PARTICIPATION OF THE BODO WOMEN IN AGRICULTURAL AND ALLIED OPERATIONS: A CASE STUDY IN BAKSA DISTRICT OF ASSAM, INDIA

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ABSTRACT:-

The women in the Bodo society occupy a crucial place. They play a vital role in social, cultural, religious and economic means of life in their society. The Bodo women of village folk actively participate in agricultural and allied sectors and thereby contribute in economic upliftment of their family. The agricultural activities that the Bodo women involve are sowing, harvesting, and weeding. In the mean time, the allied agricultural operations include piggery, poultry, dairy, husbandry etc. The agricultural and allied operations are the means of opportunities of income generation and economic empowerment for the Bodo women in the rural areas. Even after the active involvement in agricultural and allied operations they do not receive due recognition in respect of income.

This paper tries to study about the challenges and prospects, impacts of agricultural and allied operations in income generation for the Bodo women to uplift their family economy. It is also attempted to suggest policy implications for the better improvement of the involvement of Bodo women in agricultural and allied operations.

KEYWORDS – Bodo women, agriculture, participation, income.

INTRODUCTION:-

The women in the Bodo society occupy a crucial place. They play a vital role in social, cultural, religious and economic means of life in their society. The Bodo women of village folk actively participate in agricultural and allied sectors and thereby contribute to uplift their family economic structure. K. Brahma states
“The Bodo women are exceedingly industrious and they spend much of their time in the fields working side by side with their sunburnt husbands.” Even, their contributions are not highlighted in a systematic way. A major responsibility, in respect of crop production as well as allied operations are borne by the women in the Bodo society. Besides the household work management, they substitute piggery, poultry, animal husbandry. The Bodo women as agricultural workers engage themselves in sowing, harvesting, weeding. These provide opportunities for income generation. Moreover, they are lagging behind the economic empowerment.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:-
C.P. Chandra Sekhar and Jayati Ghosh in “Feminisation of India’s Agricultural Workforce” pointed out that the involvement of women in agriculture is increasing and it may be due to the reason that of the migration of males from low paid agriculture to high paid industry.
Puttaraja and O.D. Heggade states that the tribal women possess unique skills in agricultural operations.
Chandrama Goswami (2013) in her paper states that a large percentage of women are also found to be engaged in agriculture because agriculture is an occupation which provides work opportunities to women, irrespective of their age, level of education, or any formal training.
Tuteja (2000) observes that the income of female Agricultural workers is one of the important economic support for the small and landless household.
Swarna S. Vepa in “Feminisation of Agriculture and Marginalisation of their Economic Stake”, Economic and Political Weekly, 2005 is of the view that the works of women remain hidden in the family enterprises.

OBJECTIVES:-
The present study is brought out with the following objectives-
(i) To make an assessment on the role of agricultural and allied operations towards the income generations of Bodo women.
(ii) To find out the factors that stand as an obstacle in their economic condition.

METHODOLOGY:-
The study is based mainly on primary data. The study was carried in the Bodo dominated villages under three Sub-Divisions of Baksa District. A total of 183 female respondents of 172 households were interviewed. The respondents were selected through random sampling technique. The respondents were mainly
drawn from the agricultural based and economically backward households of the particular Bodo community.

**DISCUSSION:**-

Education is an important tool for the economic and social development of a society. It opens up the eyes of the people to think anything in a better and systematic way. Earlier, education could not able to touch satisfactorily to the Bodo community especially the Bodo women. The literacy rate of the Bodo women of the age group between 45 years to 55 years (<58) is 26.92% only as shown in the following Table-1.

**TABLE-1: Literacy rate of the selected sample of Bodo women**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>% of literacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15 - 25</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>85.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 – 35</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>76.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 – 45</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>46.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 – 55 (&lt;58)</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>26.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was found that 128 (74.42%) households were having 0 – 7 members and the rest 44 (25.58%) households were 8 or more members of family size.

The larger percentage(57.92%) of the total respondents were belonged to the Below Poverty Line (BPL) family as issued BPL Ration Card by the Government. The remaining (42.08%) respondents were belonged to the middle class family.

The following Table-2 shows percentage of involvement of various age group Bodo women in agricultural and allied operations. The agricultural operation that the Bodowomen engage were mainly sowing and weeding activities. But, these types of activities are seasonal.

