

CHAPTER-III

BODO WOMEN AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

Half of the world's population is constituted by the women in the socio-economic development in the society. It is an inception from both men and women that cannot be scraped silent either the one for its contribution in the economic prospect. But, the role played by women is not still felt its importance in many of the societies.¹ For which the question of ensuing women development has caused the need of the hour in society. In the patriarchal society, the women are more subject to their head of the family. Sometimes in a society they are being eased out for the burden of their dependency and become helplessness when they needed the most. The intensity towards women always look into that they are unskilled, weak and are meant only for domestic life.² There are some instances where even their contribution and role in the agricultural works and allied activities of the family are being kept under the table.³ But when their activities are defined in terms of economic performance there lays a handful of activities within and outside the domestic boundary.⁴ The women's selflessness contribution in the society is broadly notable in the socio-economic life. Besides that, culture, religion, education, political etc are also reflected in the economy society.⁵

Till the 90s, the accounts of work in the family's income enterprises are still considered as the non-working productivity in the family. The understanding of a society claimed unless doing the greater job or involvement in bigger enterprises are mere contributions at which such certainty is the beliefs of the society till at present.⁶ Yet the positions of women in the society are not given much value. Their low statuses in the society are being a matter of advantage by the men to enjoy the features of development. Different five year plans policy had provision for development of the women providing various facilities like health care, education, fund, etc for the

greater economic benefits. However, the status of the women in the Indian society failed to prove any significant improvement in society before the 90s.⁷

In the Traditional Indian society the women accessed to property or resources are mostly restricted because of the patriarchal practice of the society that made them institutionalized women's subjection in the family as well as in the society.⁸ The women in the rural area society even lagged far more behind than in urban areas in terms of their opportunities, development, status, rights, position and roles in the society which were very limited to them. In the field of agricultural activities except plowing the women used to share all the activities along with the male counterpart. They had an active role in the family livestock farming also.

To understand the economic role and status of women, their participation in economic activities remained a very vital determining factor. It is to understand that their participation is to be observed in two ways. One is that the women participated themselves in raising the status whereas in another considering the nature of work that the women are associated with. The women owned status by their capacities in holding their opportunities. It is cleared that there are no accessed resources for women to have equal weight in the society. The women's contribution in the society aimed by removing all the barriers that their mobility in socio- economic spheres might be rooted out and the unequal relation between men and women in the economy aspects are accounted same respect as economic contribution in the society.

3.1 THE BODO AND ECONOMY ACTIVITY

The Bodo society continues as an agrarian till at present. Besides this there are other economic activities carried out by them in the recent development. Apart from the traditional village communities like in *khels* and *mels*, there is no such evidence of institution for the confined economic sectors in the Bodo society in the early period.⁹ Thus, economic developments in the society come from the contribution of both men and women. Although in the patriarchal system, the society however recognizes the male contribution with much priority, but it is more or less having equal rights and responsibilities in terms of economic activities. The Bodo women have been playing a significant role in the domain of the economic activities in the

society along with men. The women are confined to look after the family and at the same time, livestock duties of the family are also managed and looked after by the women. That's why saying goes "Men are bread winners and the women are head of the household,"¹⁰

The agriculture activities remain as the most important activity as most of the Bodo families are not economically sound. The Bodo women continue to occupy good position and actively engage in various traditional and professional works like in bamboo crafts, pottery, weaving etc. Basically, from the poor family background, the contribution of women acquire better place in economic life along with the male counterpart. The girl child in the family when she attained at the age of maturity has started rendering services in various profit making activities including the domestics. The Bodo people who are mainly living in the remote reserve forest villages whose economic conditions are not sound often faced more hardship in the society. The women become more victims to it and in this juncture the Bodo women in the family continue to work to meet the family's expenses by indulging in different organized and non-organized economic field. The works among the Bodo people are dispersed according to the status of the family. For the well established family mostly the domestic works are done by servants and maid- servants. For the women of the poor family background sometimes it is also an option for the women to leave their home in search of the work for running the family. In early days commercial business was not preferable, considering it as cheating to others and the belief as a sign of leading to sin if commercial activities had been engaged. Therefore, many of the Bodos were involved in non-commercial economy activities but in the post colonial period discarding the earlier belief some of the Bodos have started commercial business.

