Chapter :1

Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

Women play a vital role in the society. The future of children depends, by and large, upon the mother who generally stays at home and takes care of her children's health and education. This is particularly in countries like India where society and life of people are still moulded by traditional and spiritual foundations, particularly in the rural setting. The need to promote and enhance women's participation on par with men in the social, economic and political process of rural development and share fully the improved conditions of life in rural areas was reiterated and elaborated in the recommendations of the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (WCARRD 1979). The WCARRD also observed that the situation of rural women has now been identified as one of the critical manifestations of the growing imbalances, which constitutes a threat not merely to the development of the female population but to the socio-economic progress of the nations themselves. The Five Year Plans which were formulated after the publication of the report have attempted to impart new thrust and direction to women's development through series of various programmes, schemes and the action plans administered. However, without economic independence women cannot achieve equality. It is in fact a peculiar situation that in spite of the extensive workload carried out by rural women their participation in the rural development programmes is overlooked. Their contribution to agricultural production has not been less than that of men. Both men and women share the pre-harvest and post-harvest manual-cum-technological operations almost equally. Unfortunately, the policy-makers, development planners and implementers have failed to reflect people's own perceptions of their need and aspirations in the strategies and programmes intended for their development. It has often been realised that while examining the causes of failure of certain programmes, the intended beneficiaries in no way saw the programmes as being related to their needs. This even more true in the case of rural women whose point of view seems to have never been taken into account. The problem of being statistically overlooked and neglected is further compounded by the urban middle class men who dominate policy planning and implementation. But it is the fact that any development strategy which neglects the need for enhancing the role of women, cannot lead to comprehensive socio-

economic development, more in the rural areas. While women including rural women cannot be seen as a homogeneous group anywhere, this is especially true of developing societies like India where the caste and the class factors stratify women like men into different social layers. As a result of this, their participation in development would differ according to their status in the socio-economic fabric. Therefore, this study aims to understand the participation of women in different rural development programmes including the aspects of politics, agriculture, household and socio-cultural activities with a comparative analysis of three villages. This chapter deals with the problem, research strategy, methodology, objectives and significance of the study.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The word 'Participation' is used broadly to refer to the role of members of the general public, as distinguished from that of appointed officials, including civil servants, in influencing the activities of government or in providing directly for community needs. It may occur on any level- from village to the country as a whole. Participation cannot be imposed on the people from above; it should be voluntary and based on will to participation. People's participation can be better understood in four senses: (i) Participation in decision –making, (ii) participation in implementation of development programmes and projects, (iii) participation in monitoring and evaluation of development programmes and projects, and (iv) participation in sharing the benefits of development. In the common parlance, participation is supporting a programme of government departments or voluntary agencies by the beneficiaries. Participation is self-doing in the context of a group. It implies that without group, participation has no relevance (Joseph 1997). Participation in development means how community member can be assured the opportunity of contributing to the creation of the communities' goods and services. It involves active, collectively organised and continuous efforts by the people themselves in setting goals, pooling resources together and taking actions which aim at improving their living conditions (Pardhasaradhi 1992). Participation is a sensitive issue and women participation is more sensitive. The issue is made complicated by the indiscriminate application of the term 'participation', irrespective of the contexts. Hence, there are plenty of words analogous to the term participation; viz, involvement, support, empowerment, mobilization, joining in, co-operation etc. The exact meaning of the term can be

correctly conceived only if the objective, values and the context in which it is used are explicitly expressed (Joseph 1997). The concept of 'Rural Development' is a combination of the two concepts i.e. 'Rural' and 'Development'. Therefore, before going for discussion on the concept of 'Rural Development', an attempt is made here to discuss about the concepts of 'Rural' and 'Development'. According to the United States Census, rural includes all the people living outside the urban area and who live on farm. Rural is differentiated from urban in terms of geographical location, spatial distribution of households based on kinship, family ties and close interaction between individuals and families. The occupation centres around agriculture (Mondal and Ray 2007). In the American context Paul H. Landis (1940) in his book 'Rural life in Process' described the concept of Rural as follows:

.....for statistical purposes, rural consists of places with less than 2500 people, unless otherwise noted. For purpose of socio-psychological, rural consists of those areas in which a high degree of intimacy and informality characterises relationships, the urban beginning at that ill-defined point where people assume impersonal attitudes toward each other. For purpose of economic-occupational analysis, farming is the central point of interest.

