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## TRIBAL WOMEN FOLK: THE NEED AND A STEP FROM DISPARITY TO EQUALITY

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### ABSTRACT:

*Mising and Bodo are the indigenous tribes of North-east India having own dialect, culture and religion. Both men and women of these tribe are very hardworking in all aspects. Women of these tribes equally work with men but still society ignores them and are not acknowledged for their work. Despite both men and women are given equal rights and freedom by the constitution of India, more or less, women are still subject to discrimination in one or the other aspect. Therefore, this paper intends to look into the changing trend of status of women in different aspects and it can be seen that though the progress is slow but women are moving towards equality and empowering themselves.*



**KEYWORDS:** *Mising and Bodo tribe, discrimination, equality*

### INTRODUCTION

Assam is a state comprising of various cultural linguistic tribe and races. It is the state where numerous tribes such as Bodo, Mising, Dimasa, Karbi, Deori, Kachari, Rabha, Hasong, Tiwa and many are found. The tribals are always been an integral and important part of Assam revealing the true essence with its varied and magnificent customs and traditions. Bodo and Misingtribe are the oldest ethnic groupsamong all the tribes and constitute largest population in Assam. The life of women of these tribe are seen as pathetic and going through many hardships, resentments and unsuccessful dreams. Despite both men and women are given equal rights and freedom by the constitution of India, women are still subject to discrimination in one or the other aspect. Though tribal women enjoy equal status but also, they have been discriminated like women of different communities in India. From morning to dawn, tribal women are often seen to be engaged in paddy fields and also plays an active role from child rearing to other household activities. Their role in subsistence activities and child rearing is very crucial. Even though they are more active than their male counterparts but society does not accept them as equal as men and looked upon them as second sex or as inferior to them. The path of success and growth for women are still entombed with many obstacles such as illiteracy, poverty, freedom, over work and attitude of people towards male members as heirs and provider with deep rooted customary and religious beliefs of the society causing disparity. Instead of many technological advancement, urbanization and modernization in the country, the mindset of people is still in the

ancient era where women were always criticized. Till date, tribal women are still struggling for gaining basic amenities such as security, education, health, employment, social and economic status which is indispensable for their as well as nation's growth and development.

### **STATUS OF WOMEN FROM DISPARITY TO EQUALITY IN DIFFERENT ASPECTS**

**Educational:** Earlier, girls were prohibited from going to school and get married at an early age which hampers the education and ultimately leading to dropout. It may be due to the traditional mindset of villagers which restricts them to do justice with the girls due to which the dropout rate of girls mainly from village area is more than their male counterpart (Das, 2021). Women of Bodo community from rural area are not even able to speak the common language (Assamese) of the state. Even though the educational status of women of upcoming generation is improving and literacy is also increasing but their status regarding higher education is not increasing with the same speed. It may be due to the poor communication mainly in rural areas, poverty, lack of strong motivation towards higher education, lack of higher education institutions in the surrounding and so on. Earlier people favored only male children to get higher education but now a days, there are few who treats both the gender equally and send their daughters for higher education. This may be one of the reasons which shows definite improvement in education in recent years.

**Economic activities:** Mising and Bodo community are mainly agrarian society and hence, agriculture is their main source of income. Women equally works with their male counterpart in rice farming, tea plantation, pig and poultry farming. They engage themselves in farm activities like sowing, harvesting and weeding. They also make traditional rice beer and rear silkworms for commercial purpose and also generate income by selling homegrown fruits and vegetables. Apart from agriculture, women of these tribe are expert in weaving which they learn from very early age. The elderly people believed that a girl who do not learn the skill of weaving is not suitable for marriage and she may get rejected. Therefore, learning the skill of weaving is a kind of necessary skill they learn from an early age in order to get married irrespective of what other likes and dislikes they have. In the past, they weaved the cloths only for self-wearing. They are very proficient and have magnificent talent of weaving as they can transform their dreams to reality in their colourful cloths through weaving and handloom which have high market value. Therefore, at present they also weave for trading purpose which is a positive sign of women towards economic progress (Swargiary, 2020). Therefore, it can be observed that womenfolk work discernibly for self, family and society's economic development and also exploring other non-traditional farm activities for income generation rather than only farming (Talukdar, 2012). Now a days, women are also seen working in areas of different enmities such as teachers, administrative jobs etc. They also run small-scale business-like weaving industry etc. Even though they are very hardworking and industrious, it is observed that women entrepreneurs are not much preferable and given less priority as people think that women are unable to crack the deals with the investors and also not capable in handling financial resources (Pegu, B. 2019). Therefore, it cannot be said that women are fully empowered may be due to lack of knowledge regarding business, scientific tools for farming, soil erosion, flood and so on due to which they are still economically not much advance.

**Political participation:** Despite of having glorious history of women of Assam in participation in politics, they could not make good position in decision making and politics. Though many supplementary laws and directives are introduced in the constitution to encourage women to involve and participate in political sphere but they are still deprived and neglected. Participation of women in decision making and political affairs is very less because of male dominated society which does not favour women participation in politics and decision making. Moreover, women also reluctant to get involved in politics and decision-making process may be due to their illiteracy, hesitation, discouragement from family members and believe that it is the business of only men. Though, women of Mising and Bodo community have been seen participating in many movements for their autonomy but their representative in Assam legislative assembly were very negligible. However, with increase in modern education and literacy among women, the participation of women in political affairs can also be

seen in recent years who have represented the legislative assembly such as Sumitra Patir and Mrs. Pramila Rani Brahma and women of these tribe have also formed different organization like AATWWF (All Assam Tribal Women's Welfare Federation), BWJF (Bodo Women Justice Forum), All Mising Women Organisation (Takamising Mime Kebang), Mising Women Association etc. which works for women empowerment and their upliftment.

Religious practices: Active participation of womenfolk in festivals, religious rituals and rites and other cultural activities is always praiseworthy. Despite the fact that without the involvement of womenfolk, the cultural activities or festivals are impossible to observe (Swargiary, 2020), there are some traditional religious rituals in Mising community such as Doburui. where women are debarred from participation and other traditional religious rituals such as, Talengui, Yumrangui, uram etc where women have lower status than men and they can participate only as a helper. Even women are not allowed to become Mibu (Priest) because people think that this is only meant for men and women can serve only as a helper. But among Bodo community, they have high status in rituals ceremonies. They have an important traditional religious festival called Bathow, where presence of female is very crucial. One of the greatest festivals of Bodos is Kherai (Brahma, K, 1989) where doudini (female priest) performs most of the essential rites and in her absence Kherai cannot be performed. Therefore, it can be said that participation of womenfolk in religious activities are essential but as the religious practices and rituals vary from tribe to tribe or state to state, the role and status of women also vary according to different tribes.

## CONCLUSION

Women are socially discriminated in areas like education, occupation, religious and cultural practices. With the advent of changing lifestyles and modern education, the standard of tribal women has been increasing but the rate is slow and much has yet to be done. Even though the discrimination may vary from community to community or state to state but still we can conclude that the trend of change is observed for women development. Gender disparity can be removed and women can be empowered if they are provided with higher education, participate in decision making and involve in political sphere.

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