

## CHAPTER- 4

### FOOD SECURITY STATUS OF WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS

#### FOOD SECURITY STATUS OF WOMEN IN WHOLE INDIA

4.1 'Woman' without whom no society can survive to its best. A better life for all will not be possible if there were no women and the contributions which they make in their whole life. It has been witnessed that since ancient times women is the most important factor that leads to achievement of any goal and towards development of an individuals' lives and of the community. They always work, make sacrifices without thinking about pain and not even thinks for gaining selfish motives fulfilled. In India too which is a land of diversity, it has been seen that from time immemorial women more or less are the most active participants in every domain of life. Even in the national struggle for independence one could many examples of womens' participation. Despite the pivotal roles performed by women there is also a bitter truth that is women are the worst sufferers and deprived section. They lack access to resources and most of women lacks decision-making power. Majority of households' women are treated as to be subordinate to menfolk and they are neglected. In some families there exist always a discrimination between a girl child and a boy child. A boy is given more importance and care than a girl since birth in many families even today. In terms of feeding a boy is accorded more importance. Therefore, in Indian society the very idea of patriarchy is very rampant and majority section of women starts their life with discrimination and neglect. 'Women' is the main contributor towards the growth, prosperity and development of a nation irrespective of developed or developing. It will be futile to think of any kind of development by a nation without participation of women. To economic

developments, household income generation, food security achievement and other work in the world women plays a crucial role. In India a large and significant portion of rural women perform various agricultural activities since long before. However, the crucial role of women in all the dimensions are found to be often ignored and remain invisible. Food security as a social goal is not very easy to achieve and to be successful regarding achievement of this goal the contribution made by women must be recognized and efforts should be made for giving due share to the women section. An effort is of utmost necessity to make women able to taste the fruits of their labour. Women in general suffers various forms of discrimination in their day to day lives. Some of them faces such discrimination knowingly while some unknowingly.. Even in the intellectual society at certain instances an inequality against women is seen. Even today most of the women in India are victims of domestic violence. In India most of the maternal deaths are caused due to poor health conditions of the mothers and this due to mainly because of domestic violence and discrimination they faces in terms of access to food, health, education and many more. In many families even today a girl child is considered to be unfortunate and a burden. Female infanticide and foeticide is still in existence in the country even after many campaign and movements and also laws and punishment by government against such practices. Recently a survey conducted by National Family Health Survey- 4(NFHS-4 2015-2016) revealed that Assam has recorded the highest maternal mortality deaths and also highest domestic violence with 25 percent of married women reported domestic violence. Many reasons have been discovered for the high mortality rates like difficult terrain and inaccessibility to health services of population who mainly resides on islands in the Brahmaputra, early marriages of women before attaining the age of 18 years as found by NFHS-4, gender differentiation, some socio-economic reasons.

In India it was first believed that the Vedic period was the golden age of Indian womanhood as during that period the status of women was very high . But with the coming of the invaders specially Muslim invaders many restrictions started to be placed on the women section. Many evil practices like purdah, sati, female foeticide started in the society in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a result of such invasion only. This view was later challenged by many historians though. Infact, when the British started ruling this territory it considered the subject population to be

very inferior especially due to the evil practices followed against women by them. Infact, the Christian missionaries accused the Hindu civilization to be cruel and also considered immoral. The British always stood for the upliftment of the Hindu women in India and they justified their rule on the ground that Hindu women required the protection and intervention of the Colonial state.

In India many feminist argued that women irrespective of upper caste and lower caste, faced inequalities. Women were considered to be subordinate to men and faced atrocities and deprivations. Although many eminent scholars like Raja Ram Mohun Roy, Jyotiba Phule stood for abolition of discrimination and torture meted out against women like Sati, purdah system, child marriage, widows' oppression, gender gap in education and they took various steps to achieve the goal but the menace is still visible in the society. Women in many families even in the present times are not being able to achieve their true position which they deserve.

In India almost half of the population is constituted by women and the women section makes remarkable contributions in almost all domains of life. Although many measures have been undertaken since independence for women upliftment and empowerment and abolilition of injustice against them by the government, yet many women are also there in the society who are living a pathetic life. Many are not having the desired standard of living. They are unable to live an active and healthy life. Generally, many rural women in the country are engaged in many farm activities along with household activities. Women are the active contributors of food production in mainly the rural areas, yet the picture of their status is very disappointing. Whenever any problem arises women are the worst sufferers. In case of food insecurity problem too women suffers more than menfolk. There is an important relationship between women's participation in food participation and household food availability and the relationship between women's opportunities to control food consumption pattern of household and achievement of household food security. Infact, women ensures dietary variations through their participation in both farm and non-farm activities<sup>1</sup>. FAO<sup>2</sup> visualized that women feed their families and there is a large contribution of women to the total availability of food in household in the regions of Sub-Saharan Africa and some places of

