CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION
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1.1 LONELINESS:

Loneliness is the emotional state that results from desiring close interpersonal relationship but being unable to attain them. In the modern world loneliness is a major and wide spread issue which gives rise to social problems in human beings. Loneliness is a common problem for most people. For instance, about two-third of the people in the "The Psychology Today" survey on friendship reported feeling lonely either "sometime" or "often" (Parlee et al, 1979).

When people have trouble forming or keeping close friendships, they become lonely. Essentially, loneliness is a subjective state reflecting the absence of satisfying relationships. It is not to be confused with solitude, which is a more objective state denoting the absence of people. Thus, some one may feel lonely despite being surrounded by people if they don't feel close to them. And people with many friends may deliberately seek brief periods of solitude to sort out what is happening in their lives, without feeling lonely. Thus, it appears that loneliness is largely a state of mind that results from the gap between people and their desire for closeness and the failure to find it.
Loneliness is more common than is believed, is not confined to a group of old or abnormal people, is associated with both unhappiness and illness, and can be cured. People who are lonely do not necessarily have fewer relationships or daily interactions than other people, but they are often less satisfied with the ones they do have (Larson et al, 1982, Reis et al, 1983). Satisfactory relationships are associated, on the other hand, with better feelings about health (Wheeler et al, 1983).

Loneliness is a state that has been defined as the unpleasant experience that occurs when a person's network of social relationships is deficient in some important way, either qualitatively or quantitatively (Peplau & Perlman, 1982). Loneliness stems from discrepancy between the levels of social contact a person needs or desires and the amounts he has. It is a subjective experience and people can be alone without being lonely or lonely in a crowd.

One feels lonely if he feels excluded from a group, unloved by those around him, unable to share his private concerns, or feels different and alienated from those in his surroundings.

Loneliness and aloneness both are not the same. Loneliness refers to the subjective discomfort people feel when their social relations lack some important feature.
This deficit may be qualitative or quantitative.

(i) Quantitative Deficit:

Individuals may have no friend or fewer friends than they want.

(ii) Qualitative Deficit:

Individuals may feel their relationships are superficial or less satisfactory than they would like.

Of all social deficiencies, loneliness is probably the most common. Loneliness can occur during any time of transition and disruption: freshman year at college, on a new job, after a romantic break-up, when parents adjust to no longer having children at home etc. Almost everyone has at some time felt lonely in a crowd and happy in complete solitude. Instead, loneliness is a feeling of deprivation produced by existing social relations. The individual wants something more or something different, than what is currently available (Perlman & Peplau, 1981).

Loneliness is an internal or covert experience and cannot be detected simply by looking at someone.

1.2 TYPES OF LONELINESS:

According to Robert Weiss (1973), there are two kinds of loneliness. In social isolation a person wants but does not have a network of friends or relatives. In emotional isolation, a person wants but does not have a single, intense
relationship. The affective sequel of emotional loneliness (e.g. anxiety and apprehension) is generally more intense and unpleasant than the sequel of social loneliness (e.g. boredom and feeling of exclusion). These two kinds of loneliness share a common emotional core but are still recognizable different (Russell et al., 1984).

Sharon Brehm (1985) also found that the experience of loneliness varies somewhat depending on which aspects of our lives are most affected. People who feel lonely because they lack a network of social ties and acquaintances suffer mostly from social isolation. That is, they may not be close to members of their family or participate enough in community activities. Other people may be dissatisfied because they lack closeness in their intimate relationships, and they suffer more from emotional isolation. They may lack close friendships or a romantic or sexual relationship.

Others have recognized four types of loneliness:

(i) **Situational Loneliness**:  
It occurs when a person is moving to a new town, going away to school, starting a new job, being separated from friends and loved ones while on a trip or in the hospital or ending an important relationship through death, divorce, or breaking-up. Situational loneliness can be recovered from.
(ii) Chronic Loneliness:

Some people suffer from loneliness for many years. Chronic loneliness can also be known as pathological loneliness, which involves the individual who does not attempt to deal with loneliness through close interpersonal relation or commitment to the human enterprise.

