CHAPTER VIII

Summary and Conclusion

The study ‘A Socio-Spatial Study on Rural Women and Empowerment among the identified Social Groups in Kamrup District, Assam’ has been designed with eight chapters viz. Introduction, Methodology, Geographical overview of the study area, Educational empowerment of women, Economic empowerment of women, Political empowerment of women, Women empowerment with respect to health and at the end the Summary and Conclusion.

The first chapter deals with the introduction, Statement of the problem, Review of literature with International status, National status and regional status, Significance of the study, Objectives and Research questions. Basic indicators of development like- health, nutrition, education and employment if considered, they seem to lag far behind the men folk. Women need to be empowered for gaining collective strength. Women’s empowerment helps women to make necessary transitions over their life courses. When proper education and environment are given, the social weaknesses can be broken up and women force can be used as a good human resource potential for the development of the nation. In order to give a fillip to empowerment of women in the country, an appropriate institutional mechanism and interventions have been consciously built into the development design by incorporating special components for Women.

However, the overall success in the empowerment mission of the country has been handicapped by lack of comprehensive effort for integrating all sections of the society irrespective of class, colour, or area. In this context, the success of
the mission has become challenging in Assam due to its wide physical and socio-cultural diversity added by the dominance of some problems social groups like Schedule Tribe, Schedule Caste, Char community and Tea garden community, as they are seen to be somewhat segregated from the mainstream.

The main objectives of the study are to draw a comparative analysis on the status of women belonging to the identified social groups with respect to different socio-economic indicators, the variation in decision making capacity of women among various social groups, the relationship between the decision making capacity of women with variables of empowerment. The study further attempts to find out the interrelationship among all the variables across the four sectors of women empowerment in respect to the sectors of education, economy, politics and health.

The major research questions formulated to address the objectives are as follows (i) Is there any difference in women empowerment Index among different social groups viz. Schedule Tribe, Schedule Caste, Char community, General and Tea garden labours? (ii) Is there any variation in women empowerment with respect to education, economic and health among the various social groups in the study areas? (iii) What is the relationship between the decision making capacity of women and the variables of women empowerment with regard to education, economic and health? (iv) Are the Self-Help-Groups differ in functioning in terms of formation, adoption of economic activities and performance level? (v) Is there any inter relation among the variables across the 3 sections of women empowerment viz. education, economic and health?

The study carries its significance as it deals with women and empowerment which is a new inclusion in the arena of gender geography in this part of the
country. The data base generated in the study may be used by the decision makers for local level planning and development. The study will pave light for further research activities on women and empowerment. The interdisciplinary relevance of the study has an emerging role to play in the academic arena.

The second chapter is meant for discussing the methodology of the present study. For the study, data have been collected both from primary and secondary sources. For collection of primary data, an intensive field survey has been carried out following a random sampling method with the help of questionnaire administered through personal interviews. A three stage simple random sampling plan has been followed to complete the field survey. The first stage of sampling consists of identification of community development blocks viz Boko, Chandrapur, Hajo, Kamalpur and Sonapur C.D. block to represent the Schedule Tribe, Schedule Caste, Char Community, General Caste and Tea Garden community respectively. The second stage of sampling considers selection of two sample villages from each of the blocks. For this purpose Composite Z-score method is employed using socio economic indicators implying status of women. As such, C.D. blocks may be viewed as per their status of women based on Composite Z-score. Kamalpur C.D. block depicts a relatively brighter picture occupying the first rank in terms of Composite Z-score followed by Boko, Sonapur, Chandrapur and Hajo C.D. block. The third stage of sampling unit takes into account identification of women Self – Help - Groups and then the households. Care has been taken so that household of different economic level may be covered. With regard to the study on political empowerment, women involved directly in Panchayati Raj Institutions are considered as sample units. At this stage, two gaon panchayats from each C.D. block have been selected, on the ground that the sample villages must fall under
the selected gaon panchayats. Three sets of Survey Questionnaires have been prepared. These are for (1) House Hold Surveye (2) Self Help Groups Surveye and (3) Survey for women member in Gaon Panchayats. A checklist has also to be used to collect relevant information. All the primary and secondary forms of qualitative data are transferred into quantitative forms and analyzed with the help of suitable quantitative techniques like weighted scores and Z-scores, Index of dissimilarity, Analyses of Variance (ANOVA), t-test, coefficient of correlation, Multiple Correlation etc. Results have been displayed with the help of maps, graphs, diagrams and tables based on which inferences are drawn.