Asia too. Women add relish to the food. However, inspite of such major contribution in terms of food availability and food security, women in many families are food insecure. In poor households with low economic status, the problem of food insecurity arises mainly, but to this problem too the women suffers more in comparison to the men in those households. Another fact is also there that even in many households with an adequate income and availability of sufficient food women are not food secured. Their consumption pattern of food is very low and they suffers from food insecurity problem. It shows that the problem of women food security is not limited to economic factor only, there are other hidden causes. Many women in India due to lack of access to sufficient and appropriate food are faced with health problems. Many women both in urban and rural areas are facing many deficiencies. Women needs special food for their growth and development but most of the women are not even having access to the basic requirement of food. But the worst part is that many women accepts their sufferings without any complain and they considers themselves as inferior to men. Most of the women irrespective of class and caste believes that their main responsibility is to feed their families properly, give proper service to all the members of their family and they feel happy and satisfied when the menfolk and other members become completely satisfied. For whole day most of the rural women goes on performing various household and other activities, even in the fields they participate but they never thinks that leisure is also needed. They do not rest for a while also, they does work but they do not eat nicely. Most of them do not even think to have access to sufficient and quality food which is very necessary to achieve food security. It has been always believed that without the immense role and contribution of women, no society can achieve any great success. Food security as already stated earlier is one of the most urgent and desired goal of the state of India and this goal is impossible to achieve without all the population of the state is food secured. Although women is an important contributor regarding achievement of food security, their status of food security is equally important for the nation as a whole to attain the target of food security. Excluding women no development is possible. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the government, of the civil society, NGOs and most importantly of the people themselves especially the women section to consider their health to be important and eating right and appropriate food is necessary for sound human development. Women must

recognize that only feeding others is not the only responsibility, to feed themselves equally is important. Health is above everything and this should be understood by all women. Women in the rural areas mainly are involved in more hazardous tasks, so they require more nutritious food. But on the contrary the rural women faces serious food insecurity and also many health related problems. Due to lower intake of nutritious and quantity food, most of time majority of the women are faced with various nutritional problems like Protein-Energy Malnutrition(PEM), vitamin A deficiency, iron deficiency anemia and iodine deficiency disorders. All the four nutritional problems are major public health problems affecting majority of the women and young children too in India, but the most serious and widespread deficiency in today's India is iron deficiency anemia. This deficiency is associated with many functional impairment such as reduction of productivity, increases instances of infections, creates adverse pregnancy outcomes like low birth weight and higher maternal mortality. To overcome this deficiency among the risk groups of women and children undoubtedly the government has intervened through supply of iron supplements to pregnant women and young children of high risk groups, yet the problem is still visible in the state, it is not been eliminated completely by the government. Regarding iodine deficiency the government has tackled the problem to a great extent, but the goal of complete elimination has not been achieved yet. Taking note of the importance of women, their health and development, it has been very rightly recognized that it is the responsibility of the women themselves to understand the necessity of a sound health and the importance of food security. Women must be firstly aware of their health and the requirements for their good health.

Though the government has already taken various sincere initiatives for women health and development, yet the result is not very satisfactory specially of the rural women and also to some extent urban women mostly who are under poverty facing food insecurity problem. It is true that today women are moving hand to hand with men, in many cases it is seen women they are moving faster than men and reached a great height of success and development. But on the other side there are also many women in this country who are suffering a lot. They face only discrimination in every respect. Many are not having enough food to eat and many are there inspite of having available food in their households, are not entitled to have access

to sufficient food and also quality food. In the process women in large number in India both rural and urban are food insecure and suffering from various health hazards. In many families in India till today there is an influence of patriarchy and this is also responsible to a great extent in creating obstacles in the path of achievement of food security of the womenfolk. And when even any section of the women faces food insecurity problem, then it is completely futile for the government to desire to achieve the goal of food security in the whole nation.

## ROLE OF WOMEN IN ENSURING HOUSEHOLD FOOD SECURITY

4.2 It is mentioned earlier that women feeds the world, and the women is the only actor that ensures household food security. Due to the incredible roles performed by women daily, other members of any household lives an active and satisfactory lives. It is known that women is the most important agent of any kind of change and development in a society and no society can develop if there is no participation of women. Women are essential contributors of production of food and main workforce in the other world of work too. Majority of the women in rural India are engaged in farm activities along with household activities. Women produce food, they utilize food and they cook food. They actively participates in the growing of crops in the field, they weed, harvest, apply fertilizer, process, store and also market the produced food and keep animals at home. They also thresh, winnow, clean and gather seeds. Along with household activities they take part in other income generating works too. They work for whole day without any rest. Since classical times no doubts there are many literatures on the women's role and significance of their roles, yet even today this women are also suffering in various ways. It is known that the 'Household' is a fundamental unit in every type of economy and it is also true that the survival, growth and development of the household sector completely depends mainly on the productive activities performed by the women. Women have been the active participants in almost all works, but their role has been often ignored and also its significance. In many

instances even today the incredible roles in the production process and in other household activities of women remains invisible and they remain the invisible workforce. In many households women are just considered to be an object of sex, and considered to be important only for the reproductive and nurturing roles of women. Even the classical economist Adam Smith (1776)<sup>3</sup> considered labour to be true source of wealth but did not recognize the significance of women's work at home and their labour. Households are units of production and consumption and the main productive activities are entrusted on the hands of the women. But inspite of such immense tasks performed daily by women, they are the most deprived and the most vulnerable. They are discriminated in terms of share of income, access to and control over resources, they lack decision-making power. Work burden is more on women than men, but they never get the deserved fruits for their labour and contribution. Women cannot be said to be only satellites orbiting around men. They work more than men, and some households are completely supported by women alone. Women's participative role is the main factor in the household largely that govern household food security. It has been found that the households jointly headed by male and female and the households headed solely by female have significantly greater food availability and energy and other nutrients too than male-headed households. Women always spend time on food supporting activities. They are found growing different kinds of vegetables, roots and fruits and in the process increases dietary variations. Most of the poor rural women even go for a long distance to collect water and fuel and they does this for preparation of food. They make great sacrifices for feeding their family members in their day to day lives. Women are in fact the major producers of food in almost all developing and less developed countries. Food security is recognized to be one of the main sources of world peace, harmony and stability. Therefore, greater attention has been paid to food issues at the level of national government as well by the international community too. In the development process food security occupies a special place in a nation and therefore government of all nations worldwide gives special focus to the adequate security of food in households. Again it has been considered that the main factors which constrain food security of households includes lack of access to land, inputs, credit, education, income and others. But another fact is also there that has been mentioned above that roles of women are main factors that ensures nutritional and food security in their

households. Their innumerable contributions makes food available in the households, fulfills the dietary needs of the other members of the households. Infact, income of women who earn has greater impact on household food security and it has been increasing. Even though most of the time it is found that rural women's cash income is lower than men, still a major share of their earnings is allocated to household food. Women are seen to make self-sacrifices for the sake of their family members' health. The income of women has greater contribution on expenditure pattern of households and women are always found to spend higher proportion of their income on food consumption and health care of children<sup>4</sup>. It shows that women is the main agent whose participation in food production and their income-generating activities enhances household food security to a greater extent.