(iii) Emotional Loneliness:

Emotional loneliness results from the absence of an intimate attachment figure; loneliness provided for children by their parents, for adults by a spouse or intimate friends.

(iv) Social Loneliness:

Social loneliness occurs when a person lacks a sense of social integration or community that might be provided by a network of friends or co-workers.

Various types of loneliness have been suggested. Some scholars have distinguished between ‘chronic’ and ‘temporary’ loneliness. Others have discussed an existential or spiritual form of loneliness. Mikulincer and Segal (1990) identified four sub-types of loneliness via cluster analysis: self-concerned, paranoid, depressive and socially estranged.
1.3 CAUSES OF LONELINESS:

Loneliness is associated with social anxiety and depression (Jones & Carpenter, 1986, Weeks et al, 1980). Indeed, all these conditions are characterized by a debilitating pattern of social interaction described earlier and illustrated in Figure 1.1.

**LOCUS OF CAUSALITY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stability</th>
<th>Internal</th>
<th>External</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stable</td>
<td>I am lonely because I am unable... I will never be worth loving</td>
<td>The people, I know are cold and impersonal, none of them share my interests. I think I will move.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unstable</td>
<td>I am lonely now, but I would not be for long. I will stop working so much and go out &amp; meet some new people.</td>
<td>The first semester in college is always the worst, I am sure things will get better.</td>
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Fig 1.1: Causal attribution of loneliness (based on Shaver & Rubenstein. 1980)

Like those feeling social anxiety, lonely people hold negative opinions of others (Hanley-Dunn et al 1985). Compared with those who are not lonely, lonely individuals are less responsive, sensitive and intimate in their social interactions, and they are more likely to be regarded by others as socially incompetent (Sloan & Solano, 1984, Spitzberg & Canery, 1985).

Depressed individuals exhibit the same pattern: rejection of others, awkward or inadequate social skills, and rejection by others (Hokanson et al, 1986, Strack & Coyne, 1983). In addition, those suffering from social anxiety,
loneliness or depression are socially cautious (Vaux, 1988, Pietromonaco & Rook, 1987). They tend to avoid interpersonal situations that pose the risk of rejection. While these cautions may reduce social failures, it also cuts down on opportunities for social success. As the saying goes, "nothing ventured, nothing gained".

Overall, there is a strong family resemblance among social anxiety, loneliness, and depression (Anderson & Harvey, 1988). Each one involves personal distress and social dissatisfaction.

It has been seen how a favorable attribution for social success can build confidence among people who suffer from dating anxiety. Causal attributions also appear to have important effects on loneliness. When Carolyn Cutrona (1982) examined the duration of loneliness among college freshmen, she found that loneliness lasted longer among those who initially blamed themselves for their lonely feelings on their shyness, their personality, their fear of rejection, or their lack of social skills.

These explanations involve an internal, stable attribution for loneliness. Internal attributions locate the cause of a condition or event in the person rather than in external circumstances; stable attributions focus on enduring causes rather than temporary, changeable ones. Blaming themselves by making an internal, stable attribution for loneliness may discourage people from trying to meet others and make friends (Peplau et al, 1979). In contrast,
explanations involving attributions that are external, unstable or both offer some hope that things can be changed for the better (Fig. 1.1). With a hopeful attitude, the lonely person may be able to take a few more social risks and gain more opportunities for social satisfaction.

Social scientists have focused increasing attention on loneliness during the past 15 years. A multidisciplinary search of the Psychological Abstracts and other sources for the 50 years period 1932-1981 produced a Bibliography of under 300 items (Peplau & Perlman, 1982). A more limited keyword search of just the psychological Abstracts for the period 1980 to March 1993 produced over 525 publications with loneliness in their title.

