

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The people's portfolios of activities that make up 'a living' are visibly diverse now. The livelihood options and opportunities open to people, and their livelihood activities are now popular areas of conceptual and empirical research that are increasingly taking a more central place in policy making. Such approaches take into cognizance people's own interpretations of, and priorities for, their livelihoods. This development obviously indicates a shift towards a more integrated, context-specific, grass root approach to the issues concerning livelihoods of people. These approaches specifically highlight working with people and understanding their existing strengths and constraints rather than adopting prescribed donor- driven solutions to poverty and sustainable livelihood issues.

India is a diverse country. The different groups of people in India have undergone critical changes in their relationships with environmental resources over the last hundred years. Open access resources have become commoditized and privatized, restricting access and excluding certain groups of resource users. This has brought irreparable changes within social, political, economic and environmental spheres, altering labour relations, local economies and resource entitlements for all people. The implications of these changes cannot be underestimated while delving in the livelihood options of people. The change in people-resource relationship has also contributed to a shift of an individual livelihood option to a communal livelihood. This (communal

livelihood) uncritically assumes that there is 'a community' and 'a tradition' to reconstruct, and neglects the very different and highly dynamic forms that past and present activities have taken.

Unfortunately, although critical changes have taken place in people-resource relationships which have lent support to redefining the concept of livelihood patterns and options, the condition of women, in this area too, has not changed much. The livelihood patterns and options of women have remained traditional and strictly limited even today. Much of women's work remains unrecognized and unvalued. This has an impact on the status of women in society, their opportunities in public life and the gender blindness of development policy (HDR, 1995). Women also make up a disproportionate share of workers in domestic service and in profession such as child care, teaching, therapy and nursing. These occupations offer low pay relative to their requirement for education, skills and other qualifications resulting in another source of gender bias in opportunities (HDR, 1999). In people-resource relationship, the role of the user also needs recognition, if necessary, by enacting laws. A study in India (Upadhyay, Bhawana; 2004) observed that a variety of water-based livelihood activities undertaken by women and men in Gujarat are under threat due to the unavailability of adequate water. Excessive ground water withdrawal and limited recharge have led to shrinking water tables. Women are basically considered as domestic water users while men are seen as productive water users, despite the fact that women make significant use of water for productive purposes as well. Since women use water for multiple purposes and help sustain the household economy, the author tries to establish the point that they should be given recognition as multiple water users which will help promote rural livelihood options of the women. The recognition of women as resource users in all areas is essential for their development.

Empowerment is the process of obtaining the basic opportunities for marginalized people, either directly by those marginalized people or through the help of non-marginalized others who share their own access to these opportunities. Empowerment is basically about power. It is the power to redefine our possibilities and options and to act on them, the power which enables people to have the courage to do things they never thought themselves to be capable of doing, and the power that comes from working alongside others to claim what is rightfully theirs. Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (2004) defines empowerment as an emancipation process in which the disadvantaged people are empowered to apply their rights, obtain access to resources and participate actively in the process of shaping society and making their own decisions (Luttrell & et al, 2009).

Development goals cannot be realized unless women's access to livelihoods is enlarged and redefined; gender inequalities are fully removed from the society and women are empowered to select and decide about their own livelihoods and welfare, the welfare of their families, and the communities in which they live. The importance of women empowerment on the international development agenda is clear from the policy statements made at high level international conferences such as Beijing Platform for Action, the Beijing+ 5 Declaration and Resolution, the Cairo Programme of Action, the Millennium Declaration and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. All these forums identified both gender equality and women empowerment as a development objective, as well as a means to promote growth, reduce poverty, and promote better governance (Gupta & Yesudian, 2006). Empowerment of women is crucial for ensuring not only their personal or household welfare, but also the well-being of the entire society since women are seen to be the primary guardians

responsible for altering the quality and quantity of human resources available in a country to promote sustainable development in the coming generations (UNFPA, 2005). According to the Guidelines on Women's Empowerment of United Nations Population Information Network (POPIN, 2014), the empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of their political, social, economic and health status is highly important end in itself and necessary to achieve sustainable human development. Besides this, it further states that "Advancing gender equality and equity and the empowerment of women, and the elimination of all kinds of violence against women, and ensuring women's ability to control their own fertility ...are priority objectives of the international community" (Principle 4 of the ICPD Programme of Action).

Women empowerment is essential for the very development of a society, as it enhances both the quality and the quantity of human resources available for development. There are a number of vital reasons for evaluating, promoting and monitoring the level of women's empowerment. Enhancing the status of women and their empowerment can play an important role in the success of many development programmes and it can bring about positive changes in the society. Empowerment of women is essential for ensuring not only their own health and welfare but also the well-being of the entire household. The three important components of empowerment which are included in much of the literature are resources, agency and achievements, although different authors have used different words with respect to these three components. Resources are enabling factors for empowerment. Agency is the heart of many conceptualizations of empowerment. It encompasses the abilities to formulate strategic choices, to gain autonomy and to control resources and decisions that affect important life outcomes.

