CHAPTER FOUR
CONCEPTUAL AND DEFINITIONAL FRAMEWORK

INTRODUCTION

According to a report of the International Labour Organization, “Women are 50% of the world’s population, do two-third of the world’s work, receive 10% of the world’s income and own less than 1% of the world’s property.” In this background, greater emphasis is necessary towards the promotion of empowerment of women and self-employment through entrepreneurship can be a big facilitator in this regard. In this Chapter, the focus will be to look into the concepts of self-employment, entrepreneurship and empowerment. It will also throw light on the differences between self-employment and wage employment, significance of self-employment and the concept of women entrepreneur.

DEFINITION OF SELF EMPLOYMENT

There is no universally accepted definition of self-employment. In this perspective, the following available definitions may be analysed before the research study is proceeded.

According to English Collins Dictionary, “If you are self-employed, you organize your own work and taxes and are paid by people for a service you provide, rather than being paid a regular salary by a person or firm.”
As per BNET Business Dictionary, “Self-Employment implies being in business on one's own account, either on a freelance basis, or by reason of owning a business, and not being engaged as an employee under a contract of employment. The distinction between the self-employed and the employed has crucial bearing on matters such as the tax treatment of pay and the applicability of employment protection. A self-employed person may be an employer of others.”

According to Employment Insurance Act, 2011:

‘Self-employed person’ means an individual who –

a. Is or was engaged in business.

b. Is employed but does not have any insurable employment.

From the above interpretations and observations made during the present research study, it is apparent that self-employment of women contemplates the fact that they undertake economic activities on their own, organise various resources, undertake risks, tap opportunities with an eye for future development, create wealth and generate employment opportunities for others. A self-employed woman through her skills, potentials and abilities can not only build a better life for herself but also bring transitions in the family, in the society and in the country for overall socio-economic development. However, before emphasizing on the prospects of women self-employment, the differences between wage employment and self-employment require proper examination.
DISTINCTION BETWEEN WAGE-EMPLOYMENT AND SELF-EMPLOYMENT

The two broad career options i.e., wage employment and self-employment differ in many ways. Firstly, the status of a person in wage-employment is of an employee but in self-employment the status of a person is that of an employer or owner. Secondly, in wage-employment, earning depends upon the employer that is how much the employer will pay a person but in self-employment earning depends upon the ability of the self-employed person. Thirdly, in wage-employment, a person works for others’ benefit but in self-employment one works for the benefit of oneself. Fourthly, the scope of earning is limited in the case of wage employment because it is decided in advance by the employer, but in self-employment scope of earning is unlimited as it is not decided in advance and depends largely on the ability of the person concerned. Finally, in wage-employment, the employee is given a specific job to work on whereas a self-employed person can undertake any work that is necessary for his purpose. Some of these differences are summarised in the table below:

**Table 4.1: Distinction between Wage-employment and Self-employment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FOCUS</th>
<th>WAGE-EMPLOYMENT</th>
<th>SELF-EMPLOYMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(i) Status</td>
<td>Employee</td>
<td>Owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) Earning</td>
<td>Depends on the employer</td>
<td>Depends on the ability of the owner to manage his business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iii) Scope of earning</td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>Unlimited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iv) Nature of work</td>
<td>Routine work</td>
<td>Work is flexible.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Thus, it may be observed that –

You are probably self-employed if you:

- run your own business/enterprise and take responsibility for its success or failure
- have several customers at the same time
- can decide how, when and where you do your work
- are free to hire other people to do the work for you or help you at your own expense
- provide the main items of equipment to do your work

You are probably employed if you:

- have to do the work yourself
- work for one person at a time, who is in charge of what you do and takes on the risks of the business/enterprise
- can be told how, when and where you do your work
- have to work a set amount of hours
- are paid a regular amount according to the hours you work, and get paid for working overtime - even if you do casual or part-time work, you can still be employed

**PREFERENCE FOR SELF-EMPLOYMENT OVER WAGE-EMPLOYMENT**

Self-employment is often preferred over wage-employment for the following reasons:
(a) Self-employment offers opportunities for using one's own talents for one's benefit. A person can use his/her ability and time in the most profitable manner through self-employment.

