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## A Study on the Contribution of Bodo Women to Upliftment of Household Economy

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**Abstract**

Bodos (Boro) are one of the largest ethnic groups of Assam and North East India with their distinct identity and rich cultural, heritage. In 1846, B.H. Hodgson for the first time used the 'Bodo' to call this racial group. They constitute a very important section of ethnic groups of Assam and have their own identity regarding their language and culture. The social structure of Bodo is not completely patriarchal. The socio-cultural life of Bodo society is equally controlled by women using their active participation in various fields of society. They enjoy sufficient freedom in their daily life. They enjoy equality with the man in every sphere of life, albeit the birth of a female child is not so much desired and favored as that of a male. In the traditional social setup, Bodo women play a direct and an indirect role in the family economy or village level. Bodo women are pure, brave, active, tolerant, free, faithful, loving (kind-hearted) and affectionate. In the case of Bodo women, they play a most important role in Bodo society and their ultimate goal is to create large-scale awareness with the active participation of women themselves. It also enables them to gain self-confidence, have access to resources, and create Adire (traditional things) to achieve and express, free from irrelevant customs, traditions, practices, and prejudices. Besides these, Bodo women play an important role in various empowerment fields such as economic empowerment, political empowerment, education, social awareness, and sports as well as agricultural fields, industries, services, and different fields of women entrepreneurship, business, self-employment micro-finance etc. in society.

**Keywords**

Family economy, Role of Bodo women, Equality and Society

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## 1. Introduction

Bodo (Boro) women are seen to be actively involved in social, economic, political, and educational development. Although the Boro society is patriarchal, women are also given equal status or dignity. From morning till night, all the work is done by Bodo women. For example for children, agricultural activities, food making, rearing animals and birds, entertainment, and all types of household work. Bodo women are generally free to participate in all spheres. Bodo women are not only developed economic sector but also in various fields such as political, social, educational, etc. That is, Bodo women equally participated with men in the development of the family's economy. The contribution of Bodo women to the development of the family economy can be seen in the following areas: These are-

- a) In the field of agriculture
- b) In Handloom & Textiles
- c) In the field of animal husbandry
- d) In the field of household chores

## 2. Methods

The methodology is an essential part of the study and a key point in measuring the research problem. The article is not written efficiently without methodology. So, the article is completely based on fieldwork and after the completion of the fieldwork, the article is written by applying the observation and analytical method. To make the study proper the data are collected with the help of fieldwork in the different places of Bodo dominated area. The study covers especially the contribution of Bodo women in the upliftment of the household economy. The study is based on their contribution and participation in the fields of agriculture, animal husbandry, handloom & textiles, and household activities.

The important data for the proposed study has been collected mainly from primary sources and secondary sources. Primary data has been used by visiting the Bodo majority area where the Bodo people are living together with the formation of society and collecting some information with observation of the Bodo people. The study is enriched by collecting secondary data from different existing published materials in various regions of the Bodo living area such as books, journals, magazines, souvenirs, periodicals, articles, etc. Both primary and secondary data were used to collect the information on this study. The data has been collected using a structural questionnaire. The structured questionnaire has been translated into the Bodo language to better understand the interviewer (Head man of the Village, Senior member of the villages/societies). After collecting the data from both primary and secondary sources, the article is tried to be written.

## 3. Finding and Discussion:

The entire family economy is generally dominated by the male folk in Bodo society but women also play an uncountable big role. The role played by the Bodo women in Bodo society cannot be denied elsewhere. The Bodo women do not participate directly but they co-operate with men folk in the family economy. The family of the Bodo society enjoys a little economic benefit from the support of the Bodo women. The womenfolk play an important role in supporting her family economically.

