

# Women's Empowerment: A Study on Kokrajhar District:2019-2020

Subhagya Das

Assistant Professor, Hatidhura College, Hatidhura

## 1. Introduction

Issues relating to women are very much important in so far as the contemporary political debates are concern. Women and gender related studies show that there is no way but to empower the women in all respect, if we want a peaceful, progressive and secured society. The word "Empowerment" means control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology etc. It involves power to, power with and power within. Some define empowerment, as a process of awareness and conscientization, of capacity building, leading to greater participation, effective decision-making power and control leading to transformative action. With reference to women the power relation that has to be involved includes their lives at multiple levels, family, community, market and the state. Importantly, it involves at the psychological level of Women's ability to capture which resist change like India.

The questions surrounding women's empowerment, the condition and position of women have now become critical to the human rights based approaches to development. The Cairo conference in 1994 organized by UN on Population and Development called attention to women's empowerment as a central focus and UNDP development the Gender Empowerment measures (GEM) which focuses on the three variable that reflect women's participation in society-political power or decision-making, education and health. 1995 UNDP report was devoted to women's empowerment and it declared that if human development is not endangered it is endangered a declaration which almost become a lei motif for further development measuring and policy planning. Equality, sustainability and empowerment are emphasize and the stress was, that women's emancipation does not depend on national income but is an engaged political process.

"Women Empowerment: A Study on Kokrajhar District 2019-2020". It is very fantastic and important topic to study. It is almost unquestionable that progress of women will ultimately lead to the progress of Society and the Country. For this purpose all social barriers and constraints related to the way of women progress must be eradicated. For this purpose we have tried to discuss the prevailing social norms on women like Purdah System, Superstitions, Male domination over women, Dowry related cases, Domestic violence and such other social evils vis-a-vis the opportunities provided for women empowerment etc.

## 2. Objectives of the study:

The gender discrimination in the district is very high. Women in the district of Kokrajhar have been suffering a lot in various aspects of livelihood. They are deprived in social, economic and political field. Therefore, the present study tries to find out the relative backwardness of the women in the

District and to provide some remedial measures to get rid of such backwardness.

The area of study covers the period from 2019 – 2020 on the ground that the Government of India as well as Assam has adopted lots of women empowerment schemes and programmes during this period. The women are given many facilities to upgrade their lifestyle. But whether they have become able to make them fit for affording such empowerment schemes is a matter of great concern. The study is conducted to prove the actual facts of government publicity and ground reality.

Further, there are the Assamese Hindus, Begali Hindus, Rajbongshi, Minority Muslims, Bodo, Rabha, Garo, Santhal etc People in the District. All these caste community people have different socio-religious norms and traditions. They have separate food habits. Even, the Garo community people have matriarchal family system. This unique system needs to be highlighted through this study. We sincerely try to make the study on Garo family system from various angles and it will be a great success for us if we can find out any positive indications or habits and respect towards women from this community people. Such findings will humbly be suggested to adopt and uplift the women status and strengthen empowerment process through this study.

## 3. Statement of the problem

The inhabitants of the district are relatively under developed. The women are lagging far behind male people. There are the problems of girls schooling facilities specially in the backward and remote areas of the District. Family restriction on women and religious binding have kept the women away from equal status. They are politically suppressed. Female development institutions and government programmes are best kept in the file containing red ribbons. Actual position of women has remained almost as it was in the past social system.

All these facts have led the researcher to study on the Topic "WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: A STUDY ON KOKRAJHAR DISTRICT: 2019 – 2020.

## 4. Methodology

The present research study has been confined to rural as well as urban areas of the District. Considering the availability of data. community Development Block level information has been used for stratification purpose.

The study has provided much attention towards the gathering and analysis of data from all section of people and community. But it is not possible to go and conduct survey in all houses and areas by a single researcher within a limited and specific period of time. Again, it is not desirable to left data and information from any part of the district, where study

is conducted, nor provide any wrong data and misinformation. Because objectivity is primary concern of the present research study.

