CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Issues Relating to Empowerment of Tribal Women:

Women in India, although constitute almost fifty percent of its total population, remain to be a neglected section of our society (Agarwalla, S., 2012). “Though men and women are declared to be equal before the law and though discrimination on the basis of sex is forbidden by the constitution, it is common knowledge that women are still at a disadvantage in India in many areas of life” (Das, B. B. & S. B. Bhuyan, 2012:43). According to FAO, “the most disadvantaged section of the society is the women; they are the ‘silent majority’ of the world’s poor. Seventy percent of the world’s poor are women. They face peculiar social, cultural, educational, political and allied problems” (Sharma, P. & Varma, S.K., 2008:46).

In Indian society, women are worshipped in the form of Saraswati, Lakshmi, Durga, Kali on the one side; but on the other side, they are tortured mentally and physically, burnt to death for dowry and sexually harassed by their male counterparts (Agarwalla, S., 2012). “They remain suppressed by their husbands and in-laws, spend most of their time in household chores and remain economically dependent throughout life and viewed as inferior in the man dominated society”. Moreover, in joint families, women have no freedom and privacy. They cannot expect good behavior from the in-laws too (Devi, M. T., 2013:65).
Prof. Amartya Sen, Nobel Prize winner, emphasized during his visit to India, “unless women are empowered, issues like health, literacy and population will remain unsolved problems of the developing country” (Das, B. B. & S. B. Bhuyan, 2012:44).

Similarly, in the words of Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, former Honourable President of India, “empowering women is a prerequisite for creating a good nation, when women are empowered, society with stability is assured” (Lavanya & Mahima, 2013:1).

The term ‘empowerment’ originates from the word ‘empower’ which means ‘to give power or authority and to enable or permit’. Empowerment, in general, means giving power to someone. The dictionary meaning of empowerment is ‘to give somebody the power or authority to do something’ and also ‘to give somebody more control over their own life or the situation they are in’ (Tomar, S., 2014:614).

The notion of ‘empowerment’ was introduced at the International Women’s Conference held at Nairobi of Nigeria in 1985 (Agarwalla, S., 2012). There are different opinions on empowerment. According to some opinion, empowerment is a process and vice versa, it is an outcome. Further, many consider it as both a process and an outcome (Pankaj, A. & R. Tankha, 2010).

The International Women’s Conference, held at Nairobi of Nigeria in 1985, defined empowerment as “a redistribution of social power and control of resources in favour of women” (Agarwalla, S., 2012:60).

The World Bank (2007) report defines empowerment as “the process of increasing the capacity of women to make choices and transform those choices into desired outcomes. Women empowerment has various outcomes, which may be social, economic or political in nature” (Rambo, M. C., 2012:59).
“Empowerment refers to increasing the social, political, educational, spiritual, gender or economic strength of individuals and communities” (Dhanasree, K. et al., 2014:9360).

In the mid 1980s, ‘women empowerment’ occupied an important position of debate on gender and development (Luttrel, C. et al., 2009). The third Millennium Development Goal (MDG) has comprised women’s empowerment and promotion of gender equality among the eight MDGs to improve women’s status (Saharia, R.P., 2014). The UNESCO has stated, “a person becomes empowered when she is able to make decision for herself and for others socially and politically” (Das, B. B. & S. B. Bhuyan, 2012:45). “Women empowerment refers to empowering women to change power relations between them and men in their favour in the different spheres of life such as economical, political, social and spiritual” (UNICEF, 2014:1). Likewise, “women empowerment means the power or capacity of women to regulate their day-to-day lives in the social, political and economic terms- a power which enables them to move from the periphery to the centre stage” (Saravanam, M., 2013:2). It refers to the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women in the society. It also refers to the process of protecting them from all forms of violence (Dandona, A., 2015). Further, “empowerment of women would mean equipping women to be financially independent and self-reliant, have positive esteem to enable them to face any difficult situation and able to participate in development activities” (Hazarika, D., 2011:200).

“So an empowered woman is self-confident and recognizes her own potentialities”. Empowerment not only gives womenfolk the capacity to influence in decision making process but also helps them in making her conscious of her financial contribution to
their household and the society (Agarwalla, S., 2012:59). Moreover, empowerment develops the capacity of women to take part in socio-economic activities as well as the decision making process. This, in turn, improves their livelihood situation (Sultana, S. & S.S. Hasan, 2010:43).

Empowerment has different dimensions – economic, social, political, psychological, etc. “Economic empowerment implies entitlement of employment, income, property, productive resources and benefit of development irrespective of gender difference” (Mandal R.K & M. Ete, 2010:52). “A woman is said to be economically empowered when she has both the ability to succeed and advance economically as well as the power to make and act on economic decisions” (Golla, et.al, 2011:4). Similarly, “women’s economic empowerment is the process which increases women’s real power over economic decisions that influence their lives and priorities in societies. It can be achieved through equal access to and control over critical economic resources and opportunities, and the elimination of structural gender inequalities in the labour market including a better sharing of unpaid care work” (Sida, 2009:7).