For instance, the US government has adopted the following definition for rural habitations:

....all persons living in (a) places of 1,500 or more incorporated cities, boroughs and villages, (b) incorporated towns of 2,500 inhabitants or more except in New Inland, New York and Wisconsin, where 'towns' are simply minor civil divisions of countries, (c) the densely settled urban fringe including both incorporated and unincorporated areas, around cities of 50,000 or more, and (d) un-incorporated places of 2,500 inhabitants or more outside any urban fringe (Doshi and Jain 2007).

In India also similar effort has been made. For purpose of government functioning, the term 'rural' is defined in terms of revenue. On population size, for the Indian government, the village means a revenue village. It might include one big village or a cluster of small village. However, for Census Commission, a village is that which is identified by its name having definite boundaries. The Census of India has defined a village as under:

The basic unit for rural areas is the revenue village which has definite surveyed boundaries. The revenue village may comprise several hemlets but the entire village has been treated as one unit for presentation of census data. In unsurveyed areas, like villages within forest areas, each habitation area with locally recognised boundaries within each forest range officer's beat, was treated as one unit (Doshi and Jain 2007).

The concept of 'development' can be viewed as a process of realising certain goals or values, such as improved health, improved housing, better nutrition, more communications, improved transportation, increased command over resources etc. It is fundamentally a process of transformation that involves the whole society- its economic, social, political and physical structure as well as the value system and way of life of the people. Development may be defined as the process of creating a situation in which all citizens of the country can lead a satisfying life. It involves improving availability for its citizens of food, drinking water, clothing, housing, education, employment, health services, science, technology, transport, communication, trade, commerce, industry, market etc. in a sustainable way, without causing any long-term deterioration of the environment. This requires planning with foresight and their appropriate implementation. The main problem in developing countries with their development programmes is their lack of proper implementation (Mondal and Ray 2007).

The term 'Rural Development' is becoming a buzz word all over the world. As most of the people on earth live in rural areas, development in true sense cannot be expected without addressing the basic necessities of this huge population. In the era of modern science and technology, large amount of population in rural areas still deprived of adequate nutrition, good education, proper communication and social justice. Therefore, rural development is gaining importance in both the developed and developing countries. However, till today, there is no universally acceptable definition of rural development. As a concept, rural development is comprehensive and multidimensional. Dictionary meaning of development is growth or evolution, stage of advancement. In the context of rural background it means developing better physical, social and economic conditions of the population living in the rural area. The objectives have been better reflected in the views of Michacl Todaro that 'Rural Development' encompasses: (i) improvement in levels of living, including employment, education, health and nutrition, housing and a variety of social services.

(ii) decreasing inequality in the distribution of rural incomes and in rural-urban balance in income and economic opportunities. (iii) increasing the capacity of the rural sector to sustain and accelerate the pace of these improvements (Karalay 2005). In the words of Robert Chambers (1983), "Rural development is a strategy to enable a specific group of people, poor rural women and men, to gain for themselves and their children more of what they want and need. It involves helping the poorest among those who seek a livelihood in the rural areas to demand and control more of the benefits of rural development. The group includes small-scale farmers, tenants and landless". Singh (1999) conceptualised rural development as a phenomenon, strategy and discipline and connotes overall development of rural areas with a view to improve the quality of life of rural people. It is a comprehensive and multi-dimensional concept, and encompasses the development of agriculture and allied activities, village and cottage industries and crafts, socio-economic infrastructure, community services and facilities, and, above all, the human resources in rural areas. Thus, rural development is a process of utilising natural and human resources, technologies, infrastructural facilities, institutions and organisations and government policies and programmes to speed up economic growth in rural areas, to provide jobs and to improve the quality of rural life towards self-sustenance.

