CHAPTER-I

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Empowerment denotes the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives (Narayan vi). According to Mhlon (13) empowerment refers broadly to expansion of freedom of choice and action to shape one’s life. It implies control over resources and decisions. In cases of poor people, that freedom is severely curtailed by their powerlessness in relation to a range of institutions, both formal and informal. World Bank’s World Development Report (11-12) emphasized empowerment as it is the need for increasing poor people’s access to opportunity, security, and empowerment for economic growth and poverty reduction. Batiwala (128) defined empowerment as the amount of influence people have over external actions that matter to their welfare.

Women’s empowerment is a process of change that involves a growing ability to make choices that affect a woman’s wellbeing, life path, and her capacity for self-determination (Jejeebhoy and Sathar 688; Malhotra, Schuler, and Bowender 5). Definitions of women empowerment include control over assets (Goetz and Sen Gupta 48-50); women’s relative physical mobility, economic security, freedom from domination, political and legal awareness and participation in public protests and political campaigns (Hashemi et al. 638-9); develop capacity to reduce socio economic vulnerability and dependency (Banu 31; Pourezzat et al. 302); opportunity to generate income and control over income (Varghese 37); and participation in household decision-making (Rahman et al. 123; Kabeer et al. 10; Ashraf et al. 8). Women empowerment is a multi dimensional process. Its aim is to enable women or a group of women to realize their full identity and power in all spheres of life. It consists of greater access to knowledge and resources, greater autonomy in decision making to enable them to have greater ability to plan their lives. It allows them to have greater control over the circumstances that influence their lives. Empowerment also makes women free from shackles imposed on them by custom, belief and practice of the traditional societies (Pithadia and Sharma).
Sen defines empowerment as “altering relations of power, which constrain women’s options and autonomy and adversely affect health and well-being”.

Popular women movements in Latin America and Caribbean considered empowerment as an improvement of self-esteem and self-confidence as well as the ability to choose what direction individual life should take for collectively changing gender relations in the economic, political, legal and socio-cultural spheres (Dooren 9).

According to Luttrell & Quiroz (1) empowerment has four dimensions, namely, economic, human and social, political and cultural empowerment. Economic empowerment seeks to ensure that people have the appropriate skills, capabilities and resources and access to secure and sustainable incomes and livelihoods. Economic empowerment of women is economic change, material gain plus increased bargaining power and/or structural change which enables women to secure economic gains on an on-going and sustained basis (Sudarshan 370).

Empowering women to participate fully in economic life across all sectors and throughout all levels of economic activity is essential to:

- Build strong economies;
- Establish more stable and just societies;
- Achieve internationally agreed goals for development, sustainability and human rights;
- Improve quality of life for women, men, families and communities; and
- Propel businesses’ operations and goals.

Yet, ensuring the inclusion of women’s talents, skills, experience and energies requires intentional actions and deliberate policies. The women’s empowerment principles provide a set of considerations to help the private sector focus on key elements integral to promoting gender equality in the workplace, marketplace and community (United Nations Global Compact and UNIFEM 1-9).
The World Bank has identified empowerment as one of the key constituent elements of poverty reduction, and as a primary development assistance goal. The Bank has also made gender mainstreaming a priority in development assistance, and the promotion of women’s empowerment as a development goal (Malhotra and Mather 610).

Since women constitute nearly half of the population, they can become a great resource in the development process if they are properly mobilized and organized (Acker 936). According to Negash, importance of women empowerment is felt everywhere. Presently, it is the aim of many Government and Non Governmental Organization to minimize gender disparity in the society. To discriminate and prevent half of humanity from reaching its full potential is an economic folly. He also mentioned that, denying women and girls equality and fairness not only hurts them, but also hinders the rest of society. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru once said “To awaken the people, it is women who must be awakened; once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves” as quoted by Pillai (32). Nobel Laureate Sen Amartya (25) also stated that the empowerment of women is one of the main issues in the process of development. The empowerment of women is a key topic of contemporary global political discourse (MacMillan et.al. 189).