One building block contributing to the increase in loneliness research has been the development of psychometrically sound instruments for measuring loneliness e.g. the ULCA Loneliness scale (Shaver & Brennan, 1991). Another underpinning of this interest is the increasing body of evidence linking loneliness to various social problems and indices of well being. These include: alcohol use, aggressive behaviour, poor academic performance, neuroticism, running away from home in adolescence, suicide, less effective immune system functioning and high age - adjusted morality.
There are some situations where everyone becomes lonely.

These can be distinguished in two ways:

1. **Trait Loneliness**:
   
   A stable and persistent pattern of feeling lonely - definitely a feature of the person he or she takes the feeling with him or her into new situations.

2. **State Loneliness**:
   
   A transient temporary feeling of loneliness - probably resulting from the situation or a move to a new environment rather than to the specific person; everyone might feel lonely in the same circumstances.

According to Perlman & Peplau, (1981), the crucial feature of loneliness is a discrepancy between what an individual is doing and what he/she expect or hope to do.

On the other hand it can be said, "a discrepancy between one’s desired and achieved levels of social relations (Perlman & Peplau, 1981. page-32). If a person desires a small number of friends and that is what he/she has, then he/she will be happy and not lonely. If on the other hand, a person desires 126 friends and has only 120, then he/she shall feel lonely.
To assess loneliness, one must look at the persons’ desired or needed levels of social contact rather than at just the levels of social contact that he or she actually achieves. People's expectations, desires and needs can fluctuate from time to time independently of their actual levels of social contact. For example, when they are under some sort of stress they may want company, but when people are working on a difficult task they would rather be alone and would find company annoying.

Experience of loneliness can vary according to internal factors like feelings or beliefs when number of friend or social contacts stays the same.

In other words, even when contacts stay the same and number of friends is constant, people could still feel lonely on some days and not others or in some circumstances and not others, depending on their present desire for company or solitude. For example people feel more lonely just after they have been beaten at racquet ball (Perlman & Seerbin, 1984), whilst teenagers experience more loneliness at weekends (Larson et al, 1982) not because they have fewer contacts then but because they expect to have more.

There is a link between loneliness and physical and psychological illness. It has been linked to poor health, alienation and suicide, negative self-concept, feeling of helplessness, vacuum and defeat. Loneliness has been linked with
anxiety, depression and hostility and with psychosomatic diseases like heart attack and hypertension.

1.4 AGE PATTERN AND LONELINESS:

Infant – parent attachment theory predict that adults will be less vulnerable to loneliness if they happened to be securely attached to their parents during childhood. Those children who lose a parental attachment due to divorce or death may be at greater risk of loneliness as adults than are children from intact families. Women who were least lonely described their parents as positively involved during their childhood. Parental coldness or parental rejection is a causal factor of loneliness.

Ironically, 18 to 25 year olds suffer more from loneliness than any other age group, which may account for the pervasive loneliness among college students. Having loosened the ties with their parents, people this age are actively seeking intimacy with their peers, especially those of the opposite sex. The idealism of youth, plus the desire for intimacy and a happy marriage, makes them especially sensitive to the discrepancy between their expectations of intimacy and their actual relationship.

Loneliness tends to decline over the years, leveling off throughout the middle age years, though less so among women than men. Although older adults spend much of their time alone, most of them are less prone to loneliness.
than popularly depicted probably because they have learned to put their need for companionship in better perspective. However, loneliness appears to increase again among those in their 80s, reflecting, in part, the greater sense of disengagement from life among those at an advanced age (Perlman 1991).

Loneliness can develop at any stage in the life span. But it usually develops at some particular time and in some situations. Generally loneliness develops during early adulthood and old age. According to Erikson (1968) early adulthood is the time of “isolation crisis” for both men and women. Young unmarried men often find themselves at a loose end during their leisure time. Even young unmarried adults are lonely at times and miss the companionship they enjoyed during their adolescent years. Tied down with the care of young children, limited by a budget and often living away from family and former friends, married adults may be as lonely as those who are unmarried (Hurlock, p - 278).