(b) Self-employment is possible even without large resources of capital and other facilities. For example, a replay-cum-service shop or a career counselling centre can be started with limited amount of capital.

(c) In self-employment, the person learns many things ‘on the job’ because he/she has to take all the decisions regarding his/her business activities for his/her own benefit.

RESOURCES NEEDED BY A SELF-EMPLOYED PERSON

In order to be successful, a self-employed person must assess what resources he/she will need. These may be of the following four categories:

i) Physical

ii) Economic

iii) Human

iv) Technological.

(i) Physical Resources

A self-employed person must have some place for his activities. He may work at his own place or hire it. He may require machines, raw materials, etc. If electricity is required for running his machines, he should make sure that there is regular power supply. For example, if a person wishes to open a tea stall, he must have a small room or a shed. He will also need utensils, oven, cups and plates, furniture
and regular supply of materials like tea, sugar, and milk, etc. These are physical resources.

(ii) Economic Resources

Besides physical resources to run a business it is also necessary to have economic resources i.e., capital. Money is required to buy a building or hire a place, to buy raw materials, equipments and machines, to pay wages to employers, and so on. Money is required not only in the beginning but also at subsequent stages to meet running expenses and for expansion of activities in future. Money or capital for all these purposes can be raised from different sources like personal savings, borrowings from outside sources such as friends, banks, and other financial institutions. Therefore, a self-employed person not only needs to assess his total funds but also decides how to raise necessary funds.

(iii) Human Resources

To run a small business like a repair shop, a hair dressing shop, etc., a self-employed person may have to employ skilled or unskilled workers. The owner of a repair shop may have to employ machines, and cleaners. He must estimate and appoint the number and types of employees he needs. The owner of a scooter repair shop located in a shed may require one or two helpers, while for the owner of a big garage, the requirement may be six or seven mechanics. Accurate estimate of skilled and unskilled human resources needed and their proper utilisation are also essential for success of a self-employed person.
(iv) Technological Resources

Last but not the least important are technological resources. This is an age of competition and production must be based on modern techniques. The business of any self-employed person can be profitable if he has knowledge of the modern techniques of production and utilises them. For example, a tailor's business will be more profitable, if he operates sewing machines with latest attachments suited for different types of stitches and embroidery. The owner of a hair dressing shop will be able to attract more customers if he knows the latest hair designs and has modern equipments for styling.

Thus, to be successful, a self-employed person must have the necessary: (i) Physical resources like a place, machinery, and materials, (ii) Human resources, i.e., people to assist him. (iii) Economic resources which implies money and capital (iv) Technological resources like best production techniques and knowledge of their use.

From the present research study, the characteristics of self-employment which have been observed are enlisted below:

1. Self-employment involves doing something on one’s own to earn one’s livelihood.
2. It involves ownership and management of activities by a person although he/she may take the help of one or two persons to assist him/her. Thus, self-employment may provide employment to other persons as well.
(3) The earning from self-employment is not fixed. It depends on the income one can earn by producing or buying and selling goods or providing services to others at a price.

(4) In self-employment, the owner alone has to take the profit and bear the risk of loss. So, we find a direct link between the effort and reward in self-employment.

(5) It requires some amount of capital investment, although it may be small.

(6) In self-employment, a person is free to take decisions in respect of running his business profitably and avail of any opportunity that may come up for expansion of his business. It gives complete freedom to work as per one’s own will and within the parameters of the prevailing laws.

Thus, self-employment may be defined as an economic activity which one may perform on his own as a gainful occupation, and this may consist of producing and selling goods, buying and selling goods, or rendering services for a price. There are several advantages of self-employment and investigation into this issue will help to highlight the factors which promote self-employment.