The third chapter pertains to the discussion on geographical background of the identified C.D. blocks. The first section of the chapter is devoted to the physical setting of the study area viz. relief, geology, soil, drainage, climate, natural vegetation and flora and fauna. In the second section of the chapter discussion is made on cultural setting viz. agriculture, transport and communication facilities, educational facilities, health facilities, drinking water facilities, growth of population, density of population, description of the social groups and sample villages and occupation structure of the population in the C.D. blocks. The Boko C.D. block representing schedule tribe community, is dotted with scattered hillocks and Swamps. The block rises relatively steep towards southern boundary. The Boko river and the Kulsi river are the main south bank tributaries of the river Brahmaputra in the block. There are many reserved forest in the area covering dense and valuable forest. The total population of the block is 99935 persons out of which 50.92% are male and 49.07% are female and the density of population in the Boko C.D. block is 372.44 persons per sq km. The Sex ratio is 964, found to be higher than that of the other identified C.D. blocks.
The growth of population depicts gradual increases during the last three decades. The Schedule Tribe population in this block is 51.14% against the district average of 9.93% and the dominant tribes are Boro and Rabhas. Weaving is the compulsory activity for the Boro women. It is said that a girl who is not expert in weaving may not be selected for the marriage. In the Chandrapur C.D. block, three types of physiographic units are found like the hillocks, the plains and the marshy land.

Total population of the Chandrapur block is 37746 persons out of which male and female constitute 53.16% and 46.83% respectively. There found to be rapid growth of population during last three decades and the density of population is 487.80 persons per sq km. A number of Bengali immigrants are found in the block. Sex ratio of the block is found to be very low which is 881 and the district ratio is 901. The women literacy rate in the block is 55.34%. Schedule Caste population in the block is 17.12% against the district percentage of 10.60%. The Schedule Caste people in Assam are known as Kaibartas which are the aboriginal inhabitants in Assam and their original occupation is fishing. The women work participation rate is very low and 85.6% women are non-worker. Hajo at the northwest of Guwahati city is a unique place for pilgrimage of Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists. The block is identified to see the empowerment of women for char areas. Physiographically, the area can be divided into three distinct divisions viz. built up area with swamps and beels on the north, flood plain in the middle and sand bars along the Brahmaputra in the south where there is an active flood plain that gets inundated frequently during summer. There are many riverine sandbars locally known as ‘Char and Chaparies’ located in the areas. The region is primarily composed of alluvial soil. Young and immature soil covers more than 80% along the beels and swamps of the area. In the hilly tracts, red laterite soil is common. A number of
tributaries of the Brahmaputra flow through the area in an east-west direction and these river channels have different names at different places. The climate is characterized by typical monsoonal type of climate with extreme humidity, heavy summer rainfall and winter drought. The vegetation in the Hajo C.D. block is of mixed deciduous type. The area is very rich in fish-fauna. Some of the fishes live in the river and in equally numerous swamps. The peasants of char areas are hard working, skilled and gifted with indigenous knowledge of crop production. There is no rail network connectivity with the block. Transport and communication either by road or water is a major problem from the char areas of the block. Total population of the block is 163808 person of which, male is 51.90% and female is 48.09% and the density of population is 641.63 person per sq km which shows that density in the block is higher all the time than the all Assam average. The population growth rate is very high and the Sex ratio is 936 female per thousand male for the block. In the char areas, the population growth rate is very high due to high birth rate. The women literacy rate is 54.45%. The people in the char areas survive with struggles against the opposing circumstances of nature, the environment and situation have made the char dweller more tolerant and adventurous. Illiteracy, lack of communication, lack of markets for products, lack of medical service, lack of consciousness about family planning etc. are some other major obstacles in the path of socio-economic development of the char dwellers. The Kamalpur C.D. block is identified to observe the empowerment of general caste women. From the physiographic point of view, the block bears homogeneity in respect of relief, drainage, climate and vegetation etc. yet the north-eastern part of the block is slightly higher than the south-western part. The alluvial tract of the Brahmaputra valley, which covers a major portion of the division, comprises
mainly of silt, sand and clay with occasional pebble beds. The deciduous, semi-
deciduous and riverine vegetation are found in the block. The transport and
communication system of the block is quite developed. Total population is 82667
person out of which male is 52.47% and female is 47.52% and more than 90% people are of general caste people and the density of population is 616.82 persons
per sq. km. In the mediaeval age, the kings of Assam imported intellectual groups
from northern India. This Assamese caste Hindu people of Assam includes mainly
the Brahmins, Ganaks, Kayasths, Kalitas and Koches are known as general caste
people. The female literacy rate is 73.24% in the block. The Sonapur C.D. block
represents the tea garden community women. Physiographically the block is not
uniform where as the southern side of the block has high altitude than the northern
side. The area has two distinct types of terrain, the plains and the hills. The Digaru,
the Kalang and the Killing are the three main rivers that flow in the Sonapur C.D.
block area. Tea is an important beverage crops found in the block. The region is
very rich for many kind of fish fauna. Total population of the block is 124043, of
which male constitute 51.45% and female constitute 48.54% and the sex ratio is
calculated at 943 females per thousand males. The density of population in the
Sonapur C.D. block is 428 person per sq.km. which is lower than that of Kamrup
district i.e. 581 per sq.km. Women participation in the tea garden is an economic
compulsion with the knowledge of their husband and children and they are happy
with their job. Tea garden people are known as Adivasi community. Working
women in the tea garden areas are perhaps the most silent participation in
economic life. They mostly belong to the lower strata of the society.