## PATRIARCHY, GENDER DISCRIMINATION AND FOOD INSECURITY

4.3 In simple words, the term 'patriarchy' denotes a system of a society or community organized on male lines that is, father or eldest male is head of the family and descent is run through the male line. It is known to everyone that in a patriarchal society system it is the men who hold primary power and also predominate in various roles like political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and control of property too. In this type of society, men hold the control and make all the rules and the women are only bestowed with responsibilities like taking care of family, their kids and they stays at home. Women in this social structure lives under complete male domination as male are considered superior in this system. It would be worth mentioning here that patriarchy is very harmful to women as it generates male dominance over women in every aspect and male enjoys special privileges. Patriarchy is the prime factor behind the occurance of 'gender inequality' in the society and India is not an exception. Gender inequality is simply defined as discrimination faced by women based on their sex. Women are exploited, violated, discriminated on the basis of gender both in private life and in the outside world everywhere in this world, only degree of discrimination differs. In India, it is prevalent more. Patriarchy is a system which is considered to be the main cause of gender inequality as patriarchy is such a system of social structure in which men always



dominate, exploit and oppress women. In India more particularly, women's exploitation is an age old cultural phenomenon and the root cause of such exploitation lies in its patriarchy system. In fact, in India patriarchy finds its sanction and validity in the various religious beliefs prevalent in the territory whether it is Hindu, Muslim or any other religion. Gender inequality is a main feature of Indian society and it is the result of the patriarchal system. In India, women even in the present day modern social structure, lives an inferior position to men except few cases. In most instances it has been found that women too have accepted their subordinate position to men which is very unfortunate and they themselves become part and parcel of the same patriarchal system. Gender discrimination could be found at various levels in the society even in terms of access to quantity and quality food required for a healthy life. Economic status is not the main factor in relation to food security of women in India. In fact, in most of the cases 'patriarchy' and its by product 'gender bias' is the main factor responsible for emergence of food insecurity problem of the womenfolk in India and in Assam too. In the study also during the course of investigation, the prevalence of the phenomenon of gender discrimination could be found against the respondents to a considerable extent and unfortunately they(respondents) in majority of the cases found to accept such discrimination. Most of the women respondents of the study are not entitled to sufficient dietary intake despite having quite satisfactory income and also sufficient availability of food.

India is a democratic country and one of the main features of democracy is equality between men and women. Although in India democracy is not only in the Constitution, it is followed to a considerable level, but when it comes to the feature of equality between men and women a different picture can be seen. The framers of the constitution incorporated provisions regarding gender equality, till now the government made many laws and formulated policies for removal of inequality between sex and establish an egalitarian state from all aspects and moreover government introduced many schemes and programmes for the upliftment of women section. However, gender discrimination in all walks of life is faced by many women in the state of India. In India in many families there exist pronounced differences between men and women. Development is a many-sided process of a human

society and it involves both women and men and both men and women have equal rights to share the fruits of development. Infact, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) recognized the necessity of investing in women's capabilities and also empowering women to make overall economic growth and development of the world. Even UNDP introduced in 1995 Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) and Gender Related Development Index (GDI) in addition to Human Development Index (HDI). Other international organizations like World Bank, FAO, UNICEF and others have made serious efforts to root out the menace of gender differences from the world and set up a world of tolerance and egalitarian world. On the contrary there exists severe inequality between men and women in India in terms of ownership of properties, education, income, access to food, opportunities, health, decision-making power and so on. Women in many families are harassed both physically and mentally. The society demands specific functions to be performed by the women section, no matter whether any woman work outside or not. In many families in India after the birth of a girl child and a boy child, discrimination is made while giving gifts too. Like a doll is given to a girl child and to a boy a bat and ball. A girl is expected to be timid and sincere, while a boy is expected to be strong and courageous. A girl is expected to stay inside home and play indoor games, while a boy to play outdoor games. In many forms discriminations meted out to woman in many households in India even today. It is widely recognized that women always perform remarkable job in every field but they do not get due honour mostly. Women are less paid than men for the same type of work, women gets fewer opportunities of schooling than men, deprivation in opportunity of participation in social functions, even many women are deprived of opportunities for higher education and professional training. There prevails gaps between men and women in terms of literacy rate, distribution of food and other resources, health facilities, and many more. There can be found different kinds of inequalities between men and women in most parts of the world including India<sup>5</sup>- i) mortality inequality, ii) natality inequality, iii) basic facility inequality, iv) special opportunity inequality, v) ownership inequality, vi) professional inequality and most importantly vii) household inequality. In India along with other South Asian countries extreme preference is given in many households and this leads to sex selective abortion though illegal even today. Mortality rates is higher among women due to other discriminations that a woman faces after

