

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: A STUDY ON BONGAIGAON DISTRICT :2002-2012

CHAPTER – I

1.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK :

The issues concerning to inequalities between Male-female people have gained much attention of the Government of India of late. There is increasing realization about the relative backwardness of the female Section of people in India. To coup up with this backwardness the government of India, the state government and other local self governments have taken some measures to up grade the women position and to provide them benefits through various government schemes, programmes and projects. These women strengthening process is best termed as ‘Women Empowerment.’

The dictionary meaning of Empowerment is to entrusted with power. The Empowerment of women has become a world wide phenomena at present. The term ‘Women Empowerment’ is a relatively new phrase so far as the “Gender Studies” are concerned. This term is explained from two angles i.e. General and Specific. From the ‘General’ perspective of the term we can say that by empowering women, they should be made self sufficient and self dependant. For this purpose they must be provided necessary facilities and liberty from which they were deprived of in the past. On the other hand, the ‘Specific’ meaning of women empowerment is power sharing in the socio-political spectrum of a nation.

Both the ‘General’ and ‘Specific’ meaning of empowerment can be said the two sides of the same coin as both are dependable to each other and the absence of one may lead to destruct the other. Hence, women empowerment must have to include the aspects of both the general and specific field.

As we have already mentioned that the term women empowerment is relatively a new phrase, so we can trace it’s origin in the 1960’s decade. *Paul Freire’s theory of “Education for critical consciousness” (Freire, P. 1973),¹* and the afro-American movement for empowering women helped in the establishment of the empowerment issue, world wide.

1. Paulo Freire was a Brazilian Philosopher and Thinker

Since 1980's decade, particularly from 1985 Caribbean and Latin American Countries witnessed women empowerment movement with two objects. First-to grow feminist movement by breaching old age traditions like prohibiting women from doing or enjoying some works or enjoying freedom, organize the women folk, arrangement of seminars, meeting, publicity for emancipation, end the suppression, and get freedom from male domination. Second, to seize power by development of self esteem and self confidence among the women. For this purpose, the leading feminist activists tried to change gender relations in the economic, political, legal, social and cultural fields of the state. This notion is still continued.

‘Women Empowerment – Meaning and Definition :

In simple words, Empowerment means a declaration which wishes to re-structure of power along with abolition of patriarchal concept and suppression by men over women. It wants to change re-construction of the social system by abolishing discriminations against women. It is a kind of concept which offers power to women and provides rights to control over materials.

Regarding women empowerment, the Beijing conference of 1995 declares under section 13. The Declaration says, *“Women’s empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision- making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace.”*²

‘Dodd’ and ‘Gutieree’ says that empowerment has a social function. But the exponent’s of this concept did not take any step to explain the term ‘Power’ in a systematic and depth manner during 1960’s. Because, to know the proper meaning of empowerment, it is necessary to analyse the notion of power. Power may be known by two ways, i.e. (i) Capacity to acquire by one’s own capacity and (ii) Capacity to influence others through which one can think, do idea and believed to go ahead. These two types of power is reflected by personal and social power.

There is another power, namely the political power. It depends upon the capacity of personal power to influence others on how and by which method. The personal

2. The Fourth world conference on women : “Action for equality, Development and Peace” was held in 1995.

power is acquired by one's own capacity, intellectuality and expertness. When a person can utilize all these elements, he can get success in his mission. This may be termed as individual empowerment.

On the other hand, social empowerment acquires power from various sources. There are five basis of social power. These are – Reward, Accommodation, Legal, Ideology and Entrance or Exit power. 'Political Power' helps a person or a society to get empowerment.

These three types of power provides new encouragement to a person or a group or a society to get rid of suppression. Besides, empowerment also shows who has got power and how. So it is a process which may be personal or collective.

Some thinkers advocate that empowerment is a high level process which help the women to realize her own personality and also to acquire power.