As changed in economic prospect with the new trends and global economy transformation. In this regard, since the Bodo women have a wider role to play in the familial society, the economic level of understanding is taken into consideration to bring more developments. Thus, present economic development among the Bodos access for greater aspects on the economic stability. The various economic sectors have influenced the Bodo women to conduct different economic activities in public and private sectors. At the same time, along with the neo-agricultural methods, the

traditional techniques also remained as the main input to participate and exercise the economic development in the society to a great extent.

3.2 BODO WOMEN IN THE FAMILY ECONOMY

The activities and the roles of the women in the family are counted as mere and insignificant but we cannot deny the duties of the women as they also perform various works for running the families. It is also evidence that the young girl in the family is often or sometimes served as a maidservant to the other family to support her family. The Bodo women usually have traditional skilled knowledge in food item processing and ‘*Naapam*’ is one of them. The reliable sources furnished that ‘*Naapam*’ occupied good market value in the Indo-Bhutan Bodo Duars areas in the past days.¹¹ Another kind of alkaline which is known as *Karoi*,¹² is also another kind of important substance used in the Bodo family. It is prepared from burnt leaves of *sobai* (black dal), banana leaves (*Thalir bilai*) or from burnt ashes of coconut fruit fibre. It is used as recipe in curry while preparing dishes like *Ondla*, *Narzi*, *lafa*, *gwkwi wngkri*, *sobai jhol*. The *napaam*, *kharoi*, dry fish and dry meat remain as regular demand in the market and attained good income till today. The Bodo women are associated with these commodities and also cropped different vegetables which lead more income generating for their concerned family. So, the women participation in the economy life is greatly noticeable and considerable since the ancient days.

3.3 BODO WOMEN IN LIVESTOCK FARMING

The women provide an ample service in the family economic and dedicatedly concentrated on various domestic livestock farming for better economic purview.¹³ They mostly perform different activities that really help the family generally in the economic gaining. The activities are found in the livestock rearing, farming etc which have been continuing in the society since the early period. The objective of livestock farming including the rearing of pig, goat, chicken, duck, cow, buffalo etc is not only for the domestic consumption but also for the commercial purpose. The rearing of pig remains as the most important place in the Bodo society till today because the pork meat continues as one of the most favourite dish of the Bodos.¹⁴ Along with pig, other animals like cow, goat, sheep etc are often exposed for sale at fairs and markets in the

early period and it is still continuing as sources of income for the family. These animals' meats are also served at various occasions like in marriages, seasonal festivals vice versa. At present the *oma* (pig) pork meat has been served and occupied good place in coming up of various hotel and restaurant industries. Animals like goat, oxen, cow etc are also given much importance and especially the cow is kept for multiplying the numbers of cattle in the family that serve as good commercial purposes. It is mentioned that in the early period, the Bodo people avoid consuming milk, as it was believed, it would be like depriving the baby calf from its natural support.¹⁵ But from recent time milk has been used for commercial purposes. In such activities the Bodo women are mostly associated with milking and commercialization of milk.

Another important lives stock farming is the rearing of fowls like chicken, hen cock, ducks etc. The poultry served in the family i.e for meat, eggs and for market. Mostly the female members in the family are having an upper hand rights on domestic livestock. It is also observed that even other family members like father or anyone has to take prior permission from them. They cannot sell off without the prior permission of their guardian.¹⁶ Sometimes even the father has to pay or take prior consent from them while using the livestock.¹⁷ This clearly indicates the rights of the women which they enjoy in the family.¹⁸

3.4 WOMEN IN AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY

The Bodo society is an agrarian and the economy is mainly dependent on the agricultural products.¹⁹ For centuries the Bodos' main economy was laid in agriculture and farmers are the common occupation. It is mentioned that they were the first to introduce the irrigation system in the North East India especially in Assam.²⁰ The cultivated crops like rice, Jute, wheat, corn, mustard seed, cotton, tea, ginger, turmeric, sesame, area nut, tapioca, sweet potato etc are still cultivated and acquired a good market demand. The Bodo women are also involved and shared market in the local *Bazar* for selling such agricultural products.