A number of research studies shows that increasing women’s economic participation develops national economies; increases household productivity; improves living standards; enhances well being of children; and can increase women’s agency and overall empowerment (UN Women, 2012). “Economic empowerment increases women’s access to economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, property and other productive assets, skill development and market information” (ADB, 2015:1, 2). Further, when women are economically empowered, society considers them as equal, and they achieve more self-respect and confidence through their contributions to their communities (Saravanam, M., 2013). “Economic
empowerment puts women in a stronger position and gives them the power to participate, together with men, in the shaping of society, to influence development at all levels of society, and to make decisions that promote their families and their own well-being” (Sida, 2009:9).

In a society, women’s status has been considered as the criteria for social justice in that society (Dhanasree, K, et.al., 2014). It has also been considered not only in terms of level of income, employment, education and health, but also in terms of their role played in the family, the community and the society (T. Y. Yamanoorappapa & M. Nagindrappa, 2014). Their status also depends on the social structure and the type of society in which they live (Chatterjee, P., 2014).

In Indian patriarchal society, males predominate in all family matters. However, in tribal communities, both the patriarchal and matriarchal family structures are to be found (ibid).

There are two different views among the researchers regarding the status of tribal woman. Some researchers opined that the tribal women enjoy higher social status compared to their non-tribal counterparts. While, others opined that the tribal women do not enjoy higher social status.

Mitra, A (2007) and Burman, Roy (2012) have opined that because of the system of matrilineal descent, matrilineal residence and inheritance of property through the female line, the Garo and Khasi tribes of North East India assign relatively higher position to women (ibid). Similarly, Hutton (1921), Furer- Haimendorf (1943), Firth (1946) and Hunter (1973) have also reported higher social status of women among the Tharus of U.P., and Nagas and Garos of North East. They, in their studies, reported that
among the Tharus of U.P. and Nagas and Garos of North-East, there is no child marriage and no stain on widows (Sing & Rajyalakshmi, 1993). In tribal families, the birth of a female baby is not considered as an evil omen for their households; rather, it is considered as a good omen as well as an economic asset of their households and their society. Moreover, girls are permitted by their respective families to take part in all social programmes too. In addition to this, the tribal women have given the rights and freedom to select their respective bridegroom. They have also given the liberty to divorce their respective husbands and remarry easily. Instead of following dowry system, there is bride price, showing higher social status of the tribal women (ibid).

On the other hand, Dalton (1872), Grigson (1938) and Rivers (1973) have reported low status of tribal women. According to them, tribal women do not have property rights in patriarchal family structure. They are even paid low wages than their male counterparts for the same work. Even in some tribal communities, women cannot cross the gate of a temple too (ibid). Moreover, the tribal women do not have decision making power in their family matters. In addition to having an equal share with men in economic as well as social responsibilities, they have to take the prime responsibility of their household works. Further, in certain tribes, only male can participate in their fore-fathers worships (Sing & Rajyalakshmi, 1993).

In rural tribal society, women play a significant role for the survival of their households. “The well-beings of the tribal community, as that of any other community, depend importantly on the status of their women” (Sing & Rajyalakshmi, 1993:9). Women, in tribal society, take part deliberately and actively in all agricultural activities along with their male counterparts. They work hard for the livelihood of their family. Besides preparing food and performing other household activities, the work of
collecting fuel from the forest is also done by women. Some of them are working as
labours in construction works, households industries too (Das, S. K., 2012). “Women
are considered to be one of the strongest pillars of house in tribal society” (Barik, S. K.,
2012:8324).

Unfortunately, the tribal women are underestimated and undervalued (ibid). They
‘often face the problems of food insecurity, malnutrition, access to education and health
care services, domestic violence and rape’ (Puttaraja & O.D. Heggade, 2012:173). In a
nut shell, the tribal women are ‘still lagging far behind in the different walks of life
including education, employment, social position, good health and empowerment’ (T.

In recent times, the tribal women empowerment has been considered as a crucial
issue in determining their status. Their primitive living standards, low level of literacy,
economic, social and political backwardness hasten the urgent need of their
development (Das, S.K., 2012). As the responsibility of maintaining households is
generally in the hands of tribal women, their improvement is necessary not only for
themselves but also the well being of their households and the society as a whole.

Hence, the need of the hour is to empower the tribal women economically,
socially and politically so that they can live with equality and dignity. In order to stride
forward on a par with men, there is the need for empowerment of tribal women.
“Empowerment of tribal women is a challenging issue in the present scenario; without
empowering them, meaningful inclusive growth of the country is not possible”
(Bhukya, D., 2014:116).
1.2 A Brief Account of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA):

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), previously known as National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), was notified on 7th September, 2005 (MGNREGA Sameeksha, 2012). The Act was enacted with an aim of increasing the purchasing power of the people living in rural areas of the country by providing semi or unskilled manual work to them (Kadrolkar, 2012).