Generalization about Empowerment :

There are some generalizations about empowerment. These are -

- (a) Empowerment is a social process which tries to abolish suppression on women. It is in this context needed to note down that if women do not take strong step, then they will be exploited as well as suppressed forever.
- (b) If it is wanted by all that there is utmost need of women empowerment, then they should come forward to acquire political power. By acquiring political power, they will be able to make development in all fronts. They will also be able to look into the plights of women in depth manner and to find out solutions.
- (c) Women empowerment may be compared with the notion of equality and equal justice. Because women empowerment creates equal status for all which leads to grow unity and prosperity in the society.
- (d) Women empowerment helps to reconstruct the society in such a way that every one will respect them. It means that every person in the society will be able to realize the equal position of women.
- (e) By empowering women, the basis of individual as well as social justice will be strong. None will be neglected. Every one would have a respectable share in the society. By these way, women, the most backward and suppressed section, will be benefited. Society too will get new energy to go on the road of development.

1.2 Elements of Empowerment :

The control over economy may be termed as the principal element of empowerment. When a person or a society becomes economically developed, then that person or the society can play leading role in the system. There is no doubt that economic soundness controls the other means of empowerment. So, economic progress is the key element of empowerment.

Secondly, Organization is one of the important elements of empowerment. When the suppressed or exploited people specially the women will form an organization, then their strength will increase. Organization should be the mouthpiece of them.

Thirdly, consciousness is an another element of empowerment. Usually it is seen that the law or the constitution of a country provides equality, freedom, justice etc. etc. to all people of that country. But if there is unconsciousness among people or a particular section of people, then there is every possibility to breach those constitutional principles. Again, there should raise demand to provide those principles. If there are loopholes in the matter then the basic objective of empowerment will be jeopardized. But for raising demand will bolden the issue. Hence, consciousness is said to be an element of empowerment.

Fourthly, education always play important role in all sphere of human development. So, if our women come forward with modern education, then their plights will come down. They will be able to lead the society.

Fifthly, self confidence is a major way of emancipation from exploitation. Anybody having self confidence and determination will get success. There is no doubt of it. Going ahead with it, nothing to be worried about or need not to see back. It provides healthy tonic to mental force. In this context, it is mentionable that 'Law' of a nation also plays a very positive role to carry on the empowering elements. If there is constructive law to help women and to protect their rights, then the condition of women will upgrade. The internal condition of a country and the attitude of international community can also bring fruitful results to empower the women in our society. Interestingly, the civil societies in the world around has been playing excellent role in this direction.

Some international thinkers advocate that there are five ways of making equality to usher the women empowerment process. These are -

- i) Welfare : Welfare is an important issue to grow full-fledged development of women. Through welfare programmes the condition of women can be uplifted from down place to up wards.

- ii) Access : The second means of establishment of women equality is to provide them all accesses. It means that they should be given necessary facilities like – access of education, health care facilities, banking, job etc. Again, the hindrances in front of women development must be eradicated. According to some feminist thinkers, women are their own enemy. They are not interested in attaining education or coming out from fake religious obligations. That's why there miseries are increasing day by day. So, to eradicate such a miserable condition women must have to come forward. They have to organize the women and to raise voice against male domination and exploitation. For this purpose, the leading women, their organizations and feminist activists should extend all possible help and co-operation.
- iii) Conscientization : Creation of conscientization in women is a very positive method of women empowerment. Actually speaking, when there is full blown conscientization, none will get courage to suppress others. Domestic violence against women will come down if conscientization is there among women.
- iv) Participation : Participation of women in social and political affairs would lead to the establishment of equal status of men and women in the society. At the initial stage, male people may not support female participation in social and political affairs. This happens mostly in the Islamic societies. But in this regard feminist thinkers should adopt necessary publicity and awareness technique to make it clear that for the all round development of a country, there is no other way, but to empower the women of our society.
- v) Control : Control is a highest way of empowerment. When a women is empowered, gets the controlling power of the society and all accept it, then, it means that empowerment has reached in its highest level in that society. That society is a developed and advanced society.

Thus from the above discussion, it is seen that empowerment is a process through which a suppressed class or an exploited section or group of people can get emancipation. It is a process to provide equality, freedom and justice to the needy people which were denied in the past. Women empowerment tries to make them strong in all fronts. It tries to provide social, economic and political power to women in our society. Through empowerment, it is hoped that women should have a say in the society.

