

Chapter-VII

Conclusion and Main Findings

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In the concluding part of our thesis, we propose to sum up our broad observations: The study on women and poverty has indicated that-

The last few decades have been relentless struggle by women of the world towards establishing their various claims for equal rights, opportunities and becoming equal partners of all development and progress of society and the nation as a whole. This study on women and poverty has shown that though women's poverty in different levels in the present day in Barak Valley has been decreasing over the last few years, yet their economic position and status in different levels of the society is much lower than their male counterparts. This is the reason why we term that poverty has a feminine face. In spite of their growing literacy, education, employment, work participation and self-awareness, women are still forced to be dominated by their male counterparts and the trend is observed across the national, State and regional boundaries. In the context of India, women's consciousness and voices has become pronounced particularly since mid seventies in wake of publication of the 'Toward Equality' report by the government of India. Since then women have achieved significant break through over participation in different socio-economic and cultural activities that hitherto were almost the sole preserves of men.

The work indicates that apart from judging the economic scenario of women' the basic motive of economic development is not only to develop the material condition of the people of a nation or society or a particular region, and eliminate the difficulties of material well being but also to promote the capabilities of human being. With the help of development programme it is realized that all efforts of development is to alleviate poverty as a whole keeping in mind both male and female irrespective of urban and rural.

From the study it can be said that economic and social status of women is very much important in the development of women's poverty. Survey of literature indicates that women are not recognized as the social and economically equal to men. It is also felt that without providing opportunities of proper education and productive employment of women, the problem of poverty can not be solved. Moreover, social justice, equality, economic prosperity and peace are a remote dream for all women. The status of women fully depend on the role of women in their decision making in the family and in the community, their educational status, their active participation in social, economic and political activities. It has been observed that in reality women in South Assam region along with other parts of the country and the state are still in the grip of traditional roles and have not freed them from the dominance of male power. In order to save them from dire poverty women still have to understand the value of education, their rights and also should become economically independent and improve their standard of living and status. Following Amartya Sen, human poverty is understood to include lack of rights or freedoms that enable people to realize their full potentials and lack of voice in governance process.

In this work, gender inequality is central to how societies assign roles, responsibilities, resources and rights between women and men. Allocation, distribution, utilization, position, status and control of resources are thus incumbent upon gender relations embedded in both ideology and practice. Gender inequality and analysis do not merely focus on the position of women, but also look at the ways in which both men and women interact with each other, their relations and also control over family and resources. Unfortunately even today in most parts of the country along with this region; there exist gender biases that greatly disadvantage women in their day to day life. Hence, it is sometimes inevitable that gender justice becomes synonymous with the rights and status of women and any discussion on gender and poverty in essence becomes a discussion on women and poverty. Thus the study has thrown some light on the observed inverse relation between women's poverty, and education, employment and status etc. both in rural and urban areas. The study goes in the line with the hypothesis that higher

status of women is determined in terms of various socio-cultural, education, employment and other economic indicators that have greatly influenced in bringing about a balance in male and female representation in the society.

It is the low economic and social status of women of the region under study which has resulted in increasing the poverty of women in the region. In fact, the study reveals that female literacy and education influences the relationship between poverty and women. It may be mentioned here that the findings of both secondary data and estimation of the regression models provide sufficient evidence in support of the hypothesis that women and poverty varies from urban to rural areas and also across different socio economic groups, all of which in turn is determined by the literacy rates and education level of women.

The literacy rate in Assam lags behind with respect to the overall literacy rate in India, whereas the literacy rate in Barak Valley (South Assam) and its constituent's districts and blocks is extremely low and is much below even with respect to Assam. This is true both for rural and urban areas. Cross section analysis of data has shown that a comparison of the women's literacy rate with their decision making, savings, income, property assets, employment status all of which are considered as proxies of economic status of women has been better for the state of Assam and South Assam as compared to India. This is indeed an interesting finding.

(H₁) Feminization of Poverty in the region is wide spread across different categories and groups of women, better record of sex ratio and educational qualifications notwithstanding.

The first hypothesis has been proved correct in this region because the feminization of poverty is widely spread across different groups and categories as is evident from the findings of the study.