Chapter 4 deals with the educational empowerment of women in the
identified C.D. blocks. Among the C D blocks the female literacy rate is found to
be highest in Kamalpur C.D block (74.8%) followed by Boko (61.6%), Hajo (60.1%), Sonapur (57.4%) and in Chandrapur C.D. block (57.3%) against the district rural average of 67.31%. It has been found from the study that the female literacy always remains lower than the male counterpart depicting a wide gender gap in the blocks. A wide variation in gender gap in literacy is found among the sample villages also. Gender gap in literacy is as high as 27% in the upper medium village of Sonapur C.D. block and as low as 4.5% in the lower medium village of Hajo C.D. block. Female literacy rate is as high 89.2% in Khudra Saraighat village of Kamalpur C.D. block and as low as 3% in No 4. Dokania Reserve village of Hajo C.D. block. When categorized the villages into literacy level, it is found that low literacy rate of villages are found in Hajo C.D. block and Kamalpur block shows an encouraging picture with 20% villages in high literacy level. The villages having low female literacy rates constitute a major share of the total villages irrespective of all the C.D. blocks. The spatial distribution of low and lower medium literacy rate of villages are located mostly in the hilly and reserved forest areas which seems to be true to Boko, Chandrapur and Sonapur C.D. block. Again these set of villages are found to be located in the char areas in the riverine sandbars in Hajo C.D. block. These villages remain relatively at a poorer level with respect to female literacy rate may be due to unfavorable physiographic settings. A comparative study based on literacy at village level shows that the Mean literacy rate is highest in Kamalpur (73.41%) followed by Boko (59.58%), Chandrapur (55.34%), Sonapur (54.24%) and Hajo (51.34%) C.D. block. Variation on literacy among the villages seems to be very wide in Hajo C.D. block with Coefficient of Variation at 48.26% and Kamalpur C.D. block is found to be consistent with Coefficient of Variation 11.57%. Women have yet to attain the highest referenced
educational level i.e. above secondary in almost all the sample villages excluding the general caste dominated villages i.e. in Kamalpur C.D. block. Prior to this level women hardly could manage a respectable share which vary from 18% to 8% across the villages of Boko, Chandrapur and Kamalpur C.D. block dominated by schedule tribe, schedule caste and general caste respectively. A majority of woman as about 10% to 24% left education after completing primary level. Again about half of the women who entered to the formal education at primary schooling, left without completing the level. The percentage shares of women in both below primary and primary level donot vary much across the villages. In char and tea garden community, illiterate women constitute a major share of women that is around 50% to 60% in lower and upper medium village respectively. The distributions of aged women are more either in illiterate level or in below primary level of education. Study reveals that there is no relationship between women literacy rate and women work participation rate. The Correlation coefficient of women literacy rate and women work participation rates stands at $r = (0.2296)$ in Boko, $r = (-0.1902)$ in Chandrapur, $r = (0.0249)$ in Hajo, $r = (-0.0768)$ in Kamalpur block and $r = (-0.2717)$ in Sonapur C.D. block. Educational empowerment of women has been studied using 19 variables from the point of accessibility to educational facility. Under the social welfare department various developmental schemes have been implemented by the government. Study reveals that access to various facilities for educational empowerment of women is far from the satisfaction level. There is a definite implications of Mid Day Meal in empowering girls education. It is seen in the present study that the status of access of vocational training remains at a poor stage where a nominal percentage of respondents expressed their satisfaction. The male child is more privileged and gets a better
chance in every aspects in the sample villages. It is seen in the present study that majority of the children, which is around 80% across all the sample villages, avail primary school within 1 km. distance. Most of the girl child could not complete the full course of primary education that is up to class IV. It is essential that a women or girl child must enjoy some basic facilities at home as their rights. Study reveals that most of the women are deprived of encouragement at home for perusing education, time for reading, time for playing and even lighting facilities at home. A girl child does not get extra time for playing. Thereby they are deprived of a very essential childhood rights. Heavy household work and responsibility is a main cause behind these deprivations. This stressed situation stands as an obstacle for empowering women in education particular and taking together all sectors in general. The poor infrastructure has a far flung negative impact on empowering women in the field of education. The status of women may be gauged by her participation in the decision making process. The decision making capacity of a women is considered as an Index of women empowerment. Therefore, in the present study an analysis is made on decision making capacity of the women in the sample villages. Data have been collected whether decision pertaining to Education, Economy and Health etc. are not taken by the wife or if taken whether jointly with husband or alone. In a response when husbands alone decides and women are not taken into confidence, is considered as the worst situation and so it is weighted with the lowest score of 1. Decision when taken by women alone is weighted with score 2. The situation when decision is taken by women jointly with her husband is considered as the best one and so it is weighted with the score of 3. Therefore, more is the women in best category of decision making better will be the level of women empowerment. In the present study these decision making
capacity is considered as the Women Empowerment Index. For the analysis the
decision making capacity of women is considered as a dependent variable that is
Y. In order to analyze the variation of variables selected to observe the educational
empowerment of women, the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) has been employed.
Out of 19 variables 6 are found to varied significantly viz. (EdX8) access to non-
formal education, (EdX10) access to co-curricular activities, (EdX13) access to
reward for good work, (EdX16) access to encouragement from guardian, (EdX17)
access to time for reading and (EdX18) access to time for playing. Rest of the
variables shows an insignificant variation. Another attempt is made to see the
relationship among the independent variables with regard to educational
empowerment of women. The result is displayed in the form of correlation matrix
which represent an overall scenario for all the sample villages of the study area.
With regard to the variable (EdX11) i.e. access to ‘Majoni scheme’ which in fact a
government incentive for empowering rural women in the field of education is
showing a strong correlation with (EdX8) access to non-formal education,( EdX9
)access to adult education facility and( EdX10) access to co-curricular activities.
This shows that the present empowerment programme has a far flung impact on the
aspects like adult education and non-formal education for enhancement of rural
women’s educational status. While examining the inter relationship among the
variables across the three sections of women empowerment i.e. education,
