CHAPTER – III

METHODOLOGY

In a research work, Methods play an important role in both social as well as natural sciences. Without proper methodology, the results are likely to be undependable and defective.

In social science research methods, techniques and devices are related to problems on the one hand and availability of personnel and finances on the other. In fact, all these are interlinked with each other and are inseparable. In social research there are many problems, which are not all amenable to current techniques available to the society e.g. such problems which have socio-cultural bias. It is therefore, in the interest of research as well as the researchers that only such problems should be selected for study which are pursuable to available research techniques and devices, unless new techniques are discovered. In social research techniques and problems must go hand in hand.

Of course, in a research study some methods will have to be used, as without the methods no research can be carried out in proper way. But at the same time it should not be forgotten that methods are means to an end in themselves. Accordingly, it is essential that stress on methods should be laid only to a limited extent. It should not be to the extent that methods become an end in themselves and that the very purpose of research is defeated. In case there is over stressing of methods then it is possible that the very results may be distorted. It is also equally possible that there might be undue stress on elegance and bypassing of vitality on the one hand and creativeness on the other. Investigator will then be less important than the technicians. What an actual practice will happen is that problem will be adjusted to techniques rather than that of adjusting techniques to the problem. If more stress is laid on methods and techniques, then in actual practice, what would happen is that the researcher will pick up a social problem only for which methods, techniques and tools are available. This in other words will mean that technician will decide what type of social problems ought or ought not to be investigated. If this happens, that will really be a bad day for social researches, when selection of a social problem will depend on the availability of techniques tools and methods alone. In social research new problems are sure to arise, because no society is static. In every society, human beings live together and create as well as
solve problems. It is therefore, both is in the interest of investigator, as well as the methods, tools and techniques that problems for investigation should be picked up and new tools and techniques should be developed for study, if these are not already available. In other words methods should follow the problems and not vice-versa.

Taking in view the above facts of use of methods in the present research study, we have decided to take help of some selective methods like – Questionnaire method, survey method, schedule method, Interview method etc. We hope that these methods will provide us sufficient data and information because in social research these methods are widely recognized and accepted as fruitful. Again, the present topic, “Women empowerment: A study on Bongaigaon District: 2002-2012, have relations with these methods. The methods are discussed here under for better concept and for larger interest of the study.

**THE QUESTIONNAIRE METHOD**:

In a large country or in a research project where the information’s are scattered in a vast and inaccessible area the information are collected with the help of questionnaire method. By using this method, related questions are mailed to the people and received replies are analyzed and presented in the form of a report.

While applying this method, the investigator need not go to any respondent for collection of data and information. Generally he prepares a set of questions, do mail them to the respondents and collect the required information from them. While defining questionnaire, Bogardus has said, ‘A questionnaire is a list of questions sent to a number of persons or them to answer. It secures standardized results that can be tabulated and treated statistically.” In the words of Good and Hatt, “In general the word questionnaire refers to a device for securing answers to questions by using a form which respondent fills in himself.”

From these definitions, it becomes clear that questionnaire is a set of questions which are sent to the respondents and the investigator himself does not go to the informants for collecting information. The respondents send their replies through mail by filling the questionnaire and the informations is then analysed and there after fed into the research project.

Studying the advantages of this method, we have decided to apply it in the present research study. Accordingly a set of research related questions are prepared and sent

them to various categories of people in random basis i.e. the people are selected with the help
of Voter’s List of Bongaigan District. Out of a total 11 (eleven) numbers of Development
Block area, we choose the Boitamari, Srijangram and Manikpur Development Block area for
gathering of data and information, because these three areas cover almost all Caste,
Community, Religion and Linguistic people. Again only the primary numbers from 1 (one) to
100 (Hundred) are taken into consideration for questionnaire method. It means that we took
help of this method for communicating at least 24 (Twenty four) people from each
Development Block area and accordingly near about hundred people are communicated.
Interestingly, out of 100 (Hundred communicated people 73 respondents replied and on the
basis of this responds, the research study has tried to analyse the problems.