Rural development has got the topmost priority in contemporary times in India, because majority of its population resides in rural areas which constitute the largest reservoir of its human resources. It is the process of collective efforts aimed at improving the well-being and self-realization of people living in the rural areas. Rural development, according to the World Bank (1975), is a strategy designed to improve economic and social life of a specific group of people – the rural poor. It involves extending the benefits of development to the poorest among those who seek a livelihood in the rural areas. The group includes small scale farmers, tenants and the landless. The role of woman is not restricted to the four walls of the households. She plays a role both at home and outside home. This is true for both urban and rural women. In comparison of the urban women, the rural women have the added responsibility of sharing non-household responsibilities like farm practices, as farming is considered as a family enterprise in which womenfolk are equally responsible and they contribute to all aspects of the cultivation and other farm operations (K. Singh 2001 : 109). Participation of women in rural development is

patterned under different sets of factors in different rural settings and is having differential impacts on women and social setups in rural areas. Social forces like gender, caste, class and religion play crucial role in determining patterns as well as impact of women's participation in rural development. Generally their role has been detected in various studies of rural areas. From the different studies on women's participation in rural development it is found that programmed development which is going on in political, economic, educational, health and communication sectors in the rural areas and women's participation in rural development varies from sector to sector and region to region. Yet, the studies have given importance to women's participation in rural development as it is seen as a means of women's empowerment. A question therefore arises: **What patterns of women's participation in rural development are perceived to be emerging in rural Assam, especially in the villages of Jorhat district?** The question is being attempted with a comparative understanding of participation of women in rural development in three villages of Jorhat district; namely, Balijan Gaon, Randhanijan Gaon and Chari Gaon to find out the actual working, institutional mechanisms and consequences of women's participation in rural development. Using mainly oral data to be collected by administering an interview schedule to the women engaged in rural development programmes, the study is intensively focused on the participation of women in various sectors of development in the three villages, preponderantly populated by Scheduled Tribe, Scheduled Caste and General Caste populations respectively. It is a comparative analysis of the three villages to analyse the status and factors of women's participation and to suggest measures for women's enhanced participation in rural development. In this study rural development refers to programmes and institutions under implementation in the three villages such as (i) Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY), (ii) Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), (iii) National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) and (iv) Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). The key term 'Participation' in this study refers to involvement of women in the implementation of the above mentioned rural development programmes and also the participation in political, agriculture, household and socio-cultural activities in their setting.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature on participation of women in rural development is vast and it covers various aspects of rural women's participation which are presented under the following classes:

I. Studies Depicting the Magnitude of Women's Participation in Rural Development

These studies have mainly presented the women's participation extending over all the three sectors of economy; namely, primary, secondary and tertiary. However, their work participation is yet to get full recognition in the society. Women have been playing a vital role since ages in the households as well as on the farm. Women have been participating in primary sector activities like sowing, weeding, transplanting, rearing animals and poultry. Besides that, in the secondary sector, they participate in activities like bidi making, rope making, pottery etc. With the passage of time, women are also participating in tertiary sector activities like banking, communication, education, transportation, etc. Women's contribution is still more in primary sector than the other two sectors of the economy. Women have always been working in and outside the house. They always have to work for sheer survival of their families. But all such involvement is generally recognized as 'casual, 'supplementary' and 'supporting' type. A focus only on education or on economic independence may not necessarily solve the problem; it requires a change in attitude of the society including both men and women, cultural transformation and a paradigm shift in status of women. The educational institutions, the media, the writers, leaders of all description, the extension personnel and above all the enlightened public should carry on the job of bringing about a change in the value orientations that the women are not only biological partners in procreation but equal partners in social and economic development. This is brought out by the studies reviewed here, which cover the period of a decade or more from 1991 to 2008 and were conducted in various states of India; namely, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Assam (Setty 2008; Bhagyalakshmi 2004; Gogoi and Goswami 2003; Sharma 2003; Kaur and Sharma 2002; Joshi 1999; Goyal and Mahipal 1991; Bilgrami 1991).