**SIGNIFICANCE OF SELF-EMPLOYMENT**

During the course of the study, it has been observed that the wage employment opportunities have been squeezed in the Government sector due to scarcity of funds as well as imposition of restrictions by different financial agencies. Statistics indicated that during 1997 out of total registered unemployed in our country, only 4.37% were employed in the public sector whereas during 2001 that figure reduced to 1.85% and it is expected to decrease further. It has also been
observed that the financial growth rate during 1983-1991 i.e. pre financial reform time was 5.7% whereas this rate was reduced to 1% during post-financial reform time. It indicated that financial reform reduces the average financial growth rate as well as decreases the employment opportunity. In India, 70% of the total population depends upon the agricultural and allied sector directly or indirectly. So, self-employment opportunity can be created easily in rural areas through agriculture and allied sector. Opportunities can be created in new sectors also. The greater population of Barpeta district lives in rural areas. In this context, rural self-employment in the district has been studied with special reference to women in the current research enquiry.

The development of rural self-employment is a complex problem which can be tackled by the social, political and economic institutions. The sooner they are established, the better it would be for the entrepreneurial development in the rural sector and the economic growth of the country.

The main points of significance of self-employment may be understood from the description below:

1. **Provide employment opportunities:**
   Rural self-employment is labour intensive and provides a clear solution to the growing problem of unemployment. Development of industrial units in rural areas through rural entrepreneurship has high potential for employment generation and income creation.

2. **Check on migration of rural population:**
   Rural self-employment can fill the big gap and disparities in income among rural and urban people. It will bring in or develop infrastructural facilities like power,
roads, bridges, etc. It can help to check the migration of people from rural to urban areas in search of jobs.

3. **Balanced regional growth:**

Rural self-employment can dispel the concentration of industrial units in urban areas and promote regional development in a balanced way.

4. **Promotion of artistic activities:**

The age-old rich heritage of rural India can be preserved by protecting and promoting art and handicrafts through rural entrepreneurship.

5. **Check on social evils:**

The growth of rural self-employment can reduce the social evils like poverty, growth of slums, pollution in cities, insurgency, etc.

6. **Awaken the rural youth:**

Rural self-employment can awaken the rural youth and expose them to various avenues to adopt entrepreneurship and promote it as a career.

7. **Improved standard of living:**

Rural self-employment will also help to increase the literacy rate of rural population. The education and self-employment of entrepreneurs will prosper the community, thus increasing their standard of living.

8. **A boon to the under-privileged in respect of higher education**

Everyone may not be able to pursue higher education after Secondary or Senior Secondary examination due to one or the other reason. Such persons can start their career as self-employed in occupations that do not require higher education.
Owing to the numerous benefits that self-employment can provide, it may be noted that self-employment has been given high priority in government policies and programmes. A number of schemes have been initiated all over the country to encourage entrepreneurship and self-employment. Since the present study is primarily focussed on self-employment of women, a clear understanding of the concept of woman entrepreneur is necessary.

CONCEPT OF SELF-EMPLOYED WOMEN/WOMEN ENTREPRENEUR

Women entrepreneurs may be defined as the woman or a group of women who initiate, organize and operate a business enterprise.

Government of India has defined women entrepreneurs as an enterprise owned and controlled by a or more women having a minimum financial interest of 51% of the capital and giving at least 51% of employment generated in the enterprise to women.

According to Sanjikta Mishra (2007)¹, a self-employed woman is ‘the women or a group of women who initiate, organize and operate a business enterprise’.

Like a male entrepreneur, a woman entrepreneur has many functions. Women entrepreneurs should explore the prospects of starting new enterprises, undertake risks, adopt new innovations, coordinate administration and control of business and provide effective leadership in all aspects of business.

A large number of women around the world have set up and managed their own businesses. It was not easy for these women to succeed in business. They had to face a lot of difficulties and overcome a number of barriers to become successful
in their ventures. They had to deal with discrimination and withstand the scepticism of society, and also put in more effort than men to prove their credibility to others. Skill, knowledge and adaptability in business are the main reasons for women to emerge into business ventures.

Thus, after analysing the viewpoints and observations of different authorities, it may be stated that a ‘Self-Employed Woman’ is a person who accepts a challenging role to meet her personal needs and becomes economically independent. A strong desire to do something positive is an inbuilt quality of an entrepreneurial woman, who is capable of contributing values in both family and social life.