The questions which are included in the questionnaire are –

1. What is the historical background of the District and its population Pattern?
2. What is the Social, Political, Economic and Cultural condition of the people of
Bongaigaon District of Assam ?
3. What are the prevailing Social tradition, customs and rituals and Conservativeness and
religious restrictions on women ?
4. What are the livelihood habits of the people of the District ?
5. How the execution of Assam Panchayati Raj Act 1994, with 33% reservation for
women is executed in PRI’s ?
6. What are the education facilities and literacy rate of women ?
7. What are the Women Empowerment schemes and programmes in the district ?
8. What are the social evils like male dominations, early marriage, dowery, domestic
violence etc, in the society?
9. What are the comparative performances of women Representatives in PRI’s ?

To find the Answers of the above questions, the researcher has adopted this
methods and contacted a number of persons in the study area.

The respondents comprised almost all categories of people and on the basis of
their response; the research work has attained a strong base on its mission and vision.

But mailed questionnaire does not suit all kinds of research informations and
data. Whether this method will suit a particular study or not will very much depend on what
type of information is required. Similarly what is to be taken care is the types of respondents,
their accessibility to the respondent and the precision of hypothesis. Besides, it should not be
expected of a respondent that he will do any amount of exploratory work or take the trouble of carefully working out discrimination of attitudes, personal history and value. The more closely focused the hypothesis, the more effective the questionnaire.

Therefore, to get neutral and accurate responds, we have also sent a personal letter describing our objectives of gathering information. The letter was printed and duly signed with full name, address and Mobile phone number and e-mail address, to provide them the good intention of our search. Many of the respondents personally corresponded with us over mobile phone and after getting clarification, they promised to provide the actual information regarding the questions.

In this context, we must mention that although, questionnaire method is a fruitful and positive method, but it is not free from some sorts of short comings.

These may be as follows :

a) it is a system under which it can’t be said as to what shall be the response. There is in fact, no certainty in it.

b) It is usually argued in favour of questionnaire method that in it time taken is less and method is more economical. But in actual practice, that is not true, because, it is seen that the responses are not received promptly and many a time several reminders are required to be sent at intervals, with the result that instead of taking less time, it takes more time and increases anxiety whether reply comes or not. Similarly the method is also not that economical as it appears to be. Sufficient money is wasted on postage and sending the questionnaire again and again. In many cases after the reply has been received, need of interviewing the respondent is still felt. In that case much money is wasted.

c) This is a method which can not be applied to the whole population. It has only limited area of application. This method can be applied in such cases where the people are educated and research conscious and not to others. In fact it can’t be applied to marginally literal respondents.

d) This method allows little opportunity for respondents to seek clarification of questions and statements made in the questionnaire.
e) The respondents have no interest in co-operating with the investigator with the result that he does not fill in all entries with the same seriousness with which researcher demands. The result is that whole exercise becomes non-serious.

Keeping in view the above limitations of Questionnaire Method, the research scholar has applied some other methods to the present study ‘WOMEN EMPOWERMENT’ – A STUDY ON BONGAIGAON DISTRICT: 2002 – 2012. These methods are discussed below:

**OBSERVATION METHOD:**

The observation method is one of the most important methods for the study of social problems or in social research. The observation can be by way of either direct participation or observance in a non-participant manner. Like wise, situation can be both controlled as well as uncontrolled in the use of this method.

By using the observation method, data from the field is collected with the help of observation by the observer or by directly going to the field. But the observation of social behaviours may be value added. When an observation adds adequate description of the character of social atmosphere of the large number of activity within which the social act occurs. In using this method, the investigator must be present in the field and collect relevant data for his study. This is the earliest method of study. There is no person in the society who does not observe anything. There are many people who keenly observe the things, while others just observe and proceed further. We see that children starts observing the parents, neighbours and the people in whose contact they come. In fact many of our social behaviours, attitudes and present day activities are the result of such observation.