But to execute the empowerment methods, we should have to go through proper channel. The channel is imparting education. The United Nations Organization, the UNESCO, The Beijing Conference and a lot of national and international organizations, civil societies, non governmental organizations etc. etc. has been trying to extend the scope of education to all irrespective of caste, community, sex, religion, language etc. But still there is the problem of education among women in underdeveloped countries. India is not exception to it. Our study of the topic which is remained within the radius of Bongaigaon District of Assam, is also facing the problem of uneducated women and the problems thereof.

Women in various community do not get facilities for proper education. Many of them live in remote areas. The minority Muslim women in char-chapori (An area surrounded by rivers from almost all sides or located in the river bank area), the tribal people like Garo, Rabha, Bodo etc. in some parts of Bongaigaon District of Assam.

Health Care facilities, political aspects, social and economic status of women are also important to discuss the topic with references to traditional as well as present norms in the proposed district. But in this context, it is necessary to provide a brief discussion on Bongaigaon District of Assam. It will give us a clear picture of the locality and to fulfill the aims and objectives of the work.

Women constitute near about fifty percent of India's population. As women comprise near about half of the total population in India, therefore, it is not possible to her to make progress without the progress of women. But what we see is that women in India have remained far behind men in every aspects of lifestyle. They are suppressed and harassed in every respect of livelihood. The Government of India as well as various state (Provincial) governments are concern with the true facts of women condition in India. As a matter of fact the question of empowerment of women is raised by successive governments in recent years. The state government of Assam is not exception to this effort. The government of Assam has provided various facilities and has undertaken a lot of schemes and programmes for the upliftment of women condition.

The Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) are introduced to extend helping hand for Empowerment of women. These institutions provide social-economic and political training to all section of people. But the important aspect of these institutions is that weaker section of people likes Women, Scheduled Caste and Tribes, (S.C. & S.T.) etc. get extra

benefit in the form of reservation of seats at various level. This benefit definitely makes them strong and empowers them to acquire equal status in the society in all sphere of livelihood.

*There are three tier Panchayati Raj Institutions in Assam. At the top of these institutions, there is the Zilla Parishad (District council), the Anchalik Panchayat is the middle level institution while the Gaon Panchyat (Village Panchayat) works at the grass root level.*³ The Present topic “WOMEN EMPOWERMENT”: A STUDY ON BONGAIGAON DISTRICT (2002 – 2012) deals with the study of Zilla Parishad level which covers the entire Bongaigaon District. But at the same time, it will also discuss the other two parts i.e. Anchalik Panchayat and Gaon Panchayat as and when it becomes necessary.

Zilla Parishad is an important part and parcel of Panchayati Raj Institutions. It plays vital and decisive role in empowering women and other section of people. Common people are more beneficial through this institution.

The word ‘Women Empowerment’ essentially means that the women have the power or capacity to regulate their day-to-day lives in the social, political and economic terms – a power which takes them to move from the backwardness to the up wards.

The principle of freedom, equality, liberty, unity etc. is enshrined in the preamble of the Indian constitution. *Fundamental Rights, Duties, Directive Principles of state policy are also included in the articles 12 to 35, 51(A) and 36 to 51 respectively.*⁴ These articles and directions not only grant equality to all, including women but also empower them to adopt measures which will prevent others to indiscriminate against women. Our political system, successive five years plan, law of the land, developmental programmes, all are conscious about the plights of Indian women and they work accordingly to make them strong. The department of social justice, women cell, family welfare etc. are created to empower Indian women. The women’s movement and a number of Non-Government Organizations (NGO) have been working to upgrade socio-economic and political condition of women.

3. Bharotar Panchayati Raj Byabastha aru Asomor Sayattya Sashan, By N. Das, 2006.

4. Indian Government and Politics by

At the same time, we should mention that the women in India have overcome of their age old shackles of serfdom and male domination. They have come to their own and started scaling the ladders of social advances with proud and dignity. Women in India are now uplifted and emancipated and granted equal status. The reservation of seats in the Panchayats have provided great opportunity to Indian women to overcome many barriers of their life.

