Chapter 8
Conclusion

One of the most challenging tasks for the 21st century policy makers is the realization of gender justice by bringing into equality in all respects between the male and female. On the basis of gender based dichotomy of male female in the society, different roles have been assigned to them wherein the male is in the public which concern the society as a whole and the female is in the private that concern the family only. But very often, private options become the basis for evolving public opinion and social decision. In fact, the norms, practices, values and preference of a society provide the backdrop in which privacy and private arena within the family are defined.

This public and private dichotomy in the society has been strongly criticized by the feminists. They are of the view that the relegation of the household to the private sphere has disempowered women and it is based on the patriarchal ordering of the society only. Indeed, they have questioned the very distinction made between the public and the private. The household has been regarded as private because it is based on a qualitatively different set of values such as emotions, loyalties and unreflective affiliations in contrast to the rational, self-interested and egoistic public sphere. The feminists make powerful argument that the identification of the household with the private and the women has brought in a status of subordination for women. The identification of female and male has been done in two different ways – while the former is affective, unreflective and limited within the domestic world, the later is rational and deliberative one. This has leading to a situation of
demand for empowerment of women, particularly when women are now gradually getting involved in different activities out of home almost at par with man.

In a democratic society the subordination of women in the domestic world reflects their exclusion from the democratically conceived notion of equality in social life. Her subordination within the family life is reflected in the social life also. Under such a situation rights or empowerment of the women cannot be realized. The feminist are of the opinion that in the structuring of the gender-based modem society, gender oppression violates the rights to equality and justice for women and thereby making it essential to consider the empowerment of women. The traditional thinking about the role and status of women in the society has been vehemently challenged by the social scientists in general and feminist activists/scholars in particular. The idea that public domain is for man and private domain is for women has been viewed seriously and is now becoming an area of scholarly discussion. This is more so in view of the rise of feminization movement during 1960-70, when women's empowerment become a new terminology being increasingly applied by the scholars of different branches of social science.

The traditional patriarchal society has nurtured the idea that women are both physically and mentally not equally capable with man and hence they are not able to share in the social decisions making process and thus, to be left out for man. This gender-based role, on one hand limited the role of women in the society and on the other hand it goes against the democratic principle of rights and equality. Therefore the concept of women's empowerment has lead to a serious discourse about the status of woman.
In Indian context, empowerment of women means economic security, capacity building, skill formation, participation in the decision making process (in whatever levels it may be) and above all a dignified social status for women. Empowerment, however, does not mean only attainment of political power. Numerous decisions are taken at the family, caste, village or regional levels and for an effective decision at all such levels, women should be adequately empowered. But after adaptation of a democratic constitution in India some six decades back, the ground reality represents a different picture altogether demanding empowerment of women in the real sense of the term. The enactment of 73rd amendment of the constitution is a glaring example of it.

The Bodos are the most prominent tribal community in Assam. As a tribal group, they have their own rich cultural heritage and age-old tradition in social life. Living mostly in some rural pockets of the Brahmaputra valley, they are neither educationally advanced nor economically solvent. In spite of their constitutionally recognized Scheduled Tribe status since independence, their socio-political awareness level is also not significant. However, within the last few years, with the initiation of the 'homeland movement', a new social resurgence has come in the Bodo society, wherein, particularly the women have a significant role.

The present study reflects the empowerment process among the Bodo women in the backdrop of the Bodoland Movement. The Bodoland Movement was initiated in a latent form from 1985 and, it continued till the signing of the Memorandum of Settlement on
February 20, 1993 in Guwahati. Thereafter also the ‘homeland movement’ continued to protest against the non-fulfillment of the 1993 accord. The movement was most intense during this later period with the mass participation of the community members from all walks of life, including massive participation of women. Ultimately the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) was formed in December 2003. Therefore, to study the empowerment process, the period from 1985 to 2005 has been considered in the present study. To present the changing trend in the role of the Bodo women during the aforesaid period, the socio-economic condition of Bodo women, their literacy level, social awareness, political participation and involvement in the decision-making process is incorporated in the study.

