

Role of Education in Personal Empowerment of Bodo Women in Sonitpur District of Assam

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Abstract

Education is widely recognized as one of the most powerful instruments for achieving social and economic development. In India, education has played a crucial role in improving the status of women by enabling them to participate more effectively in social, personal, economic, and political spheres. Among the various tribal groups of Northeast India, the Bodo community represents one of the most significant indigenous groups with a rich cultural heritage and distinct identity. Despite progress in recent years, many Bodo women still face challenges related to literacy, employment, and decision-making power. This study focuses on understanding how education influences on the personal empowerment of Bodo women in Sonitpur district of Assam.

Key-words- Education, empowerment, Bodo women, challenges, development

I. INTRODUCTION

Bodo people are recognized as a plain tribe in the 6th schedule of the Indian constitution. In Assam, Bodo women play a significant role in the Bodo society but it cannot be said that Bodo women are free from socio-economic and personal issues and challenges. For the purpose of tribal women's welfare and their empowerment, Assam government has sponsored various laws, policies and

schemes time to time, but the government initiatives are unable to achieve its goals. It is observed that the major Bodo dominated areas of Assam such as- Kokrajhar, Baksa, Udalguri, Chirang, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Darrang and Sonitpur the female literacy rate is low in comparison to male literacy rate as per the census report of 2011. It is significant that without proper educational development of the common masses a society cannot be considered as a developed society, Women's welfare and their development is very much dependent on their education. Report on Empowerment of Women for the XI plan, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Govt of India has stated that education is a key intervention in initiating and sustaining processes of empowerment, quality education can help women and marginalized communities improve their status, enable them to have greater access to information and resources and to challenge various forms of discrimination. Education helps strengthen democratic processes as it allows for greater and more equitable participation, being educated or literate leads to greater self-confidence and self-esteem. It indicates that education can improve one's social status, remove social discrimination, creates self-confidence and make a healthy personal life. Through this study it is tried to study how education is correlated with women's personal empowerment; the study is conducted on the Bodo women of Sonitpur district of Assam.

Relevance of the study

Bodo women are the indispensable part of the Bodo society; they have lots of contributions in making a sound Bodo society. Though Bodo women play a crucial role in making sound Bodo society still, women are not free from socio-economic and personal issues. There are different reasons which hampers in Bodo women's true empowerment and among the several reasons lack of education is identified as the major one. Mandal, B. (2018) stated that education is one of the most important means of empowering women with knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process, educated women have greater chance to achieve high empowerment level. Similarly, Bera, N. (2016) stated that education empowers women and helps to abolish gender inequality, makes quality of life, provides knowledge of health and hygiene, teaches skills of family management, creates socio- cultural awareness, develops economic efficiency and enhances mental strength. 'National Policy for the Empowerment of Women' on 20th March, 2001 has also stated that to make women empowered 'equal access to education' is very important. Considering the above analysis, it can be said this study is relevant because this study tries to find out how education is correlated with different aspects of women's personal empowerment such as, Women's decision-making, their confidence, autonomy, independency, advocacy, realization of own rights and responsibilities etc.

Review Related Literature

Devi, B. (2014) found out that Garo women have the freedom to take decision independently in comparison to Bodo women of Assam, regarding inheritance of parental property Garo women have the right to take parental property but in Bodo society a very few sections of Bodo women have got parental property. Kar & Basumatary. (2019) stated that the rate of infant mortality, disability, death rate are high in all the regions of BTAD. Daimary & Sarma. (2021) found out that though Bodo women play a significant role in society but they suffer from gender discrimination in social, educational, economic and political fields. Talukdar, S. (2021) found out that educational development is very low in BTR (Bodoland Territorial Region) and to rectify this issue BTR has adopted several educational and welfare schemes.

Objectives of the study

The major objectives of the study are-

- 1) To identify the personal issues and challenges of the Bodo women.
- 2) To study the role of education in personal empowerment of Bodo women.