Marital Status affects the risk of loneliness. It is commonly believed that married people are less likely to be lonely than others. But Rubenstin and Shaver (1982) found that some married people (18% in one large study) do feel lonely. Married people might be lonely if they lack friends or their marriage or marital partner is not personally satisfactory.

Loneliness is related to age. Popular stereotype depict old age as a time of great loneliness. But research shows that loneliness is highest among
teenagers and young adults and lowest among older people (Parlee, 1979). Brennan (1982) observed that despite the problems of childhood, it is in adolescence that loneliness can reach a peak. Researchers have not yet determined the reasons. However, two reasons may be cited for interpretation. (1) As regard to Parlee’s study there may be ‘generation gap’. Young people being more willing to talk about their feelings and knowledge of loneliness than are older adults. Young people face a great deal of social transitions, such as, leaving home, living on their own, going to college, or taking a first full-time job - all of which can cause loneliness. As people get older, their social lives may become more stable. Age may also bring greater social skills and more realistic expectations about social relations. (2) During adolescence individuals begin to separate from their parents, seek close relationship outside the home, and begin to assume personal responsibility for their actions.

Indian psychologists have observed among Indian samples, that senior citizens or aged do feel more lonely. They reasoned that as individuals grow older they lose their contemporaries. Individuals also lose their spouses or relatives and friends who are older to them. Such a loss narrows the network of friends and relatives with whom the elderly would have shared a lot of experience. This situation deprives them of people with whom they can share their joys and sorrows. As a result the elderly feel lonely (Muthayya, 1995, Anuradha and Prakash, 1991 etc.).
Contrary to the stereotype of the lonely old person, the loneliest people in American society are adolescents and young adults (Peplau et al, 1982, Rubenstein & Shaver, 1982). In fact loneliness declines with age, at least up to a point where difficulties like poor health may reduce social activities (Schultz & Moore, 1984).

Regardless of age, however, the loss of a close relationship increases loneliness. Widowed, divorced and separated individuals are lonelier than those who are married or never have been married (Perlman & Peplau, 1981).

1.5 THE ANTECEDENTS OF LONELINESS:

Roughly 26% of a large sample reported feeling “very lonely within the past few weeks” (Bradburn, 1969). Almost everyone experiences intense loneliness at some time or another (Peplau & Perlman, 1982).

The important thing is the presence or absence of a feeling of control over interactions with others (Shulz, 1976). Another important thing is the availability of a close confidant (Peplau et. al, 1982) and whether the person has been used to being single through life (Shanas et al, 1968). According to Tunstall’s (1967) study only 15% of old people report that they feel lonely quite often (which was contrary to popular myth).
Being socially isolated is an obvious antecedent of loneliness. Research suggests that the quality and provisions of relationships are more crucial than quantitative aspects of a person’s social network (Kraus, Davis, Bazzine, Church & Kirchman, 1993).

One way of conceptualizing the determination of loneliness is to start with predisposing and precipitating factors which lead to desired and actual levels of social contact. When predisposing and/or precipitating events produce a mismatch between desired and actual levels of social contact, then the person will normally experience loneliness. The intensity of the loneliness experienced may be moderated by cognitive factors.

Predisposing factors are persisting factors such as personality traits and cultural values, which make people vulnerable to loneliness. Psychologists have empirically demonstrated links between loneliness and several personality characteristics: low self-esteem, trait anxiety, depression, shyness, self-consciousness, the lack of social skills needed for making new friends, introversion and lack of assertiveness and external locus of control. Sociological theorists such as David Riesman and Philip Slater have argued that North American Culture in the mid twentieth century had a paradoxical system of values: the North American was simultaneously expected to be cooperative team players and competitive individualists. These inconsistent demands fostered loneliness.
Specific events such as moving to a new community, the breakup of a close relationship, or the death of a spouse can precipitate loneliness. While many such events undermine the attained level of social contact, other events (e.g. high-school dances) can trigger loneliness by raising peoples' expectations or desires for social contacts.