Agriculture like *Jhoom*²¹ cultivation was also noticed and the wet- rice cultivation was the main crop of the Bodo people. The women are the active

participants in all the agricultural activities since the early period. The Bodos are very much aware of the agricultural field in term of choosing the land for cultivation. The suitability of the land types of that grass grown, availability of the irrigation, flowing rivers and streams and the level of the soil are also greatly concerned as the considerable factor for the cultivation. Rice cultivation is mainly done on the suitable land which is called *hamaha* means alluvial land. The decision of sowing the seed and choosing of the land are taken by the male folk. The different types of rice cultivation are *Maisali*, rice (*Sali* in Assamese), *Aijong*, *Jhwsa*, *Bawa*, *Maibra* (sticky rice) and *Ashu* rice. They prefer mostly the cultivation of *Maima*, *Ashu*, *Aijong* and *Maisa* rice.²² Majority of the historians and scholars are agreed with the fact that the Bodo women make a significant contribution in the agriculture activities since the ancient time. They began the cultivation works by performing with a simple prayer by lighting *ahuti* to *Mainao*, the goddesses of wealth.²³ The transplantation of paddy saplings is completely done by the women in the agricultural field. The plantation of seed to till husking and storing of rice to *Bakhri* (granary) are mainly entrusted to the women folk and they are responsible for said tasks. Besides these, they are also assisted in the pre and post harvesting works like mixing of seeds, softening the soil, harvesting, winnowing etc. Acknowledging and recognizing of the various duties performed by the Bodo women, Sidney Endle described that *Kachari* women during the cultivation time, cooked food and made serve all the workers in the field.²⁴

In the early period when there was no rice mill available. The Bodo women took the charge of milling the entire rice by a traditional tool called *uwal* made from wooden bowl shape tool use for milling rice. This traditional technique of milling rice is still practiced in Bodo villages but not in large scales because of the availability of the modern machine of milling. The milling of the rice was exclusively done by the women through the *uwal* to feed the entire family members throughout the year in the early period. They also used to collect the firewood from the jungles and sold to the local markets which was the worth mentioning of the economic activities of the women.

3.5 BODO WOMEN IN FISHING AND CRAFT TOOLS

Fish is one of the most favorable food items for the Bodo. The Bodo people catch fishes from the beels, lakes, ponds, streams, rivers, agricultural field etc where the fishes are available in which both women and the men are involved.²⁵ It has been noticed individual, group and community fishing among the Bodos. In course of the fishing the Bodo women used *Zakhoi* (bamboo trap tool) and *Kobai* (for storing fish) or *palha* etc.²⁶ The fishes which have been caught from the different sources are used for the families' purposes and the surplus is also made available in the markets. As the Bodos are very fond of fish, fishes are highly demanded. The Bodos eat not only the fresh fishes but also the dried and preserved one. In the processed of the dried and preservation of the fish we noticed the active engaging of the women as they are very expert in that field which really indicated the participation of the women in the economy activities. It was also mentioned that the Bodo women used to go to the river for fishing, snail and along with bringing wild jungles vegetables and eat.²⁷ The dry fishes attained good markets in the local markets which are still continued by the women till at present.

Besides that the craft products are also very important in the Bodo society. It is found that the Bodo women are also noticed having highly expertise hand skilled in field of the craft making. The different products are *sen* (fish trap), *koka* (bamboo trap tool), *pohlo* (Bamboo type trap), *je* (Jal), *mushari* (net), *zekhai* (bamboo trap mostly used by women), *kobai* (bamboo basket for storing fish), *Songrai*, *Sandri* (bamboo rice cleaner), *Khaosa*, *Don*, *Jhantha*, *Dhara* (bamboo big mate), *Dhuli* (rice store-make of bamboo), *Dwihu*, *maldang* (earthen water pot), bamboo and cane furniture and different types of textile equipments.²⁸ These products are highly demanded in the market which could fill up economy vacuum of the certain families in the society. Basically such craft markets are still occupying good markets in the Bodo local markets.

3.6 BODO WOMEN IN WEAVING AND SERICULTURE

The weaving and sericulture activities are the integral part of the Bodo society since ancient days. The weaving activities of the Bodo women are a very essential