The primary objective of MGNREGA is to enhance the livelihood security of rural households by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment to every household in a year whose adult members are willing to undertake unskilled manual work (The Gazette of India, 2005). “The significance of NREGA lies in the fact that it creates a right based framework for wage employment programme and makes the government legally bound to extend employment to those who demand it” (Shah, D. & S. Mohanty, 2010:540). “MGNREGA ranks among the most powerful initiatives ever undertaken for transformation of rural livelihood in India” (Guha, A. & G. Mazumder, 2015:315).

The Act has some other objectives too. These include- generating productive assets in rural areas, protecting the environment, rejuvenation of natural resources, empowering the rural women and reducing rural-urban migration (Harish, B. G. et. al., 2011).

The NREGA was renamed as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) on 2nd October, 2009 in connection with the birth date of M. K. Gandhi, father of our nation (Sharma, A., 2013). It is also known as Mahatma
Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), which was previously known as National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS). “It is the first nation-wide employment scheme that guarantees employment opportunities legally to India’s rural population” (A. Gowhar Bashir, 2014:55).

In India, the MGNREGA was implemented in a phased manner. Phase I was started on February 2, 2006 by covering 200 most backward districts of the country (MGNREGA Operational Guidelines, 2013). In Phase I, seven districts of Assam viz. Bongaigaon, Dhemaji, Goalpara, Karbi-anlglong, Kokrajhar, Lakhimpur and North Cachar Hills were included (Borah, P. 2013). Subsequently, an additional 130 districts of the country were added in Phase II during 2007-08 (MGNREGA Operational Guidelines, 2013) including five districts of Assam. Later, it was implemented in the remaining rural districts of India from April 1, 2008 in Phase III (ibid) where remaining fourteen districts of Assam (including Nagaon district) came under the purview of the Act. The Act is now effective in the entire country with the exception of the districts that have a 100 percent urban population (NREGA Operational Guidelines, 2008).

The salient features of the MGNREGA are as follows:

- Adult persons, irrespective of gender, caste or religion, of a rural household, desire to undertake unskilled manual work, can apply for registration in writing or orally to their local Gram Panchayat office. The unit for registration is a household. Each household is entitled to a 100 days of guaranteed wage-employment every year [MGNREGA Sameeksha, 2012].
- The Gram Panchayat, after verification of the place of residence including the age of the willing household member / members, issues a Job Card to the applicant households. Each Job Card has a unique identification number [ibid].

- Job Card should be issued to the eligible households within a fortnight of the application [MGNREGA Operational Guidelines, 2013].

- Job Card contains the photographs of all adult members of the household desire to work under MGNREGA, which is free of cost [NREGA Operational Guidelines, 2008].

- A Job Card holder household may submit a written application to the local Gram Panchayat Office or Block Office for employment, mentioning the time and duration for which work is sought [MGNREGA Report to the people, 2013].

- Gram Panchayat issues a dated and signed receipt of the written application to the applicant households [ibid].

- Minimum period of employment is 14 days [NREGA Operational Guidelines, 2008].

- In case, employment is not given within 15 days from the date of receiving the written application for employment, then daily unemployment allowance has to be paid by the concerned State Governments to the applicant households as per the Act [ibid].

- MGNREGA wages are to be paid to the beneficiary households according to the Minimum Wages Act 1948 for agricultural labourers in
the state, if not, the Center notifies a wage rate which will not be less than Rs. 60 per day [ibid].

- MGNREGA wages are to be paid to the beneficiary households according to piece rate or daily rate [ibid].

- The payment of wages has to be done on a weekly basis and not later than a fortnight in any case [ibid].

- Equal wages will be provided to both men and women workers of the scheme [ibid].

- Payment of wages is mandatorily done through the Bank / Post Office beneficiary accounts [MGNREGA Report to the people, 2013].

- Work should be provided within 5 k.m. radius of the village where the worker resides at the time of application. If the work is provided beyond 5 k.m., then extra wages of 10 percent are payable to meet additional transportation and living expenses [ibid].

- At least one third of the beneficiaries who have registered and applied for work under the scheme should be provided to women [ibid].

- Facilities such as crèches, drinking water, shade, etc. have to be provided at all active worksites [ibid].

- In response to the frequent demand of the States, the provision in Schedule I has been amended by the Indian Parliament vide notification dated 4th May, 2012 [MGNREGA Operational Guidelines, 2013]. The list of permissible works under MGNREGA as per amended schedule I is presented in Annexure: I.
• In terms of cost, at least 50 percent of the works are to be executed by the Gram Panchayats. A 60:40 wage and material ratio has to be maintained [MGNREGA Sameeksha, 2012].