But, in this context it is mentionable that notwithstanding the remarkable changes in the position of women in independent India, there remained major difference between the constitutional status and ground reality of deprivation and degradation. Whatever amount of emancipation has observed in Indian society, has been acquired and enjoyed by a little percentage of conscious women who reside mostly in the urban areas. The people living in the rural and remote areas are still living in miserable conditions, facing poverty, ignorance, superstition and slavery. The differences between male-female thinking, position etc, are not decreasing, but the rising trends of crimes against women in India as well as in Assam give us negative indication of women condition in future which demand regular discussion on male-female equality, equal rights etc. It is the need of the hour to make people aware about the better half of male.

Although women constitute nearly half percent of total population in India, they have given the worst deal in every sphere of socio-political and economic field in India. Prior to independence, women were not only physically and mentally abused, but they were also denied a say in the process of decision making and governance. They had little role in social spectrum, political process, economic and other allied field of livelihood. Even they were denied wages in exchange of their labour. Polygamy, negligence to girl children, Sati system, child marriage were also there in the pre-British and pre independence India. In fact, there seems to be an intensification of torture and harassment against women.

Paying attention to such miserable conditions of women, the government of India and the state (Provincial) governments have evolved the policy of Empowerment of women. Panchayats like Zilla Parishad, Anchalik and Gaon Panchayats have been playing key role in this efforts.

India achieved independence on 15th August 1947 and established democratic form of government. However, Indian democracy is representative in nature and as such common people could not take part in decision making process. It hampered the true spirit of democracy. Therefore, in order to ensure peoples participation in the decision making process at the grassroots level and thereby ensure it as dynamic and affirmative, multi-dimensional steps are being adopted and established. Democratic decentralization of political power through PRI's is an important step in this direction. In the word of Craig Johnson, "Democratic Decentralisation can be defined as meaningful authority developed to local units of governance that are accessible and accountable to the local citizenry, who enjoy full political rights and liberty. It does differ from the vast majority of earlier efforts of decentralization in developing areas, which go back to the 1950's and which were largely initiatives in public administration without any serious democratic component.

*According to Assam Panchayati raj Act, 1994 there will be a Zilla Parishad in every district in Assam. But the Municipal corporation, Municipalities, Town Committee's or the areas covered by Army cantonment will not cover by the Zilla Parishad as well as PRI's.*⁵ Zilla Parishad is the highest body in the PRI's. It plays vital role in the socio-political and economic development of the society. It makes plan and programmes for the rural people and ensures their implementation. It also works for establishment of social justice, development of agriculture with modern method and technology, electrification of rural areas, animal husbandry, cottage industries, village roads and bridges etc. It facilitates schooling to the people and works for welfare of people in almost all respect of their daily lives. Thus we can say that Zilla Parishad represents an indispensable first step towards the provision of equality of opportunity to all the citizen it comprises. There is also a Zilla Parishad in Bongaigaon District of Assam as per Assam Panchayat Raj Act, 1994. It comprises with 12 (Twelve) members since its inception.

At present, there are 27 (Twenty seven) Districts in Assam. One of them is the Bongaigaon District. This District was formerly attached with Goalpara District and it was a Sub-Division of the erstwhile Goalpara District. But due to popular demand and administrative flexibility, the Bongaigaon Sub-Division is declared a full-fledged District on 29th September 1989. It's Head Quarter is located at Bongaigaon town.

5. Extracted from www.assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1994.

The Goalpara District was first created in 1822 A.D. by British Officer David Scott. Mr. Scott was the first commissioner of newly established North-East Rongpur District. The Head Quarter of this District was in Rongpur town which is now in Bangladesh. During the period of Mr. Scott, the newly created Goalpara District was tagged to North-East Rongpur District for administrative feasibility. A part of Garo Hills District area namely the Bijni kingdom area was also constituted the original Goalpara District area in 1822. Later, an area, namely “Greater Koch Behar” was created by demarcating erstwhile Garo Hills District and added with Goalpara District. In 1874 a new province namely Assam Valley Province was created by British Govt. and Goalpara District area was tagged with it which constitutes till today unless petty political gambling disturbs. Now the original Goalpara District has given birth of five Districts namely (i) Goalpara, (ii) Dhubri, (iii) Kokrajhar, (iv) Bongaigaon and (v) Chirang.⁶

