PREFACE

The topic of the research work is "Government Policies and Empowerment of Women in Assam: A Case Study in Kamrup District." The study takes into account government policies since 1980s onwards in the areas of women empowerment. The scope of the field study is the Goreswar and Hajo development block areas located in the respective revenue circles of Goreswar and Hajo which form a significant part of the Kamrup District. However, Goreswar revenue circle is now a part of Baksa district within BTAD area.

In the present context, women empowerment as a concept has occupied primary interest in the process of policy formulations for diversified development works of all modern democratic nations.

In the international platform, the Convention for Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing platform for action have greatly influenced the policy making of different nations with regard to women empowerment. India is also a signatory to these conventions.

Empowerment in the women context means the manifestation of redistribution of power that challenges patriarchal ideology and male domination. It is a transformation of the structures and institutions that reinforces and perpetuates gender discrimination. It is a process that enables women to gain access to and control of material as well as informational
resources. Empowerment is thus a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation and greater decision making power and control over resources.

Efforts to challenge limitations and atrocities imposed on women by the traditional society were made long back. Even British Government supported moves by social reformers in banning the cruel practice of sati. The freedom movement spearheaded by Mahatma Gandhi provided the greatest opportunity to Indian women to express themselves in many capacities. The Governments after Independence have implemented many programmes and schemes for the development of women education, their economic status and health. Study of the key indicators of development in education, health and economy reveals that there are significant improvements. But, there are grey areas as well. The rural-urban gap regarding development in all aspects has not been obliterated totally. Universalisation of primary education is yet to be achieved. Gender discrimination is expressed in labour segmentation and wages. Despite huge development in medical and health infrastructure, maternal and infant mortality continues to take place. Women are yet to assert their political power in a larger dimension.

Policies are made with specific goals to achieve in set directions. Study and analysis of various Government policies undertaken so far for women empowerment is required to find out the probable loopholes and drawbacks in the stages of policy formulation and implementation. The
present study refers to the Government policies and programmes as far as their basic objectives and contents are concerned. The policies taken up for study here are limited to the period after the 1980s. The rationale behind this selection is that women empowerment in India as a strategy for development began to express in policies after 1980. Many policies are general in nature with specific component earmarked for women, and there are policies made only for women. The status of target fulfillment at various stages of planning are indicated with the help of data from reliable sources. Field survey has been undertaken with a view to finding out the measure of development in respect of women education, health and economy and also the other basic issues still creating strong impediments in the path to women emancipation.

The present study tries to find the causes of under-achievement in the vital areas of human development related to women and recommend measures for improvement.

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