The introductory chapter deals with the main problem of research leading to the present research work. The study is in the framework of public private dichotomy to focus the absence of gender neutrality as advocated by the feminists. On the basis of gender discrimination practiced in the society, the gender-based role of women that has been traditionally in operation in the patriarchal social set up, has justified the relevance of women’s empowerment process. An overview of the women’s empowerment process that India has witnessed almost from the time of British India to the present day has been produced duly, incorporating the efforts of all concerned towards women’s development from time to time. To study the empowerment process amongst the Bodo women, the role and status of woman in a traditional Bodo family has been included in this chapter. Considering the objectives of the present work, the hypotheses that have been formulated during the course of the study have also been incorporated in this chapter. The significance
of the study included in the chapter, clearly outlines its importance as a study on empowerment of women not only among the Bodos, but a tribal society in Assam in general, the material for which is sadly lacking. Moreover, the changing trend towards achieving empowerment amongst the Bodo women has been analyzed within the time frame of pre and post Bodoland Movement, which is considered to be a defining moment in their history of Bodo community. During the course of the field survey for collection data, selective sampling technique has been adopted in the study. Well-structured schedule were used for collection of data from the respondents. Relevant secondary source data are also used in the study. For convenience of presentation of the findings, the entire work has been divided into eight chapters inclusive of the introductory and the concluding chapter. In this regard, view points of different social scientists and activists in the field of gender studies have been included. Existing literatures relevant to the issues of the present work have been discussed.

The second chapter is a short anthropological description of the Bodo community in the state. It starts with a distinct note about the origin of the Bodos in Assam, their traditional life and society and the role and status of women in a traditional Bodo family. It has been found that in the traditional Bodo family system, the women have a respectable status. Their involvement in family economy and other day-to-day activities is very significant in spite of having the tradition of patriarchy. To reflect the awareness generated during the course of the Bodoland Movement, in the Bodo society in general and women in particular, a brief description of the Movement and the involvement of the community members in it have been included here. The role played by the women in the movement is also
mentioned. In this context, it may be mentioned that, in all the agitation programmes that has been undertaken by the Bodo community for different issues including the latest one led by ABSU for a separate homeland for them, women and girls have participated in large numbers but no one has been ever included in the leadership level at any point of time. The chapter has included the contributions of the organizations like Bodo Sahitya Sabha, All Bodo Students Union and All Bodo Women’s Welfare Federation who are playing a pivotal role in the formation and development of the Bodo society. Moreover, the role of Christian religion and the ‘Brahma Dharma’ towards the socio-educational development of the Bodo society have been included in this chapter.

Third chapter gives an elaborate account of the seven villages that have been selected as study area. A detailed report of the villages along with its demographic profile, geographical location, socio-economic condition of the villagers and other civic amenities available at the disposal of the villagers has been included. A brief account about the involvement of the villagers including the women section in the Bodoland Movement is also included in this chapter. Out of the seven villages, two are in Kamrup district and the remaining five villages are within the Bagsa district of the BTAD. All the villages participated in the Bodoland Movement but the two villages in Kamrup district remained outside of the BTAD due to lack of territorial linkage. Even then, the awareness process equally developed in these two villages also as an after effect of the Bodoland Movement.

Fourth chapter deals with the changing educational scenario of the Bodo women during the pre and post Bodoland Movement period. Before presentation of the educational status
achieved by the Bodo women during the specific period mentioned above, an overall estimation about the condition of women’s education in India since pre-independence period is incorporated in the chapter. Women’s education was limited within a very small elite group in pre-independent India as the prevailing patriarchal social norms and values were against this. But at the initiative of some enlighten Indian social reformers; steps were taken for spreading women’s education in India by the British administration. Later, the Indian national government took the necessary steps in this direction through constitutional provisions and policy formulation. The necessity of education for empowerment of women was widely felt. The worldwide women’s empowerment movement also influenced the state authority for policy formulation to that effect. The tribal communities such as the Bodos were not educationally advanced and so was the case of empowerment of women. But Bodoland Movement brought a social resurgence, as a result of which, a changing trend of education among the Bodo women has been observed. The younger generation has seriously taken up formal education where the role of the parents is also equally encouraging. Information collected through field survey, covering the level of girl’s education, parental education, and drop out rate along with other relevant information such as out of home activities like job and business, have been included here, reflecting the changing trend of education among the Bodo women during the pre and post Bodoland Movement period. The analyzed data clearly indicates that, as a result of the Bodoland Movement, the Bodo women are socially awakened to a state of academic advancement, which in turn helped them in achieving empowerment. The significant role of Christian Missionaries and Brahma Dharma in spreading education and socio-cultural reformation in
case of village Patkijuli and Village Jhargaon respectively has also been adequately reflected through presentation of statistical data within this chapter.