Research Questions

The major research questions are-

- 1) What are the personal issues and challenges of Bodo women?
- 2) What is the role of education in personal empowerment of Bodo women?

Methodology

Population and sample of the study: There are 400 Bodo women are selected as population of the study from the total 10 villages. Among the total 400 Bodo women (population) 40 women (10%) are selected as sample of the study. The investigator has selected purposively 40 Bodo women from total four Bodo villages, from each village 05 Bodo women who have high educational attainment (higher education) and 05 women who have low educational attainment (primary education) are selected purposively. The selected sample villages are-

- Chengeli Mari Gaon
- Araliloga
- Upar Kachari
- Mainshree. The investigator has purposively selected the sample according to their educational attainment. Total no of women of high educational attainment is 20 and low educational attainment is 20 and overall selected women from all the above-mentioned villages are 40 (total sample)

- **Sampling technique used:** Purposive Sampling technique is used as sample technique in this study.
- **Sources of the data:** Basically, primary sources are used to collect the relevant information.
- **Tools of the study:** ‘Structured Interview Schedule’ and ‘Focus Group Discussion’ are the tools used for data collection purpose.
- **Variables:** In this study the independent variable is ‘Education’, dependent variable is empowerment. The major indicators of personal empowerment are- self-confidence, autonomy, decision-making, skill and competencies.

Delimitations:

The study has some limitations, these are-

- The study is confined to Bodo women residing in Chariduar revenue circle of Sonitpur district of Assam.
- The study focuses specifically on the relationship between education and women’s personal empowerment and not included other areas of empowerment-social, economic, political, legal etc.
- As sample, women of Bodo villages are selected who are between the age of 30 to 50 years.
- Regarding women’s educational attainment only higher and primary education are selected.

Data Analysis

Here, the data are analysed according to the objectives of the study. Data analysis procedure is shown below-

Objective (1): To identify out the personal issues and challenges of the Bodo women.

To find out the personal issues and challenges of the Bodo women, the researcher has used ‘Focus Group Discussion’ as research tool. For taking information regarding Bodo women’s personal issues and challenges, a group of individuals are chosen, they are-social workers, employees of social welfare department, educated community members, teachers, NGO workers etc. The researcher has asked an open -ended question and discussed with the group without any hesitation, the question is -

- a) **In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges to achieving personal empowerment for women in your community? (Open-ended response)**

Qualitative Analysis (Objective1): The researcher asked the respondents about the Bodo women's autonomy, decision-making in the family, women's awareness towards health and hygiene, the respondents reveals that due to patriarchy social system Bodo women's decisions are given less importance in comparison to the men in the most of the families. During discussion the respondents stated that in most of the families of their society women are restricted and not permitted to go outside for working. Regarding skill and competencies, they said that educated women are more skilled and competent in comparison to illiterate women in their society. The respondents clearly revealed that lack of proper education among Bodo women is the main reason which hampers in women's Personal empowerment. Due to lack of proper education women are unable to build confidence and take proper decision of their life. Bodo women are not very much aware about their mental health and hygiene, most of the women of their society prefer using of medicated plants such as, siju, tulsi, sewali, jaluk, kolful, neem etc instead of visiting doctors when they suffer from any diseases. In economically weak families generally women's life is confined to the four walls of the home only, women are involved in different house-hold works only. In the family life also, Bodo women have less freedom in comparison to men.