When deficiencies in social provisions occur, the resulting experience of loneliness is influenced by social comparison, attribution and perceptions of personal control. For example, students who believe they have fewer friends than their peers are likely to experience depression and pessimism with their loneliness. When partners terminate a relationship, both lose their relationship. Yet the person terminating the relationship typically experiences less loneliness than the person being dumped.

1.6 GLOBALIZATION, SOCIAL CHANGE & LONELINESS:

Change is a natural process, which touches every aspect of human life. Every major development in human society has been followed by some social change. The world today has become a smaller place or a global village due to the revolution in information technology. People have easy access to each other and practically every information that they seek. In such a set-up it is possible that a rapid change is taking place in the social world too, which would affect every individual in society.
Due to Information Technology revolution, any one can access the facilities or tools of modern IT. In this area too women are marching forward with their male counterpart, with the spread of internet, e-mail, video conferencing, etc. Connectivity through telephone is also highly developed. Women are also connecting or conversing with any one in each and every corner of this world. These changes have also occurred in Assamese society, as our society too is a part of the Global village with internet connectivity.

This growing interaction through internet and telephone serves to keep people connected but it could probably also decrease face-to-face social interactions and meeting people and thus resulting in loneliness.

Women constitute a large part of the society but they are still facing various social problems in terms of low literacy, status, marital problems etc. One problem, which is known to have far reaching ramification, is loneliness. With the present fast pace of life feeling lonely is still a real problem in today's world.

1.7 GENDER & LONELINESS:

Divorced men and women are lonely when they find themselves deprived of the constant companionship of a person of similar interest and values.
Studies have shown that married women report greater loneliness than married men. However, among separated and divorced people, men report greater loneliness than women, most likely because men's main source of closeness is their romantic partners (Brehm, 1985).

1.8 THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF LONELINESS:

In a representative sampling of United States citizens, 26% said they had felt "very lonely or remote from other people" in the past few weeks.

British, Canadian and Scandinavian surveys show similar results. Women are more likely than men to say they are lonely. Experimental evidence shows that social censure for being lonely is less for women than men to admit being lonely.

Loneliness also varies as a function of other demographic variables. People with lower incomes, for example, are more likely to be lonely.

With regard to age, loneliness is specially prevalent in late adolescence and young adulthood. It tapers off during the rest of the working years. Despite widespread stereotypes and consensus about loneliness being a problem for seniors, the prevalence of loneliness is not unusually high among seniors aged 65 to 80. An increased likelihood of being lonely has been found in
some studies for respondents aged over 80. This may be due in part to the high proportion of the very elderly that is incapacitated and/or widowed.

Loneliness is less common among married than non-married individuals, but when the unmarried are divided into categories, the results vary somewhat by study. The general tendency appears to be for single people to be less lonely than the divorced or widowed. Loneliness is, of course, a common experience during bereavement. Within marriage, loneliness is associated with marital happiness so that unhappy married individuals are vulnerable to being lonely.

1.9 REACTION TO LONELINESS:

Four patterns of loneliness are: (1) Sad passivity (e.g. Sleeping, Crying, done nothing), (2) Active solitude (e.g. working, listening to music, exercising), (3) Spending money and (4) Social contact.

Many more people report having recently felt lonely than describe themselves as a lonely person. Most experiences of loneliness appear transitory. Longitudinal studies of first-year University students consistently show that their loneliness decline over time. Treatment outcome studies provide encouraging evidence that therapy can, if persuade, help people overcome loneliness.
People’s expectations about relationships and about loneliness will be influenced by their personality, beliefs about attractiveness, and whether they tend to take credit for their social success in meeting new people or blame for their failures to make friends.

Shy people habitually fear making new friends and may be anxious in ways that could affect their adequacy in carrying out new encounter. Those who usually assume that social failures are their own fault are likely to overtake other factors that could account for loneliness such as ‘circumstances’ or moving to a new neighborhood. They will probably blame their habitual and personal difficulties.