According to Bhatia (125-26) one of the powerful approaches to women empowerment and rural entrepreneurship is the formation of Self Help Groups (SHGs) especially among women. An SHG is a small group of about 20 persons from a homogeneous class, who come together voluntarily to attain certain collective goals, social or economic. The group is democratically formed and elects its own leader. The essential features of SHGs include members belonging to the same social strata and sharing a common ideology. Their aims should include economic welfare of all members. The concept of SHGs is predominantly used in the case of economically poor people, generally women, who come together to pool their small savings and then use it among themselves. Receiving finance is also easy for Self Help Groups as the mechanism of lending through Self Help Groups has gained wide
popularity during the last few years and has been adopted as an important strategy by banks for lending to the poor. A member can generate social capital in the form of personal empowerment through participation in self-help group. It can facilitate his/her goal of benefiting as much as possible from the group for effective coping and handling of the problem through group activities (Mok and Leung 12). The strategy had fetched noticeable results not only in India and Bangladesh but world over. Women SHGs are increasingly being used as tool for various developmental interventions (Wale and Deshmukh). In Assam 90% of total members of SHGs are women. SHG run by women are found to be of high grade in comparison to the groups run by men (Rao 13). According to Reddy & Manak (35) it is vitally important that both government and NGOs should bear the costs of interventions to make SHGs sustainable. Otherwise the SHGs will be overburdened and destined to failure.

In the context of the ‘shrinking of development space’, the growing international focus on tourism as a development strategy particularly in relation to poverty reduction had a significant impact in Central America (Ferguson 2). Tourism development has been seen as a positive agent of change for many areas because of its potential for job creation, income generation, improvements in the balance of payments and the acquisition of hard currency (Andriotis and Vaughan 66).

The Tourism industry has witnessed an unprecedented growth in recent years. Bezbaruah (124-25) suggested that tourism can be a tool to fight the biggest challenge of today, poverty. As the world’s largest employer with 231 million employees generating 10.4% of the world GDP, the tourism industry is rapidly expanding and is estimated to employ approximately 269.5 million people by the year 2015 (World Travel and Tourism Council). It may provide avenue for women employment and participation. According to Ghodsee (1) tourism is a labour intensive industry and tends to employ many economically disadvantaged groups, such as, women and ethnic minorities.

The UN World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) declared the theme of World Tourism Day for the year 2007 as 'Tourism Opens Doors for Women'. UNWTO
Secretary General Francesco Frangialli's message for the Day reflected the positive note of the theme with an affirmative statement that "Tourism is a sector of the economy that not only employs significant numbers of women, but provides enormous opportunities for their advancement". UNWTO and UNIFEM (now UN Women) have signed the initial cooperation agreement in 2008. The aim of this was to harness tourism's potentials to contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment (UNWTO). Worldwide, tourism is an important sector for women as they make up to 46% of the tourism labour force. This percentage is higher than in the workforce in general, where 34-40% is women (Vagus and Aguilar). According to recent ILO (15) data women make up between 60 and 70 per cent of the labour force in the tourism industry. Most of the jobs for women are in unskilled or semi-skilled work and they are often employed in the informal sector with poor wages and working conditions. Women are therefore vulnerable in the industry and face precarious types of jobs, inequality, and violence at work, stress and sexual harassment. ILO has also reported that women workers earn up to 25 per cent less than male colleagues performing equal work. The low level of women's participation in workers' organizations, with even fewer women at higher levels of representation, often puts them in a weaker bargaining position. Gender issues, such as workplace safety, including workplace violence, are often insufficiently addressed.

Kaziranga National Park (KNP), a name known worldwide for its success in the conservation history of one horned Indian Rhinoceros, provides habitat for a number of threatened species and migratory birds. It is spread over civil jurisdictions of Nagaon and Golaghat districts in Assam with mighty Brahmaputra river on the north and verdant Karbi Anglong hills on the south between Longitude 92°50'E & 93° 41'E and Latitude 26° 30'N and 26° 50'N. Kaziranga National Park is an outstanding example representing significant ongoing ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of wetland ecosystem and communities of plants and animals. Kaziranga contains the most important and significant natural habitat for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation. The above mentioned values and criteria made Kaziranga National Park to get inscribed on the world heritage list of "Convention
concerning the protection of the world cultural and natural heritage” in the year 1985 (Environment and Forest Department, Govt. of Assam 2).

Kaziranga National Park is a major tourism destination in Northeast India. At present, Kaziranga is the most popular tourist destination of Assam. A substantial number of tourists visit Kaziranga National Park every year. The tourist density is highest in KNP in comparison to other destinations of Assam.

According to the Department of Forest the destination attracted 1,19,839 tourists during the year 2010-2011, out of which 1,12,392 were domestic tourists and 7,447, foreign tourists. The revenue collection from the tourists was INR. 1,36,73,482 during the period. Figure 1.1 represents the number of Indian and Foreigner tourists at KNP from 1997-2011.

![Graph showing number of domestic and foreign tourists at KNP from 1997-2011](image)

Fig. 1.1-Number of Domestic and Foreigner Tourists at KNP (1997-2011)*
*Source-Department of Tourism, Government of Assam.