### 3.1 In the Field of Agriculture

Agriculture is the main means of livelihood for the Bodos, that is, the main means of economic development of the family. The main crop of the Bodos is Paddy. During the winter and monsoons, the Bodos cultivated a variety of crops to collect the food that was needed for their families, as well as support the family's finances. Besides paddy, various types of vegetables, mustard oil, pulses, and other crops such as bananas, wheat, turmeric, and other fruits are also grown in the Bodo families. This is mainly done by the male members of the family, but still, the Bodo women contribute by participating in all the agricultural activities equally with the men. Christian missionary Rev. Sidney Endley said, "Agriculture is still the great industry of the Kacharis... [1] (Rev. Sidney Endley, 2007). Bodo women are equally involved with men from the time of the start of the plow to cultivate paddy on the farm until the time of the grain harvest is deposited in the granary. For example, from the beginning of the harvest, Bodo women provided tea, and water to the fields, provided food for the needy, and were actively involved in the activities of plowing, paddy cultivation, paddy harvesting, and transportation of paddy to the house. This type of activity provides financial support to the family.

Primarily, the Bodos cultivate *ASU* in the hot season and *SALI* in the winter season paddy as a whole, but now they are focusing more on *SALI* paddy, excluding *ASU*. In today's situation, the Bodos take measures to improve the economic condition of the family, besides cultivating paddy for food. This includes various paddy crops, as well as *Jwsa* (a kind of paddy) and *MAIBRA* (a kind of paddy that is useable for cake, etc.) flavors. The Bodo women grind the grain needed to eat it through a heavy wooden pestle for pounding and husking pad and a pestle in the family.

Besides paddy cultivation, the Bodos have also cultivated a variety of fruits and vegetables cultivation in their domestic garden. e.g. in the winter season *Lai* (a kind of leaf vegetable), *Lapha* (a kind of leaf vegetable), *Mula* (radish), *Donia/Dundia* (coriander), and during the monsoons *Jwgwnar* (sweet gourd), *Khumbra* (pumpkin), *Jinkha* (cornered gourd), *Lesra* (long bean), *Kabi* (cabbage), *Paleng* (spinach) *Thaso* (arum plant), etc. These crops are mainly done in the rest time of paddy cultivation and the suitable period of season. In these fields' Women work equally with men and they collect vegetables that are needed by families, and they support the family economy. Besides cultivating family crops, they have also picked up a variety of vegetables from nature. E.g. *Dingkhia* (fern), *Mana Muni*, *Singri Mwkhw* (a kind of creeper with sour taste), *Thaso Bitho* (the edible sheath of an arum plant) *Thaso Aitheng* (long sucker root arum plant), *Thaso Bibar* (flower of arum plant) *Tha* (tuber), *Buthua* (a kind of winter plant used as vegetable) *Khunthai* (a kind of bitter fruit) *Khwrwdwi/Khambrenga* (carambola) *Norsing Bilai* *Thaigir Fithai* (Fruits of wood apple), *Mwikhun* (mushrooms), etc., The Bodo women collect all these vegetables without disturbing their household work or they collect their essential vegetables, supporting the family economy.

The Bodos have also cultivated a variety of crops as per their requirement. For example, mustard oil, sesame seeds to make a cake, lentils to make curry, papaya, turmeric, ginger, onion, garlic, etc. In all these types of cultivation, women are equally involved. Currently, the Bodo women have also started trading in paddy rice and also variety of vegetables. With trade and commerce Bodo women contributed a lot to the maintenance of the family and sufficiently helped in the economic development of the family economy.