Accordingly, they are much more likely than everyone else to feel negative about themselves and personally hopeless. Trait lonely people (i.e. the long term lonely) are found to have the characteristic that makes it more likely that they will blame themselves for their way. They have a low opinion of themselves, see themselves in negative terms, dislike talking about their feelings, and are low in intimate behaviours (Solano et al, 1982, Jones et al, 1981).

1.10 BEHAVIOURS OF LONELY PEOPLE:

Lonely people do habitually report quite consistently feelings that go with loneliness (Rubenstein & Shaver, 1982).
These are:

- Desperation (being panicked and feeling helpless).
- Depression (feeling sad and worthless).
- Impatient boredom (restless and simultaneously bored)
- Self-deprecation (what's wrong with me? why am I so useless?)

Chronically lonely males have characteristic sets of beliefs about themselves and other people that lead them to act in an aggressive and hostile way (Check et al, 1985).

- Lonely males are more punitive than non-lonely males, particularly towards female partners who make errors on a learning task that the male is 'supervising'.

- Many violent males, particularly rapists, are found to score highly on loneliness scales and to have been socially isolated well before they committed their violent assaults. (Howells, 1981).

- Lonely persons are self-absorbed, non-responsive, negativistic and ineffective in their interactions with strangers (Jones et al, 1985).

- Lonely people spend more time alone, particularly at weekends and are less involved with voluntary organizations, dating, relatives and neighbors or social activities generally (Jones et al, 1985).
• Lonely people sometimes show “sad passivity”, which involves overeating, oversleeping, watching TV, crying, drinking alcohol or taking tranquilizers (Rubenstein & Shaver, 1982).

• Other typical styles of coping with loneliness are to:
  1. Engage in busy-busy activity,
  2. Jogging alone
  3. Vigorous exercise.

• Other people react to loneliness by self indulgent actions, particularly buying themselves ‘toys’ like microcomputer, stereo, just generally running riot with their credit cards.

• When we get lonely we often turn into 'big spenders' in an effort to make ourselves feel better about ourselves.

• More useful are coping strategies that involve visiting other people, writing to friends, calling them on the phone or just attempting to increase social contact.

1.11 WHEN FORCED TO BE ALONE:

The sense of control is probably one reason why not all “being alone” is loneliness, as the Perlman-Peplau model makes clear. If peoples' desired
level of social contact is low for some deliberately controlled reason (e.g. if individuates are feeling creative and want to write a novel) then low levels of social contact will be highly enjoyable and high levels may be unattractive to them.

The problem arises when some one is forced to be alone willy-nilly. For instance, students typically report feeling lonely soon after they arrive in their new university at the start of their freshman year. Friends rather than dates or lovers are the best buffer against loneliness in those circumstances (Cutrona, 1982).

1.12 PRESENT STUDY:

Women in our country continue to bear the burden of poverty, lack of access to resources, exclusion from decision-making etc. In Assamese society women's position is still inferior to men though probably better than in the rest of the country. This is seen in the field of literacy, educational status, health, administration, work participation etc. As the difference in the male/female literacy rates (77.58% / 56.03%, 2001) has decreased, it is expected that other social changes have also probably occurred. Against the background of possible social changes a study of loneliness is particularly relevant.
Loneliness is more common among the poor than the affluent.

Good relationship may be easier to maintain when people have time and money for leisure activities and entertainment. It was also observed that marital status is more significant for women than men (Peplau and Perlman, 1982). With such a perspective in mind the present study is undertaken to study loneliness in urban middle class women of Assamese society.

1.13 PROBLEM:

The problem of this study is:

Are age, marital status and employment status related to loneliness in middle–class women of Assamese society?

1.14 HYPOTHESES:

With the above stated problem in mind the following hypotheses were tested:

1. Married women will not differ from unmarried women in the level of loneliness experienced by them.

2. Employed women will not differ from unemployed women in the level of loneliness experienced by them.
3. (a) Young adult women will not differ from middle age women in the level of loneliness experienced by them.

(b) Young adult women will not differ from old aged women in the level of loneliness experienced by them.

(c) Middle aged women will not differ from old aged women in the level of loneliness experienced by them.