Assam has the longest concentration of weavers in India. Handloom weaving and its vast range of design reflect the sartorial taste of multi faceted composite culture and tradition of Assam. There is hardly any village in Assam where one will not hear the rhythmic sound of the looms and shuttle. Designed dress materials produced by weavers of Sualkuchi are highly
claimed for its uniqueness and quality standards. The famous *Vriundavani vastra* now preserved in London museum was woven under supervision of Sri Sankaradeva, the great religious and social leader of the 16th Century. (Ministry of Tourism and Culture 16-18).

Assamese women are known for their expertise in handicrafts. Weaving is one of the traditional crafts that every Assamese woman takes pride in. The Assamese women produce silk and cotton clothes of exquisite designs in their looms. Assam is renowned for its exquisite silks namely *Eri, Pat* (silk) and the world famous *Muga (Antheraea Assamensis)* which is available only in Assam (Government of Assam). Mahatma Gandhi complimented the weaving skill of the women of Assam as artists who could weave dreams in their looms. Every woman in Assam is by nature an artist. This particular aspect can be utilized in tourism. Apart from this, involvement in tourism activities can be seen as a complementary activity to the main occupational activity of the household so that the economic conditions improve. Government of Assam also has emphasized on local art and crafts for properly designed souvenir shops in each major tourist destinations of Assam. Tourism Policy of Assam-2008 planned to encourage and assist local entrepreneurs to produce authentic designs of local art and craft forms in a way that the tourists can easily carry them as mementoes (Tourism Policy of Assam 20).

The present study was mainly aimed to formulate strategies for economic empowerment of women through tourism related activities (TRA). To formulate the objectives and the methodology of the study an extensive review of literature was done which is presented in chapter II. A six phase methodology was designed for achieving the objectives. Methodology included a women survey, tourists’ survey, Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) for skill mapping of local women, stakeholder analysis, formulation of strategies for economic empowerment of women through tourism related activities and practicability study of formulated strategies.

Women survey was conducted among women belonging to the villages in the periphery of KNP. 10 villages were selected by judgmental basis. Number of sample for the study was 645. Women survey gave the socio-economic status...
of women and their involvement in tourism related activities in the study area. It also provided information about perception of local women about tourism and women empowerment. Tourists' survey was conducted to find out demands of tourists about various services, souvenir and consumable items in the study area. 514 duly filled questionnaires formed the database for analysis of tourists' demand, of which 400 were domestic and 114 foreign tourists. Period of survey was 2010-2011. PRA methodology was used for interacting with villagers, understanding them, and learning from them. Main purpose of PRA method was skill mapping of village women in the study area. The latent purpose was to sensitize and motivate village women to utilize their capability to get involved in tourism related activities for their economic empowerment. PRA was conducted in all 10 villages selected for women survey. Workshops were organized with the help of Anganwadi (Scheme of Social Welfare Department, Government of Assam) workers of the concerned village. Local women drew the map of their villages showing different skills of women.

To gain qualitative information, semi-structured interviews were taken of stakeholders. The chosen stakeholders were tourism officials, forests officials, academicians, administrative officers, tourism entrepreneurs and official from Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship, Guwahati. Information on opportunities for women to get involved in tourism was obtained from the stakeholders.

Information gained from stakeholder analysis, women survey, PRA and tourists' survey was utilized to develop strategies for economic empowerment of women through tourism related activities in the study area. The suggested strategies were circulated among experts in three rounds to find out the feasibility of the same. Expert suggestions and modifications were incorporated in the strategies so that these can be practically implemented. Chapter III describes the methodology of the study comprehensively.

Results of the study are described in details in chapter IV. This chapter also includes the stakeholders' suggestions and strategies formulated for economic empowerment of women through tourism related activities. Chapter V is the concluding chapter of the thesis. This chapter gives an overview of the research.
The study documented the present socioeconomic status of women in the fringe villages of Kaziranga National Park. It revealed the perception scenario of local women regarding tourism, and women empowerment. Formulation of 'Skill maps' showing different skills of rural women through Participatory Rural Appraisal method is the most vital contribution of the study. Most studies look into any one aspect of women getting involved in tourism related activities. This study made analyses of the skill levels of the women in the study area, demand pattern of the tourists, society's perception towards women getting involved in tourism related activities and ultimately attempted at developing local level strategies for socio-economic upliftment of women. Convergence of all the aspects attempted in the study is its contribution to the existing body of knowledge.

The results of the study will be beneficial to policy makers. They can utilize the findings of the study for future tourism planning and local area development. Local tourism entrepreneurs also can exploit the results of skill mapping and formulate strategies for establishing new and expansion of their existing tourism businesses. They can provide employment to skilled women of the locality. Finally, the findings will be beneficial to the local women as well as the local people residing in the periphery of KNP.