The second hypothesis was that:

(H₂) The second hypothesis that economic growth does not affect the economic status of women has not been proved correct. The region has experienced a very low growth rate and development over the years. Economic status of women had improved but the trend of this growth rate is slower in comparison to the already slow growth rate of the region. This implies that the benefit of the slow growth rate of the region has percolated down between men and women in an uneven manner. The result is that the condition of women has experienced hardly any change. Only that section of the women who have access to education, which in turn is the result of economic growth of the region, has benefitted marginally from the growth of the economy. The level of poverty in different dimensions for this section has thereby been reduced to large extent. However for majority of women particularly in rural areas and belonging to certain communities there has been absence of any perceptible change in the extent of poverty

The last hypothesis which we adopted was that:

(H₃) As for the third hypothesis that economic growth may not affect the status of women, economic status of the family may affect the status of women: Though direct relationship between economic status of the family and poverty of women has not been established directly by the present study, nevertheless it may be concluded that women belonging to families belonging to higher income group have better access to education. This in turn results in higher income earning capacity and also results in greater decision making power of the women. These are some of the crucial factors which the study has identified as determining factors of poverty of women. It may therefore be concluded that higher economic status of the family helps in mitigating the level of feminization of poverty. It may therefore be concluded that the present hypothesis is proved correct.

In our sample study of both urban and rural areas of South Assam region it has been observed that women of the region in various forms supplement their family income

along with male some times working outside the four walls of the house, but unfortunately most of their works are lowly paid and even unrecognized. Keeping this view in mind we have tried to point out the different views of feminists economists, in which they explained the existence of traditional patriarchal attitude. They also explained that though such false hood process; women are forced to remain within the domestic boundaries which indicate the existence of gender discrimination in the society. This picture of gender inequality and discrimination is evident not only in India and Assam but also in most parts of South Assam region. It has been observed through out the study that the productive activities of women have not been considered in the true economic sense. On the other hand women's employment and other earning source are much less in the rural areas then the urban and semi-urban sectors. Both secondary and primary data in chapter-V findings of the above facts have been observed.

The present study has sought to examine the employment pattern of educated women both in urban, semi-urban and rural areas and to assess the distribution of educated employed women in various sectors. An attempt was made to investigate imbalances of employment in various sectors since employment can indicate the degree of poverty.

As regard women's role in decision making, which is taken as an important determinant of poverty, the study reveals that men dominates women in making independent decisions in almost all the spheres of family. However, women take independent decision in the area of home management, almost two third of the decisions are taken by women alone, which is high among urban women in comparison to rural women. This in turn impacts the level of poverty of women in the urban and rural areas.

The situation is reverse in case of child related decisions where men overshadowed women in taking prime decisions. In rural areas almost all decisions in this regard are taken by the men. But in the urban areas most of the decisions are jointly taken by men and women. Financial decisions are taken independently by men, which is more common in the rural areas then in the urban areas. Such decision making power which is

highly related to the level of education of women in turn is directly related to the extent of poverty of women. In rural areas in the field of agriculture most of the decisions are taken independently by men. But in making socio religious decision the role of both urban and rural women is quite significant.

The higher level of illiteracy, unemployment among women leads to conclude that women's proportion below the poverty line in the region is higher than that of men. The national policy on education envisaged that education would be strategy for achieving a basic change in the status of women which would (a) play a positive role in the empowerment of women (b) contribute towards self development along with national development. Unless the educational and economic status of the women of the region can be improved by providing proper education, employment and other income source, it would be impossible to eliminate women's poverty.

We observed from this study that the most relevant gender inequality in the region is the economic role of women. This leads women breakdown position in the family when any 'conflict' arises out of household resources distribution. In this context of our present study, Sen.'s 'co-operative conflict' model is observed to be correct implying greater allocation, equality among the family members specially the females. Keeping Sen.'s view in mind women's employment and economic development should be more carefully considered.

From the overall study it is revealed that the position of women in South Assam region is very poor especially in the rural areas in comparison to other parts of the country. Historically the women of this region were deprived from proper education, employment, property rights, social and economic rights, decision making, expression of their opinion, equal rights etc. As such they were dominated by men and had very low status. Such serious gender discriminations resulted in confinement within the domestic arena and made their lives miserable. Male control over women's socio economic mobility widely enforced and restricted their power, movement, capability and status etc.

Conditions of extreme poverty of women as manifested in the case of women which still exists in various parts of South Assam region cannot be addressed without deliberate planned and targeted action. Thus, the central paradox faced by poor women in South Assam region is the exercise of male domination and control over the women.

If we discuss the feminization of poverty it may be said that under this situation mal-nutrition of women which is very much attached with poverty and lack of health awareness which is also consequence of poverty. Our survey further reveals that the problem is more acute in rural areas in South Assam region because of inadequate medical facilities and health care infrastructure, un-hygienic living condition, poor sanitation etc. It is now well admitted fact that poor health of women is one of the causes of poverty and effects development of a nation or a region. It is now well admitted fact that poor health of women is one of the causes of poverty which greatly effects development of a nation or a region.