• No contractor and machinery is allowed in work execution [MGNREGA Report to the people, 2013].

• Social audit has to be done by the Gram Sabha twice a year [ibid].

• Grievance redressal mechanism has to be put in place for ensuring respective implementation processes [MGNREGA Sameeksha, 2012].

• All information regarding MGNREGS must be displayed in a public notice. All accounts and records pertaining to the scheme should also be available for public scrutiny [ibid].

As far as the implementation structure of MGNREGA is concerned, Gram Panchayat exists at the bottom in the structure. Gram Panchayat is authorized to select, design and implement 50 percent of the works under MGNREGA (MGNREGA Report to the people, 2013).

Block Panchayat acts as an Intermediate Panchayat. It monitors and coordinates the plans and works at the block level. MGNREGA has permitted the State government to appoint a Programme Officer, who is not below the rank of Block Development Officer, at the intermediate Panchayat. The Programme Officer acts as a coordinator of MGNREGA activities at the block level. He shall function under the direction, control and superintendence of the District Programme Coordinator (The Gazette of India, 2005).
District Panchayat coordinates the activities of the scheme at the district level. At the district level, the State government has designated a District Programme Coordinator. The District Programme Coordinator can be either the Chief Executive Officer of the district Panchayat, or the District Collector, or any other district level officer of similar rank. District Panchayat also monitors and supervises the MGNREGS in the district (ibid).

State Government has given the authority by the Act to set up a State Employment Guarantee Council for taking advice from them regarding implementation of MGNREGA in the state. The State Employment Guarantee Council is also responsible for monitoring and evaluating the MGNREGA activities in the state (ibid).

Central Government exists at the top in the structure of implementation. It is responsible to set up the Central Employment Guarantee Council. It takes advice from the Central Employment Guarantee Council on MGNREGA implementation. It not only prepares budget and disburse funds, but also issues operational guidelines for the effective implementation of the Act. Moreover, it also undertakes independent evaluation, monitoring and research on the performance of MGNREGA activities (MGNREGA Operational Guidelines, 2013 & The Gazette of India, 2005).

The MGNREGA states that the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) should be the key agencies for planning and implementing the scheme (IIM, 2009). The PRIs consist of elected executive bodies of people’s representatives at the village level known as *Gram Panchayat*, at the block level known as *Anchalik Panchayat* and at the district level known as *Zila Parishad*. They are directly involved in the MGNREGS.

The Panchayats at the village level are responsible for the following activities:
• Creating awareness among the people living in rural areas regarding MGNREGS [MGNREGA Operational Guidelines, 2013].
• Receiving and verifying applications for registration [ibid].
• Registering households and issuing Job Cards to the eligible households concerned [ibid].
• Receiving written applications for employment from the registered households [ibid].
• Issuing dated and signed receipts to the registered households against their written application for employment [ibid].
• Allotting work to the employment seeking households within fifteen days of submitting the written application for employment [ibid]
• Identifying works to be taken up under the scheme as per recommendations of the Gram Sabha [The Gazette of India, 2005].
• Preparing development plan and maintaining a shelf of possible works to be taken up under the scheme [ibid].
• Forwarding proposals for the development projects to the Programme Officer for preliminary approval [ibid].
• Preparing annual report containing the facts and figures including the achievements relating to the implementation of the scheme within its jurisdiction [MGNREGA Operational Guidelines, 2013].
• Convening Gram Sabha for planning and social audit [ibid].
• Maintaining records and accounts of the works undertaken [ibid].
• Making availability of documents relating MGNREGS such as Muster Rolls, bills, vouchers, measurement books, copies of sanction orders and
other connected books of accounts and papers for conducting social audit [ibid].

- Monitoring implementation of MGNREGA at the village level [ibid].
- Conducting periodical survey to assess the demand for work under MGNREGS [ibid].

“A Gram Sabha is a body of all persons entered as electors in the electoral roll for a Gram Panchayat” (MGNREGA Sameeksha, 2012:2). It is responsible for the following activities:

- Gram Sabha recommends works to be taken up in the Panchayat. It is the final authority to determine which works will be started under the scheme [MGNREGA Operational Guidelines, 2013].
- To monitor and supervise the execution of works within the Gram Panchayat [The Gazette of India, 2005].
- To conduct regular Social Audits of all the works undertaken within the Panchayat [ibid].

The Panchayats at the Block level are responsible for the following activities:

- To approve the block level plan for forwarding it to the district level Panchayat for final approval [MGNREGA Operational Guidelines, 2013].
- To supervise and monitor the projects under MGNREGA taken up at the Gram Panchayat and the block level [ibid].
- To perform such other functions relating MGNREGS as may be assigned to it by the State Council [ibid].
The Panchayats at the District level are responsible for the following activities:

- To approve and finalize the block-wise shelf of projects to be taken up under the scheme [The Gazette of India, 2005].
- To supervise and monitor the projects under MGNREGS taken up at the block level and the district level [ibid].
- To perform such other functions relating MGNREGS as may be assigned to it by the State Council [ibid].