Achievements are recognized as the well-being outcomes that women experience as a result of access to resources and agency (Gupta & Yesudian, 2006).

The term 'empowerment' entered into the women's movement in India by the mid-1980s. At the same time, it replaced the earlier expressions of 'women's welfare', 'women's development', and 'women's upliftment' used by the government and major donor agencies supporting work with marginalized women (Batliwala, 2007). The South Asia document (1992) defined the process of empowerment as the result of a process of transforming the power relations between individuals and social groups. Feminist activists, who were the first to use the term, defined empowerment in gender perspective which represented the transformation of the relations of power between men and women, within and across various kinds of social categories. The document defined empowerment as a process that shifts social power in three significant ways i.e. by challenging the ideologies that justify inequalities in society such as gender or caste, by changing existing patterns of access to and control over economic, natural, and intellectual resources, and by transforming the institutions and structures that reinforce and sustain prevailing power structures such as the family, state, market, education, and media (Batliwala, 2007).

The existing literature on the problem of marginalization of women almost unanimously admit that earnings capability and the nature of job of women play important role in determining the status of women in the family and society. The recent researches on empowerment of women throw new lights on this area. The term 'women empowerment' has come out from the discussions in the major international conferences of the 1990's that have defined it as having five

components: women's sense of self-worth; their right to have and to determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally (Guideline on Women's Empowerment, POPIN-UN Population Division, United Nations, 2014). Combining all these, 'women empowerment' may be defined as a package of both the financial and the decision making powers. It is recognized that women empowerment is essential for sustainable economic growth and reduction of poverty in developing countries (Klasen, 1999). In the World Bank Policy Research Report, it is unambiguously suggested that women empowerment is being progressively recognized as an important policy goal for improving not just the well-being of women themselves but also for its positive impact on the family (King and Mason, 2001). Economically empowered women play a more active role in household decision making, with greater bargaining power to increase spending on education and health (DFID, 2007). In this context, a large number of studies have found that the empowerment of women depends on their workforce participation. The participation of women in economic activities, particularly outside home, is often posited as an important enabling factor in the economic and social empowerment of women. Not only can employment be a source of economic independence, but it can also help to give women a sense of self-worth. Women's labour force participation outside the home also exposes them to the world outside the household and kin-group. In different studies female workforce participation is considered as an important determinant of women empowerment (Ashraf and Ashraf, 1993; Kozel and Alderman, 1990; Azid et al. 2001). Another important study shows that women empowerment is considerably influenced by education, access to media, socio-

cultural norms of the community, job of women and household participation rate (Imran Sharif Choudhury et al, 2009). Women's income and participation in farm land or nonfarm activities has considerable impact on their empowerment level (Shahnaj Parveen et al, 2004). Employment, particularly for cash and in non-traditional occupations, potentially empowers women by providing financial independence, alternative sources of social identity and exposure to power structures independent of kin network (Sunita Kishore et al, 2004). These suggest that the link between women empowerment and women's participation in workforce is a vital one for their emancipation from poverty. Research in this area in different settings would definitely help policy makers to formulate policies for the overall development of women in the society, particularly in less developed areas such as Assam.

A livelihood is a means of making a way to survive. It denotes the capabilities, assets, income and activities of people required to secure the basic necessities of life. A livelihood is sustainable when it enables people to cope with and recover from difficulties and stresses such as natural disasters and economic or social upheavals, and enhances their well-being and that of future generations without undermining the natural environment or resource base. Apart from environmental sustainability, the notion of sustainability also includes other dimensions like economic, social and institutional.

Women's economic empowerment is perceptively related to livelihood pattern of women. Women's economic empowerment level should have a connection with their livelihood pattern although the nature of the direct connection between the two is not very clear from available literature. However, women should have the appropriate skills, capabilities and resources and

access to secure and sustainable incomes and livelihoods for their own development. For their livelihoods, women are generally found engaged in various economic activities. Their economic activities can be divided into three sectors:

1. **Primary Sector:** It includes those activities which lead to the production of goods by exploitation of natural resources. Primary sector produces natural products like cotton, milk, fruits, wheat, fish, rubber etc. This sector is also called agriculture and related sector because most of the natural products obtained are from agriculture, diary, fishing, forestry etc. Examples of primary sector activities are agriculture, fishing, mining etc.
2. **Secondary Sector:** Secondary sector includes those activities which result in transformation of natural products into other forms by manufacturing. It produces manufactured goods like cloth, sugar, bricks etc. Secondary sector is also called the industrial sector as this sector has come to be associated with different kinds of industries. Examples of secondary sector activities are processing, manufacturing and construction.
3. **Tertiary Sector:** It includes those activities that are necessary in the development of the primary and secondary sectors by supporting the production process. Tertiary sector does not produce goods but generates services like transportation, communication, banking etc. It is also called the service sector as this sector generates services rather than goods. Examples of tertiary sector activities are banking, insurance, finance etc.