skill mandatory in the sense of social identity. The social perspective for girls who are well skilled in the weaving activity served good criteria for recommendation of marriage. In the traditional Bodo society, the girl who does not know how to weave is called *haba rwngi* or *aoluri hinjao*²⁹ which means unskilled women. It is also taken into consideration that anyone who marries with such a girl would fall into misfortune in her family life.³⁰ Therefore, it is mandatory for the women to learn the skills of weaving and mothers are the responsible for giving skills. The weaving culture is the gift of art of the Bodo women. Some scholars are consensually written that the Bodo women are more expert in the field of weaving compared to other tribal communities in Assam.³¹ Sidney Endle went on to praise that the *kachari* women were so fast in weaving that they could weave about half yards wide daily if they were not frequently interrupted in her weaving time which makes ready to sale at about Rs 2/-per yard where he commented during the colonial period.³² The demand of loom weaving silk clothes extended the good market value even in the *Kachari Duars* markets in the colonial period.³³ Seeing the swiped hand skill of the Bodo women in weaving, the wife of first governor of Assam Mrs Hydori commented that she had never seen such a woman who spined and weaved cloth for herself and as well as for the entire family members.³⁴ From this account it is indicated that the Bodo women were expert in the art of weaving. The weaving was not only an option but they also remained as responsible individual in the family. The loom employed for weaving industry is constructed in a very simple way with traditional equipments installed at the courtyard of the house. The materials required for the installation of loom are wooden post, bamboo, ropes for tying and thatch to cover or shields the roof in order to protect from sunlight heat. The interesting fact is that the engineering of the installation of loom are done only by the directions of the women. Amongst the weaved cloth, the *Aronai* (long scarf) is the most popular cloth in the Bodo cultural society commonly used while welcoming the special guest at different occasions.

The variety products of clothes like *Dhokona*, *Sadri*, *Sima*, *Gamcha* etc for the family used in the early days but in later time they produce these for the purpose of earning income by selling in the markets. Females' garments like *Dhokona*, *Jumgra* and *Mekhelas* (wrapper), *Mekela* are mainly used by the Bodo women of Kamrup,

Darrang and Nowgaon district. The Goalpara Bodos use *Dhokona* and the west Bengal Bodos are using sari. The *Dhokona* are designed with vibrant colour and embroider designed like *agor geder*, *aghor gwlwi*, (small and big design) *gwmw*, *gwtang*, *bato gab* (colours like yellow-blue-parrot colour). They are also ornamented *dhokonas* like *dhokona thaws* which are used for the newly wedding bride. The new *dhokonas* are compulsory for the new bride and the *Bwirathis* also dressed with new *Dhokona* during the time of marriage. Different names of the *Dhokonas* are *pharaoh megon*(pigeon eye), *daotu koro* (dove head), *moider agan* (elephant's foot print), *besor bibar* (mustard seed flower), *dingkia bibar* (fern flower), *akahi* (blue), *bidun* (plan yellow), *gwmw burwi* (yellow old), *gwja* (red), *daorai mwkreb* (peacock eye), orange, yellow, sky blue etc.³⁵ are weaved with different colours and design.

The tradition of weaving in the loom has been continuing in the Bodo society till at present. The traditional skills and technique of weaving are still possessed by the women and has continued passing from generation to generation. At present many small scales weaving industries are being set up by the Aids provided by the government side to provide self employed to the work for the greater interest of the family economy. The fashion of weaving attitudes is still seen among the Bodo women as many women continued taking it as the profession for commercial purpose. Thus, surplus of different weaving clothes are found available in all the commercial markets.

In the early days one of the chief industries and profitables among the Bodo was the culture of rearing silk-worms. The traditions of rearing silk-worms was the common activity found in the Bodo society and the history says that the using of *eri* silk spinning and weaving had first been invented by the Bodo people in the ancient time in Assam.³⁶ The women completely looked after the rearing of silk-worms right from the hatching of eggs to till getting of cocoons silk. The cocoons of *eri* silkworm are spun into yarn for weaving different *eri* clothes by the Bodo women. The *eri* silk was highly demanded in the *haats* and *mels*³⁷ during the colonial period specially in the *kachari duars* areas.³⁸ The manufactured of the *eri* cloth from the *eri* drawn was a very profitable occupation.³⁹ In olden times most of the warm clothes used during the winter season are being produced from the *eri* silk thread. The products of silk cloths

were used both in the winter and summer season because of its softness, hygienic and weather durability quality. The clothes like, jacket, shirt, shawl, *Dhokona*, *Gamcha*, *Sadwr*, *sima* etc are also weaved from of it.⁴⁰