II. Studies Focusing on Women's Participation in Agricultural Activities

These studies mainly focus on women's participation in the activities related to farm, animal husbandry, irrigation etc which have been recently recognized but their access to modern technology is still denied there. These studies reveal that rural women contribute significantly to agriculture, animal husbandry, poultry and allied process of production, i.e., women are playing very vital role in almost all agricultural operations. Women are sharing responsibilities in the agricultural activities like irrigation of fields, application of manures and fertilizers, sowing and transportation, weeding, harvesting etc. Participation of women in agriculture has been though recently recognized, the access of modern agricultural machinery has been denied to women because of the belief that they cannot handle modern machinery. The world of mechanization is considered the male dominated in most countries. Women's key roles are seen in terms of users and collectors of water for domestic use. However, when water distribution and management becomes decentralized and/or privatized, then the gender role gets reversed; it becomes a male dominated area, where males are the managers and women are workers. If women have a more effective role in irrigation management, it will boost the economic production in agriculture. Improved technologies will increase and improved the food security. All obstacles to the full participation of women must be removed to ensure that they find themselves on equal terms with men in all facets of life such as cultural, social, economic and political. A working woman must be recognized as an asset for the family- and for the nation too.. These studies are covering the period from 1991 to 2008. (Soni 2008; Kulkarni 2008; Hashia 2007; Arul and Kaqruna Karan 2006; Ghosh 2004; Agrawal 2003; Jain 1991; Sethi 1991).

III. Studies Highlighting Women's Participation in Entrepreneurship

There is a good number of studies which bring out the women's role in entrepreneurship and manufacturing based on rural crafts, though they are facing various problems in their venture into the secondary sector of economy. Though entrepreneurship is important for increasing national production to raise standard of living of the people and to solve the unemployment problem, in India adequate employment facility to its people has become a herculean task. This problem is more acute among rural women. The only alternative to solve this problem is

entrepreneurship development among women. Enterprises which are familiar to rural women locally should be encouraged. For quick and better returns locally available raw materials must be used. The activities like handicraft, rural crafts etc. may be considered. Steps have to be taken in this direction providing training to women to give guidance in technical, financial as well as on marketing front. But more important is to make the society aware of their potentialities as a significant human resource, creating a proper climate in the society, conducive for women to come forward and become self-employed. Women entrepreneurs of North East India started their business mostly on their own initiative to become self-sufficient and to establish their own identity and majority of the women entrepreneurs faced some problems like finance, high prices of materials/tools, procurement of raw materials, etc. Some other problems like problem of mobility, criticized by others, unable to pay enough attention to their children and the need for playing double role as housewife and entrepreneur. The reviewed studies on women's entrepreneurship mostly cover the period from 1991 to 2006 and were conducted in North East India, West Bengal and Assam (Jaswal and Jaswal 2007; Sidhu and Kaur 2006; Ghosh 2006; Dasgupta, Roy and Chattopadhyay 2006; Agarwal 2004; Verma 2003; Talukdar 2003; Das 1997; Durgadevi 1991).

Recently a new approach, SHG approach, has been introduced to augment women's and poor people's participation in entrepreneurship for their development and it is slowly but steadily changing scenario of rural women's participation in development. The Self-Help Group (SHG) is a small group of poor people, having a homogeneous social and economic background and joining together. SHGs give some opportunities to the women of villages. The various employment and income opportunities they have given can be stated in the following sectors- agriculture, allied agricultural activities, agro-based and small scale industries, handloom weaving, sericulture, food processing industries, tailoring and embroidery etc. The SHGs are the tool to promote rural savings and gainful employment. Therefore women's contribution to household income is also increased. The study reveals that the participation of women in the SHG is strongly determined by household income, employment, saving, literacy positions and in the reduction of migration of rural households. These studies have been conducted in the period of half a decade, from 2006 to 2010 in the states like Karnataka, Bihar, Chattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya

Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Orissa, Haryana and Assam (Panwar 2010; Choudhury 2008; Planithuria 2007; Chetan and Murthy 2006; Srivastava 2006; Pati 2006).

IV. Studies Signifying the Women's Participation in Rural Development Programmes

These studies show how women's involvement in government induced programmes like NREGA has paved the way for their economic improvement and empowerment. Studies reveal that development participation, particularly rural development participation involves a complex process of change in rural sub-system and their interactions resulting into desired improvements in rural incomes, employment opportunities, rural welfare and allied aspects of rural life. Generally, majority of the rural women depend on the wages they earn through unskilled, casual and manual labour. After implementing the NREGA (now renamed as MGNREGA) programme, the studies found that NREGA has become a beacon of light in the empowerment of rural women and contributed substantially for the increased living and economic conditions by creating equal wages to male and female workers and increasing the minimum wage (Ramesh and Krishna Kumar 2009; Joseph 1997; Mishra 1992).