her birth itself. Life expectancies for women becomes lower related to men in the process. Extreme biasness is seen in terms of health care against women which is needed for survival and in other areas too<sup>6</sup>. Women in large number in India irrespective of rich and poor and caste are subjected to insecurity and ill-treatment. Many do not enjoy a physically and mentally healthy life and also a normal length. In most of the families even today women are not given due respect and not allowed to live a dignified life. They do not get the right to do anything of their own choice. They are considered to be born only to serve the menfolk. They participates in food production, cook food, performs other food related activities, but they do not get to eat the appropriate and sufficient food mostly. They sometimes are left with no food as always the menfolk and other members eats first and the women at last. In this process the cream of the foods are consumed by the men. The discrimination meted out against women is very dangerous for the whole society as it not only affects victims but also brings serious consequences later on. Everything is interlinked, like intra-household discrimination of food allocation towards women leads to poor health status of women and this ultimately leads to lower birth weight of babies and continued health problems of both men and women. This slow the pace of growth and retards the development process of the nation as healthy population is the main source of growth and development of a country along with education<sup>7</sup>. Elimination of gender inequalities is very necessary for overall social and economic development.

Household is not a homogeneous unit, and in many households women are denied the 'right to equality'. Work responsibilities are more for women but they enjoy lesser rights and they are losers in the level of household distributive process. Women's status in food and nutrition security is low in comparison to their work participation with respect to household economy and food security. Women in many households are in disadvantaged position in terms of access to various opportunities and also even in stable access to food required for a healthy and active life. Often it has been found that in many households food is available in abundance but the available food is not equally accessible to the men, women and children. In the process of food distribution gender and age comes in many households. In spite of the crucial role of women in household food security, they are not ensured food and nutrition

security as individuals. Their work and its significance are ignored and this primarily leads to weak position of the women. Most women's work do not have any direct monetary return as much of their work is unpaid. Even in paid activities there is gender discrimination and it results in failure of distributive justice in Indian society. There is no proper measurement of women's work. In the rural areas of India including Assam, women in almost all households are found to be engaged in both farm and non-farm activities. In many poor and landless households, women even go to the agricultural fields of others and perform various activities and through this participates directly in the generation of household income. Even many poor women after doing their own household activities works as maid in other households to earn. But the women never thinks to fulfill any need of their own even if they earn. In the study area of the research problem, it has been found that majority of the rural women performs various household activities from morning till night like cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, childcare, fetching water, and also participates to a considerable extent in food processing and storage activities. Of households having own farms almost all women takes part in home-produced food items in various ways like land cleaning, layout preparations, sowing seeds, application of manure, weeding, harvesting, threshing, drying and cleaning grains. Rural women almost take the charge of household work solely irrespective of they work outside or not. The sample population in large number even perform other activities apart from household and farm related activities like weaving, rearing of goats, pigs, poultry, ducks, pigeon, preparation of silk thread, knitting, and some of them are engaged in wine-making. These women used to spend 5-6 hours everyday performing household activities, even some of them spend more than 6 hours. But hardly they take rest for a while also daily which is of utmost necessity and they do not have any complain in the type of life they are living. In fact, many of the women finds nothing wrong in the discriminations meted out to them regarding work responsibilities and enjoyment of opportunities and rights. They themselves are very much inclined to the term gender and various roles entrusted on them with sharp discrimination. Women in the many rural households irrespective of literate or illiterate and also class consider themselves to be inferior to men and they remain happy and satisfied with their traditionally disadvantaged position. They do not try to recognize their potentiality and their right to the share of various facilities which remain only in the hands of the menfolk.

While doing the survey it has been found that in many households income is quite good and also expenditure on food monthly is very much proportionate to income. But still the pattern of food consumption of the women in those households is very low. The intake level of nutritious food among the women is very low of the rural households. The lives of the rural women of almost all households are thus centred around the factor of 'gender' with respect to food entitlement too. India is the fastest growing economy but at the same time it is a homeland for 26 percent of the world's extreme poor people. Poverty removal is the top priority of the government since independence and also at the present time. Of this problem of poverty the most severely affected victims are the women, therefore, another major goal of the government is protection of the women from all hazards and constraints. Food insecurity is an outcome of poverty in most households, but this food insecurity seriously affects the women more than the other members. Poverty has increasingly become feminized as women are much more likely to be poor than men and this problem of feminization of poverty recently has become an international concern as well. Gender discrimination is the main source of all hazards in the lives of the women, even in the restriction in food access. Gender is the main factor that reduces women's output and restrict their access to opportunities. Between men and women the biasness in attitude and behaviour within the family exist, sons are favoured more than daughters and this is perhaps the major issue in explaining nutritional differentials of the population and also mortality differentials. Most of the mothers lack health infrastructural facilities and as a result this affects the children too. Women workers are confined to low paid than men. Women's decision-making power within many households both rural and urban is lower than that of their husbands. Lower decision-making power affects in turn children's health. In a patriarchic society like India, even in terms of family planning along with other aspects of life, men are often the primary decision-makers. In India the process of achieving gender equality is not at all satisfactory. Substantial differences still exist between men and women in the context of health and well-being and also forced marriage, marriage of under-aged girls are still very much prevalent in the country. Gender discrimination in many families of Indian society begins from breastfeeding. A girl baby in some families where patriarchy prevails subjected to delay in breastfeeding. Compared to baby boy a baby girl is delayed by 1-2 hours can be seen.

Gender discrimination against women section is one of the biggest problems of Indian society along with other major problems as equality is a prerequisite for making possible to achieve all the desired goals by the society as women constitute half of the population of the country and this section always plays an irreplaceable role in the growth and development of the society and their roles go on increasing day by day. Even great political thinkers of India talked about eradication of discrimination against women so that a full-fledged development of the society prevails in India.