### 3.2 In the Case of Handloom & Textiles

The handlooms of the Bodos are mainly known as weaving. Padma Shri Mangal Singh Hajowari said, 'There is no single woman or young girl who is not expert in weaving with the Bodos... [2], (M. Hazoary, 2007). Bodo women experts in weaving. In the olden days, a Bodo woman who did not know how to weave could not get married, which means *ALURI* (unknowing weaving art). So, every Bodo woman was trained from Childhood and became an expert at weaving clothes from an early age. Bodo women are also able to quickly infuse the shape of a bird that escapes from their skulls while weaving clothes. Bodo women weave two types of clothes – men's and women's. *Gamsa*, *Shawl*, or *Alan* are for men and themselves, Bodo women weave clothes such as *Dokhona*, *Langa Dokhona*, *Aronai*, *Rege-Regang*, *Jwmgra Si*, *Phasra*, *Sima Si*, etc. These fabrics include various types of agar such as *Gwjam Agor* (old designs), *Hajw Agor* (hill designs), *Maoji Apha* (footprints of cats), *Bibar Agor* (designs of flower shapes), *Bwiragi* (a design like a medal), *Lao Begor* (seed design of sweet gourd), *Hangsw Agor* (design of duck), *Singri* (a design of a small leaf), *Lai Agor* (design of leaf), creeper design, *Dingkhia Agor* (fern design), *Okhaphwr Agor* (moon design), *Sikhiri Agor* (butterfly design), *Na Agor* (fish design), *Hathorkhi Agor* (star design), *Bwigri bibar* (design of plum flower), *Daothu Agor* (design of dove), *Pharwo Megon* (the eye of fowl), *Muphur Agan* (footprint of bear), *Daorai Mwkhre* (feathers such as ornamental design), *Thaigir Bibar* (flower of wood apple), etc. are worn by Bodo women with their clothes on.

In the past time, Bodo women reared the Eri insect and from the cocoon, they spined yarn to weave cloth. They cut all the tools needed to make the thread. e.g. *Thaokri* (a kind of tool for spinning), *Phithwb Gon* (cocoon stick), *Dwi Kurwi* (Bowl for water), *Fomfla/ Somfla* (like a flat or a puff), etc. After the spinning of yarn from the cocoon Bodo Women used to weave cloths in different colors. For example, for black, it was made by mixing silica or citrus fruit, and for yellow it was made by mixing jackfruit or wood skin. They cut down on the tools needed for the construction and sought the help of men if they couldn't. For example, from a tree *Sal*, *Gandi*, *makhu*, *Jenther*, *Musra* (all are weaving materials), etc., and made from Bamboo, *Swrkhi*, *Uga*, *Hissan Kunta*, *Sal Gon*, *Nw Hasung*, *Khilabari* (all are weaving materials), etc.

Bodo women are busy with different activities but are still engaged in weaving clothes. Efficiency Bodo women are now weaving a variety of designed clothes in different colors with new technology. Apart from this, it has also gained popularity among other communities and has received a lot of support. Bodo women's beautiful weaved clothes in the Shape of beautiful nature, the shape of fowls, and animals are not only for wearing these are also found in the form of Shirts, Cap, Burn, mattress covers, Table Cloths, Door-window panes, etc., For which weaving clothes of the Bodo women are not only become their dresses but also support significant economic growth in their family. Weaved by the Bodo women *ARONAI* is getting popularity and honor at the national level today. So, we can say Bodo Women's weaving is a

small-scale industry of the family. Many self-help groups and societies have been able to bring economic growth through the weaving sector.

### 3.3 In the Field of Animal Husbandry

The Christian missionary Rev. Sidney Endle has pointed out that- a Kachari village usually abounds with livestock of different kinds...[3] (Rev. Sidney Endle, 2007). Apart from agriculture, the Bodo family also experiences a variety of animal husbandry. Primarily, the pigs, birds, ducks, cows, and goats are the pets of the Bodo women. In the olden days, the Bodos used to rear these domestic animals for food, but now they are reared for food as well as for the economic development of the family. There seems to be a lot of emphasis on Bodo women, especially in domestic animal husbandry, whereas men do not.

#### 3.3.1 Pig Rearing (Piggery)

Pig farming is one of the most cherished of Bodo women. Pork is the most delicious food item of the Bodos. Pig farming is also associated with the festivals and social customs of the Bodos. Social festivals of the Bodos are said to be non-vegetarian or non-vegetarian, and there is a system of feeding pigs or pigs to the uncle-ant and the elderly (father-in-law/mother-in-law). Bodo women take care of the pig even after they stop doing their household chores. In addition to the number of pigs in a Bodo family, one can be seen rearing from 5 to 10. Bodo women tend to raise (*Adi*) from others even if they cannot afford it on their own. Bodo women have long-reared pigs by making pig sheds in one corner of their household. But over time, pigs have been reared with modern technology instead of traditional ones. When the pig is 10-12 months old, then sells the pig and buys the family's necessities, that is, to compensate for the family's needs. Men are not involved in pig rearing, especially women who take care of the pig despite the hardships they face. Now, we see pig farming as a result of the modern system. Bodo women started raising pigs by forming the SHG, Society. The Boro women helped the family's finances by raising pigs. In the event of a financial crunch to raise pigs, they start rearing pigs despite having to seek financial aid from various institutions and sell pigs to strengthen the family's policies.

