society fully depends on equal development of both genders. Women are important part and have a great role in development of society but their status is not equal to that of men in rural area. In this regard the Government of India has introduced various laws and rights in the constitution, yet it is not able to apply properly in the society due to many reasons, and is being reason of suffering of women. They remain busy with household chores within the four walls of the family; strictly follow society's rules and regulations. Due to the lack of education, most of them don't know about the laws existing in the Constitution for them. Only a marginal section of the society has been empowered but belonging to the lower, middle classes and rural areas are deprived from development process. In this paper an attempt is made to study on the present women educational status, employment opportunities, household, financial authority, freedom of movement, political participation etc and its issues and problems in Bodo society of Assam with special reference to Baksa District.

Keywords: - Women, empowerment, development, and society.

Introduction:

Among eight states of North- East India Assam is also one where different tribe are inhabiting since the pre historic age embracing their unique cultural identity. Geographically Assam is located between the longitudes of 89 °42' E to 96 ° E and 24 °4'N to 28 °2' latitude have an area of 78,438 square km, on the south of the Eastern Himalayas. The land of Assam is decorated with a number of hills which include Karbi Anglong and North Cachar hills and expensive rivers like Brahmaputra and Barak which create the valley of Assam. Overall, the state of Assam has been important within Indian polity for it represents a large group of Indian tribes who belong to various groups of tribal origin. The population of Assam consists of different ethnic tribal and Aryan origin. The origin of tribal groups which exist in Assam can be traced within the Negritos, Dravidian, Alpines, Tibeto – Burmese and Aryan race this travelled from far off areas and settled in centrally located regions of Assam. These tribes unite to form the colorful tribes of Assam.

The human society consists of both men and women. Without women no society of human being can exist. In the society, both the sex of human community, i.e., man and women have various roles and statuses in terms of objectives, desires and aspirations, duties and responsibilities, dress style and behavioral pattern. The development of the society depends upon the proper realization of women's role

who leads the family mainly in Indian scenario. In our society women are regarded as the most vulnerable and weaker section in every nation of the world. So, they are lacking behind in most of the important categories of the society like education, socio-economic, culture, politic etc. The traditional mentalities of Indian as well as Assam assure that the place of women is mainly concentrated to the household activities and upbringing of the children. That is why the huge social disorder comes out and new attention is to be laid so that society can run smoothly with dignity.

In tribal society, women have the vast and peculiar role in their way of life. The statuses of tribal women naturally depend on their roles and duties. If it examined, could be seen that their duties in the family is not less than males. They bear the responsibilities of the families and society as social customs, norms and cultural legs. In case of matrilineal societies like Khasi, Garo, the women enjoy more power, but in patrilineal society most tribal women enjoy less power and they remain under male dominant. For the uplift of society with the development of women, there should be better women empowerment among tribal societies too in various fields. Due to not being of proper empowerment, maximum tribal women are suffering from traditional rules and norms of society, so country empowerment process should be emphasized upon these phenomena.

Objective:

- To study current scenario of tribal women of Assam regarding empowerment with special reference to an area of Baksa District.
- To evaluate the major problems faced by the tribal women and to find out the reasons for lacking behind.
- Trying to give recommended suggestion for the same.

Methodology:

The study is based on both primary and secondary resources. Required data are collected by observing the said villages. Questioning, interviewing as well as approaching to the villagers is applied in the collection of primary data. As the secondary resource, books, journals, relevant web pages etc. are used to collect necessary information.

Discussion:

Here, a case study is done on a revenue area of tribal villages to understand and make assumption about role and status of tribal women and their problems. The area is known as 'Bunmaja area' which is comprises four villages viz. *Nopara*, *Karaiguri*, *Bunmaja* and *Bagarpar*. The said area is under *Gabardhana* block in Baksa district of BTAD, located in south-east from *Barpeta* Road and about 3-4 km. distance via *Howly*. The mentioned area is very underdeveloped and it is almost a tribal people inhabitant village. The livelihood of this village is not much complex. It is simple and a good-looking lifestyle though various problems arise in sometimes. Their social condition is patriarchal type, yet it is not justified women as low section. The villagers are mostly depended on Agriculture though house made income of village comprises of many governments' employee, but the most of them are male. The women and girls of the villages have to opt some locally bases job for their extra income. They depend either on their men or income sources like poultry, weaving, cultivation, self-help group, homemade equipment etc. It has mentioned in the earlier that the most of the government employee are male where the percentage would be 60 to 65. The female statistic of the area in village wise in terms of government

employee or related service could be found as showing in the following tabulation where others are living as normal as housewife.

Table-1

Sl. No.	Name of village	Teacher	ASHA	ICDS	Nurse	SHG	VCDC member
01	Nopara	Nil	01	02	Nil	04	Nil
02	Karaiguri	01(High School)	01	02	Nil	03	Nil
03	Bunmaja	01(Senior Secondary)	Nil	04	Nil	03	Nil
04	Bagarpar	01 (High School)	Nil	02	Nil	04	Nil
Total	04 (four)	03	02	11	Nil	14	Nil

In *Nopara*, *Karaiguri*, *Bunmaja* and *Bagarpar* villages, there are 65, 40, 42 and 35 families respectively and among only some of them have sufficient paddy field to crops. In the cultivation, the women of the villages are very much conscious and they have enough time to look after it. Though the women are not disturbed by outside force, there is necessary for adoption the new mechanism of society which will give them opportunities for their personal development. It could be seen that women of the said villages maintain basic routine and the dignity comes out from their duties.