With the advent of media, women are aware of their own traits, rights and also the work situations. The number of women starting their own enterprises has increased in the past few years. There are many obstacles in the way of self-employed women such as gender bias, obtaining capital financing, as well as establishing a broad network and regardless of these hurdles, there is a constant increase in the number of women entrepreneurs. Women self-employment is not just a trendy pastime but it is an ultimate output of energetic work, balancing the personal and professional spheres and the growing acceptance of women leaders.

Very few women are lucky enough to have the type of job they wanted. With many household responsibilities, they are entering into the corporate world. As women are known for their multitasking ability, they can perform many responsibilities such as household chores, office work and still give excellent results. It is proven that women who work for themselves are happier than those who work for others under a contract of employment.
Women can also start their business at home or on online basis. For that, the requirement of start-up capital is negligible and they can start earning money right away. There are many women who are working online and earning more money than they ever could have if they had a full-time job. As they start making money, they can feel the financial independence and it motivates them to do more work in the economic sphere and prove their mettle.

However, being a self-employed woman can give a person more benefits than just making a lot of money along with financial independence. She has the freedom to work when she wants and still pursue her passion. She can start her own home office and can work at any time - in evening, morning or on weekends – and at the same time can perform all her household chores.

When a woman is self-employed and she has success building her enterprise, irrespective of small, medium or big, she will also be building something that she can hand down to her children. This will secure both her and her family and this is something that she can never get by working for someone else.

**CONCEPT OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

Despite the fact that the entrepreneur has been defined and redefined by historians, economists, sociologists, psychologists and behavioural scientists, misconceptions arise in the minds of those who deal with entrepreneurs in the developmental process. Examining the misconception/myths is one way of clarifying concepts in this regard. The prominent interpretations on entrepreneurship have been stated below:
Cantillon (1755)² drew attention to entrepreneur as a technical term. The essence of the function of the entrepreneur was to bear uncertainty.

Hawley (1882)³ saw risk taking as the distinguishing attribute of the entrepreneur and ranked this as a factor in production on par with land, labour and capital.

According to Dannof (1949)⁴ an entrepreneur is primarily concerned with changes in the formula of production over which he has full control. The entrepreneur is an economic man, who strives to maximize his profits by innovations.

Lamb (1952)⁵ defined entrepreneurship as that form of social decision making performed by economic innovators, and thus entrepreneurship means broadly the ability to recognize and exploit economic opportunity.

Further, Gordon (1961)⁶ stated that the entrepreneurs are not simply innovators in the sense of innovation, they are men with the will to act, to assume risks to bring about change through the organization of human efforts.

Forster (1953)⁷ while describing farming as a business, identified farmer is an entrepreneur and that he should apply business principles to the organization and management of the farm, if he expects to utilize his resources to the best advantage.
Hoselitz (1957)\textsuperscript{8} opined that entrepreneurship is a more evasive thing. It is not so much a particular set of institutions through which it is brought to bear, but its presence or absence, its vigour or ability depends upon a whole series of environmental conditions and appropriate personal motivation.

Entrepreneurship is the purposeful activity (including an integrated sequence of decisions) of an individual or group associated individuals (Cole, 1959)\textsuperscript{9}.

McClelland (1961)\textsuperscript{10} pointed out that the man who organizes the business unit and/or increases its productive capacity is an entrepreneur.

Lockwood (1965)\textsuperscript{11} defined the entrepreneurship as the ability to recognize and exploit economic opportunity.

Joshi and Kapur (1973)\textsuperscript{12} described farm entrepreneur as a person (can be a group of persons also) who thinks of organizes and operates the business, and is responsible for the results i.e., losses and gains from the business.

Minzberg (1976)\textsuperscript{13} stated that entrepreneurial behaviour is characterized by active search, expansionist outlook and decision taking.

Further, Leeds and Stainton (1978)\textsuperscript{14} defined entrepreneur as a person who initiate production, takes decision, bears risks, involves, organize and coordinates the other factors.
Heredero (1979)\textsuperscript{15} described agricultural entrepreneur as a person who introduces change which directly or indirectly lead to higher agricultural output.

