

NOTE

WOMEN IN BODO SOCIETY

Merina Islam writes :

PEOPLE ARE FAMILIAR WITH Bodo insurgency in Assam. Not much is written about Bodo society and less about Bodo women. The status of women in Bodo society is basically patriarchal but partly matriarchal too. They enjoy sufficient freedom in their daily life.

They enjoy equality with man in every sphere of life, albeit the birth of a female child is not so much desired and favoured as much that of a male. In the traditional social set up, Bodo women play an indirect role in decision-making in a family or at village level.

Divorce is permissible by mutual consent of both husband and wife with certain formalities. The women are deprived of the right to have a share of the property of her husband in the marital separation. She has the right to take her ornaments. Afterwards she is socially allowed to have full liberty to live with a second husband.

The Bodo-Kacharis belong primarily to a monogamous race and as per practice there is no bar to polygamy. Polygamy prevailed but only amongst high social position holders or rich people, such as Mauzadars, Mandals etc. If the first wife proves childless, the Bodo-Kacharis customs allow the taking of a second, mainly with a view to handing down the father's name to posterity. Polyandry is strictly forbidden. The widow remarriage is prevalent. There is certain limitation in the widow remarriage. A widow may marry her deceased husband's younger brother, but not the elder.

There is an adoption system of bridegroom in the Bodo society. This system is known as *Gwrjia Lakhinai*. The parents give marriage of their daughter to adopted bridegroom in their family to keep their property and to care them during the old age if they have no male child. In such case the property is inherited by their son-in-law and not by daughter.

In the last part of the 19th century the Bodo society is said to have intermixed with mainstream Hindu society when the Hindu society was under the sway of many social evils such as child marriage, dowry system, sati system, purdah system etc. Surprisingly these obnoxious social customs are not practised in the Bodo society.

Bodo women play an important role in performing religious rites and rituals. Except *Garja Puja* no religious rites, rituals and festivals can be performed without their presence. In *kherai puja* a female shaman called *Doudhini* performs various dances in propitiation of various gods and goddesses.

Bodo Women are expert weavers and a Bodo woman without the knowledge of weaving can hardly be given in marriage. Most of the domestic requirement of clothes is met from the

family looms. They design artistic dresses. Marriageable girls weave their own bridal apparels by themselves. The Eri cloth (Endi Ji in Boro) is made from a special kind of thread which is not available in the market, but is prepared from the cocoons by the Bodo women themselves.

Bodo women enjoy same status in the social and educational fields. They have similar education as man and often participate in some philosophical debates. They are also allowed to take part in political affairs. The role of Bodo women in the Bodo Liberation Movement in the late 80's is very praiseworthy. They formed various social and political organizations e.g. All Assam Tribal Women's Welfare Federation (AATWWF), Bodo Women Justice Forum (BWJF), to work for the Welfare of tribal women and to make awareness about the role of women in a family and society including child rearing, health and hygiene, family planning and alcoholism, consequences of polygamy and children's education. Bodo Women leaders such as Pramila Rani Brahma, Anjali Daimary etc. work for upliftment of status of not only the Bodo women but also of the tribal women of North-East India.

Bodo Women said to have kept the cultural identity of the Bodo community by wearing their traditional dress called *Dokhona*. These days Bodo women bring out their dress materials for sale in the open market. But interaction with mainstream social milieu is still very insignificant without which North-East will remain an ethnic cauldron inviting anthropologists from across the globe for research. □□□