Keeping in mind, the views as expressed, the researcher has selected one subdivisions namely Gossaigaon and respectively to collect primary as well as secondary data

The methods of data collection is both Primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included observation method, survey and field work etc, the secondary sources of data collection included books, references, questionnaire etc.

However, interview method also used to collect data and to compare things prior to 2020 and from 2019 to 2020 on women empowerment matter. Besides this, the Gossaigaon Town has selected for study of women empowerment. This has done because of comparing rural and urban scenario of women empowerment.

In each selected villages the listed households were grouped into strata as per the Assamese Hindu, Bengali Hindu, Rajbongshi, Muslim, Bodo, Rabha, Garo etc. In other words the said communities have been categorized as first, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh-stage stratum.

About 100 household were selected in all from each sample for detailed enquiry. These 100 households were surveyed door to door.

#### 5. Tools Used:

Relevant data were collected with the help of (i) rural household schedule and (ii) Urban household schedule. Both household schedules were prepared in such a way so that they could capable of collect necessary data and information in socio-economic and political field in the study area and to know the actual empowerment scenario of the women.

The rural schedule tried to gain authentic data regarding the village on women economic status, etc.

On the other hand urban schedule tried to garner authentic data on family pattern, opportunities, migration, political and economic status of women etc. Besides, both the schedule covered health care facilities, community development, employment, Job, family torture, domestic violence, dowry, sexual abuse etc.

#### 6. Limitations of the study:

Being the first full doctoral study on the Women Empowerment of Kokrajhar District, it has some limitations. Till now, no academic research has been conducted on the topic in the District. People are living in many remote and backward areas. Moreover, many caste-community people have been living in the area since past time. Touching all problems of women and covering all section of people may not be possible. But despite these problems, the researcher tried to present all relevant document data and information in respect of all needful matters and humbly hope that this study will overcome these problems and able to bring some empirical reality into the agenda of social science.

#### 7. Review of literature:

The Topic "Women Empowerment – A study on Kokrajhar District 2019- 2020" is a fundamental Research Work. In the process of study of this topic some publications

and references has been reviewed. Some of them are as follows:

"Society and Politics in Assam" by Narayan Kanwar, is a classic work to know about the socio-political traditions, Voting behaviour, Party Politics etc. in Assam. In short, it may be said that the above literature gives an overall pen picture of Assam but it has not mentioned about Kokrajhar district which need to be studied with much care to highlight the aspects of women empowerment and some other related issues which have direct or indirect influence on Assamese society. Hence, independent study is needed and thus the topic is selected accordingly.

In the review of literature section, another book namely 'Mahila Aru Rajniti' (Women and Politics) by Das (et. al) has focused on many important issues concerning women in Assam with special references to Indian great women leaders like Kasturba Gandhi, Aruna Asaf Ali, Sarojini Naidu, Annie Bechant, Mother Teresa, Vijaya Laxmi Pandit, Indira Gandhi etc.

'Politics in India, Issues, Institutions, processes' – Edited by Akhil Ranjan Dutta is another publication which is reviewed to attain knowledge for our research work. The book contains 15 articles by different scholars. The first article of the book explains about 'Indian Politics: Nature Legacies and Dynamics', by Akhil Ranjan Dutta has explained various issues including legacy of colonial rule like legacy of Government of India Act, 1935, Legacy of steel frame, Armed Forces (Special power Act) 1958, Legacy of colonial Economy, Legacies of Freedom Struggle, Legacy of People's Resistance, Legacy of Liberal Democratic Values, Legacy of Secular Politics, Class Dynamics, Caste Dynamics, the policy of Reservation and Its Rationale, other Dynamics like gender, Language, Ethnicity and Nationality, Global Economic Forces etc.

#### 8. Methodology

In a research work, Methods play an important role in both social as well as natural sciences. Without proper methodology, the results are likely to be undependable and defective.

In social science research methods, techniques and devices are related to problems on the one hand and availability of personnel and finances on the other. In fact, all these are interlinked with each other and are inseparable. In social research there are many problems, which are not all amenable to current techniques available to the society e.g. such problems which have socio-cultural bias. It is therefore, in the interest of research as well as the researchers that only such problems should be selected for study which are pursuable to available research techniques and devices, unless new techniques are discovered. In social research techniques and problems must go hand in hand.