Dinesh (1992)\textsuperscript{16} stated that entrepreneurial function does not end with the launching and consolidation of an enterprise. Continuing search for new products, new markets and new technology to ensure sustained growth is essentially entrepreneurial in character.

Commonly-assumed previous definitions of an entrepreneur as someone who finds a new venture or who owns a business is too restrictive (Alison and Shailender, 1994)\textsuperscript{17}.

It is commonly believed that an entrepreneur is basically an intelligent person and has a definite ability to create something new to prove its worthiness (Anonymous, 1996)\textsuperscript{18}.

The entrepreneurial behaviour is not necessarily doing new things but also doing things in a new way that has been already done (Narayana Swamy, 1996)\textsuperscript{19}.

Entrepreneurship Development Model for 21st century explains Entrepreneurs are those who (1) Learn and listen (2) Take risk and responsibility (3) Know their own uniqueness and hence are innovative, creative in their own way (4) Are free from fear of failure or success (5) Always add value to what they produce (6) Above all, are always achieving (Ranade, 1996)\textsuperscript{20}.
WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN GLOBAL CONTEXT

There are many women entrepreneurs around the world. Entrepreneurship emerges from an individual’s creative spirit into long-term business ownership, job creation, and economic security. Women bring commitment and integrity because they care about economic empowerment, entrepreneurial development and innovation. Female entrepreneurs seek the professional and personal support that is found in business associations. Economic globalization has encouraged the expansion of female business ownership.

The growing economic power and influence of women-owned businesses are changing the shape of the global economy,” remarked Sakiko Fukuda- Parr, director of the UN Development Program’s Human Development Report. The global impact of women entrepreneurs is just beginning to gain intensity. In the global economy, the number of female business owners continues to increase steadily. For example, women produce more than 80 percent of the food for Sub-Saharan Africa, 50-60 percent for Asia, 26 percent for the Caribbean, 34 percent for North Africa and the Middle East, and more than 30 percent for Latin America. Female entrepreneurs are active at all levels domestically, regionally, and globally. The manner in which women entrepreneurs are significantly affecting the global economy may be evidenced from following observations:

- Research about human capital factors in women’s entrepreneurship is more than 35 years old. (Grossman Amy, 2009)21
- Women in advanced market economies own more than 25% of all businesses
In **Russia** - women own 64% of firms employing 10 people or more.

In **Germany** - women have created one-third of the new businesses since 1990 representing more than one million jobs. There are a total of 1.03 million women-owned businesses in Germany. Women-owned and managed businesses having annual turnover of at least Euro 16,620 number 522,000, represent 18% of the total in this group, and provide jobs for 2 million employees. Their turnover is in total € 232 billion, appr. 6% of the overall turnover or 11% of the turnover gained by owner managed firms. (Kay *et al.*, 2003)\(^{22}\).

In **France** - women head one in four firms.

In **Switzerland** - Women account for about 70% of micro, small, and medium Enterprises.

In **Sweden** - Women start 28% of genuinely new firms and employ on average 0.6 full time employees compared 1.7 for men. (ITPS, 2002)\(^{23}\).

In **UK** - There are approximately 1,013,000 self-employed women (7.6% of women in employment) and 2,706,000 self-employed men (17.4% of men in employment) in the UK. Survey evidence indicates that businesses that are wholly or majority female-owned account for between 12.3% - 16.5% of the UK business stock. A large proportion of female entrepreneurial activity takes place in businesses that are co-owned equally by men and women. If the definition of women’s enterprise included co-owned businesses (an approach often used by US researchers), it is estimated that between 34.1% - 41.2% of the UK small business stock is either owned or co-owned by women. (Carter *et al.*, 2006)\(^{24}\)
In Romania – Between 2000-06, women represented approximately 35.4% of all entrepreneurs (Noya Antonella, 2006).  

In Ireland - In terms of female entrepreneurship, current estimates suggest that around 15%-18% of established entrepreneurs are women.