MGNREGA is enacted by the Central Government in such a way that ‘it reflects several important provisions which are of the special interest to women workers’ (Borah, P. et. al., 2013:70). These include:

*First,* the Act mandates 33 percent reservation of work for the women workers. While providing employment, ‘priority shall be given to women in such a way that at least one third of the beneficiaries shall be women who have registered and requested for work under this Act’ (The Gazette of India, 2005:14).

*Second,* the wage is same for both men and women workers under the scheme. “Equal wages shall be paid to both men and women workers and the provisions of the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 shall be compiled with” (MGNREGA Operational Guidelines, 2013:69).

*Third,* the Act provides for childcare facilities at the worksite. “In case the number of children below the age of six years accompanying the women working at any site are five or more, a crèche will need to be provided” (MGNREGA Operational Guidelines, 2013:66). “This is an important provision given that, in large parts of the
country, there are no childcare arrangements for working women” (Khera, R. & N. Nayak, 2009:50).

Fourth, the Act stipulates that ‘as far as possible, employment shall be provided within a radius of 5 kilometers of the village where the applicant resides at the time of applying’ (The Gazette of India, 2005:15). Moreover, in the allocation of work, the guidelines instruct that ‘women, especially single women, and older persons should be given preference to work on worksites nearer to their residence’ (MGNREGA Operational Guidelines, 2013:22). This provision has also encouraged the rural women wage seekers to work under the scheme.

Fifth, the MGNREGA mandates at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment to every household in a financial year whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work (The Gazette of India, 2005). The Act gives no instruction on how each household’s quota of 100 days is shared among the willing household members. This implies that there is copious scope for women to work under the scheme (Khera, R. & N. Nayak, 2009).

Apart from these, there are some other issues which attract the rural women wage seekers to work under MGNREGA. These include- unskilled manual work, ‘flexibility in terms of choosing periods and months of employment’ (Pankaj, A. & R. Tankha, 2010:45), absence of contractors, act as member in Vigilance and Monitoring Committee, participating in social audit, etc.

Thus, MGNREGS covers all the weaker sections of the society including the rural poor women in the country.
The state wise percentage of women participation under MGNREGS in India is presented in *Annexure: II*.

### 1.3 Rational for Selecting Nagaon District:

There are 27 nos. districts in Assam (Statistical Handbook, Assam, 2012). Among them, Nagaon district has been selected deliberately for the purpose of the study. The reasons behind the selection of the district are:

- Nagaon is centrally located district of Assam.
- As on 2011, Nagaon has the highest number of Gram Panchayats and Anchalik Panchayats among the districts of Assam (ibid).
- In terms of expenditure on the implementation of MGNREGA during 2012 – 2013, Nagaon ranks top among the districts of Assam (Statistical Handbook, Assam, 2013).

### 1.4 Rational for Selecting Kathiatoli Development Block as Study Area:

There are 20 nos. development blocks in Nagaon district of Assam (Census of India, 2011). Out of them, Kathiatoli Development Block has been selected purposely for the study. The reasons behind the selection of the block are:

- As per Census data of 2011, in terms of geographical area, Kathiatoli development block ranks top among the development blocks of Nagaon district.
• As per 2011 Census data, Kathiatoli development block has the highest numbers of inhabited villages and second highest numbers of tribal women population among the development blocks of Nagaon district.

• In Kathiatoli development block, no scientific and comprehensive studies in connection with the Employment Generation Programmes like MGNREGA have been conducted till now.

• It is one of the development blocks under Nagaon district where tribal people in general and tribal women in particular are remaining still very backward.

1.5 Statement of the Problem:

To improve the socio-economic condition of the weaker sections of the society, especially rural poor women, employment generation for them is essential. By raising productivity and promoting more efficient use of abundant resources available, employment opportunities can be generated that accelerates the process of economic development resulting in promotion of women’s position. Therefore, the programmes and policies of the government need to be emphasized on employment generation especially for rural women.

The Constitution of India has guaranteed different provisions for women. Article 14 guarantees equality, Article 15(1) prevents discrimination by the state, Article 16 guarantees equality of opportunity and Article 39 (d) guarantees equal pay for equal work (Das, B. B. & S. B. Bhuyan, 2012). “The Constitution not only grants equality to women but also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women” (Begum, R., 2014:216).


“Though women today are conscious of their rights, duties and laws, though they are given equal rights with their male counterparts in almost all spheres of life, yet we find that women still have to fight for justice and there is a great cry for women empowerment all over the world” (Agarwalla, S., 2012:58, 59).