The spinning of *eri* silk thread from cocoons are done by employing simple technique of manual hand work tool called *Thaokri lunai* (yarning) in Bodo, made from wooden. The actual works are carried out either by mother of the house or by grown up skilled daughters.⁴¹ This work is very suitable for the women specially as it required a little exertion of strength and makes it with their quickness and readiness of hand, which is totally dependent on the hands skill. The Sericulture activity taken up by the Bodo women plays a significant area that the economics of the family is to some extendable support. The industry continues to grow till at present having high demand of its products and the silk thread particularly. In fact, Assam was famous for this and the product items were exported even to China, Tibet, and European markets during the colonial market.⁴² It is believed that the *eri* silk clothe making was first introduced by the Bodos and later this technique has been transferred to the other society in Assam.⁴³ The *eri* silk worms are consumed as good delicacy dishes of the Bodos. It is also mentioned that the ability of the Bodo women in the loom is quite praiseworthy.⁴⁴ Sericulture activity of the Bodo women at present not only confined to the traditional family weaving but continuing by setting up of different weaving centres and industries for more commercial purpose and the majority of the workers engaged in it are women. The skilled and technique for weaving silk clothes are only conducted by the Bodo women with the traditional knowledge which has been continuing in the Bodo society in the post colonial period. The rearing of silk worms is a very common tradition still in the Bodo villages. The fresh silk worms are used for consumption at home and for the purpose of the money also. At present through this silk industry the Bodo women even have national and international markets export brands tied up with neighbouring countries like Bhutan, Bangladesh and Nepal.

3.7 BODO WOMEN AND PRODUCTION OF *ZOU* (RICE BEER)

The use of *Zou/Jhumai* (rice beer) has been continuing since the ancient days in Bodo society. The rice beer is prepared with an utmost skill and labour especially by the women folk. It is a popular drink of the Bodos, mostly used during wedding ceremony, welcoming guests, religious pujas, festivals etc. But the use of rice beer gradually has declined due to the influence of different social and religious reformation in the post colonial period. Therefore, preservation of the traditional skill of making rice beer is the need of the hour for understanding the younger generation as many of the Bodo women have engaged different professions and occupations but very few retain this traditional knowledge. However the knowledge is still retained by some of the Bodo women. Not only the requirement for the preservation of the old technique of the making of the rice beer but also we need to examine the hygienic way of the preparation of the rice beer. Also the productions of rice beer began declining due to the restriction or ban made by different organizations in the Bodo society. The coming of different religions like *Brahma*, Hinduism and Christianity led the people to completely restrict the use of rice beer in the society. Because of which the production of rice beer is lessening. Since this drink is related to different occasions and festivals in the traditional Bodo society, the production of rice beer is still continuing. Nowadays, a few women have taken a step for commercializing the rice beer with an aim for attaining a good space in the market. Through this step women could be able to run their family and brought good income. Thus, preparations of *Zou* (rice beer) also play a significant role for the economic support. The women at this juncture become an important necessity agent for the preparing of rice beer as most of the Bodo people have lost this traditional skill and stopped producing. So, the Bodo women who are having such skill took it up as the new profession to commercialize it. Through this they could be able to support their family, children's education, food, dress and other essential things. It is found that many *Bodo* families are being run by this profession by selling rice beer liquor. At these instances the Bodo women are the main people who are associated with this work.

3.8 BODO WOMEN IN LABOUR WORK

The paid labour work is also a kind of earning for livelihood of the Bodo people. The Bodo society was not an economically sound in the early period nor upto an expectation at present but satisfactorily improved. The Bodo women apparently involved in various labourers' works available in the past and present. During the colonial period the Bodos were highly demanded as the labour workers in the tea factory, construction of railway line, road construction, clearing of jungles etc.⁴⁵ Few Bodo women were also involved along with the male folk in such labourer work.⁴⁶ Besides, that various labour works are also picked up by them in such an instance when there lays no earning male person in the family. The activities of engaging in labour works seems to be burden for the women particularly, but it's all about for earning livelihood for the family.

In the Bodo society, since the early period the system of slavery was totally absent. The '*Pandulipi*',⁴⁷ a Bodo's social laws mentioned the institution that there had been an existence of female labour in the Bodo society which was known as *ruati* and *bokali* in Bodo, a female paid labour(maid-servant) and babysitter servant respectively but not slavery. The practicing of female paid labour in the Bodo society is still continuing. Here, a young girl or mature female basically from the poor family background used to go and serve as servant to other family on paid service. In olden days the wages or the salary was paid in mounds of rice.⁴⁸ During harvesting time the female *ruati* was paid seven and half mounds and six mounds during the month of cultivation but the payment or wages to *bokali* had no fixed rate.⁴⁹ Different perceptions had been put forward on *ruati* and *bokali* services –paid labour. Generally, it is taken as an economic earning by the individual who is *ruati* and *bokali* or might be to save family's expenses as a burden to concerned parents. But after all finally it relied on concerned individual's decision either to spend for her or give to family. Basically, these systems still exists among the poorer sections of the Bodos family residing among mostly in the rural areas where the question of education, development and awareness has not yet properly reached till at present. The wages of the labour is now paid by cash money.⁵⁰ Besides, that various labour works are being carried out by the Bodo women at present like in cultivation and harvesting, cleaning

and washing dishes in the various hotel, constructions works and at various paid labour works.