V. Studies Dealing with Women's Participation in Microfinance

This class studies exposit the women's role in micro-finance activities and their economic independence resulting from it. Microfinance is emerging as a powerful instrument for poverty alleviation in the new economy. Micro-finance has leads to the economic empowerment of women relieving them from debt and financial burden. The micro-finance helped poor women by providing independent source of income outside home, which reduces their economic dependence on husbands as well as by increasing the assertiveness of women and providing independent source of income with exposure to new sets of ideas, values and social support. But there are some factors which make it more difficult for women empowerment through micro businesses. The factors are like- lake of knowledge of the market and potential profitability, employment of too many relatives which increases social pressure to share benefits, inadequate book-keeping, lake of capital, setting prices arbitrarily, credit policies that can gradually ruin their business (many customers cannot pay cash, on the other hand, suppliers are very harsh towards women) etc. To solve the

above mentioned problems, the education of women is necessary. There is an urgent need to enable women at the receiving end to build their perspective and understanding regarding how their situation is impacted by micro-credit and how that is impacted by the macro paradigm shift in the discourses of empowerment and development. This is brought out by the studies reviewed here, which cover the period from 2002 to 2010 (Dheepa and Barani 2010; Biswas 2010; Lalnunmawia 2008; Sharma 2008; Verma 2008; Chaturvedi 2002).

VI. Studies Revealing Women's Participation in Political Process in Rural India

Studies have brought out the women's increasing constructive role in development and political process in the rural areas. Panchayati Raj is the best system for empowering women and it is the lowest unit of local government. It is a trap to believe that if women came to power through PRIs it will necessarily lead to empowerment, a reduction of gender discrimination and a better life for them. To overcome the deep rooted prejudice against women in public life one measure is the reservation of 33% seats for women in local self-governments. As a result of reservation for women, their participation in the political process has been ensured and they are now playing a constructive role in development and welfare activities courageously. But, still, they have to go a long way to prove that they are equally capable as men. This has been brought out by the studies conducted in Karnataka, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh from 1997 to 2010 (Malyadri 2010; Kotwal Lee 2008; Singh 2006; Subha, Bhargava and Nayak 2006; Vats 2004; Vidya 1997; Thakkar and Gawankar 1997)

VII. Studies Related to Women's Empowerment through Education

These studies reveal women's participation in education and its empowering impact upon them. Gender equality is a constituent as well as instrument of development. It is not possible for a country to achieve the objective of growth in real terms unless half of the population is at disadvantage in terms of basic needs, access to knowledge and political voice. Education has been considered as one of the most important means of empowering women with knowledge, skills and confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process. The greatest single factor which can incredibly improve the status of women in any society is education. Inadequate share of women in education is affecting their status in all walks of life

and also compromising the health and education of their children. Education enables women not only to gain more knowledge about the world outside of her home but helps her to get status, positive self esteem, and self confidence, necessary courage and inner strength to face challenges in life. Apparently it also facilitates them to procure a job and supplement the income of family and achieve social status. Considering education as one of the most important means of empowering women, many programmes, schemes, awards and facilities have been initiated by the central Government and State Government to promote girls and women education. Distance education has emerged as a boon to women of all ages to equip themselves intellectually through acquisition of knowledge, leading them to new radical methods of thinking and alternative and thus rendering them more autonomous and liberated. However, there is a still gap between male and female literacy rates, high dropout rates of girls in school are also alarming. There are some factors that are responsible for the non-enrolment and high dropout rates of girls; viz., poverty, early marriage, conservative attitude and social traditions, inadequacy of infrastructure facilities like toilets, drinking water, hostel facilities in schools, etc. This is brought out by the studies reviewed here, which cover the period from 2001 to 2010 (Modi 2010; Nagar 2008; Janaki 2006; Rahman 2005; Sambangi 2002; Seth 2001)

From the review of the literature on Women's participation in rural development it is found that variations owe to various factors in different settings. These factors may be differently ordered at the macro and micro levels. Thus, a comparative analysis of different local settings is useful to analyse the status and factors of women's participation and to chalk out programmes augmenting women's participation in rural development. There are mostly studies of women's participation in rural development based on extensive area surveys as well as one of the sectors or a few of rural development. Intensive as well as comprehensive studies of women's participation in rural development in comparative perspective are only few and these, too, are area-specific. The studies conducted in North-East India also represent specific area. Moreover, these are not intensive and comprehensive in their nature to grasp the subtle nature of women's participation in rural development.