## AWARENESS OF PROPER DIET AMONG WOMEN

4.4 It has been recognized that women and their contributions are irreplaceable in the whole world. No man has the capacity to compete with a woman. It will be worth to say that women is not moving equal with men, but moving faster than men and there are many evidences to prove this worldwide. A woman is a house-maker and also a doctor, a teacher, an engineer and many more at the same time. All women performs much more activities than men in their day to day lives. A section of the womenfolk in India are engaged in special kinds of work too that demands more energy and strength. A healthy diet is the urgent need for a woman to carry out the diverse roles more nicely in their lives. In India specially rural women are entrusted with overload of work. They not only performs their own work but also participates in the various works of the men members of their families. Already it has been discussed earlier that in the food production process there is commendable participation of the rural women along with the menfolk. Infact, women's role is greater and essential than men. Physical labour is more among the rural women in India and this demands more healthy and sufficient access to food as absence of adequate food is detrimental to the women's health. Although food demand is fulfilled in the rural households with sufficient income, but the food intake of the women of those households is not stable and very low. This indicates that economic access is not the sole condition to make the rural women food secured. A better life is possible accompanied with better health. Despite being performed so many remarkable jobs by rural women they live a very poor life in relation to health mainly. In the

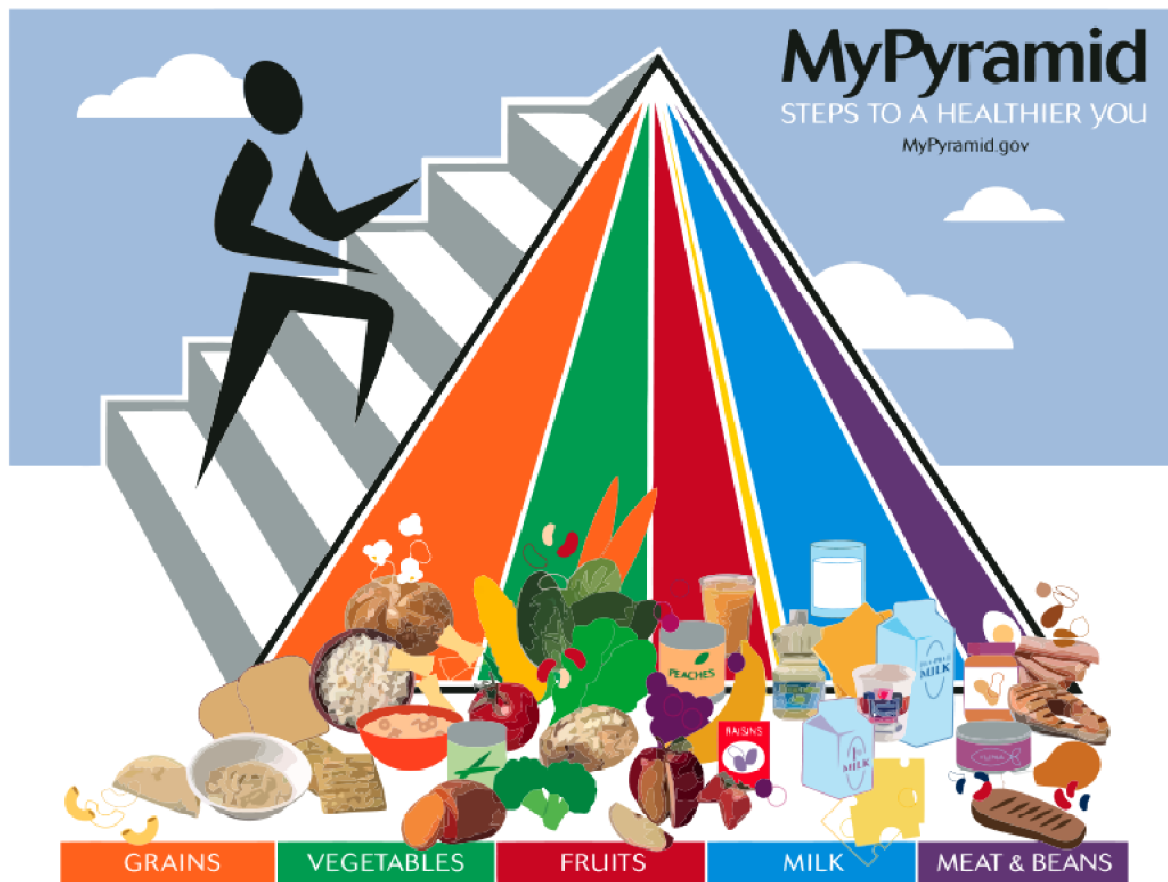
same household the status of food security of the women and the men varies. This implies discrimination exist at the intra-household distribution of resources along with food between men and women. The concept of food security ensures that households are able to acquire adequate food through home production or through purchase and the women plays numerous roles to ensure household food security. They expand their working hours even for better achievement of food security in the households. Around the world in many areas uses their income generated from poultry and other activities to pay children's school fees, medical fees and other assets<sup>8</sup>. In the study area of Kamrup(Rural), Lakhimpur and Cachar district of Assam, an information has been derived that majority of the women infact all rural women of the sample who generates income from poultry, dairy production, weaving, knitting, and other activities uses the money for social goods to help their families. Most of the women buys food items liked by their children. They never think of any kind of food which they like to eat. Women has greater influence on household food expenditure, calorie intake and they always allocate their time resources to ensure that their children and other members are fed within available means<sup>9</sup> and in the process ensures household food security. Rural women have special relationship with the natural resources and they promotes for a balanced use and preservation of the natural resources to make the future generations to meet their needs. Women plays a role towards sustainable development too.