3.9 BODO WOMEN IN TRADE AND COMMERCE

In the colonial period, generally the Bodo people were not much aware of trade and commerce. They were living in simple life and actively engaged in agricultural and others traditional activities. They were not having much idea on the commercial aspects to earn their livelihood. The idea of commercial activities came into Bodo society only after the colonial period.⁵¹

When the Bodo people were being marginalized and faced the low productivity of income the idea of the commercializing came to the mind by doing different means. So, in this connection, the gradual changes have been witnessed and the women also started taking initiative rather than depending on the male counterpart. Firstly the products were barter in the local markets and exchanged their required commodities. In the colonial period the Bodo people were having a trading relation with the *Bhoteas* (Bhutanese). There were different *Kachari Duars* where *Bhotea Mela* and market used to hold in the Border line of the Bhutan, Tawang and Ladak and even with China also.⁵² Different commodities like rice, cotton, yarn, clothes, silk yarn, dried fish etc were bartered with silk, yarn, ponies, musk-wax, rubber, gold etc in the *duars* market.⁵³ There was a route to udalguri⁵⁴ leading from the other bordering *Duaars* like kokrajhar, kamrup and others places. So, all the Assam traders specially, the Boro enjoyed and bartered their products in the biggest border markets in udalguri which was known as *Bhotea mela*.⁵⁵ Because of the exchanged of the surplus product there had emerged of trade in the Bodo society, in the earlier, the Bodo people considered business in a negative sense and thought that the conducting business might lead to sin.⁵⁶ Therefore, earning money by selling cow milk was not accepted in the society.⁵⁷ It is indeed believed that it would be somewhat like stealing its baby calf's milk.⁵⁸ However, in the post colonial period, the Bodo people started picking up the commercial activities as the main economic profession for the development and greater interest of the Bodo society in general.

In the post colonial period as the commercial ideology tremendously changed. The commercial activity among the Bodo women has also taken into a new shape. It is needless to mention that the Bodo women had been contributing economic benefits to the family since the early period by performing through various traditional and untraditional economic activities. Their contribution in the family is still admirable at present. The women are the chief owner on the family livestock farming. The commercialization of pig, piglets, chicken, cow, calves, milk, vegetables and agricultural products are carried out for selling in any local markets by the women. The weaving products like *Dhokona*, silk clothes, *Aronai*, *Gamcha*, *sardar* and many other clothes are also hugely commercialized locally, nationally and globally. The different items like dried fish, meat, forestry products are also attained good demand in the markets. The Bodo women also carry out different hand crafts materials for selling in the weekly markets. The *indi*-silk worms also served as the main business items, as a thread and clothes or for consumption of silk worm. It remains as the main business item that has occupied the local and international market as well.

Therefore, to handle and carry out the different micro business in the society, the idea of business was first time initiated by Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma in the colonial period and early post colonial period. He encouraged weaving activities among the women in the Bodo society by forming a new *Mohila* (women) *samitis* and did an excellent work. Another organization named Gram *Hiteshi Samiti* which was under the *Parbotjowar* estate in the Goalpara district also extended support in this regard. Later different *samitis* were developed and founded during the *Brahma Dharma* and extended various financial aids. Besides these, setting up of rural development, health care centre, educational institutions were institutionalized to provide more economic development for the society. These facilities are specially meant to support financial assistance to the women's groups in different enterprises to excel in the economic activities. These *samitis* moved from place to place to bring awareness in the economic sectors, especially in weaving industries. Such *samiti* continued to work for the women empowerment throughout the later colonial period also.