Taking in view the above facts of use of methods in the present research study, we have decided to take help of some selective methods like – Questionnaire method, survey method, schedule method, Interview method etc. We hope that these methods will provide us sufficient data and information because in social research these methods are widely recognized and accepted as fruitful. Again, the present

topic, "Women empowerment: A study on Kokrajhar District : 2019-2020, have relations with these methods. The methods are discussed here under for better concept and for larger interest of the study.

### 9. The questionnaire method :

In a large country or in a research project where the information's are scattered in a vast and inaccessible area the information are collected with the help of questionnaire method.

Keeping in views the above limitations of Questionnaire Method, the research scholar has applied some other methods to the present study 'WOMEN EMPOWERMENT'– A STUDY ON KOKRAJHAR DISTRICT: 2019 – 2020. These methods are discussed below:

### 10. Observation method:

The observation method is one of the most important methods for the study of social problems or in social research. The observation can be by way of either direct participation or observance in a non-participant manner. Likewise, situation can be both controlled as well as uncontrolled in the use of this method.

By using the observation method, data from the field is collected with the help of observation by the observer or by directly going to the field. But the observation of social behaviours may be value added. When an observation adds adequate description of the character of social atmosphere of the large number of activity within which the social act occurs. In using this method, the investigator must be present in the field and collect relevant data for his study. This is the earliest method of study. There is no person in the society who does not observe anything. There are many people who keenly observe the things, while others just observe and proceed further. We see that children starts observing the parents, neighbours and the people in whose contact they come. In fact many of our social behaviours, attitudes and present day activities are the result of such observation.

### 11. Interview method:

Now-a-days interview method is becoming increasingly popular in social research while adopting this method, the interviewer himself interacts with the interviewee, offers questions to him and records the replies by self without noticing the respondents. This system has its own merits and drawbacks. This system as a whole requires preparations and many steps are to be overcome to start with actual interview work. The interviewer should have a guide who tremendously helps the in completing his task. In the words of Fred, N. Kerlinger, "The interview is perhaps the most ubiquitous method of obtaining information from people. It has been and still used in all kinds of practical situations; the lawyer obtains information from a client; the physician learns about a patient; the admission officer or professor determine the suitability of students for schools, department and curricula. Only recently, however, has the interview been used systematically for scientific purposes, both in the laboratory and in the field."

### 12. Field data analysis

For finding out of the causes of a social problem, data is collected with the help of various methods. Each method of course has its own limitations, but every method is made to ensure that while data is being collected, there should be no bias and that the data is collected in an impartial manner. But mere collection of data does not lead any society anywhere, unless that is properly analyzed and tabulated. Again data can of course be collected from different sources but all that is needed is to classify them properly.

### 13. Interpretation of data:

Data collected can become socially useful when it is properly interpreted. Unless that is done there can be no utility of data collected by the researcher. But at the same time, we should be careful that such an interpretation should be objective and unbiased. Otherwise the results are bound to be misleading. Data can be classified in different ways. How best the data can be presented in a readable and presentable form will very much depend on the judgment of the researcher and as such this work cannot be left to the interviewer.

### 14. Collection of data and analysis:

The topic of the present study 'WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: A STUDY ON KOKRAJHAR DISTRICT 2019-2020' needed various type of data collection and hence we did our level best to capture all kinds of relevant data, information and happenings throughout our study. During our study period we planned to find out answer of one question and thereby proceed for another, so that clear picture comes in the scenario. Accordingly, we first tried to answer the following question, i.e. what is the historical background of the District and its population pattern? To get proper answer of this question. we studied some manuscript and met some leading persons of the district who led various movements and agitations to create a separate district in the name of Kokrajhar out of the old Goalpara district. After collecting data it is found that there is a long history behind the creation of the kokrajhar District.