Objective (2): To study the role of education in personal empowerment of Bodo women. To study the role of education in personal empowerment of Bodo women, the researcher has used structured interview schedule as a research tool. The interview schedule comprised of 10 questions which has no right and wrong answer. Against each question there are yes/no responses. The detail analysis has given below-

Format of the Interview-

Structured Interview Schedule	Dimensions related to Personal empowerment
1) Are you capable of achieving in your personal goals?	Self-confidence
2) Do you have confident to take personal decision of your life?	Self-confidence
3) Do you actively involve in house-hold decision making?	decision-making
4) Do you take any decision for your children?	decision-making
5) Do you have confident to take decisions of your personal finances?	decision-making
6) Are you financially independent?	Autonomy

7) Do you have freedom to keep money for personal expenditure?	Autonomy
8) Do you confident in your communication skills?	Skill and competencies
9) Do you feel confident in your leadership skills?	Skill and competencies
10) Do you have household management skills?	Skill and competencies

Qualitative Analysis: The detail analysis which has been found out by the investigator after taking the interview are given below-

- **Self-confidence:** Women of high educational attainment show more confident in achieving in their personal goals rather than the women of low educational attainment are capable of achieving in your personal goals.
- **Autonomy and decision-making:** Women with higher education reported greater autonomy in personal and financial matters, including owning and using personal bank accounts independently. Less-educated women reported limited control over financial decisions. Regarding household decision making and taking decision for the children, the women of high educational attainment show more confident in comparison to the women of low educational attainment.
- **Financial independency:** Regarding financial independency women of high educational attainment opined that they are financially independent but women of low educational attainment have expressed that they have less freedom to keep money for personal expenditure, it indicates that there is a huge gap between the women of high educational attainment and low educational attainment regarding freedom of spending money for own purpose.
- **Skill and competencies:** Regarding skills and competencies such as, communication skills, leadership skills, household management skills there is a huge gap between the women of high educational attainment and low educational attainment. The women of high educational attainment show more confident in communication, leadership, household management skills in comparison to the women of low educational attainment. It indicates that educational attainment of women is cordially connected with the different indicators of personal empowerment such as, decision-making process, autonomy, skill and competencies etc.

Major Findings: The major findings of the study are-

- i) Patriarchy social system, lack of awareness among women towards mental health and hygiene, family restrictions, poor economic condition of the families, gender- discrimination etc are several issues and challenges which hampers in women's personal empowerment.
- ii) Lack of education is the main reason which creates barrier in women's personal empowerment.
- iii) Women who have high educational attainment are more confident in comparison to the women of low educational attainment in achieving in their personal goals, house-hold decision making and taking any decision for the children.
- iv) Regarding financial independency and keeping money for personal expenditure the Women of high educational attainment show more confident.
- v) Regarding skills and competencies such as, communication skills, leadership skills, household management skills there is a huge gap between the women of high educational attainment and low educational attainment.
- vi) Women's education plays a significant role in their personal empowerment.

Suggestive measures: From this study it has been found out that Bodo women are confronting personal issues and challenges. It is not easy to prevent the issues and challenges but it is tried to provide some preventive measures which may help the women's development, some preventive measures are given below-

- a. The government initiative, proper planning is very significant. The government must find out the root causes which hampers in women empowerment.
- b. The role of mass-media, newspaper and news channels are very important, these social medias can spread educational, social, civic awareness among the common masses.
- c. The educated community members, teachers, social workers can organize meetings, discussion programmes at the villages for creating educational awareness among the women.
- d. Distance mode of education, correspondence education, open education plays important role in spreading education among the women.
- e. The government must provide women empowerment schemes, plan-policies, acts time to time and the proper investigation should be done so that every rural woman can take proper benefit of the schemes or policies.

II. CONCLUSION

Among the various tribal groups of Northeast India, the Bodo community represents one of the most significant indigenous groups with a rich cultural heritage and distinct identity. Despite progress in recent years, many Bodo women still face challenges related to literacy, employment, and decision-making power. In this regard, education is recognized as one of the most powerful instruments for achieving social and personal development. Education can be considered as the key factor in social change and women's empowerment but this study shows that Bodo women are unable to take proper education. Lack of education is the basic factor which hampers in women's personal empowerment. In this regard, the initiatives of the government, mass-media, the educated community members are very significant, they can create educational awareness among the rural women and help in their personal empowerment.

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