At present, various economic activities are undertaken by the Bodo women. The hotel, vegetable vendors, meat vendor, stalls, beauty parlour, business profession, small scale industries etc are the economic activities. Besides these some national and international silk thread industries are also carried out by the Bodo women at present. At recent time mostly the Bodo women are associated with the daily market business, like vegetables vendor. Fruits vendor, sweet vendor, meat vendor, fish vendor, clothes shop, tea stall, hotel industries, stationery shops, micro finance works, online business, various cattle farming industries, etc. Such businesses are now actively participates by the Bodo women.

3.10 BODO WOMEN IN SELF HELP GROUP (SHG)

Government of India adopted various programmes and schemes to raise the economic status of the women in India. It aims at eradication of poverty, by forming different volunteers groups and the NGO agencies in India specially to give scopes and privileges to make them economically sound in the society. The different enterprises group, social development group and volunteers' workers group are actually confined to 15-20 members.⁵⁹ The groups used to have regular meetings, social gathering, and counseling program. Each group adopted certain activities considering the financial viability in the maintenance of the different workshops, program, and occasions. It is in the policy of women empowerment to engage the unemployed women for their economic status in the family which brought positive income among the participating members. Such programmes help to change in the position of economic status of the Bodo women particularly and decline dependency on male counterpart. By this they could raise their level of status and partake in any decision making, in and outside family.

With the help of SHG, the Bodo women could be able to provide loan to the needy person with a minimum rate of interest and generated profit out of it. Through SHG, different training and counseling programmes like capacity building, labour skill training, awareness program, business policy, profit making, silk weaving, entrepreneur activities etc are carried out.⁶⁰ Participation in the SHG group also helped the Bodo women's groups to change their life and status of family economy.

The involvement in the small scale industries and engagement in the different economic activities has brought inspiration amongst the other women in the line of living economically independent without hampering the normal traditional duties of the women in the family.

The economic empowerment programme through SHG also helped the women to take up economic decision in the family and various other social issues. On the other side SHG also made women compulsory to participate in various social and religious functions. In such an instance, they not only confined to the domestic works but also learned to face the public spheres. In this respect one of the respondent mentioned that their SHG named as Gwjwnshali (SHG) was formed in 2010 and through this programme and training and small micro business activities were carried out by their ten members group. The training and project were like cattle farming, weaving, rearing silk worms, silk yarning, and micro finance fund raised work. Recently they are also projected to work on the cow farming.⁶¹ Therefore, with that aim in view the women adopted some traditional economic activities and turned it into a commercial means.

The SHG mostly dealt in promoting such small scale entrepreneur and budgetary planning amongst the small business groups which were already there in a traditional formed.⁶² But to make it more commercial process, the steps were taken to put the women's activities more commercial in nature for greater income of the family and society. The rearing of pigs, weaving and sericulture activities, poultry farming and animal husbandry, production of rice beer, honey bee farming, and vegetable vendors, mushroom cultivation etc are greatly encouraged by SHG for commercial means. Along with these some women have started hotel business, sweet and grocery shops, stationery shops, small dairy farming, fishery business, tent house, clothes marketing, meat vendor like chicken and pork meat, craft industries, catering group, local women fund raiser, tailoring etc.⁶³ All these basic commercial means had been taken up by the women folk, showering economic growth and increased in commercial activities through the agencies like NGO, SHG, in the *Bodo* society. Thus, it has given us cleared pictures of understanding that the *Bodo* women are actively involved in the economic activities with no stone unturned.

In the light of the economic status and role in the economic aspects, the *Bodo* women have significantly been contributing in the growth and development of the *Bodo* society and family on a sound economy status along with the male counterpart in bringing the desired economic changes in the society. It is mentioned that even though the *Bodo* society is patriarchal in nature, still women's role in economic contribution cannot be denied. They are highly valued, enjoyed equality of rights and take part in the decision making of the family. No doubt, there has been some social imbalance system in the traditional property rights and other means of social norms but they have never suffered suppression and oppression in the society. The *Bodo* society always recognized their power and offered dignity to them. It is clearly noticed that half of the contribution of the economic probability in the society flowed from women activities. Many a times, despite being women and holding such different policies, business activities, they never left out their domestic duties. Being busy in such activities they continue to perform as mother, daughter, daughter in-law, wife, or mother in-law. *Bodo* women are hardworking, energetic, kind hearted, dedicated and sincere in their work. Thus, from the above discussion it is mentionable that the contribution of *Bodo* women in the society was very significant and their status and role in economic activities are the most blessed to the family, society and for the nation in the field of economy.

Endnotes

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