1.2 Rationality of the Research Study

Empowerment refers to the processes by which women can enlarge their choices and thereby control their lives and become independent and self-confident. In India women constitute half of the total population. But despite their large size in population, the present status of women in India is very miserable. India's Human Development Index (HDI) value for the year 2014 is 0.609 which keeps the country in the medium human development category, positioning it at 130 out of 188 countries and territories. From 1980 to 2014, India's HDI value increased from 0.362 to 0.609, an increase of 68.1 percent or an average annual increase of about 1.54 percent. In the Human Development Report (HDR), 2014 a new measure, the Gender Development Index (GDI) is introduced based on the sex-disaggregated Human Development Index and defined as a ratio of the female to the male HDI. The GDI measures gender inequalities in the achievement in three basic dimensions of human development like health (measured by female and male life expectancy at birth), education (measured by female and male expected years of schooling for children and mean years for adults aged 25 years and older) and command over economic resources (measured by female and male estimated GNI per capita). In 2014, female HDI value for India is 0.525 in contrast to 0.660 for males, resulting in a GDI value of 0.795, female life expectancy at birth of 69.5 years, expected years of schooling for female of 11.3, mean years of schooling for female of 3.6 against of 7.2 for male, Gross National Income (GNI) for female of Rs. 2116 against Rs. 8656 for male. Gender Inequality Index (GII) identifies gender-based inequalities in three dimensions, and they are reproductive health, empowerment, and economic activity. Reproductive health is measured by maternal mortality and adolescent birth rates; empowerment is measured by the share of parliamentary seats held by women and

attainment in secondary and higher education by each gender; and economic activity is measured by the labour market participation rate for women and men. The Gender Inequality Index can be interpreted as the loss in human development due to inequality between female and male achievements in the above mentioned three GII dimensions. India has the GII value of 0.563, ranking it 130 out of 155 countries in the 2014 index. In India, only 12.2 percent of parliamentary seats are held by women, and 27.0 percent of adult women have reached at least a secondary level of education compared to 56.6 percent of their male counterparts. Besides these, for every 100,000 live births, 190 women die from pregnancy related causes and the adolescent birth rate is 32.8 births per 1,000 women of ages 15-19. Female participation rate in the labour market is 27.0 percent compared to 79.9 for men (Human Development Report, 2015). From the above discussion it can be concluded that the status of women in India is poor as compared to male population. As per census 2011, in India the female literacy rate was 65 percent and sex ratio was 940. India Country Report, 2015 on Millennium Development Goal reported the following findings in case of the third goal: Gender Equality and Empower Women:

- ❖ Target : To eliminate gender disparity in primary, secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education, no later than 2015
- In primary education the enrolment is favourable to females as Gender Parity Index (GPI) of Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is 1.03 in 2013-14. In secondary education also gender parity has achieved GPI of GER as 1 in 2013-14 and in tertiary level of education, the GPI of GER as 0.89 in 2012-13.
- As per Census 2011, the ratio of female youth literacy rate to male youth literacy rate is 0.91 at all India level.

- The National Sample Survey (NSS) 68th round (2011-12) results had estimated the percentage share of females in wage employment in the non- agricultural sector as 19.3% with corresponding figures for rural and urban areas as 19.9% and 18.7% respectively. There is an improvement in the status as NSS 66th round (2009-10) had reported that the share of women in wage employment as 18.6% at national level and the corresponding estimates for rural and urban India pegged at 19.6% and 17.6% respectively.
- As on January 2015, India, the world's largest democracy, has only 65 women representatives out of 542 members in Lok Sabha, while there are 31 female representatives out of 242 members in Rajya Sabha, and hence the proportion of seats in National Parliament held by women is only 12.24% against the target of 50%.