Women of the said villages enjoy a full-fledged freedom which is comparatively equal with male counterpart. The women are fully entitled into traditional social activities, without which it cannot be performed. The women of the villages could be seen conscious about their political right. They have voting right and enjoy it during election. Though they enjoy political rights, there is lacking of political opportunities for them. So, there is no active women political member relating to ruling body of government as seen in table-1. The women of the said villages enjoy equal opportunity of duties and responsibility of family and society, but they are not empowered with the modern gadgets. The women of the villages are very interested in their home keeping works and they consider that thinking about matter of political, economic, ruling of the society or government are not a part of them. These are because lacking of education. More than 50% of women are illiterate because of unavailable of proper education system. The various government policies for growth of literacy are yet to touch the people of the villages. Due to lack of education, women are more conservative and traditional. That is why empowerment concept does not play any role in the village. To make women strong than before there is need of important to take initiative for development of education system in the area.

The Bodo people have to obey the traditional rituals and customs of the society. They perform various religious and seasonal festivals where the women play great role. The women of the Bodo society bear great responsibility for survival of culture and societal progress. They have their own dresses, cooking style, house model, folk songs, dances, language and behavior which are significantly preserved and prevailed accordingly. The women of the villages reflect the culture and tradition of the society and so they are considered as the medium of it. They celebrate religious festivals like *Kherai*, *Garja* and seasonal festivals like *Bwisagu*, *Magw*, *Khatigasa* etc. where the women wear their traditional dresses *Dokhona*, *phashra*, *Aronai* etc. which are prime identity of Boro culture. The weaving culture is one of the main duties of women by which they prepare their own dresses for the family members and to yield income. Such types of all cultural activities also could be seen in the said area of villages.

But, as most of them are illiterate, there is much involvement of superstition among them for which some extra-ordinary duties are done by them without any scientific reasons. Though they are busy

with their mutual duties towards family, children and communities; they waste time in the name of unknown beliefs which is a harmful cause in modern time for development of society.

Role of women in family and society:

Besides the daily household chores of the family there are some functions of the family and society where women participate strongly. These are briefly discussed below-

1. Farming domestic birds and animals:

The women of the village help their family in the development of economic condition by farming domestic animals and bird. They farmed goat, fowl, duck, pig, pigeon etc. in traditional way for the consumption of family and for sell in the time of necessity. To give women more economical power and responsibility need to develop the farming habit from traditional way to modern commercial purpose. In the time of interviewing, they expressed their willingness and interest in this field. They always wish help from the government also so that they can maintain their family life smoothly.

2. Spinning and Weaving clothes:

Weaving is another important character of Bodo women. Necessary clothes of the family are weaved at home. For the production of yarn they rear Eri-silk worm for both the consumption of the pupa and for the cocoon. They spin the cocoon with the help of 'thaokhri', a drop spindle (made with hand) and produce yarn from the cocoon. Using this yarn they weaved Eri-clothes for the winter wear.

Both the male and female garments 'gamsa' and 'dokhona' of the family are weaved at home with handloom. Besides these 'aronai', bedsheet, scarf etc. are also weaved. Each and every family of the village had loom at their own home. They also produce yarn from the fruit of cotton plant. All this work of spinning and weaving are done with the help of hand in traditional way where need to spend more times of the day.

3. Performance of festival and ceremonies:

The women of Bodo society have a great role in the performance of religious and agricultural festivals. The religious festival *Kherai* is the main festival of Bodo community which cannot be performed without the presence of 'Doudini' a female prayer dancer. In the same way the agricultural festival 'Aag lainai' (bringing *mainao* or *laxmi* from the paddy field to home during the time of Assamese month *Aghon*, English, December), 'bhakri dangnai' (entering in the granary), 'mai gajennai' (first plantation of paddy seedling) etc cannot be done without woman.

Result and finding:

Though the women section is regarded as important part for existence and survival of human being and society, yet the tribal women are failed to contribute towards progress of the society as needed. These are because of lack of proper empowering to them in many factors. As the most women of the said area are illiterate, they cannot take own decision on household matter, cannot actively participate in political matter and different social activities, cannot move freely and is also result of being unemployment. Due to lack of proper education, the belief on superstition, one of the social evils is prevailing among them which are the reason of drawbacks for their development. Unless education is rightly imparted to the women for their development, they will continue to be exploited by the family

and society. It is the education only which will give them the knowledge, self-confidence and self-attainment. It is through education only; the women will know themselves, their contributions and importance in the family and society and realize their potential in social, cultural, political and economic spheres.

Poor nutrition status and poor economic condition are also major problems for unable to develop of women folk along with society. It is said that sound mind live in sound health. The traditional social conditions that prevailing among them is also worth mentionable. The society is patriarchal and all the power of the family lies upon male where women have nothing to do. Lazy, lack of skill etc. are also some of factors for their drawback. Besides, more male and female folk practices to take alcohol prepared by them.

Conclusion:

For the development of the society, active co-operation and participation of women in any approach is very much necessary. The tribal women of many castes of Assam are still not empowered in various fields. The society should be sympathetic toward them and should think for their empowerment so that they can think and develop themselves to provide contribution toward development of society and nation too besides family. The male dominate society should understand women's role in the formation of society. They must be given rights and due respect to see the world from their own outlook. They also have will power to take own decision, so, should be allow to do what they want. In order to make women participation effective, efficient and successful in any approach, the traditional, social attitude and patriarchal value of society must be changed. The women of tribal society must be given appropriate training to improve their knowledge, capacity relating to their rights, responsibilities and duties. There also need for launching more and more awareness campaigns in favor of women's empowerment along with making them educated. In these regard besides government, other organization, political parties, self-help groups, mahila mandal, NGO etc. have to play significant role. Then they will realize first to possess self-knowledge, self-awareness and self-belief to meet the problems, after that they will see themselves empowered.

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