economy and health, with the help of multiple correlation it is seen that (EduX14)
i.e. completion of primary education has high positive correlation with an
important economic variable i.e. (EcoX1) access to Self Help Groups. Likewise,
same educational variable shows high positive correlation with a health variable
i.e. (HLTX19) access to free medicine.
Chapter 5 pertains to the discussions on the economic empowerment of women. Before going to the economic empowerment of women a brief discussion is made on the women work participation rate in the identified C.D. blocks. It is found that women work participation rate is comparatively high in Boko C.D. block representing schedule tribe women and low in Kamalpur C.D. block representing general caste women. Women work participation rate seems to be not satisfactory where it does not exceed more than 22% in the entire C.D. block. Higher participation in work implies more income and better well-being. But till now, the scope of gainful employment in favour of women is very much limited. It is not that they are not willing to work outside for remuneration, rather it is a fact that they are forced to remain within the four walls of their households for unpaid households management. Economic empowerment of women is studied under some accessibilities avail by the Self-Help-Group women members in the sample villages. Study reveals that the women members are totally at dark regarding even existing of some schemes in their local areas like Udisha schemes, Swa-shakti schemes, Nabow/ Baidew schemes etc. Yet the Self-Help-Group women members successfully maintain their group performance, repaid their loan very regularly, they generated fund among themselves at a low rate of interest, adopted different kind of economic activities like handloom, pig farming, livestock rearing and dry fish activity etc. In the sample villages, the women Self Help Groups (SHGs) member adopted 3 to 4 different types of economic activities and they are more active and organized. Study reveals that major share of SHGs members i.e. 60% of the lower medium villages takes loan for treatment, social ceremony and food where as in the upper medium village 80% SHGs members take loan for education, treatment, social ceremony and economic activity. It is found that with better
socio-economic status of women in a village number of economic activities adopted by women SHGs increases followed by their better investment and more profit i.e. income. It is further seen that these village have more savings culture which invariably will effects the process of empowering women in the field of economy in a positive way. The married women come forward to join in the Self-Help-Group. The relationship in terms of correlation coefficient between married women and membership in SHGs stands at \( r = 1 \) or close to 1 in all the sample villages. It is clearly depicted that the credit disburse to women SHGs seems to have no relation with that of the number of SHGs formed in the C.D. blocks as well as in the sample villages. There exist both strong and weak SHGs which demands further indepth analysis to address the underlying problems. Contrary to this the SHGs of char community although display a poor status in performance but they seem to be highly consistent with low Coefficient of Variation (C.V) depicting the SHGs at uniform level. In the present study it is found that the SHGs women members are imparted training by the government and there is an increasing trend in training imparted to women SHGs during the period from 2002 to 2007. A conclusion can be drawn that more the access to loan and adoption of economic activities more will be the access to practical training also. The correlation coefficient between trained SHGs women and income from economic activities in the sample villages stands at \( r = +0.407 \) to \( r = +0.685 \) in the entire sample villages. An examination to understand an importance of Self Help Groups in the empowerment as perceived by women respondent with the method of weighted score, it is seen that Self Help Groups has been playing a positive role in empowering rural women, the most in the Boko C.D. block representing schedule tribe population. It may be the result of successful functioning of Self-Help-Groups
in terms of distribution and repayment of internal loan etc. reflecting good cooperation and coordination among the group members. This positive outcome has another positive input towards gain of financial improvement, gain of political focusing; gain self confidence, gain knowledge base, gain social respect and improving decision making capacity. This block is followed by Kamalpur, Chandrapur and Hajo C.D. block. The existence of Self-Help-Groups remains as a question in respect of the sample villages of Sonapur C.D. block representing for tea garden community. The tea garden community has yet to function actively in the Self-Help-Groups. Even if these exist to sum extent the impact of which are found at a very poor level with a total score of 51 and 56 against the expected score of 120. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) has been employed to observe the economic empowerment of women with the help of the 19 variables where 16\(^{th}\) variables are found to varied significantly viz. (EcX1) access to Self-Help-Group, (EcX2) access to Loan facilities, (EcX3) access to Subsidy, (EcX6) access to adopting economic activity, (EcX7) access to Na-bow/Baidew scheme, (EcX8) access to Udisha scheme, (EcX9) access to Swa-shakti, (EcX10) access to join Gramyashree Mela/Sale centre, (EcX11) Access to medical facilities, (EcX12) completion of Primary Education, (EcX14) access to join social ceremony, (EcX15) access to family encouragement, (EcX16) gain social respect, (EcX17) gain political focusing, (EcX18) gain self confidence, (EcX19) Gain knowledge. Rest of the variables shows an insignificant variation. These are (EcX4) access to training facilities, (EcX5) access to loan repayment rate, (EcX13) access to time for economic work. Another attempt has been made to see the inter variable relationship with the help of Correlation Matrix which represent an overall scenario for economic empowerment of women in all the sample villages of the
study area. Study reveals that with regard to the variable (EcX1) access to Self-Help-Group which in fact a government incentive for empowerment of rural women in the field of economic is showing a strong positive correlation with (EcX13) access to time for economic work, (EcX14) access to join social ceremony, (EcX15) access to family encouragement, (EcX16) gain social respect, (EcX17) gain political focusing, (EcX18) gain self confidence and (EcX19) gain knowledge. Another variable (EcX6) i.e. access to adopting economic activity is highly related with (EcX4) access to training facilities of the women. (EcX18) Gain self confidence is positively related with (EcX1) access to Self-Help-Group, (EcX4) access to training facilities, (EcX6) access to adopting economic activity, (EcX8) access to Udisha scheme, (EcX14) access to join social ceremony, (EcX16) gain social respect and (EcX17) gain political focusing. To find out the inter relationship among the variables across the 3 sections of women empowerment viz. economic, education and health multiple correlation method have been adopted. The variable viz.(EcoX1) access to Self Help Groups is found to be highly related with (Edu X8) i.e. completion of primary education. Likewise high positive correlation is observed between the variable of (EcoX1) access to Self Help Groups with (HLTX1) access to safe drinking water facility which signifies a healthy stress free home environment followed by (HLTX10) children less than 3 implying less burden in childcare.

