

Preface

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. But, throughout history and in many societies including India, gender inequality was a part and parcel of an accepted male-dominated culture. The traditional mentalities of India assumed that the place of women is mainly concentrated to the household activities like kitchen work and upbringing of the children. They have been considered as the sex object and inferior to the men in different spheres of knowledge and life. The 'Sati Pratha', 'Pardah System', 'Child Marriage', 'Dowry System', etc. have been some form of atrocities and discriminatory attitudes against women. It is facts that even after more than sixty years of Indian independence women are still one of the most powerless, weaker and marginalised section of the Indian society. Women form nearly half of the human capital in the country, but they remain the most deprived and long neglected segment of the society, despite the constitutional guarantee for equal rights and privileges for men and women. As result of colonial domination and prevailing conditions of the society, the socio-economic condition of women is miserable.

In recent years there has been increasing awareness and recognition of the fact that women who formed half of the population of the society cannot be ignored at all. Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, developmental policies, Plans and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres of life. From the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78) onwards it has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognised as the central issue in determining the status of women. The National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) to the Constitution of India have provided for reservation

of seats in the local bodies of Panchayats and Municipalities for women, laying a strong foundation for their participation in decision making at the local levels.

India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. Key among them is the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1993, The Mexico Plan of Action (1975), the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (1985), the Beijing Declaration as well as the Platform for Action (1995) and the Outcome Document adopted by the UNGA Session on Gender Equality and Development & Peace for the 21st century, titled "Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action" have been unreservedly endorsed by India for appropriate follow up. This attracted a large number of researchers and social scientists to study and on the issue of women. Large numbers of researches have been developed in the field of NGOs and women's empowerment in the international as well as national level. But there are a few researchers who have turned the focus of the enquiry on the NGOs and women's empowerment in Darjeeling District and hence, there is no serious study on the District of Darjeeling, West Bengal.

The present study has covered the entire district of Darjeeling in the state of West Bengal. It is a frontier district, running up between Nepal and Bhutan and stretching from the plains of Bengal on the south to the state of Sikkim on the north. The Darjeeling district lies between 26° 31' and 27° 13' north latitude and between 87° 59' and 88° 53' east longitude. Geographically the district can be divided into two particular divisions, the hills and the plains. The hill areas cover the three hill subdivisions of Darjeeling, Kurseong and Kalimpong. The foothills of Darjeeling Himalayas come under the Siliguri subdivision and are also known as Terai.

The basic objective of the study is to examine the position of women in society and to develop an understanding the socio-political factors influencing the rise of NGOs in Darjeeling District of West Bengal. To examine the roles and activities of NGOs in the society and to find out whether they are able to

empower the womenfolk as an alternative mechanism of empowerment. To do an in-depth study of a selected NGOs starting from its history, organizational set-up, staff pattern, different activities, staff's job satisfaction, beneficiaries observation, local parties perception, and to explore how far NGOs are able to empower women.

Keeping in mind the above noted objectives, the present study seeks to find out the level of women empowerment in the district of Darjeeling. The study further aims to explore the obstacles of women's empowerment with an expectation that findings of this research work along with its recommended suggestions would be able to offer a fresh outlook and valuable inputs to the government policy formulators in their future course of action on women's empowerment.

The entire study has been divided into six broad chapters which include several sections and sub-sections covering the specific dimensions of the study. **CHAPTER-1** has provided for introductory information of the present study, discussed the Problems of the study, Objectives of the Study, Research Questions, Theoretical Framework, Significance of the study, methodology, Types of Data Collected, Sources of Data, Field of Study, Process of Data Collection, Sampling, Rationale for the selecting Darjeeling District, Limitations of the Study, Analysis of Data and Plan of the Study. **CHAPTER-2** mainly deals with NGOs in India: Historical Roots, Meaning, Characteristics and Types - A Narrative and Conceptual Account. Here, the concept of Voluntary organisations and NGOs, Meaning of NGOs, Characteristics of NGOs, Types of NGOs, Typology of NGOs in India, Brief history of NGOs in India, Voluntarism in the Pre-Independence era, Voluntarism during the post-Independence era, Contemporary voluntary action since the early 1990s, Evolution of NGOs in India, Basic Facts on NGOs, Size, Sources of Funding in India, Types of Funding, Dominant activities in India have been discussed. **CHAPTER-3** focussed on the Idea of Empowerment: Conceptual and Operational Dimensions of Women Empowerment: A pan-Indian Perspective and here the concept of empowerment, Women Empowerment, Review of Literature, Women's

Empowerment in Contemporary India, Darjeeling District of West Bengal and its milieu have been discussed. **CHAPTER-4** mainly dealing with NGOs in Darjeeling- Their Emergence, Growth, Types and Development: An Overview. Here History, Society, Economy and Polity of Darjeeling District have been discussed in details. **CHAPTER-5** has provided for NGOs and the Empowerment of Women: A Study in the Context of Darjeeling District of West Bengal in details. **CHAPTER-6** is the concluding portion of this thesis and here the Major Findings of the study, Suggestions and Concluding remarks have been highlighted.