

## Chapter- 7

### Conclusion

The Bodo is one of the earliest and largest indigenous tribal communities of Assam belonging to the Tibeto-Burman linguistic family. The society of the Bodo is primarily patriarchal with a few elements of matriarchal characteristics. Most of the Bodo family live in nuclear family, though a few extended families also exist. As per the evidence a normal Bodo family consists of parents and 4 to 6 children (Boys & Girls). Father is the head in the family; he is honoured and obeyed by other members of the family. In absence or death of father the eldest son assumes the charge of the household and discharges his responsibilities in consultation with his mother. In important matters or in decision making cases related to the family, the opinion of sons in the family is always given importance, though daughters are also present. In traditional Bodo custom inheritance of property is patrilineal as daughters have to leave parents' house after getting married. The eldest son of the family inherits half of the father's property and the rest is distributed among other sons. The daughters can claim from their parents before getting married, but if married she can claim nothing.

In the Bodo socio-economic set up, it is the women who occupy more dominant role rather than the men; consequently their social status is much higher when compared to their counterparts in other parts of the country. Moreover, their contribution to the family starts from childhood and continues unabated till their death. If we see the ratio of male and female workers to the total population of the country is 5:1 and for the tribal population it is 3:1. Among the non-tribal women, 12% are workers and it is 21% among tribal women. So, from the above ratio it is

confirmed that women's initiatives is foremost in tribal family affairs and so also in the Bodo family affairs.

There is no doubt that the status of the Bodo women in Bodoland is better than that of their non tribal counterparts in many respects in the society. However, the status of Bodo women in Bodo society cannot be looked upon in isolation as it is closely integrated with the status of women in general. Their problems have to be considered equally with the women in general in the context of time, space, region, socio-cultural and political upheaval and family system, which differ among the various women of India. Though the Bodo women contributed lots to the development of their community, yet their contribution is not duly recognised by the society. Despite their massive contribution, there is no comprehensive study, which looks into the social, political and economic condition of the Bodo women and also there are hardly any schemes for the upliftment of the Bodo women. This study may be the first of this kind in this very backward area of Bodoland Territorial Council.

During the Bodoland movement also the contribution and role played by the Bodo women was indispensable. The exhortation of the Bodo women was first and foremost, very new and unexpected. It threw a challenge to the women, and also it provided an opportunity for them to enter into the political arena which was absolutely monopolised by male until then. The Bodo women responded positively and formed the nucleus of the women participants in the movement and gradually brought other women, particularly from the rural areas. This movement also gave them privileges to test their leadership capabilities and some of them proved themselves to be highly successful in their political life. The very foundation of the All Assam Tribal women Welfare Federation (AATWWF) and its prominent role in the movement was a landmark not only in the history of the Bodo women but also of the

Bodo society as a whole. The existence of women organization is not new in India, but the active participation of such an organisation directly in the movement for a separate Bodoland under their own banner was unprecedented. But the fact is that during movement period, it is the men who often commit senseless crimes and the women have to bear the consequences, the men blow off bridges, public buses and railways, and women have to answer why they do it, and finally the men are acclaimed for their martyrdom; but for women the job continues as they did before. If one observes practically in Bodoland, the case of Bodo women is not much different from the above opinion.

In the traditional social set up, the Bodo women might have played an indirect role in decision making at family or village level. But their opinion was always neglected by their male counterparts. This neglecting attitude of the men folks in decision making was challenged for the first time in the oftumath of the Bodoland movement. The All Bodo Women Welfare Federation (ABWWF) leaders took over the authority to make decisions on issues relating to women and even implemented such decisions both at family and village levels. One of the important impacts of their participation in the Bodoland movement is perhaps the widely shared sense of belonging to a category called 'women'. This sense was further widened and consolidated in the process of the spread of awareness regarding education, health, child rearing etc. among the rural Bodo women.

Women constitute half of the total population of Bodoland. They control over neither resources around them, whether it is physical resource, human resource, intellectual resource and the self, nor over ideology. Analysis of women status reveals that women even in the present age are suffering from many disabilities and discriminations everywhere. In Bodoland, Bodo women enjoy much higher status

than the women of others part of the country as women are free from the caste related problems and other social problems such as dowry, child-marriage and bride-burning etc. which are rampant in most of parts of India. But they are economically dependent and vulnerable, politically and legally powerless. We can simply define power as control over resources and control of ideology and it is exercised through a series of orders or decision making capacity. Therefore, to establish gender equality there is need for the empowerment of women in society. The concept of 'empowerment' refers to a range of activities from individual self-realization and self assertion to participation or involvement in projects in a functional sense, to the control over decision regarding all aspects of one's life and livelihood. Women are very important segment in development from local to global levels. But women are treated as secondary status in social life, economic activities and decision making. Among their families their role in work productivity, employment generation and income oriented activities are hindered by many socio-economic constraints. So the upliftment of women is essential for the over all socio-economic development of the society.

Since 1990, women subordinate position has been recognised and the need to improve their status beyond the traditional spheres has become a significant step in international arena. In India also three important approaches were adopted one after the other by the central as well as state government towards the development of women through the welfare approach, anti-poverty approach and equality approach. Some of the basic empowerment mechanisms introduced in India are literacy and higher education, better health care, greater work participation, opportunities for higher position of power, knowledge of rights and self-reliance, self-respect and dignity of being a woman. Besides government initiatives, in BTC area

recently a number of NGOs and Self- Help Groups started to play a prominent role in the empowerment of women and gender equality. The income generating activities of the NGOs and SHGs resulted in various positive aspects such as arousing self confidence among women; women get recognition as an economic entity; women get to know about the outside world; they gain greater control over self, share their problems, and a feeling of oneness among women were developed furthering group solidarity.

Education of women has got immense importance for the upliftment of rural Bodo women and their social setup. Education is an essential factor in achieving economic development, individual development and technical progress and in creating a social order founded on the values of freedom, social justice and equality of opportunities, to avoid social evils and taboos through educating them. So I sum up my work with the tune of Jawaharlal Nehru: *"in order to awaken the people, it is the woman who has to be awakened, once she is on the move, the household moves, the village moves, the country moves and thus we built the India of tomorrow."* So, the empowerment of woman is the empowerment of all humanity.