The name of “Bongaigaon” is the extension of a fig and old village named Bongaigaon alias Bong-ai-gaon situated on the southern border of the town. According to haearsay (1) in the long past there were plenty of wild (Bon) Cows (Gai) in the surrounding hilly and forest area. So, the villagers assembled time to time to drive away the wild cows or protecting their crops. Thus this area was popularly known as Bon-Gai-Gaon. (2) In the big village areas there dwelt one nature poet named ‘Bong’ (Bong Roy) who could induce laughter’s to all his bye-standers with his cryptic but harmless oral composition describing the situation on the spot. He had the capacity of ventriloquist art. Through there he could collect grains or coins voluntarily offered by the audience. This was his only source of income and profession. Thus his areas was roughly identified as the village of Bong (Ray) i.e. Bong-er = Gaon = Bongaigaon that is in course of time. This Bongaigaon village area was famous for orange fruits which were sold inter alia other agricultural products in the nearest market named Birjhora Bazar located at the heart of present Bongaigaon Town. The word Birjhora was derived from Bir + Jirowa (Jirowa means resting place) of Bir (Hero). It is held that the noble hero Chilarai took here rest for about two months during rainy season at the time of his invasion to the neighbouring Kingdoms of entire north-east India.⁷

6. Goalpara Zilla Itihash by S. Sarma, 2008, P. 2 – 15

7. *ibid.*

Bongaigaon District comprise with 3 (Three) Sub-Divisions namely Bongaigaon (Sadar), Bijni and North Salmara Sub-Divisions. The District consists with 5 (five) Development Blocks namely Dangtol, Manikpur, Boitamari, Tapattary and Srijangram Development Blocks. According to Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 there are 3 (Three) types Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) in Bongaigaon District namely Gaon Panchayat, Anchalik Panchayat and Zilla Parishad. The condition of Women Empowerment can be Judged by studying the women's share in PRI's and Block Level programmes. Therefore the topic "WOMEN EMPOWERMENT : A STUDY ON BONGAIGAON DISTRICT 2002 – 2012" is selected to find out the actual position regarding Women Empowerment.

In this context, this is to be noted that *there are 904835 Nos. of total population in Bongaigaon District. The male-female ratio in the district is 1000/945. From the historical background of the district, it can easily be summarized that the entire Bongaigaon District area was ruled by Kings / Zamindars / Feudal Lords hailing from the Koch-Rajbongshies belonging to Indo-Mongoloid ethnic group of people right from 15th century to the end of Princely states in 1956 A.D. Naturally Koches alias Koch Rajbongshies and Kocharies are the original sons o the soil of new district. Ravas, Garos, Yogis, Kalitas, Kayasthas and older Muslims are also indigenous who settled in this part of the land prior to the advance of Britisher in North-East Region. After the advent of Britishers in this part of land a new term named Bodo alias Boro was coined deliberately by European historians.*⁸ Thus the district is experienced with various caste-community people. Their traditions, socio-cultural and other rituals are interesting and need to be studied in the light of the selected topic.

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY :

Bongaigaon District is one of the most backward District in Assam as well as in the country. *The Assam human Development Report (AHDR), 2003 states that in respect of human development Index (HDI), Bongaigaon is one of the lowest ranked districts of Assam. The District ranks 21 in respect of HDI with an Index value of 0.263 which is much lower than the state Index at 0.407. The Human Poverty Index (HPI) shows that almost a quarter of the population in the District is in poverty. The Gender related development*

8. Extracted from www. History of Bongaigaon, Assam.com

*Index (GDI) for Bongaigaon in 2001 is estimated to be 0.376, which is far less than the state average of 0.537.*⁹

The gender discrimination in the district is very high. Women in the district of Bongaigaon have been suffering a lot in various aspects of livelihood. They are deprived in social, economic and political field. Therefore, the present study tries to find out the relative backwardness of the women in the District and to provide some remedial measures to get rid of such backwardness.

The area of study covers the period from 2002 – 2012 on the ground that the Government of India as well as Assam has adopted lots of women empowerment schemes and programmes during this period. The women are given many facilities to upgrade their lifestyle. But whether they have become able to make them fit for affording such empowerment schemes is a matter of great concern. The study is conducted to prove the actual facts of government publicity and ground reality.