**TABLE-2: Percentage of involvement of Bodo women in agricultural and allied operations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Agriculture</th>
<th>Piggery</th>
<th>Poultry</th>
<th>Animal Husbandry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15 – 25</td>
<td>90.47%</td>
<td>14.28%</td>
<td>38.09%</td>
<td>09.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 – 35</td>
<td>78.72%</td>
<td>36.17%</td>
<td>68.08%</td>
<td>25.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 – 45</td>
<td>92.06%</td>
<td>87.30%</td>
<td>88.30%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 – 55 (&lt;58)</td>
<td>94.23%</td>
<td>90.38%</td>
<td>86.53%</td>
<td>44.23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The above table reveals that a majority of the respondents engage in agricultural sector. It was found in the survey that the Bodo women belonged to the age group between 35 years to 55 years (<58) perform activities like sowing, harvesting, weeding.

The respondents of the age group between 15 – 25 years whose majority were the students mainly engage in sowing. Rather, they were the seasonal workers in agricultural sector. They were also associated with piggery, poultry, animal husbandry as shown in the Table.

The Bodo people mainly reside in the rural areas. Agriculture is their basic source of livelihood. 88% of the Bodo women are also associated with the agricultural sector. Most of them actively participate and support their husbands and family members. Even the Bodo women from landless households are also associated with this sector as hired labour. The remaining 22% do not take part in agricultural sector.

67.03% of overall Bodo women are engaged in piggery business which they suppose as supplementary business of income. But, 87.30% of the age group between 35 to 45 years and 90.38% of the age group between 45 to 55 (<58) are the main participators in this sector.

58% of the Bodo women are supplementary engaged in poultry. They think it as an easy source of income. 42% are not interested as there is no certainty of earning.

32.24% of Bodo women are associated with the animal husbandry. Goat rearing is the main activity which the Bodo women are engaged themselves in this sector. 67.76% are not interested in this sector.

**TABLE – 3: Percentage of income source of Bodo women in three Sub-Divisions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Divisions</th>
<th>Agriculture</th>
<th>Piggery</th>
<th>Poultry</th>
<th>Animal Husbandry</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mushalpur</td>
<td>58.48</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamulpur</td>
<td>56.42</td>
<td>6.52</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>29.14</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salbari</td>
<td>57.68</td>
<td>7.28</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>28.68</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table-3 shows that a larger percentage of women are earning their income from agricultural and allied operations. A majority Bodo women engaged in the particular agricultural sector i.e. sowing, harvesting, weeding etc.
TABLE-4: Age group and dependence of the respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Dependence on Agriculture</th>
<th>Dependence on Others</th>
<th>Total (fi)</th>
<th>Mid Value (Xi)</th>
<th>Fi.Xi</th>
<th>Mean= fi.Xi/ fi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15 – 25</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>420</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 – 35</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1410</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 – 45</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2520</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 – 55 (&lt;58)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2600</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>6950</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table-4 shows the average age group of respondent Bodo women and the dependency that are engaged in agricultural and allied operations in a higher percentage.

FINDINGS:-

The major findings of the study can be revealed as under –

i) The study investigates that the agricultural and allied operations play a crucial role in income generation for the Bodo women. But, their incomes are not taken into account in the total family income. The sowing, weeding activities are performed only by women in Bodo society where the poultry, piggery, animal husbandry are also actively maintained by the women in their society.

ii) The Bodo women are associated with the agricultural and allied operations in the manner of their traditional culture. They are not much aware of the scientific ways and the Government schemes. Lack of education is the root cause for this.

iii) The Government’s nodal agencies do not take necessary steps to reach different government productive schemes in the remote rural areas.

iv) Some of the Bodo women do not get prior opportunities to utilise their earnings independently.

v) The women especially the Bodo women in agricultural sector are deprived of receiving a legal amount of wages for their labour.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS:-

The policy implications can be suggested as under-

i) The Government should pay a special attention of skills formation and development programmes for the benefit of the women.

ii) Mass awareness should be organised for development of girls’ education.
iii) The Bodo medium schools need to be increased in the remote rural areas.
iv) Proper training facilities for the women SHGs (Self Help Group) should be provided even in the rural areas.
v) The Government should introduce and implement different types of allied agricultural related schemes and policies.
vi) Financial support to the women should be provided for piggery, poultry, animal husbandry etc.
vii) Healthcare service and health insurance policy to improve health status and supply of food grains through PDS (Public Distribution Scheme) should reach properly for the Bodo women in rural areas.

CONCLUSION:-

The study envisages that the agricultural and allied operations provide great opportunities of income generations for the Bodo women and thereby to strengthen their family economy. The society should support and motivate the women for active and productive participation in the agricultural and allied operations. There is also an urgent need to pay suitable and legal amount of wages to women labour. The Bodo women in particular and the women in general with commercial pattern in agricultural and allied operations can pave the way towards their economic empowerment in a better way.

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