Numerous studies till now have showed that women in developing countries including India most steps in food production are entirely shouldered by the women expect ploughing. In rice consuming regions mainly ploughing and parboiling of paddy is the sole responsibility of women. In the agricultural sector, women takes the entire responsibility. But the worst fact is that women in large number in India are ignored, their labour is ignored, they are alientated from the produce, they are exploited to the extreme by the menfolk. Many literatures are there and studies have been conducted till now on women, their role in various aspects and various exploitation faced by them, still most women faces a deplorable condition in their lives. Food security is a matter of concern of all countries, especially in developing countries and women and their role in ensuring household food security is widely recognized all over the world. Food security needs to be achieved at all levels- at the individual, household,

national, regional and global levels and concerted action and effort is required at all levels. But the rural women as individuals never enjoys a satisfactory food secured life. The tragedy is that though millions of women throughout the developing world performs the major role in food production chain, yet they are the ones who are the most deprived and who get the least out of food production. Malnutrition is a major problem and women are the major victims of this problem. Rural women plays the dominant role of a food producer and they are provider of food and nutritional care at the household level. But they are unaware of the dietary needs for their proper health. They are concerned for fulfilling the dietary needs of their family members, but they are least concerned about their own health and access to proper diet which is already discussed earlier. There exist big difference between the work pattern of rural women and their husbands or other male relatives. While male members if they work in agricultural sector works for 8-10 hours as a whole time job but for women farm activities is a part of their daily chores. It indicates that women bears unjustifiable overload daily. As they works so much, therefore, they needs special and proper food to maintain a good health. On the contrary, it has been noticed that rural women in India in majority are completely unaware of food requirements for their body and the necessity of eating right food at right time. They are under the spell of patriarchy so much that they feel as if they have eaten when their husbands and other members eat nicely.

There are so many list of guides for nutrition, what kind of food what amount we should eat daily to have a general health. Food Guide Pyramid has been developed to make the choose the best foods daily to get the nutrients that we need and that is right for us but it is not a rigid prescription but a general diet.





Source: USDA's updated food pyramid from 2005, My Food Pyramid

These types of foods women and men should eat daily for a healthier life. And if the reality is seen one could notice that many rural women even do not identify some of the foods. When the rural women of the sample are asked about their knowledge of a balance diet for them, almost all answered in negative. Another fact is that all of them in fact, do not know about the nutrition fulfillment of the various foods they cook daily. They just cook different foods without having any knowledge of the fulfillment of dietary needs by the foods. They are unaware of the concept of calorie too. Fruits and vegetables are very important as vegetables provide vitamin A and C and folate, and minerals such as iron. Fruits provide important amounts of vitamin A and C and potassium. Rice, cereals provide carbohydrates and are important source of

energy, vitamins, minerals, and fibre. Foods from grains are necessary for our body daily. Pregnant women or breastfeeding and very active women needs 2800 calories per day. On the contrary, rural women especially are out of any food pyramid and do not follow any diet. They wake up early morning and starts working household works without eating any breakfast for long. In fact, many do not find necessary to eat anything doing work. They go on working, but they do not eat. Then they eat their lunch also very late as already mentioned many eats at last. This ultimately creates various health problems among the womenfolk. Their pattern of food consumption is very discouraging in comparison to the menfolk. The menfolk always eats away the cream of all foods and the women are left with nothing. This is a major factor of the poor health condition of the rural women. They claim to be happy infact with the life that they are living. This is a clear indication of severe influence of patriarchy in our society specially in the rural parts of the country. Women in rural areas mostly faces various nutritional disorders due to lack of nutritional knowledge. Even many do not find any necessity to have the knowledge of proper diet. According to WHO, life expectancy of women in developing countries is lower than the females in developed countries and those women in developing countries who survive beyond middle-age have comparable life-expectancy to women in their counterparts in developed countries<sup>10</sup>. Women in general lacks the anxiety over their food situation. Maternal education is important for child nutritional status along with family income and birth order<sup>11</sup>. Firstly, women themselves must be aware of the basic and special requirements for their healthy development and make the world a healthier place to live in future. They must strive towards removal of various hazards coming in the path of their health security with full cooperation.

## HEALTH PROBLEMS FACED BY RURAL WOMEN DUE TO NUTRITIONAL DEFICIENCY

4.5 Women who have limited or even no access to nutritious food are found to be under chronic food insecurity and suffers from various forms of diseases in general. No woman can escape from nutritional disorders without adequate access to appropriate food. There is a saying that 'health is wealth' but this is hardly followed in the lives of the most vulnerable section of the society-'women' specially in Indian rural areas. It is a very much right that without proper development of health an individual cannot live a dignified life. Human development includes development of health too of the people in a country and this is applicable for the women too. Women always takes care of their children, their husbands and other family members. They remain always ready for providing various services to their families. They go on working for the whole day to give a satisfactory and better life to their husbands and other members without any leisure time for themselves. Too much of activities demands much consumption of nutritious diet for an individual. Women although are associated with various activities but they never enjoy a healthy diet for healthy development. Deficiencies becomes a part of their lives. Many women who are poor are subjected to food insecurity no doubt but also those women who are economically in a better position are also the victims of food insecurity in rural India especially. As a result of poor access to proper diet by women, they suffers from various health related problems. Life span of women becomes shorter than men due to their poor health conditions and the presence of health problems. It has been cited earlier in this work that women in India are the worst sufferers of any problem, even in relation to diseases. Food is the medicine to all diseases, and having access to nutritious and sufficient food reduces the risk of emergence of many diseases in an individual's body. But large number of rural women in particular in India lack access to adequate food per day and this results in nutritional disorders in their bodies. It is believed that proper development and education of mothers is the most important condition for the development and well-being of the future generations. Maternal mortality is the outcome of food insecurity of the women in many cases. It has been found that majority of the women in India in general lacks knowledge of a proper diet necessary for their welfare and functional

knowledge on nutrition and health. The percentage share of women's work is the greatest for food related activities but they do not get the proper nutrients like vitamins, iron, protein, calorie, etc. and as a result are stunted by malnutrition. Nutritional efficiency of households depends on many inter-related factors like income control and resource allocation within the household<sup>12</sup> and sex-bias is one of the factors that plays a major role. Inequality against women in relation to enjoyment of opportunities is the greatest hurdle in the development of women's lives. Existence of inequality in terms of gaining access to balanced and adequate food reduces the status of food security of women as individuals and lower calorie consumption and protein consumption. Calorie gap exist to a greater extent between males and females within the household, males being in better position.