Findings of the study of enrolment data for sample population in the age group 06-20 years shows that there is marginal difference among males and females in respect of never enrolled category among the religious groups. Although the percentage of never enrolled is 10 percent of the sample population in the age group 06-20 years, 20 percent left after enrolment while 10 percent are enrolled but do not go to school. 70 percent of the enrolled and regular students attend government schools. The drop out rate by religious groups show that Hindus have comparative high drop out rate than the Muslims. The drop out rate among the Christians is the lowest among the sample population. Gender segregated data shows that male drop out rate is higher than the females across all religious groups. The primary reason for drop out is the need to earn for family and 46 percent of the drop outs among the Muslims attributed this to be the main reason whiles the corresponding figures for Hindus and Christians is 30 percent and 20 percent respectively. The drop out rate due to necessity of earning is more renounced among the male children than the females. The second most important reason for drop out is the expenditure and cost of fees and 22 percent of Hind children and 15 percent of Muslim children dropped out due to the cost/fee structure. Although failing in

the examination has very small impact among Muslim children to drop out from their education, however 18 percent of Hindu children are reported to have dropped out because of failing in the examination. Significant to note that 20 percent of Muslim children and 15 percent of Hindu children dropped as they were not interested in studying. While failing in the examination is the primary reason for Muslim females' drop out from school.

#### **Socio-Political Affairs and People's Participation :**

The world is moving fast in all respect. The contemporary development debates advocates a pro-active role of the people at the grassroots for successful democratic decentralization, which in turn accelerates the process of development. The 73rd and 74th amendments of the Constitution further paved the jurisdiction of democratic decentralization in our country by making local governance Institutions at the centre-stage. The process of democratic decentralization can be most vulnerable source of ushering development, particularly in rural areas, with their active support, help and co-operation. Our study traced that the participation of the selected households in political and social affairs has been indicated by their voting behaviour and membership in local VCDC. Our survey indicated that Muslims have a higher participation rate of voting in any election. But the participation of Hindus are less than that of Muslims and the Christians in the electioneering process. This indicates in a way the significant role played by the Muslim votes in local level political process in the district. It has been observed that 18 percent of the selected households have membership of SHG or religious social organization. The most common social organizational membership is SHG. Among the religious groups 20 percent of the selected households have membership of any kind and the corresponding proportions for Muslims and Christians is 15 percent and 10 percent respectively in the district. It is also observed that during election time, both male and female section of people come out of their home specially during VCDC election time. For some people particularly for rural Muslims, election time become festive time. They whole heartedly participate in it.

#### **Issue of deprivation in the families:**

During our investigation and interaction with the people of selected villages, they repeatedly told us to highlight the major issues of deprivation which includes lack of proper education, un-employment, lack of electricity, pure drinking water etc.

#### **Welfare of minority communities:**

It is observed that the district administration has given some facilities to the people. But the minority community like Muslims, Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribes are lagging behind development. So, they tried to convince us that they need some priority basis development programmes like construction of village roads, establishment of school, college, ITI Centre's and health Centre's. Besides, we have seen that there is no electricity connection in some villages.

It is found that the health infrastructure of the villages and health status of the population in the district reveals that the district has major deficiency in delivering health care

services. It is found that the number of hospital beds in the district per one lakh population is 15. Moreover, only 10 percent of the inhabited villages in the district have medical facility. The institutional delivery among the Muslims was low and consequently, health problems among the Muslim children are higher than other community. The immunization status of the surveyed population shows that 76.5 percent of the children in the age group of 0-6 years have been immunized which needs to be acquired hundred percent.

During our survey period, it is found that education continues to be an area of major concern in the developmental efforts of the district. Although 98 percent of the sample villages have a primary school, but 60 percent of them are one room schools and black board desk are available for only 80 percent of the schools. The survey indicated poor literacy status among the Muslims particularly females of selected villages. The high drop out ratio of male students particularly the Muslims due to poverty needs serious attention, from the Government and from the NGO's.

Implementation of statistics is a central function of every research work, because it is a mathematical technique or process for gathering, organizing, analyzing and interpretation of numerical data. In the present study the data have been analyzed statistically or quantitatively.

#### **15. Summary**

In the discussion of the role of women in social and political sphere in the Gossaigaon area, it has been observed that the role of women in the said area has been largely increased and the trend is being continued. Women of this remote and under developed area had no any say on any socio-political affairs a few years ago. We can say this condition of women in the line and language of communist thinker Karl Marx as 'HAVE NOT' category people. But now the situation is being changed and they have acquired the minimum status of saying something on societal affairs.