Chapter 6 discusses the political empowerment of women in the identified C.D. blocks. In the study it is discussed that necessary amendments have been made in the Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 for strengthening Panchayati Raj system and constitutional, administrative and financial rules have been framed. In the Goan panchayats Secretaries post are provincialised to strengthen the
Panchayati Raj System in the state. Participatory development of women in the gaon panchayats have been ensured through regular holding of gram sabha. During the two session of Panchayati Raj Election women empowerment has been given special emphasis. The Participation of women in the panchayats seems to maintain the required percentage share of 33%. At the Zila parishad level 36% of the elected representatives are won. At the intermediate level women won 37% of the seats and the percentage was 38 at the Gaon Panchyat stage. Capacity of the elected representatives has been developed through various training progeammes. Special courses have been organized on health, sanitation, education and other such issues for the elected representatives of Panchayats. Implementation of Rural development programmes through Panchayati Raj Institutions has been streamlined. Study reveals that in the gaon panchyats of the identified C.D. blocks, 93% women are Hindu and only 7% women are Muslim. Participation of schedule tribe women are seems to be as high as 73% in the gaon panchayats of Boko C.D. block. Participation of schedule caste women are seems to be as high as 80% in the gaon panchayats of Chandrapur C.D. block. In the gaon panchayats of Hajo and Sonapur C.D. block 2% women of char and tea garden community are represented in the Gaon panchayats election respectively. As high as 67% general caste women participated in the gaon panchayats of Kamalpur C.D. block. Women members i.e. 40% across the gaon panchayats belong to the age grouped of 36 to 45 years. participation of women members decreases after the age groupe of 45 years. This situation arises may be due to the fact that the Panchayati Raj Institutions of Assam are actively operated only for two sessions i.e. since 2001 and 2006. As gaon panchayats have not yet attained maturity in terms of span of time women members have not got opportunity for accruing experience in gaon panchayats. It is
very unlikely that inexperienced women at the higher age group will enter into the Panchayati Raj Institutions. In the age groups of 45 to 55 years, participation of women does not exceed more than 20% across the sampled Panchayati Raj Institutions in the study area. With regard to the marital status of women members of gaon panchayats, the women get involved in the political arena mostly after they get married only. Educational level of women members in the gaon panchayats remains at a poor state. A picture is almost clear that women with a very poor educational background will not be able to contribute to the gaon panchayats at a desired level. The gaon panchayats women constitute 87% as simple members only. Women members are not being able to achieve the status of president as 1 of 10 gaon panchayats is having women president. However, 3 women members hold the post of vice president. In percentage terms leadership at vice president level constitute 10% of the total gaon panchayats members. Political empowerment of women is observed in terms of some developmental programmes and awareness level of the women members. The awareness level is comparatively high among the gaon panchayats women of Kamalpur C.D. block representing for general caste people may be due to the high literacy rate. In the gaon panchayats of Hajo C.D. block, the awareness level of voting rights is relatively better may be due to the fact that the communities being the immigrants from the neighboring countries they are struggling for permanent citizenship. But 50% to 83% women members across the gaon panchayats are not aware about the reservation of 33% seats of women in the Panchayats as per 73rd amendment of the constitution in the year 1992. The women who are actively involved in the gaon panchayats are expected to shoulder the responsibility of fighting against the weakness of the society namely the social taboos to bring about its overall social welfare. A nominal share
of gaon panchayats women is aware of some of social taboos like child marriage, child labour and dowry. Goan panchayats are the part of the decentralized form of administration at the grassroots level. Therefore, members of gaon panchayats are supposed to take part in different developmental programmes of the government like the selection process of Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA), supervising the activities of Rogi Kalian Samiti, implementation of the various poverty alleviation and rural development training programmes and participation in Gram Sabha. Quite unfortunately the participatory level of women members in the study area shows a dismal picture which implies the fact that the women members are not exercising their minimum responsibility in this section. It is revealed that participation of women in Gram Sabha is almost negligible as participation level rest at 17% only in all the gaon panchayats of C.D. blocks excluding the Kamalpur C.D. block where participation level is found at marginally better with 33%. Unless women members don’t take part in the gram sabhas, they can not improve their participation level in different fields of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI). The study further reveals that lack of awareness and participation in various aspects of political field are due to poor support from the family members and shortage of spare time to take up political activities because of busy daily time schedule. As per the perception study based on weighted score method it is observed that the impact of political involvement in the empowering process in terms of gain political focusing, gain confidence and social respect impact is far below the ideal situation.