To alleviate poverty and hunger, and improve the situation of women, the Government of India has implemented various schemes in the country. One of such
schemes benevolent for rural poor women is Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) (Das, D., 2012). The prime goal of MGNREGA is not to empower the rural women and therefore, it is not included in its main objectives (De, Debasree, 2014). However, some philanthropic provisions like priority for women in the ratio of one-third of total workers, equal wages for men and women workers, and the crèche facility for the children of women workers were included in the Act. This is done to ensure that women living in rural India benefit from the scheme in an effective manner.

“Molyneux (1985) divided women’s needs into practical and strategic”. Practical needs are related to short term issues like food, cloths, housing, etc. Similarly, strategic needs are related to the long term issues of developing the ability to change the position of subordination and discrimination (Pankaj, A. & R. Tankha, 2010:46). MGNREGA plays a significant role to meet the practical as well as the strategic needs of women (Chatterjee, S., 2014). “NREGS meets the practical needs of women workers in the short-run and their strategic needs in the long-run”. From the earnings of MGNREGS, ‘women are able to buy food, clothes, medicines, etc. that addresses their short-term needs’. Similarly, ‘their reduced dependence for these basic needs on male family members addresses the issue of subordination and subjugation in the long-term’ (Pankaj, A. & R. Tankha., 2010:46). Thus, MGNREGS helps rural women to meet their practical needs as well as their strategic needs who have come under its purview.

MGNREGA gives plentiful scope to women living in rural areas of the country to take part in planning and implementation of the programme too (Savaiah, H.M.C. & F.M. Jayaraj, 2014). Generally, women in rural areas are staying at home for doing their household works. But after the implementation of MGNREGA, they have got the
opportunity to share their feelings and experiences with their counterparts at MGNREGS worksites. Besides, they have got the opportunity to meet and talk with the bank and government officials involved in the scheme. This, in turn, helps them to develop their self-confidence level.

Similarly, MGNREGA has given the opportunity to rural women to earn and spend for their basic personal / household needs who have worked under this flagship programme. “MGNREGA empower women by giving them a scope of independent earning and spend some amount for their own needs” (Das, D., 2012:212).

It is believed that the schemes benevolent for rural women would improve the socio-economic conditions and the empowerment level of the women beneficiaries of that scheme. Therefore, MGNREGS has assumed significance in this context. “The implementation of MGNREGA could be observed to be a boon to unemployed rural women in India, as it can enhance the socio-economic and political empowerment of rural women” (Shihabudheen, N., 2013:272).

1.6 Objectives of the Study:

The objectives of the present study are:

- To examine the socio-economic characteristics of tribal women workers of MGNREGS in Kathiatoli development block.
- To review implementation process of MGNREGA in the said block.
- To examine the awareness of tribal womenfolk working under MGNREGS regarding different provisions of MGNREGA.
To assess the impact of MGNREGS on economic empowerment of tribal women workers of the scheme of the said block.

1.7 Research Questions:

In the course of investigation, attention will be made to seek answer to the following questions:

- Whether tribal women workers of MGNREGS are aware of different provisions of MGNREGA?
- Whether tribal women workers of MGNREGS are able to enhance their income level after working under MGNREGS?
- Whether tribal women workers of MGNREGS are able to develop their saving capacity after working under MGNREGS?
- Whether tribal women workers of MGNREGS are able to increase their spending capacity after working under MGNREGS?

1.8 Data Base and Methodology:

The present study is mainly based on primary data collected from the MGNREGS beneficiary tribal households residing in Kathiatoli Development Block of Nagaon district.

The field survey was conducted during the period from May, 2013 to April, 2014.
In this section, an attempt has been made to prepare a methodology of the present study. It includes Data Source, Sample Design, Data Collection-tools and techniques and Analysis of Data.

### 1.8.1 Data Source:

The study uses both primary and secondary data. The primary and secondary data have been collected from the following sources:

#### 1.8.1(a) Sources of Primary data:

Primary data have been collected from 300 sample MGNREGS beneficiary tribal households scattering in 10 sample tribal inhabited Gram Panchayats falling under Kathiatoli development block of Nagaon district of Assam. Apart from household survey, relevant field data / information are also collected through informal discussions with the elected representatives of respective Gram Panchayats and the implementing staff involved in MGNREGA in the block. Besides, to get the required information about the study area, one village headman from each of the sample Gram Panchayats is also interviewed.

#### 1.8.1(b) Sources of Secondary data:

Secondary data have been collected from the official websites of Ministry of Rural Development, Govt. of India; National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD); Census of India, 2011; Economic Survey, Government of India, etc. Further, required data are also collected from State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD), Assam; Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Assam; Assam Institute of Research for Tribal
and Scheduled Caste, Assam; District Rural Development Agency (DRDA), Nagaon; Block Development Officer’s office, Kathiatoli; respective Gram Panchayat offices; etc.