The basis of observation is curiosity and the research scholar has tried to find actual facts and issues related to the present study namely ‘WOMEN EMPOWERMENT’ – A STUDY ON BONGAIGAON DISTRICT: 2002 – 2012. By adopting this method we have seen the condition of tribal women in Bongaigain District who comprises mainly the Rabha people, Bodos, Garo etc. Besides, we have observed minority Muslim women’s condition and empowerment scenario in such societies. During our observation, we have found that Tribal societies are far behind general caste societies especially in the matter of women empowerment field. The education scenario of women is not satisfactory. There are superstitions, blind faith and many other social and religious barriers in the way of empowerment of women. A major problem in this regard is found in the Bodo Society, where
a harmful tradition of ‘Dainy’ (The bad doer men/women) is prevailing. Many people specially the innocent women have become the victim of this socio-religious evil. Even such an incident occurred in the Khoragaon (Nayagaon) area under North Salmara Sub-Division of Bongaigaon District three years ago, i.e. in 2010, where a Koch Rajbongshi family became the victim of large scale attack by village people. The victims could save their life but the whole family was severely wounded and police rescued them at the eleventh hour. Their property were destroyed and warned their relatives to deport them from the village as well as from the locality. Therefore, the scholar have observed that incident as the area is hardly about five kilometers away from his residence. Again during our study period we have visited the Bamungaon area of Borigaon Panchayat under Srijanagram development Block of Bongaigaon District where we have met a Rabha community village. It is our good luck that we could witness a village gathering which was meant for social meet presided over by village headman. The meet was held to listen a divorce seekers case. After taking due permission from the village headman we have observed that both the husband and wife have described their fate and problems in the meeting during their conjugal life. At first, the gathered people especially the village headman tried their best to keep them together and to compromise their fates within themselves. But both of them did not want to continue their conjugal life and at last, when all efforts have gone in vein, both of them were given a pan (a leafy thing for chewing). Then both of them tore the pan. This is called pan-chira-chiri (toring of pan) by the husband and wife in front of the village meet and from that time, the marriage got divorce. This incident is seen and after having discussion with the village people, it has become clear that in the matter of marriage divorce, both husband and wife get equal rights. But in the matter of marriage, it is the bridegroom family who get advantages from the selection of bride up to marriage. There is the system of dowry in that society. But it is not a major issue because Rabha society believes in traditional culture and accordingly, the dowry has not become a problem creating issue in the matter of conjugal life.

During the observation period, it is observed that the social and political rights of tribal people in the Bongaigaon District is not fruitful. Male people have been dominating in both the field. Women get a less share in both the field as they are not much aware about social changes and political happenings in their district or state (province) or in the country. Even, in comparison to men, they do not know the name of their political representatives as well as the ruler of the state and the country. They could say the name of few political parties. They are not aware about women empowerment even, there is no any Mahila Samitte
(Women organization), Self-Help Group or any other women consultative centre in such society. They have no idea about various government schemes like Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Jivan Jyoti Scheme, Manashi Scheme etc. Even, they have no idea about the developmental centres or institutions through which these schemes are executed. No Government official or personnel visit their village and explain these programmes. In simple word, it may be called that the tribal societies in the Bongaigaon District specially the Rabha and Garo tribes have been spending a dark life. But what has come to our observation exceptional is that the Bodo (Tribes) people have improved a lot since they have secured autonomous council in 1993. But still there are many hindrances in the path of women empowerment in Bodo society. One example will clear this concept. There are 11 (eleven) member in Assam Legislative Assembly from Bodo community. Out of this only 02 (Two) are women. They are Smt. Pramila Rani Brahma and Smt. Kumali Basumatary. Again out of 40 (Forty) member in Bodo Territorial Council (BTC), there is no women representative in the council. These examples show that, although Bodo women have achieved some kind of success in their personal life, but they are still far behind of securing empowerment to its actual extend.

Here comes the illustration of Koch Rajbongshi women. It is in this context, mentionable that Koch Rajbongshi comprise the largest population in Bongaigaon District and they dominate in the socio-political, economic as well as other allied segments. But the condition of women in such a community is not well as it is expected. During our observation period, it is seen that there are total patriarchal family pattern in this community. Women play a comparatively smaller role in family affairs as well as socio-political issues. Women are not allow to participate in the social and community affairs. They are debarred to take part in political field. Only a few number of women can come to such fields and credit may be given to them for their personal efforts. There are many social barriers in the way of women emancipation from male domination in the Koch Rajbongshi community. The literacy rate in Rajbongshi community among women is not satisfactory. The families which live in rural areas and in interior places suffer many constraints.