In the Czech Republic - Support for women entrepreneurs in the Czech Republic has become apparent in recent years. The SME support programmes, open to both genders, from the Ministry of Industry and Trade made 2,584 grants to women entrepreneurs, i.e. 17.1% of the total grants awarded. This represented financial aid of 9 million Euros to Czech business women, i.e. 5.7% of the total financial support available. Women entrepreneurs also owned 11% of the Limited companies which obtained grants. (Women Entrepreneurs, 2001)

In Hungary - women started more than 40% of all businesses since 1990

In Poland - women own 38% of all businesses

In Turkey - Men account for 73% of the formal labour force and women for 26%. Women are less likely to work in the private sector (16%) and even less likely to be business owners in businesses with employees (3.4%). More than 50% of women in employment are unpaid family workers; most are in the agricultural sector. As a vocation for women in Turkey, entrepreneurship has been held back by factors such as a patriarchal society, traditional gender roles, lack of education and lack of experience in the labour force. (Small and medium-sized, 2004)

In Europe and Newly Independent States Transition Economies – women are 25% of the business owners
In **USA** - women own 38% of all businesses (8 million firms), employ 27.5 million people (or 1 in 5 workers), and generate $3.6 trillion in annual sales.

In **Canada** - There are more than 821,000 women entrepreneurs and they contribute to an excess of CAD 18,109 billion to the economy annually. Between 1981 and 2001, the number of women entrepreneurs increased 208%, compared with a 38% increase for men. Average annual sales for women owned firms are significantly lower. In 2000, women-owned SMEs averaged CAD 311,289 in sales, compared with 654,294 in sales for firms owned by men (Sarmite and Bulte, 2003)\(^ {28} \).

**CONCEPT OF EMPOWERMENT**

Empowerment has become a central concept in development discourse and practice since the 1990s. The notion of empowerment is widely used in the policies and programmes of both bilateral and multilateral agencies and not just NGOs. Yet it is a complex term that is not easily defined and is open to a wide variety of interpretations. Any attempt to assess whether or not a particular development intervention has ‘empowered’ people must recognise this and for this reason in this Chapter, a brief analysis of the concept of empowerment is given.

There is an ever-expanding literature on empowerment. Van Eyken (1990)\(^ {29} \), Friedmann (1992)\(^ {30} \), Craig and Mayo (1994)\(^ {31} \) and Rowlands (1997)\(^ {32} \) have all examined the concept and focused on the notion of ‘power’, its use and its distribution as being central to any understanding of social transformation. This
centrality includes power both in terms of radical change and confrontation and also in the sense of the power ‘to do’, ‘to be able’ and of feeling more capable and in control of situations. Power is, in most contexts, the basis of wealth, while powerlessness is the basis of poverty and both the ‘powerful’ and the ‘powerless’ are categories of actors fundamental to understanding the dynamics of any development process. Power can be seen as an asset owned by the state or a dominant class and exercised in order to maintain its control and to stamp their authority and legitimacy. Power, furthermore, operates at many different levels and is manifest in the conflicting interests of different groups within any particular context; for example, local or regional patrons, the power that men often exercise over women and the power that institutions such as the church exercise over people.

Furthermore, Rowlands (1997)\textsuperscript{33} distinguishes between ‘power over’, ‘power to’ and ‘power within’; while Craig and Mayo (1995)\textsuperscript{34} contrast the notions of power as a ‘variable sum’ in which the powerless can be empowered without altering the level of power already held by the powerful, with power as a ‘zero sum’ in which any gain in power by one group inevitably results in a reduction in the power exercised by others. Power is also related to knowledge, which is both a source of power and a means for its acquisition. In this respect, Chabel (1992)\textsuperscript{35} has argued that ‘all development work is to do with the control of knowledge’ and that if the ‘underprivileged’ were able to control the sources of knowledge, the structures of existing power relations would be radically altered. The following three quotations illustrate the range of meanings of empowerment in a development context.
an alternative development involves a process of social and political empowerment whose long term objective is to rebalance the structure of power within society by making state action more accountable, strengthening the powers of civil society in the management of their own affairs and making corporate business more socially responsible. (Friedmann 1992)  