The various sources used to collect secondary data also include different studies and reports of MGNREGA published by Government and Non-Government Organizations, monographs, research reports, journals, magazines, books, periodicals, unpublished literature, etc. Moreover, internet has also served as an efficient source of secondary data.

1.8.2 Sample Design:

A multi-stage sampling with blending of Purposive and Simple Random Sampling methods has been adopted in the present study. Simple Random Sampling refers to that sampling technique in which each and every unit of the population has an equal chance of being selected. On the contrary, Purposive Sampling refers to that sampling technique in which items for the sample are deliberately selected by the researcher (Gupta, S.P., 1993).

There are three stages in which sample process has been carried out. The first stage is the selection of Tribal Inhabited Gram Panchayats; second stage is the selection of MGNREGS Beneficiary Tribal Households and the third stage encompasses the selection of Tribal Women Workers of MGNREGS.

1.8.2(a) Selection of Tribal Inhabited Gram Panchayats:

In the first stage, the tribal inhabited Gram Panchayats (GPs) have been selected. The purposive sampling method has been adopted to select the GPs. There are 19 nos. GPs in Kathiatoli development block. Out of which there are 17 nos. of GPs where
tribal people inhabit. From the tribal inhabited GPs in the block, 10 nos. GPs were selected for the study. The criterion of selecting GPs is having the highest number of tribal women population in the respective GPs.

The selected GPs are – Barpathar, Dakhin Nonoi, Deb-Narikoli, Kondoli, Longjap, Nambor Lalung Gaon, Niz Kathiatoli, Rangaloo, Singimari and Tetelisara.

1.8.2(b) Selection of MGNREGS Beneficiary Tribal Households:

MGNREGS beneficiary tribal households have been selected in the second stage. The random sampling method has been adopted to select the tribal households. As the numbers of MGNREGS beneficiary tribal households in the selected Gram Panchayats (GPs) are more, therefore, 30 nos. tribal households from each of the selected GPs were chosen for the study. For this purpose, all MGNREGS beneficiary tribal households having women members working under the scheme of the selected GPs were identified with the help of elected representatives of the respective GPs and thereafter sample of tribal households were chosen randomly.

In this way, 300 nos. MGNREGS beneficiary tribal households from the selected GPs have been taken as sample for the purpose of investigation.

1.8.2(c) Selection of Tribal Women Workers of MGNREGS:

In the third stage, the work of selection of tribal women workers working under MGNREGS has been performed. Using purposive sampling method, one tribal woman worker of MGNREGS from each of the selected tribal households was chosen for the study.
In this way, 300 nos. tribal women workers of the scheme from the selected MGNREGS beneficiary tribal households have been taken as sample to elicit the required information for the study.

Thus, altogether, 10 nos. tribal inhabited Gram Panchayats, 300 nos. MGNREGS beneficiary tribal households and 300 nos. tribal women workers of MGNREGS have been taken as sample for doing the present research work.

The sample frame for the present study is presented in Table: 1.1

**Table: 1.1**

Sample Frame for the Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Development Block</th>
<th>Name of Tribal Inhabited Gram Panchayats</th>
<th>No. of MGNREGS Beneficiary Tribal Households</th>
<th>No. of Tribal Women Workers of MGNREGS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>BARPATHAR</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>DAKHIN NONOI</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>DEB NARIKOLI</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>KONDOLEI</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>LONGJAP</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>NAMBOR LALUNG GAON</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>NIZ KATHIATOLI</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>RANGALOO</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>SINGIMARI</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>TETELISARA</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>300</strong></td>
<td><strong>300</strong></td>
<td><strong>300</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Source: Field Survey_
1.8.3 Data Collection - tools and techniques:

Interview schedule has been prepared carefully to collect the primary data from the respondents. The schedule is developed keeping in mind the objectives of the present study.

The interview schedule consists of four parts:

*Part I* of the interview schedule covers the questions relating to the socio-economic characteristics of the tribal women workers of MGNREGS in the study area. These include - Age Structure, Educational Background, Religious Composition, Marital Status, Family Size, Family Type, Primary Occupation, Possession of Agricultural Land, Housing Status, Sources of Lighting Used, Sources of Drinking Water Used and Possession of Asset of the tribal women workers of the scheme.

*Part II* of the interview schedule contains questions relating to the implementation process of MGNREGA in the study area. While setting questions regarding implementation process of the Act, Dissemination of information about MGNREGS, Registration process, Employment details, Wage payment details, Worksite details and Transparency and Accountability issues of MGNREGA are taken into consideration.

*Part III* of the interview schedule contains questions pertaining to the awareness of the tribal women workers regarding different provisions of MGNREGA such as 100 days of employment guarantee, issuing Job Cards within 15 days of registration, submitting written application for employment, minimum wages fixed by the government, equal wages for men and women workers, payment of wages within a fortnight, payment of unemployment allowance, works within the radius of 5 km of the
village, provision of basic facilities at worksites, reservation for women workers, role of gram sabha and conducting social audit.