Fifth chapter is all about the changing economic role of the Bodo women. Traditionally, Bodo women are a strong workforce in all areas of family activities starting from the kitchen to the cowshed. Their contribution towards the total productivity of the family is significant. But poverty is at large in the community life. The Bodoland Movement has made them realized that only political statehood is not going to help them until and unless they can achieve financial solvency. Therefore, in recent time they have adopted certain traditional activities in a commercial manner within the family, so that they can achieve self-dependency and thereby empowerment as well. It also helps in improving the economic condition of the family. In the present study, to highlight the changing economic condition achieved by the Bodo women, the areas of livestock farming, weaving and sericulture, honeybee farming and mushroom cultivation, their involvement in Self Help Group (SHG) activities and rice beer business etc. have been reflected with the help of statistical data presentation. Based on the findings of field survey, it is seen that the new economic role adopted by the Bodo women have not only made them free from dependency factor but also empowered them to have a say in all socio-economic decisions within, and, occasionally even outside the family. The fact that, Bodo women are now participating in economic activities in the public domain and able to earn a significant income is invariably contributing to their enhanced decision making capacity. This can be taken as the beginning of women's empowerment process in the community.
Sixth chapter describes the political participation of Bodo women. Before looking into this, a general discussion on the women’s participation in state politics, the constraints involve in it, the general trend of women’s political participation in pre and post independent India is presented. In ancient India, women had a high place of honour in society. But the history of modern India presents a very gloomy picture of women, where political participation of any nature by women was not there. The gender-based role of woman in patriarchal social structure is responsible for this. During British period, only a handful of women from the elite section of Indian society participated in agitation politics with Gandhiji. Of course, later the situation was improved. In post Independence period, gradually women’s participation in politics increased but as voter only. So far the Bodo women are concerned, in spite of a constitutional guarantee of voting right to them, their participation was at the lowest level from the time of the First General Election in India. A slight upward trend was observed in 1985 due to ‘Assam Gana Parishad’ (AGP) factor in electoral politics of Assam. This was once more significantly changed during the course of the Bodoland Movement. This growing trend of political awareness resulted in their committed involvement in agitation politics during the movement period and mass participation in electoral politics in the subsequent time i.e. after the creation of Bodoland Council. In fact, Bodoland Movement has been a turning point towards developing political awareness amongst the Bodo women. Observing the trend of political participation of the Bodo women in electoral politics in the recent time, as shown by the present study, we can foresee the beginning of empowerment process in the form of women political leadership. Political participation is an indication of the involvement in the decision-making process, which leads to empowerment. So far as the presence of women in leadership among the
Bodos is concerned, it is very negligible. The involvement of Bodo women in politics, as reflected by the present study is almost limited as voter only. Within my study area, there is instance of only one Bodo women being elected as member of Gaon Panchayat. However, towards achieving empowerment, political participation is a very vital factor and Bodo women are in the process of achieving the same. In this direction, more platforms could have been provided by student's organization or other socio-political organizations in focusing women's leadership and thereby contributing to empowerment of women in their society.

Seventh chapter is about the social awareness that the Bodo women have achieved in the backdrop of the Bodoland Movement. Social awareness has been examined on the basis of their concern about family healthcare and maintenance of hygienic living condition, their eagerness to promote girl's education, their consciousness about violence of any nature against women, their approach towards the issue of property rights for women and involvement in the decision making process, either in socio-political dimension or in the issues of reproductive health and childcare. In all these areas of social awareness, the response of the elderly women are not encouraging mainly because of illiteracy and simplicity of a traditional tribal life style. For them, all these issues have little relevance in their traditional life. But for the middle aged women and the younger generations have a different expression and they are aware of all these issues. Here, Bodoland Movement has a significant role. It has evoked a social resurgence and under its influence even the middle aged Bodo women are now eager to send her daughter for higher education. Young women are not interested to have more children. They want property as means of security for future
life. Thus their involvement in the decision making process in all the above areas of the
family is definitely an indication of women’s development leading to state of
empowerment.

The eighth chapter is the last chapter presenting the conclusion drawn by the study. Based
on the set of objectives of the present study and formulated hypothesis, the gap between
public private dichotomies based on the consideration of gender is gradually decreasing and
therefore involvement of women in public arena has increased. The Bodoland Movement is
a causative factor in increasing social resurgence among the Bodo women and religion has
played a significant role in creating social awareness and development. During the course
of the study the hypothesis that was adopted have been tested positive and as such
concluding opinion is drawn.

Findings:

- Bodo women have been able to achieve a significance status in the economic front
- Women have improved their educational status, which will be more significant
  within the next few years.
- Religious trait has been able to improve the educational and socio-cultural life of
  the Bodo Women.
• They have become politically conscious but leadership is yet to emerged among them. Had it been so, the empowerment of women would have been more. ABSU can be considered as a potential platform towards emergence of woman leadership.

• Bodo women are now socially conscious about a better and dignified living condition.

• The presence of the Bodo women in the public that is outside of home is widely felt which is an indication of empowerment.

Suggestions and Recommendations: Some of the suggestions and recommendations in brief are:

• Government efforts should be accelerated further for spreading of education among the Bodo women.

• Financial institutions should come closer to help the young enterprising Bodo women.

• Political parties should patronize and evolve women’s wing to promote women leadership.