Chapter 7 throws light on empowerment of women with respect to health. Study reveals that drinking water facility is found to be much below the desired level as Tap water is almost absent in the sample villages. Tube well is procured by
a considerable percentage of households which ranges from 10% to 70% across the villages. Accessibility to the drinking water facility \((F = 13.86)\) seems to vary significantly in between and among the sample villages. Again this situation has an impact on the daily workload of women where women has to spend 30 minutes to 1 hour daily in fetching water for drinking purposes. The sanitation facility depicts a gray scene where sanitary latrine is availed by a small percentage of households which varies from 8% to 24% across the sampled villages. On an average, 16.36% households are availing sanitary latrine facilities against the state average of 35%. The sanitation facility also varies across the study area \((F = 8.13)\). Ventilation facility in the selected households is found to be absent in a considerable share of households of tea garden and char communities percentage of households being as high as around 80%. Poor ventilation is a cause of indoor air pollution and has a negative impact on health of the dwellers. Presence of ventilation in the households shows a significant variation in the study area \((F = 5.25)\). Total absence of solar energy and other renewable sources depicts lack of awareness among people as one of the causes. The medical facilities in the study area are studied in terms of distance required to avail the facilities like dispensary, hospital, maternity and child welfare centers, primary health center, primary health sub-centers, family planning centers and community health center. It is noticed that the villages with relatively better socio-economic status are availing medical facilities better within an average distance of around 3 km. than that of the lower level villages where villagers have to travel long distance of around 7 km. distance for availing medical facilities. In the present study only 22% house holds have been provided tetanus toxied vaccination, 16% house holds women are provided Iron /folic acid tablets and Pulse/polio vaccination is availed by 50% households. The aforesaid medical
facilities are found to be significantly varied in the study area with F value rest at 8.392.