Interestingly, the women in this community not only look after house keeping works, but also perform agricultural works in the field like they sow the seeds and harvest them. Many male companions are engaged in anti-social works like gambling, drinking etc. The women in such a society are frequently faces domestic violence due to such anti-social works. However, the educated section of Koch Rajbongshi Community have improved their

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life style and women are getting well treatment from their male counterpart. At present this community has fetched up with a negative proportion of ‘Dowry’ system and this has occurred due to their assimilation with other community people specially the linguistic minority people in the district.

Muslims are the second largest group in the district. But it is obvious to mention here that the women are worstly treated in this society. They enjoy less freedom and liberty in their livelihood. They have no freedom of speech on socio-political affairs. They have to confine their livelihood within the compound of their family. They can not go outside of their family without the permission of their guardian. There are the problems of education, purdah system, various religious bindings, domestic violence, dowry, child marriage etc. The village headman plays an important role in executing some extra socio-religious norms in this society.

During our observation period, the scholar has found that the Muslim families give much importance on the study of religious books, like the quran, Hadith, Islamic Fikh & Akaid etc. The topics of such type of book create an ideal obedient house wife rather than providing them the teachings of fast changing world situation. They do not come into the contact of modern teachings like modernism, feminism, liberty, rights, their duties etc. These have made their life miserable and worse kind of its nature. Social, political and economic empowerment is not entered in their thinking. About 95% (Ninety five percent) of them do not know the term empowerment or what is it.

Although, there is the system of 33% (Thirty three) percent reservation for women in the Panchayat Raj institutions and accordingly the women representatives have been elected, but in actual practice, it is seen that their all powers and functions are exercised by their husband or other legal guardians. They put their signature and seal at the definite space and place as per guidance of such male influential. Lots of examples may be cited to prove this claim. Here is the Panchayat office in Sontoshpur-Dumerguri, Mererchar etc., where all official works are look after by the male guardians in lieu of female panchayat presidents. These have hampered the government intention of empowering women in the Bongaigaon District in Assam. That is why we have selected the topic “WOMEN EMPOWERMENT OF BONGAIGAON DISTRICT 2002 – 2012, to bring to light this facts and to provide our humble and sincere suggestions to make healthy society where every one will get what he or she has the share on such matters.
In observation therefore, basic thing is to curiously observe the object to be observed. We have tried to mind this things in our observation period. We have also provided maximum stress on eye because during the field observation time, we have desired to catch things through own eye and study them attentively. Besides we had definite aim and planning to cover the topic of our study. We used direct observation method to collect first hand data. We also tried to control ourselves to have accurate study on the topic, because according to Good and Hatt, “For a social researcher it is rather difficult to control the object under an investigation but he must at least put control on himself.”\textsuperscript{20} We followed this definition and went ahead for further study.

**INTERVIEW METHOD:**

Now-a-days interview method is becoming increasingly popular in social research while adopting this method, the interviewer himself interacts with the interviewee, offers questions to him and records the replies by self without noticing the respondents. This system has its own merits and drawbacks. This system as a whole requires preparations and many steps are to be over come to start with actual interview work. The interviewer should have a guide who tremendously helps the in completing his task. \textit{In the words of Fred, N. Kerlinger, “The interview is perhaps the most ubiquitous method of obtaining information from people. It has been and still used in all kinds of practical situations; the lawyer obtains information from a client; the physician learns about a patient; the admission officer or professor determine the suitability of students for schools, department and curricula. Only recently, however, has the interview been used systematically for scientific purposes, both in the laboratory and in the field.”}\textsuperscript{21}

Interviewing was known to the society in the ancient past as well. In our society, there has been no person who has either not been interviewed or who is not being interviewed at some stage or the other, in one form or the other. Since in society every person is face to face with others, therefore interviewing in society is a continuous process.