Part IV covers the questions relating to the impact of MGNREGS on economic empowerment of tribal women workers of the scheme.

Moreover, to get the overall information of the block, a separate block schedule is also prepared.

Personal interview method has been adopted for canvassing the schedules. Audio-video equipments like camera, tape recorder, etc. are also utilized for collecting primary data.

1.8.4 Analysis of Data:

Keeping in view the objectives of the study in mind, the primary data which are collected from the sample MGNREGS beneficiary tribal households have been tabulated to analyse the socio economic characteristics of tribal women workers of MGNREGS, implementation process of MGNREGA, awareness of tribal women workers of the scheme regarding different provisions of MGNREGA and the impact of MGNREGS on economic empowerment of tribal women workers of the scheme in the study area.

The analysis has been made using simple statistical tools like percentages, ratios, averages, etc. Moreover, diagrammatic representation of data is also incorporated to strengthen the field data.
To test the significant difference of aware and unaware of the sample tribal women workers of the scheme regarding different provisions of MGNREGA, *Binomial test* has been applied using popular statistical package SPSS version 16.

Further, *Paired 't' test* has been applied to test the income, savings and expenditure of the sample tribal women workers before and after working under MGNREGS using SPSS version 16.

1.9 Scope of the Study:

The present study is emphasized mainly on the assessment of impact of MGNREGS on the economic empowerment of tribal women workers of the scheme working in Kathiatoli Development Block of Nagaon district of Assam. Besides examining the socio-economic characteristics of the tribal women workers of MGNREGS, the study also reviews the implementation process of the programme in the said block. The study has also made an attempt to examine the awareness of tribal women workers of the scheme regarding different provisions of the Act.

Although the area of the study is confined to Kathiatoli Development Block of Nagaon district, the review of literature has been presented in the state as well as the national perspectives too.

1.10 Utility of the Study:

MGNREGA is a potent tool to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor in rural areas of the country. The success of the programme depends on the process of implementation followed by the implementing agencies involved. In addition to this, its
success depends on the awareness of the rural people regarding different provisions of the Act and their active participation in the programme.

The present study is a sincere attempt to analyse and assess both the implementation and impact of MGNREGS on economic empowerment of tribal women workers working under the scheme. It is expected that the result of the study will help the implementing authorities to understand the loopholes of implementation process of MGNREGA, if any, in the study area. It will also provide valuable insights to the government for implementing the scheme successfully.

Moreover, it is also expected to help the policy makers in formulating better policy and devising strategy for rural women, especially for rural tribal women in future.

1.11 Limitations of the Study:

Major limitations of the study are presented as follows:

- Due to time and money constraint, the researcher has tried to assess the impact of MGNREGS on economic empowerment of tribal women workers of the scheme only.
- The data used for analysis are collected from the sample MGNREGS beneficiary tribal households of the block only.
- The respondents have provided the required data from their memory. Hence, the data may suffer from recall bias.
- Findings and observations made in the study are based on respondents’ opinions and responses.
- The study focuses on a particular block of Nagaon district of Assam. Hence, it may not be applicable in any other parts of the country.

1.12 Structure of the Thesis:

The present research work has been presented in Six Chapters.

Chapter-I: Introduction

This chapter contains a brief account of some issues relating to empowerment of tribal women. In addition to this, an attempt has also been made to present briefly about Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act; Rational for selecting Nagaon District; Rational for selecting Kathiatoli Development Block as Study Area; Statement of the Problem; Objectives of the Study; Research Questions; Data Base and Methodology including the sub-heads of Data Source, Sample Design, Data Collection-tools and techniques, and Analysis of Data; Scope of the Study; Utility of the Study; Limitations of the Study and Structure of the thesis.

Chapter-II: Review of Literature

This chapter tries to make review some studies on MGNREGA and its different aspects.

Chapter-III: Profile of the Study Area and Socio-economic Characteristics of Tribal Women Workers

This chapter consists of two Sections. Section I focuses on the Profile of the Study Area and Section II presents the Socio-economic Characteristics of Tribal Women Workers of MGNREGS in the studied block.
Chapter-IV: Implementation Process of MGNREGA

This chapter tries to review the implementation process of MGNREGA on the basis of primary data collected from the sample MGNREGS beneficiary tribal households and the researcher’s field observations.

Chapter-V: Awareness and Empowerment of Tribal Women Workers

This chapter has been divided into two sections. Section I presents the awareness of Tribal Women Workers of the scheme regarding different provisions of MGNREGA and Section II assesses the impact of MGNREGS on economic empowerment of Tribal Women Workers of the scheme in the study area.

Chapter-VI: Summary and Conclusion

This chapter contains summary of findings, conclusions and suggestions of the present research work.