By calculating the Index of dissimilarity of the marital status of women in the sample villages, it is observed that the marriage seems to vary according to the social groups. The median age at marriage is found to be as high as 19.4 years for schedule tribe and as low as 13.2 years for char communities as against 18 years of minimum legal marriage age in India. In an attempt to discuss the linkage between the daily workload of a women and her health condition. This figure seems to rest at similar levels across the sample villages. Again it is seen that women in the sample villages have diseases like backache, bodyache, head ache and cold /cough. Percentage of women suffer varies from 20% to 52% across the sample villages. These kind of illness arises due to high household work as reported by WHO -3-1992, Geneva.

The kitchen environment plays a crucial role in the health of a woman as all women spend a considerable amount of their life in the kitchen. A nominal share of households from schedule caste, tea garden and char communities has separate kitchen. Access to separate kitchen show a wide variation in between and among the social groups. Again most of the kitchens are found to be environmentally harmful, unsafe and unhygienic without any ventilation or chimneys for release of smoke. Most of cook stove are traditional meant for fuel wood only. Emission from such source condition, harmful pollutants combined with confined space without ventilation and long cooking hours results in health hazard causing respiration diseases to women. Smoke from biofuels contains several hazardous pollutants viz. particulate matter carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, formaldehyde, polycyclic organic matter including carcinogens. Exposure to indoor air
pollution from combustion of unprocessed biomass fuels is an important cause of morbidity and mortality in the rural areas where the use of biofuels is quite high. Further indoor air pollution is said to cause various respiratory diseases, viz. acute respiratory infections, chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases, lung cancer, asthma, tuberculosis, low birth weight, cataract etc. according to WHO /PEP/1992-3, Geneva, report. The role of women as a mother is crucial which is examined in the present study in terms of number of children per women. Women in the char community has maximum number of children mostly 3 to 4 and above 4, percentages of women being 40% and 30% respectively. The present analysis gives us a clear understanding that health condition of women is adversely affected as they are over taxed with repeated child birth under improper place of delivery.