Keeping in view the above arguments in mind, we have also adopted the interview method in the present research study namely” Women Empowerment : A study on Bongaigaon District 2002-2012. The purpose of the use of this method is to get necessary data from all caste community society in the proposed district. Hence interview is conducted

\textsuperscript{20} ibid, P. 214
\textsuperscript{21} ibid, P. 175
in Assamese Hindu, Bengali Hindu, Muslim, Harijans, Rabhas, Garos, Bodos, Koch Rajbongshi etc. societies to get all relevant data and information about women and their rights, plights, status and the empowerment system. Taking at least one or two prominent figures of the above mentioned societies, we conducted our study and could able to know about some hidden facts on women related traditions and legacies of every societies of the district concerned.

The interview method is adopted with some definite objectives. One major objective is to gather information about untraced facts through face to face communication. It is through the help of interview that we have attempted is made to know actual feelings of the respondent and it is ensured that the respondent really provides information which he is disclosing and that there is no concealing in regards to the issues concerned.

Another aim of this method is that both the investigator and the respondents would know each other, so that they can come into contacts of each other’s research needs and requirement. While both of them closely know each other, the objective is that the investigator obviously tries to collect such information from the respondent which other method usually failed to achieve. An interviewer’s aim should not waste his time in finding out such facts which are already known, but should collect such facts which are unknown about that person or area or the people.

Interview method always tries to form hypothesis about a specific problem. While the interviewer is in the field and has the probability of meeting people, so it becomes easy to compile hypothesis for his study. When a new facts is found, a new hypothesis are formed for personal and social need. Besides this, the aim is to test and then disapprove the existing hypothesis of the study.

This method is used to collect information about qualitative facts of the study. It is well know that social research is qualitative in nature. Therefore, we have provided importance on attitudes, ideas, feelings, views, etc. These facts and ideas are related with both individuals and society. Interview method aims at gathering such qualitative data which hardly be collected by adopting other methods.

The objective of interview method is verification of new ideas, which the interviewer should have been entertaining from some persons. They can provide him fresh data, ideas and concepts that must help him to improve or ushering new hypothesis for his study.
Collection of extra additional data is another objective of the interview method or views of other persons for various problems in different situations, specially from those who have suggestive capacity and able to offer actual and concrete proposals for the improvement of the research study. The objective is also to find out the attitude of different persons under different situations; specially to those who are intellectuals and are quite aware of the social transformation which are developing around them. These people are supposed to provide up to date information about social, economic and political matters of the society.

It is said that interview method gives us an opportunity to see things from very close sights. No other method can offer the facility of observing things from such close distance. If he takes interview, in right manner and treats it seriously the purpose of observance is very much served.

It is said that interview is not only sounding of individual minds but with attitudes coming from psychology. Interviewer used it as an additional to direct observation like that of the seeker of culture patterns and for the regularities of real social manner. In the words of Benjamin D. Paul, “Interview aims at gathering and relating to sets of data.” In other words, interview is “A description of the situation as he sees it, looking from inside out.”

Analyzing the above facts and utilities of interview method, the present researcher has carefully adopted this method in his research work namely WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: A STUDY ON BONGAIGAON DISTRICT: 2002-2012. Our aim of adopting this method is to make the study solid and acceptable to its greater limit.

But at the same time we were careful of selecting the persons with whom we interacted closely. The method help us tremendously to collect some inner facts which were not found in any written scripts earlier. Our earnest effort in this matter help us to come to contact with some old age persons of the society. We came to know the position of women in the past and various social and religious norms relating to our women living in the society. We met some scholastic women like Dr. Mamoni Roysom Goswami alias Indira Goswami, Dr. Marami Barthakur Talukdar, Dr. Rupanjali Devi, Joshnapriya Devi, Nalini Majumdar, Akila Kawsar, etc. During our interview period, it is seen that almost all women were

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22. ibid, P. 177,178
expressing deep concern that the condition of women is not good so far as the socio-economic and political position of women in Assam as well as in the Bongaigaon district concern. All of them wished to eradicate barriers in the path of women development. For this purpose, they suggested various means and ways which are discussed in the later chapter of this thesis.

Briefly speaking, the present research work is a pioneering efforts and we have not spared any field of study which we have felt deem fit for the study. In such a situation, we have tried to cover a large area of the study adopting various methods and techniques.