Rationale of the Study

Looking to the paucity of intensive and comprehensive studies of women's participation in diverse regions a comparative study of patterns of women's participation in various development sectors has been taken. Therefore, the study is designed to analyse women's participation in three villages of Jorhat district in Assam. The participation is examined intensively in various sectors of development in the three villages attempting the following questions:

1. What patterns of women's participation in rural development are perceived in rural Assam, especially in the villages of Jorhat district?
2. What are the important dimensions of women's participation in rural development?
3. What social forces/factors are responsible in shaping women's participation in rural development?
4. What are social consequences of women's participation in rural development?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study has attempted to achieve the objectives such as:

(i) To understand the nature of women's participation in rural development under the social structure of the villages

(ii) To know the dimensions of women's participation in rural development under the village social structures

(iii) To identify the social forces (gender, caste, class and religion), influencing women's participation in rural development in the social structure of the villages

(iv) To assess the social consequences of women's participation in rural development in terms of women and social change in the villages

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The study is based on oral responses of the women engaged in rural development programmes in three villages of Jorhat district of Assam. All the women, engaged in rural development programmes in Balijan Gaon, Randhanijan Gaon and Chari Gaon constitute the universe and each woman represents a unit of the study. A

10% stratified random sample of the total adult women population and of their SHGs was taken from each of the social strata of caste, class and religion in the respective village as respondents. For sampling of respondents a list of the women for each village was prepared by conducting household census. Besides, all the women participating in MNREGS were selected as the respondents. Thus, there are three types of women respondents from each village; viz; (i) women from households, (ii) women from SHGs and (iii) the women participating in MNREGS. For comparative analysis, the three villages; namely, Chari Gaon, Randhanijan Gaon and Balijan Gaon, each, dominated by the General Castes, the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes respectively were selected purposively. The data were collected through a structured interview schedule administered to the women sampled by using random sampling for three groups of each of the three villages. The three groups of respondents are briefly introduced here:

(i) Household Women

In each village there are two units (*Guts*) i.e Unit I and Unit II. Under these two units there are some *Chucks* (Sub-units). In Balijan Gaon, unit I consists of five *Chucks;* namely, Malor Chuck (corner), Podu Chuck, Nawboisa Chuck, Medhi Chuck and Khutikati Chuck. The another unit, i.e, Unit II also consists of five *Chucks*; namely, Jalmai Chuck, Lawbor Chuck, No. 1 Jurula Chuck, No. 2 Jurula Chuck and Saikia Chuck. In Randhanijan Unit I is called Randhanihan General Caste Gaon and Unit II consists of four *Chucks*; namely, Janaguri, Phakuwadaul, Benganaati and Mising Gaon. In Charigaon Unit I consist of five *Chucks*; namely, Saikia Chuck, Dutta Chuck, Bordoloi chuck, Khargharia chuck and one part of Kathaniakuri. The unit II also consists of five *Chucks*; namely, Mina Chuck, one part of Lahetia Chuck, one part of Dahikhur Muslim Gaon, one part of Tukuria Chuck and one part of Na-Bora Chuck. First of all, a list of the adult women in the three villages was prepared by conducting household census in each *Chuck*. After that the households were stratified into 4 caste group, i.e, General, OBC, SC and ST. From each caste group's households, 10% of the total adult women (excluding SHGs members and MNREGS participants) were selected as respondents using simple random sampling (lottery method).

(ii) Women from SHGs

There are 16, 10 and 17 SHGs in Balijan Gaon, Randhanijan Gaon and Chari Gaon respectively which were established in different years. The SHGs were selected by drawing lottery, making a sample of 24 SHGs and 287 women, in all, from the three villages. While selecting them they were also classified according to year of establishment and 50%, taking at least one, was selected. At the first stage, the SHGs in each village were enlisted by the year of their establishment ranging from 1999 to 2011, which were 43, in all, and 17, 10 and 16 for the respective village. The following table shows the status of SHGs in the three villages:

Table 1.1
SHGs in Chari Gaon, Randhanijan and Balijan
(Percentage in Parentheses)