While conducting the survey for the research problem in selected villages of Kamrup(Rural), Lakhimpur and Cachar district in Assam, it has been found that almost all the women respondents belonging to three different categories of caste-ST, SC and General Caste, faces various forms of severe health problems due to intake of improper food daily by them. Even some of the respondents are literate considerably, still they also could not evade from health problems. While interviewing the respondents, many were found to be earners , some through farm activities who are landless, many of them earn money by rearing of poultry, goats, pigs, cows, ducks, pegions, etc., many through weaving, and some of the literates are teachers too in schools. Household income and level of expenditure on food greatly influences nutritional status of individuals of the households. Of the sample population households', monthly income and food expenditure of many is found to the desired and satisfactory level. Despite this the women of many of those households are food and nutritionally insecure and many health problems are pronounced among them. During the process of the survey, almost all of the sample population are found to be suffering serious health diseases such as gastric, headache, vision problem, body pain, nerve problem, anemia, heart diseases, low blood pressure and so on. In fact, number of women belonging to higher caste category are found to be facing these health problems more. However, when the women of the sample when interviewed about the causes of their food insecurity and the health problems they are facing, they did not answer in the negative, in fact, they are very

much satisfied with their health conditions. The women respondents of the three districts are too much under the spell of patriarchy that they do not even think to have access to proper food. Whatever food they are left with, they eat it and become satisfied. They no doubt cook various common Indian food items daily like rice, vegetables, dal, chicken, fish, egg, tea, etc. which if consumed properly daily by an individual will definitely fulfill the dietary needs for that individual. But these women never gain access to those cooked food in sufficient quantity as most of them eat last and the least and these creates barriers for them to live an healthy and active life and they lives a unhealthy and insecured life. An attempt is made to show below the nutritional value of common Indian especially some Assamese food preparations and also calorie requirement of males and females from 18 – 60+ years of age.

### Nutritive Value of Common Assamese Food Preparations\*\*

<u>(I) Cereals</u>	<u>Weight*(gm.)</u>	<u>Calorieskcal.</u>	<u>Proteingm.</u>
1. Plain rice	200	222	4.4
2. Curd rice	253	221	6.0
3. Chappatis	57	193	5.0
4. Puris	32	136	2.6
 (II) Pulses			
1. Red gram dal	135	109	6.0
2. Black gram dal	145	161	9.0
3. Green gram dal	155	316	19.2

(III) Vegetables

1. Potato curry	135	132	3.2
2. Dry potato curry	70	94	1.7
3. Brinjal and potato	130	134	1.7
4. Ladies finger	140	226	5.5
5. Pumkin curry	165	110	2.6
6. Cabbage	100	131	2.3

(IV) Meat, fish and poultry

1. Omelete	39	77	5.8
2. Fried fish	85	218	18.2
3. Fish curry	110	141	17.6
4. Meat curry	142	339	21.8

(V) Milk products

1. Tea	200	72	1.4
2. Coffee	200	104	3.8
3. Milk (cow's)	200	130	7.0
4. Milk(buffalo)	200	216	8.4

(VI) Fruits

1. Banana	70	116	1.2
2. Lime	85	57	1.0
3. Mango	81	74	0.6
4. Jack fruit	76.2	88	1.9
5. Pine apple	87.8	46	0.4
6. Apple	84.6	59	0.2
7. Grapes	92	32	0.7

Source: Swaran Pasricha (1989). Count What You Eat. National Institute of Nutrition, Hyderabad.

\*Weight refers to converted volumetric measure for one serving.

\*\*Nutritive value of food items restricted to those foods commonly consumed by the rural households in the study area.

Calorie Requirement of Adults (Kcal/24 hour)