Empowerment is about collective community, and ultimately class conscientization, to critically understand reality in order to use the power which even the powerless do possess, so as to challenge the powerful and ultimately to transform that reality through conscious political struggles. (Craig and Mayo 1995)  

While the empowerment approach acknowledges the importance for women of increasing their power, it seeks to identify power less in terms of domination over others and more in terms of the capacity of women to increase their self-reliance and internal strength. This is identified as the right to determine choices in life and to influence the direction of change, through ability to gain control over crucial material and non-material sources. It places less emphasis than the equity approach on increasing women’s status relative to men, but seeks to empower women through the redistribution of power within, as well as between, societies. (Moser 1991)  

The concept of empowerment has been operationalised into practical project methodologies and, in terms of its effect and impact, it is beginning to be translated into observable and measurable actions. To be precise, people’s empowerment can manifest itself in three broad areas:
i. power through greater confidence in one’s ability to successfully undertake some form of action

ii. power in terms of increasing relations which people establish with other organisations

iii. power as a result of increasing access to economic resources, such as credit and inputs.

In the social development concept, empowerment does not see poor or vulnerable people as deficient and needing external support. Rather, more positively, it seeks to create an interactive and sharing approach to development in which people’s skills and knowledge are acknowledged. Empowerment is not merely a therapy which makes the poor feel better about their poverty, not simply the encouraging of ‘local initiatives’ or making people more politically ‘aware’. Similarly, it does not assume that people are entirely powerless and that there do not already exist networks of solidarity and resistance through which poor people confront the forces which threaten their livelihoods. On the contrary, empowerment has to do with ‘positive change’ in an individual, community and structural sense, with organisation and with negotiation. But, as Rowlands (1997) has commented, ‘empowerment takes time’ and it is not a process that necessarily achieves results in the short term.

As with other development concepts, such as civil society or participation, there is always a danger that the use of empowerment in the context of development interventions may be based on a superficial understanding of local
relations of power. Empowerment may be limited to little more than greater participation in project decision-making and have little, if any, impact on wider structural change. This has led to some concern that the use of the concept in development tends to mask the true nature of empowerment if there is variation in methodology as well as in the indicators of empowerment. In recent years, there has literally been a high-jacking of the term so that it has become a popular, largely unquestioned ‘good’ aspired to by such diverse and contradictory institutions such as the World Bank, Oxfam and a large number of more radical non-government organizations (NGOs). Initially, it was commonly associated with alternative approaches to development and in particular, with the women’s movement. But more recently, empowerment has been adopted by diverse agencies and institutions. Thus, business and personnel managers have generally thought of empowerment as a means of increasing profitability within established structures.

Mainstream development agencies adopted the term in the 1990s when they too began to use the language of empowerment, participation and people’s development, more to improve productivity within the status quo than to foster social transformation. Batliwala (2007)⁴⁰, therefore, bemoans the fact the empowerment has now not only become a buzz word but a magic bullet for poverty alleviation and economic development, rather than a multifaceted process of social transformation, especially in the arena of gender equality. Given the widespread use of the term by diverse agencies and institutions and their understanding on what it connotes, it might be useful to find out why empowerment is acceptable to such different and often conflicting development
approaches and institutions and how it goes a long way to elevate the position of women in different aspects.

CONCLUSION

The development of rural entrepreneurs through self-employment is a complex problem which can be tackled by the social, political and economic institutions. The sooner they are established the better it would be for the entrepreneurial development in the rural sector and the economic growth of the country. Systematic steps are necessary for Capacity Building through skill oriented training programmes on Management Development, Technology Support, Skill Up-gradation, etc., for self-employment in rural areas by taking up economically viable activities. The district of Barpeta has a diverse demographic, social, cultural and economic profile. Systematic steps taken towards self-employment through different entrepreneurial activities can take the people of the district in general and women population in particular to unprecedented heights of development and empowerment.

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33. Ibid