Further, there are the Assamese Hindus, Bengali Hindus, Rajbongshi, Minority Muslims, Bodo, Rabha, Garo, Santhal etc. People in the District. All these caste community people have different socio-religious norms and traditions. They have separate food habits. Even, the Garo community people have matriarchal family system. This unique system needs to be highlighted through this study. We sincerely try to make the study on Garo family system from various angles and it will be a great success for us if we can find out any positive indications or habits and respect towards women from this community people. Such findings will humbly be suggested to adopt and uplift the women status and strengthen empowerment process through this study.

1.4 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM :

*Bongaigaon District was created in 1989 curving out areas of Goalpara and Kokrajhar District. The District headquarter is in Bongaigaon. It is surrounded by four Districts of Assam, namely Barpeta in the east, Goalpara in the south, Kokrajhar in the north-west and Dhubri in the west. The District falls within 26°28' N to 26°54' N latitude. The District has a total land area of 2152 Sq. Km. as per the records of census 2001; of this, the total rural area is 2123.92 Sq. and urban area is 28.08 Sq. Km. respectively.*¹⁰

9. Baseline Survey by OKDISCD.

10. *ibid.*

Administratively the District is divided into three Sub-Divisions viz. Bongaigaon, Bijni, and North Salmara. There are five revenue circles and seven community Development Blocks in the District. According to Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, the Zilla Parishad works as the “Zilla Unnayan” (District Development) authority with the help of District administration.

The inhabitants of the district are relatively under developed. The women are lagging far behind male people. There are the problems of girls schooling facilities specially in the backward and remote areas of the District. Family restriction on women and religious binding have kept the women away from equal status. They are politically suppressed. Female development institutions and government programmes are best kept in the file containing red ribbons. Actual position of women has remained almost as it was in the past social system.

All these facts have led the researcher to study on the Topic “WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: A STUDY ON BONGAIGAON DISTRICT : 2002 – 2012.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS :

Every research wants to justify some problems with empirical study. The study on women Empowerment of Bongaigaon District 2002-2012 is not exception to it. This research work has found some problems during pre-study period. So, the researcher designed them in a systematic way and determined them after proper field study. In the subsequent course of time, these problems were arranged as questions. The researcher tried to acquire answers of the following questions during the study period and accordingly, The research work was carried on.

The study seems to answer the following Research questions -

1. What is the historical background of the District and its population patter ?
2. What is the Social, Political, Economic and Cultural aspects of the people of Bongaigaon District of Assam ?
3. What are the prevailing Social Tradition, Customs and Rituals in the District ?
4. What are the livelihood habits of the people of the District ?
5. How the execution of Assam Panchayat Raj Act, 1994 with 33% women Reservation facilities ?

6. What are the education facilities and literacy rate of women ?
7. What are the employment facilities for women with male-female ration in government offices and services ?
8. What are the Women Empowerment schemes and programmes in the district ?
9. What are the pattern of conservativeness and religious restrictions on women ?
10. What are the Dowry system and how it effects the society ?
11. What are the impact of Panchayati Raj Institutions on people specially the women ?
12. What are the social evils like male dominations, early marriage, dowery, domestic violence etc. in the society ?
13. What are the comparative performances of women Representative in PRI's "
14. What are the corruption cases and a comparative findings on male-female Representatives in PRI's ?
15. What are significant problems related to the study and to suggest some remedial measures to eradicate these problems ?

Keeping in view the above questions, the researcher collected both primary and secondary data from the study field. Thereafter, these collected data, information etc. were arranged in systematic way, then classified them with utmost care and analyzed them with empirical outlook. Thus the questions and their answers became clear and the objectives of the research came to be true in the final stage of the study.

1.6 METHODOLOGY :

The present research study has been confined to rural as well as urban areas of the District. Considering the availability of data. community Development Block level information has been used for stratification purpose.

The study has provided much attention towards the gathering and analysis of data from all section of people and community. But it is not possible to go and conduct survey in all houses and areas by a single researcher within a limited and specific period of time. Again, it is not desirable to left data and information from any part of the district

where study is conducted, nor provide any wrong data and misinformation. Because objectivity is primary concern of the present research study.