Secondly, role of women in other social affairs like social development programme, education development programme, public awareness programme on AIDS, Family Matters etc. increasing gradually in the Gossaigaon area.

Thirdly, women participation in cultural programmes, economic affairs etc. are also increasing day by day. The orthodox Muslim families in the area could not allow their girls to take part in cultural programmes. If the situation remains unchanged like this participation by women on political affairs will not increased. But this situation is gradually changing into positive directions.

Forth, Women empowerment process has largely increased in so far as group activities are concerned in Assam since 1994. The process of formation of VCDC Institutions, women representation, formation of Mahila Samittee, Self-Help Group (SHG) etc. has been increasing women empowerment process.

Fifth, there is a feeling in the society that women are not capable to take any decision in the socio-political matters. But this feeling has been proved wrong by the women representatives in the various levels of PRI's. Many women representatives performed much better than their male counterpart in the cleanliness in many affairs in contrast to male representatives.

Sixth, women have taken the chance of improvement of economic condition improvement by throwing out social and religious restrictions since the Assam Panchayat At. 1994 is implanted. Now, they are interested in the engagement programmes launched by the government of India through Block Development office.

Seventh, schooling facilities have changed the day to day life style of rural people vis-a vis women. It have enabled them conscious in various socio-political and economic matters, superstitions etc. The people have become too scrupulous about their own traditions and beliefs. Women have a share in such social transformation affairs. The educational institutions have been playing a great role in process of social reformation activities.

Eighth, child marriage is cease to exist in the State. Early marriage of girls has also come down in number.

Ninth, interest of people has been increasing. Self-income, self-reliant and self-sufficient in the minds of women is seen in the study time. Therefore, self-help groups are emerging among all section of people.

#### 16. Socio-Political Problems of Women in Kokrajhar Area:

Therefore, the social problems of all these people are not the same. Therefore, our discussion of social problems will be done separately, so that the basic problems come into light. In the Koch-Rajbongshi community Male domination over women are very high in the Gossaigaon area. There is the problem of alcohol drinking by male people. This system is almost socially accepted norms and nobody can protest against such malpractices. This has made the rural women life miserable..

Religious bindings and conservativeness is very much high in case of women. According to Hindu religious law women are not permitted to take part in socio-political affairs. Many women are not permitted to participate in the religious programmes. They cannot go into Mandir. Religion prevents many of them to take to take part in social affairs.

Marriage and Dowry have been prevailing in this society. In some remote areas of the district there is early age marriage system. As per social norms, girls are to be given marriage at the early age because at this time their demands are very high. Of late, this tendency of early marriage system is going to be end by the passing of time. "Dowry" is treated as a socially accepted norms in this society.

Lack of proper Education is a major problem in this society. A few years ago, women were not allowed for higher education. Economic under development also prevented them to acquire higher education by the girls. Most of women of the area were basic (lower primary Education) passed. Although this backwardness has come to down but still major portion of girls are not getting proper schooling facilities. This caused a major problem in social development and in the matter of empowerment of women.

There are some major social problems in so far as the women of Kochrajbonshi is concerned. They cannot take part in the society related meetings or "Gram Sabha" related program to raise their issues. Even they cannot take leading part in "Puja" related functions. Male domination is too much high in these affairs.

#### 17. Major findings of the study: -

The area of the study i.e. Gossaigaon area is one of the development area of Assam. There are several social, political as well as economic-problems in the area. These problems are originated due to lack of proper education facility, infrastructural development, religious conservativeness, superstitions, and so on.

This research work is an attempt to observe the results found out from the data collected. From the Questionnaires, the investigator has deducted some vital women related problems in the socio-political sphere in Gossaigaon area. Investigator selected 5 villages near gossaigaon area for in-depth study and found the following problems.