#### 3.3.2 Poultry

Bird farming is also a favorite of Bodo women in various animal husbandry practices. In Bodo families, fowl and ducks can be seen. Bodo women rear fowl despite having to cope with their daily routines. Bodo women are adept at making toys, taking care of them after hatching, or giving eggs to birds. A large number of fowl can be seen reared in Bodo families. fowl are used as food when they grow but now, they can earn a lot of money by selling instead of eating at home. When guests arrive, the family often offers chicken at family functions, which can be seen as financial support for the family. Today, many Bodo women are rearing fowl, ducks, and pigeons commercially, in addition to using the family food form. Through this, he was able to meet the needs of his family, that is, to help the men run the household.

#### 3.3.3 Dairy Farm/Rearing of Cattle

Cows are common in agricultural Bodo families as the Bodos migrate with their bulls to cultivate rice in lean fields. Bull care is mostly done by the men in the family, but the Bodo women do not lag in caring for the cows. The activities of cleaning the cows, defecating, and milking the cows are mainly done by the female household. Cattle rearing among the Bodos is also related to social customs. A few days later, the bridegroom is allowed to give birth to the bridegroom which is called the breed of cows. Thus there is a system of Uncle sending cattle to her niece which is called Sending a cow to the uncle. This means that their families are financially supported by the aid of cows. The Bodos are so interested in rearing cows that if there is no cow in the family, they bring it from someone else, which is called *Adi lanai* (taking a loan). Milk is obtained through cattle rearing as well as cow dung. Cow dung is used as fertilizer for agriculture or growing vegetables in orchards.

#### 3.3.4 Goat Farm

In Bodo families, goat rearing is less common than that of birds, pigs, and cows. The Bodo women rear the goat, like the other animals in the family. Through the rearing of goats, the Bodo women also try to improve the family's finances. Since men do not seem to be interested in raising sheep, women take care of the goats even through their work. Today, many Bodo women rear sheep commercially and try to support their families as well as themselves.

### 3.4 In Terms of Household Chores

A Bodo family cannot operate with a male household. Here, the contribution of women is immense. This is because Bodo women are busy with household chores from morning till nightfall. Engaging men in agriculture to weaving, and raising chickens, pigs, and cattle, they also have to engage in household chores. Such as cooking, vegetable picking, forest collection, grinding/digging, washing clothes, washing household firewood, feeding chickens, and pigs, fishing or catching, and cleaning the family, All the work of writing and caring for or caring for children is done by women. Therefore, it can be said that women are the biggest contributors to the development of the family economy.

### 4. Conclusion

The economy plays a major role in the development of a family. Bodo women are closely associated with the development of the agrarian Bodo family. Although men may not be able to do many things equally, women help men in all their activities and try to develop a family through many things on their own. Today, Bodo women are trying to economically support their families through various means, without being involved in agriculture, poultry, pigs, and goats. For example, tea shops, grocery stores, vegetable trades, rice mills, meat cutters, etc. also work and support the family as well as promote economic prosperity. Moreover, today, many of the Bodo women are educated and employed, and many work in search of different livelihoods. For example, by providing beauty parlors, becoming LIC agents, co-operative societies, clubs, self-help groups, NGOs, *Mohila Got* (Women committees), working in RCM, Oriflamme, Amway, Titans companies to help them grow financially as well as grow their families. In short, the Bodo women are accepted as *Mainao* (most lucky woman of the family) of the Bodo family.

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