Study reveals that out of 22 variables 21 are found to be varied significantly. While examining the relationship between the health variable with that of decision making capacity of women it is observed that the variables like (HLTX1) access to ventilation facility, (HLTX3) access to electrification facility, (HLTX7) access to scientific chulla and (HLTX9) access to separate kitchen have positive correlation. As these inaccessibility to the aforesaid facilities are the cause of some common diseases of women, established by the WHO /PEP/1992-3, Geneva, report, it is evident that poor is the accessibility poor will be health condition and low will be the decision making capacity of women. Likewise decision making capacity has positive relation with (HLTX12) access to medical facilities, (HLTX13) access to institutional delivery and (HLTX21) access to family planning measures. To find out the inter relationship among the variables across the 3 sections of women empowerment viz. health, education and economic multiple correlation method have been adopted. Study reveals that the variables
from (EcX1) access to Self Help Groups and (EcX6) access to adopting economic activity have positive correlation with (HLTX12) i.e. access to medical facility. Again (HLTX1) access to drinking water facility, (HLTX2) access to sanitation facilities, (HLTX3) access to ventilation facility and (HLTX7) access to scientific chulla have positive relation with (EcX6) i.e adoption of economic activity. The variable (HLTX9) access to leisure time has positive relation with (EcX1) access to Self Help Group, (EcX2 access to loan facility, (EcX3) access to subsidy, (EcX4) access to training facility (EcX7) access to Na-bow/ Baidew scheme, (EcX8) access to Udisha scheme, (EcX9) access to Swa-shakti and (EcX10) access to join Gramyashree Mela / Sale center.

Following suggestion can be drawn from the above discussion (i) Completion of primary education can be ensured when women is encouraged at home for pursuing education and not stressed with heavy household work. A girl child must enjoy some basic facilities as their childhood rights for enhancement of educational level like time for reading at home, time for playing at home and reward for good work. (ii) Emphasis should be given for better implementation of women empowerment schemes related to education as for example ‘Majoni Scheme’ so as to make the rural women accessible to non-formal education, adult education and vocational education. (iii) Measures should to taken to ensure uniformity and better functioning of Self Help Groups in order to minimize variations regarding social respect, political focusing, self confidence and knowledgebase of women in between and within the social groups as these variables have positive relations with decision making capacity of women. (iv) The mission towards achievement of primary education should be strengthened so that variation in completion of primary education by women may be minimized which
in turn will have a positive impact in the success of Self Help Groups towards economic empowerment of women. (v) In order to enhance women empowerment in terms of gain of political focusing, self confidence and social respect through the involvement in the gaon panchayats and different development programmes level of awareness has to be increased and affords will be given for assuring better support from the family. Concerted efforts are of paramount importance so that women can find spare time for getting them involved in the gaon panchayats activities. (vi) The Child Marriage Restrained Act of 1987, may be reinforced with desired level of awareness among the char and tea garden community for overall improvement of marriage age of women. (vii) Various rural development programmes related to implementation of new and renewable sources of energy, improve cook stoves and awareness drive should be strengthened so that kitchen environment of women may be improved and her burden in cooking also be minimized. (viii) The char and the tea garden community required urgent attention for overall improvement in the marriage age of women. The high median age at marriage in char and tea garden community in the study areas may be supported by relatively poor educational attainment of women in the respective community. (ix) Inequalities in the distribution of facilities like drinking water, sanitation, scientific cook stove and medical facility should be minimized by strengthening the various rural development programmes in order to get rid of the vicious cycle of poor accessibility, high household workload with less leisure time, poor health and less empowerment in the study area.

Like one small step for man, the whole study among several others, is a humble attempt towards understanding women empowerment with special focus on the identified social groups in Assam.