Year of Establishment	Village			Total
	Chari Gaon	Randhanijan	Balijan	
1999	-	-	1(6)	1(2)
2000	-	-	2(13)	2(5)
2001	1(6)	-	-	1 (2)
2002	2(12)	-	-	2 (5)
2003	3(18)	2(20)	2(13)	7(16)
2004	-	-	1(6)	1(2)
2005	3(17)	1(10)	-	4(9)
2006	-	5(50)	3(18)	8(20)
2007	2(12)	-	-	2(5)
2008	3(17)	1(10)	6(38)	10(23)
2009	-	1(10)	-	1(2)
2010	-	-	1(6)	1(2)
2011	3(18)	-	-	3(7)
Total	17(100)	10(100)	16(100)	43(100)

Source: Field Survey Data Collected during 7 August 2011- 30 January 2012

The SHGs were arranged according to their year of establishment and, then, 50 per cent of these self help groups from each year of their establishment in each village were selected by simple random sampling method, which came to be as 9, 6 and 9 for Charigaon, Randhanijan and Balijan. Thus, a sample of 24 SHGs, in all, consisted of the three sub-samples of SHGs drawn from the three villages. Finally, at the third stage, all the members of the sampled SHGs, 287, in all, comprising 110, 74 and 103 for the respective village, were included as the respondents in the study. While selecting the SHGs a number with fraction was rounded off to the subsequent number and therefore the actual sample size of both the SHGs and the respondents happened to be over 50 per cent of the respective

population. The following table shows the method of selecting the sampled SHGs from the three villages:

Table 1.2
Year-wise Distribution of the Sampled SHGs and the Respondents by Their Villages
(Percentage in Parentheses)

Year of Establishment	Chari Gaon			Randhanijan Gaon			Balijan Gaon			Total of the Sampled SHGs	Total Respon-dents
	No. of SHGs	No. of Members	50% of the SHGs	No. of SHGs	No. of Members	50% of the SHGs	No. of SHGs	No. of Members	50% of the SHGs		
1999	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	13	1	1 (4.16)	13(4.52)
2000	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	10/12	1	1(4.16)	12(4.18)
2001	1	12	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1(4.16)	12(4.18)
2002	2	12/14	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1(4.16)	14(4.87)
2003	3	14/13/10	2	2	14/13	1	2	15/10	1	4(16.66)	48(16.72)
2004	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	11	1	1(4.16)	11(3.83)
2005	3	10/11/12	2	1	12	1	-	-	-	3(12.50)	34(11.84)
2006	-	-	-	5	10/11/12 /10/12	2	3	11/13/10	1	3(12.50)	32(11.26)
2007	2	13/13	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1(4.16)	13(4.52)
2008	3	13/12/11	1	1	15	1	6	15/10/12/ 12/10/10	3	5(20.90)	65(22.64)
2009	-	-	-	1	11	1	-	-	-	1(4.16)	11(3.83)
2010	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	10	1	1(4.16)	10(3.43)
2011	3	11/12/14	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1(4.16)	12(4.18)
Total	17	197	09	10	120	6	16	159	09	24 (100)	287 (100)

Source: Field Survey Data Collected during 7 August 2011- 30 January 2012

The 24 SHGs in the main sample which was constituted by the three sub-samples (9,6 and 9) from the three villages were Jeauti, Milijuli, Samprittee, Chandrakala, Sajagota, Sadhani, Surujmukhi, Pubali and Arunav from Chari Gaon; Chickmik, Randhanijan Mahila, Trinayan, Sanjivani, Nayanjyoti and Sati Radhika from Randhanijan and Lakhimi, Nayanjyoti, Navanika, Krishna, Kaberi, Parijat, Sampreeti, Rupali and Sanjukta from Balijan.

(iii) The Women Participating in MNREGS.

In Balijan Gaon and Randhanijan Gaon there are 3 and 12 women respectively, participating in MNREGS and all of them are selected as respondent. Therefore, sample size of the study is 119 from households, 287 from SHGs and 15

from MNREGS participants and in total it is 421respondents from the three villages. Chari Gaon had no MNREGS women participants.

SIGNIFICANCE

The study is a microscopic and empirical attempt to understand patterns, determinants and social consequences of women's participation in rural development in India in general and in Assam in particular. It throws light on new data on women's participation which are visible at household and village level and not at the level of region or nation as a whole. Findings may give insights for policy making on rural development which is perplexing the administrators and development agencies, even after more than six decades of India's Independence.