1. Male Domination: - Male Domination over women on every respect of livelihood is very high in almost all villages of gossaigaon area.
2. Religions Bindings: - Religious bindings on women are also very high in gossaigaon area. Due to these problems, Women development is jeopardized.
3. Purdah Pratha: Purdah Pratha is seen in the Muslim orthodox families in gossaigaon area. It is also a hindrance to the women development affairs
4. Dowry Problem: The problem of dowry in matrimonial ceremony is also found. It is high in Bengali community (SC) societies in gossaigaon area.
5. Lack of proper Education: Education is not up to the expectation in gossaigaon area. Although the literacy Rate is shown about 60% but there is lack quality education.
6. Lack of political consciousness: The people of gossaigaon area are not politically conscious at all. This hampers their development.

#### 18. Suggestions:

The above study has acquainted us with the problems of women in gossaigaon area. These problems are the great obstacles for all round development of women in the gossaigaon area. Hence following are suggested for eradication of these problems.

1. Education: Education is the epicenter of the development of human mind and thinking. It makes people conscious and logistic. Education, as in the contrast of gossaigaon area. Especially women need this facility in broader sense. Without proper education. The eradication of the problems as discussed above is not possible. Therefore proper and modern education is eminent for women development.
2. Stop Early Marriage and Dowry: To uplift the women status in the society, the early marriage and dowry system must be stopped in all forms all fronts. Mahila Samittee. Social organizations, volunteer organization etc. must have to take active role in this regards. Only women may not vanish this evil from society. So the participation of male is also necessary in this matter. Women should encourage male people specially the progressive youths of the locality to take measures against early marriage and dowry system from the society. This will definitely benefit all section of people.
3. Organization of Awareness Programme: For the upliftment of socio-political role of women in the

gossaigaon area. Various awareness programme such as 'AIDS' such as 'AIDS' camp, family welfare and Birth control programme, Education seminar. Cultural programme, various village level competitions, Awareness programme on deforestation etc. are needed. District Administration must have to pay special attention in this regard.

4. Increase in Political Participation: Political parties have to work for increase of political participation among women. By this process women will be able to take active part in the politics and policy formation matters in the grass root level. Right selection of public representatives will be possible in this system.
5. Stop Manipulation: In our discussion it is seen that the politicians, bureaucrats, contractors and social elite manipulate in the working of VCDC and women representative are seriously sufferer in this regard. This could have happened due to lack of proper consciousness among women representative about their works and powers. Therefore, this type of manipulation must be ended. Policy should be framed and law should be executive in this matter.
6. Relinquish Social Barriers: it is seen in our study that women cannot in some social and religious meeting and they cannot take part in village level trial process. Some social sanctions is preventing them from this process. Hence these types of barriers must be relinquished from the society.

**Eradicate Corruption and Poverty:** Corruption is a Major cause for the under development of society. Gossaigaon is not exception to it. Public representatives and officers of various departments except a few are more or less corrupt. Many public works do not get reality due to corruption. In some case. Finances are sanctioned several times in one

development work in the several different under various schemes. It has caused under development of society. Moreover, People of Gossaigaon are poor and middle class. Maximum people are still doing agricultural works in traditional manner. Agricultural sector needs major changes and reforms here by this way economic condition of people will development. In this regard we can say in the language of Kari Marx that Economics is the principal factor of socio-political changes and brings justice and equality in the society. Therefore, to bring such conditions corruption must be eliminated in all forms and in all fronts. Various poverty alleviation programme must be implemented in the society, Public money should be expended in development works. People specially the women should keep dog type vigilance on such public works. They should not think that they have no power and mere created to obey the dominance of their husbands and guardian. Rather the women should think that they are as equal as with men and are the integral part of the society. Hence they have also some social and political role. This social political sense is to be grown in the mind of women. Anchalik Panchayat can take leading role in such affairs. More over, the salary and other bonus are very low in Panchayat level members and representatives. They allocate development works, sanction money for this purpose and jobs are allocated among people, they implement various programme which have huge monetary grants.

#### 19. Conclusion:

The above discussion about the Role of women in Gossaigaon area shows that women of this under developed society are facing enormous hardship and challenges. Most of the people are unconscious about their daily doings and happenings. They see these challenges & hardship as the writing of their Luck, and by this way they tolerate.

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