Keeping in mind, the views as expressed, the researcher has selected two out of three subdivisions namely Bongaigaon and North Salmara respectively to collect primary as well as secondary data. It is also planned to select three community development block namely the Dangtol Block, the Boitamari Block, Tapattari Block etc. as sample collection and data information gathering area. Again some village are selected on random basis from this development block area so that the study gets impartial and biasless.

The methods of data collection is both Primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included observation method, survey and field work etc, the secondary sources of data collection included books, references, questionnaire etc.

However, interview method also used to collect data and to compare things prior to 2002 and from 2002 to 2012 on women empowerment matter. Depending upon the size of study area, 5 to 6 villages were selected from each development block area. Besides this, the Bongaigaon Town and Abhayapuri Town has selected for study of women empowerment. This has done because of comparing rural and urban scenario of women empowerment.

In each selected villages the listed households were grouped into strata as per the Assamese Hindu, Bengali Hindu, Rajbongshi, Muslim, Bodo, Rabha, Garo etc. In other words the said communities have been categorized as first, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh-stage stratum.

About 20 household were selected in all from each sample village for detailed enquiry. These 20 households were surveyed door to door.

TOOLS USED :

Relevant data were collected with the help of (i) rural household schedule and (ii) Urban household schedule. Both household schedules were prepared in such a way so that they could capable of collect necessary data and information in socio-economic and political field in the study area and to know the actual empowerment scenario of the women.

The rural schedule tried to gain authentic data regarding the village on women economic status, etc.

On the other hand urban schedule tried to garner authentic data on family pattern, opportunities, migration, political and economic status of women etc. Besides, both the schedule covered health care facilities, community development, employment, Job, family torture, domestic violence, dowry, sexual abuse etc.

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY :

Empowerment of women is an important issue in the present day world. India have also paid much importance on it. Empowerment means control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology etc. It involves power to power with and power within. Some define empowerment, as a process of awareness and conscientization, of capacity building, leading to greater participation, effective decision-making power and control leading to transformative action. This involves ability to get what one wants and to influence others on our concerns. With reference to women the power relation that has to be involved includes their lives at multiple levels, family, community, market and the state. Importantly, it involves at the psychological level of women's ability to capture which resist change like India.

The questions surrounding women's empowerment, the condition and position of women have now become critical to the human rights based approaches to development. The Cairo conference in 1994 organized by UN on Population and Development called attention to women's empowerment as a central focus and UNDP development the Gender Empowerment measures (GEM) which focuses on the three variables that reflect women's participation in society-political power or decision-making, education and health. The 1995 UNDP report was devoted to women's empowerment and it declared that if human development is not endangered it is endangered a declaration which almost become a lei motif for further development measuring and policy planning. Equality, sustainability and empowerment are emphasize and the stress was, that women's emancipation does not depend on national income but is an engaged political process.

Women Empowerment : A Study of Bongaigaon District 2002-2012 is a very fantastic and important topic to study. It is almost unquestionable that progress of women will ultimately lead to the Progress of Society and the Country. For this purpose all social barriers and constraints related to the way of women progress must be eradicated. The present study will try to bring to book the prevailing Social norms on women like Purdah System, Superstitions, Male domination over women, Dowry related cases,

Domestic violence and such other social evils vis-à-vis the opportunities provided for women empowerment etc. The research work will also try to focus the people's outlook over women. The study, as hoped will definitely give emphasis to the question of Social, Economic and Political Condition of women of the Bongaigaon District of Assam. That is why there is vast scope to study about the topic as selected for.

In this study we have proposed to look into the socio-economic and political conditions of the women of Bongaigaon District of Assam. It is a kind of micro level study and its main purpose is to up grade living condition of women of Bongaigaon District of Assam with a positive outlook. The study is planned to divide into various segments and to present authentic data on all respect of the study. It is tried to make the study fully non-biased and data based. No ambiguity is desired and work has been done accordingly.

1.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY :

Being the first full doctoral study on the Women Empowerment of Bongaigaon District, it has some limitations. Till now, no academic research has been conducted on the topic in the District. People are living in many remote and backward areas. Moreover, many caste-community people have been living in the area since past time. Touching all problems of women and covering all section of people may not be possible. But despite these problems, the researcher tried to present all relevant document data and information in respect of all needful matters and humbly hope that this study will overcome these problems and able to bring some empirical reality into the agenda of social science.

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