Therefore women are observed as a weaker section in the society. Except the women belonging to the high class group, the entire class of poor women is surviving in the worst socio- economic condition. In Assam also women enjoy lower status like the average women in India. Hence the nation's five year plans are designed in such a way as to achieve inclusive growth which means the all round development of weaker sections and all of the society. To achieve inclusive growth it is necessary to bring the female population to the path of economic development. Therefore the government launches various development policies and schemes to improve the status of women in the society. The main objective of these policies and schemes is to benefit this weaker section of the society. Administered by the central and state governments, these policies aim at ensuring women's participation in various economic, social, political, cultural and employment generating activities and thereby help improve their quality of life. However, despite all these efforts, the

overall status of women has not improved much in several areas including their empowerment level and workforce participation. The nature and extent of the underdevelopment of women is also different in different parts of the country.

In this research work, therefore, an attempt is made to study the level of empowerment of women in Nagaon district of Assam. Here the empowerment of women is measured with the help of several indicators representing women's participation and decision making abilities in important domains of life. The rationality of this study is that through it the present position of women in Nagaon district in the area of empowerment and livelihood can be assessed for initiating corrective measures for development, if necessary. It will show whether all the women of Nagaon district are able to get employment or not, and if employed, what are the sectors in which they are employed and the levels of their empowerment. Thus, it will be a critical evaluation of their livelihood pattern and empowerment which are so essential for their upliftment. Besides this, it will also show their level of education and how it impacts on their status in the society and reveal a clear picture of the level of empowerment of women and their livelihood options and pattern in Nagaon district. Therefore this study will help the government and the policy makers of our country to implement proper policies and schemes for that section of the society of Nagaon district of Assam in particular and in other similar backward areas of the country in general.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The present study focuses on the livelihood pattern of women and their level of empowerment in Nagaon district of Assam. The broad objectives of the study are:

- (i) To study and examine the livelihood patterns of women and their valued and unvalued works.
- (ii) To assess and examine the women's own interpretations of, priorities for, and abilities for their livelihoods.
- (iii) To estimate and examine the level of empowerment of women by constructing a suitable empowerment index.
- (iv) To find out the empowerment differentials among women having different livelihood patterns and options.
- (v) To assess the impact of livelihood patterns of women on their level of empowerment amidst different personal backgrounds and characteristics.

1.4 Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are tested to provide insight into the problems outlined by objectives as stated above.

- (i) Work force participation of women has no impact on their empowerment in urban areas.
- (ii) Women employed in informal sector have higher level of empowerment.
- (iii) Education of women and their place of residence have no impact on the empowerment of women.

1.5 Limitations of the Study and Scope for Further Research

The study is conducted in a single district of Assam. This is a limitation of the study. A study based on a bigger sample representing heterogeneous characteristics such as geography, community etc. is necessary for generalization of the findings of the research. The study has not

attempted to find out, investigate rural-urban disparity in the pattern of women livelihood and empowerment in details since these are out of the purview of the present study. However, this is a limitation of the study which may be addressed in future research.

Empowerment is a complex concept. The quantification of such a complex and multidimensional concept requires application of extra caution. Although available literature provides a framework for identification of the constituent parts of women empowerment and attributes to represent those constituent parts, they themselves impose one kind of selectivity bias on the study which is difficult to overcome. Inclusion of some local characteristics in the study to quantify women empowerment may be one way of addressing this kind of problem but there may be no literature support available to an attempt like this. However, a strait jacketing approach based on only literature support may itself be construed as a great limitation to the socioeconomic problems like livelihood problems and empowerment of women who are the inhabitants of a place which is located in a remote area of a vast country like India.

All these limitations offer scope for further research in this area of study. Studies may be conducted in future by taking a more heterogeneous group of people as sample. And different case studies by including local characteristics will also help formulate regional planning for the development of regions like Assam.

1.6 Organization of the Thesis

This research thesis is organized by writing six chapters which together present the entire gamut of the research in a sequential manner. The Chapters are,

- I. Chapter I: Introduction: This chapter introduces the problem, highlights the marginalization of women folk in different spheres of life. This also includes the Objectives and hypotheses of the present research and identifies its limitations.
- II. Chapter II: Review of Literature: In this chapter the available works like research articles, reports, books on livelihoods of women and women empowerment are reviewed to take note of important findings of other researches on this area of study.
- III. Chapter III: A Brief Socio-Economic Profile of Nagaon District: This chapter explains the demographic characteristics, socio- economic conditions etc of the district with special reference to women of the district.
- IV. Chapter IV: Conceptual Framework, Design of the Study and Methodology: This chapter represents the concepts and meaning of empowerment, women empowerment, and livelihood. This also includes the design of the study and various techniques and methods that are used for analysis of data.
- V. Chapter V: Data Analysis and Results: This Chapter deals with the data analysis process and results of the research work.
- VI. Chapter VI: Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations: This chapter includes the findings and discussion of the results, conclusion and recommendation.

Bibliography part which shows all references of materials consulted and studied for organizing the thesis, is annexed at the last part of the thesis.