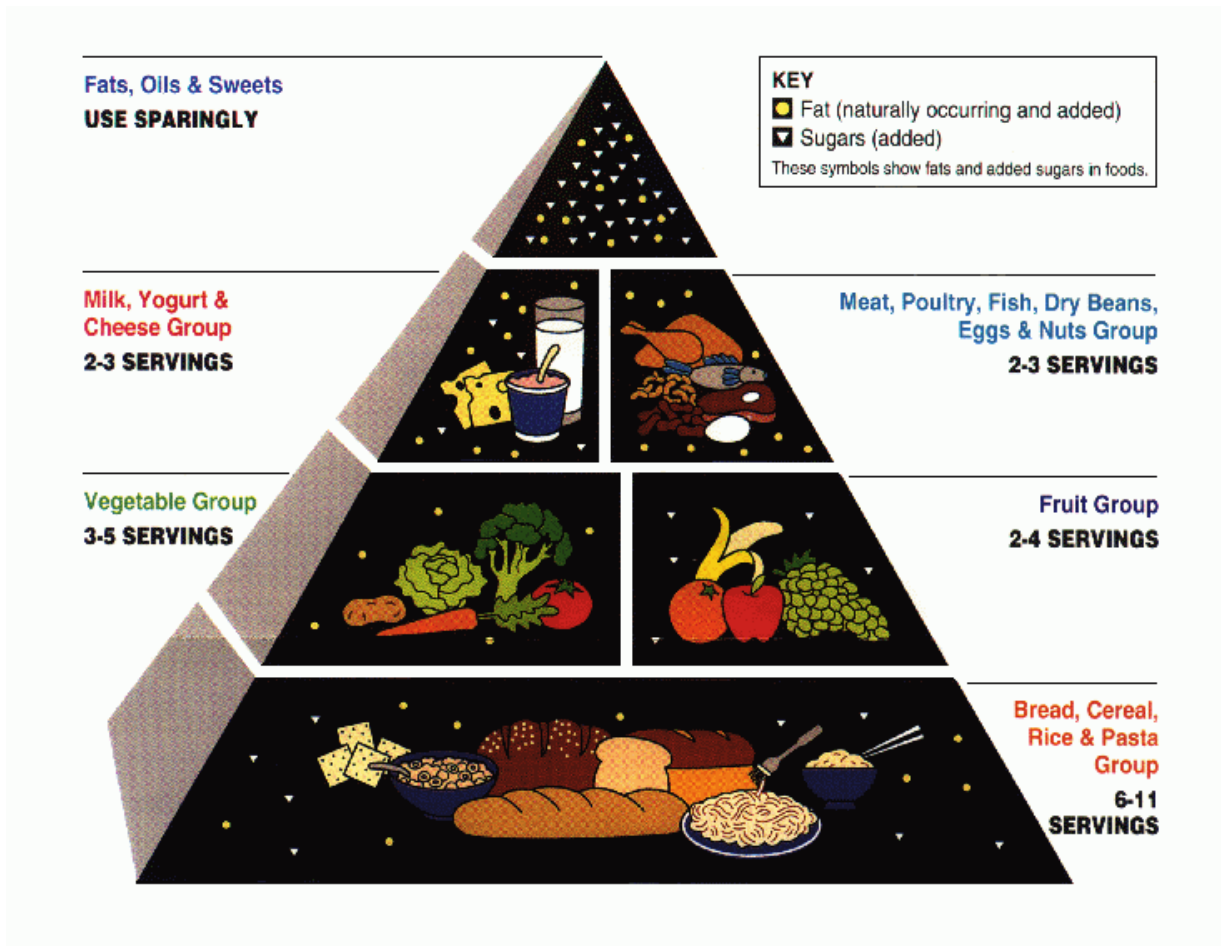
Age 18-30 Years

	Male			Female		
	<u>Activity</u>			<u>Activity</u>		
	<u>Sedentary</u>	<u>Moderate</u>	<u>Heavy</u>	<u>Sedentary</u>	<u>Moderate</u>	<u>Heavy</u>
( in kg)						
35	-	-	-	1536	1824	2400
40	1960	2328	3063	1648	1957	2575
45	2080	2470	3250	1760	2090	2750
50	2192	2603	3425	1872	2223	2925
55	2312	2746	3612	1984	2356	3100
60	2424	2879	3788	2096	2489	3275
65	2544	3021	3975	2208	2622	3450
70	2656	3154	4150	2320	2755	3625
75	2806	3335	4388	-	-	-

		Age 30+ to 59+		Age 60+years	
		Activity		Activity	
Sex	Body weight(kg)	Sedentary	Moderate	Heavy	Sedentary
Male	45	2120	2518	3313	1664
	50	2208	2622	3450	1768
	55	2296	2727	3588	1872
	60	2376	2822	3713	1976
	65	2464	2926	3850	2072
	70	2552	3031	3988	2176
	75	2640	3135	4125	2280
Female	45	1792	2128	2800	1544
	50	1856	2204	2900	1624
	55	1920	2208	3000	1704
	60	1984	2356	3100	1784
	65	2056	2442	3213	1864
	70	2120	2518	3313	1944
	75	2184	2594	3413	2024

Source: I.C.M.R. (2002). *Nutrient Requirement and Recommended Dietary Allowances for Indians : A Report of the Expert Group of the Indian Council of Medical Research*. National Institute of Nutrition, Hyderabad: 22-23.





Source: USDA's updated food pyramid from 2005, My Food Pyramid

According to the guidelines shown above in the diagram regarding types of food and the amount of food that if an individual follows daily then will enable the individual to develop and live an active and healthy life without any health problem. But in reality it has been found that women in general and rural women in particular in Indian society including Assam, hardly follows the guidelines. Infact, the women are not aware of this diet plan for humans and its significance for developing a sound health. As women's share on work daily is much more higher than the men particularly the rural women's workload and home caretakers, therefore, it is even more necessary for the rural women to follow this nutrition guidelines to escape from

diseases and to achieve a good health. In absence of getting right type of food and right amount of food by women to eat, makes them the worst victims of the various forms of health related problems which are discussed above. The women themselves must be educated regarding dietary needs and special food requirements for their bodies.

## SPECIAL GOVERNMENT SCHEMES AND FOOD SECURITY PACKAGES FOR WOMEN

4.6 The government of both the national and state level in India has adopted many strategies and formulated many schemes and policies for healthy development of women till now. Food security of all population is an important and desired social target of Indian government. Women as it is the most vulnerable section and deprived section and suffers from number of handicaps, many serious efforts have been made by the government for bringing equality between men and women in all respect and in terms for achievement of food security by women too, the government again formulated special schemes for women and also some food packages for women. Some of the special schemes for women launched by government and also food packages are listed below.

Integrated Child Development Services under MoWCD was introduced on October 2, 1975 to tackle malnutrition and health problems in children below 6 years of age and their mothers.

National Maternity Benefit Scheme was launched for providing a sum of Rs. 500 to a pregnant mother for the first two live births and the woman must have to be older than 19 years of age. The benefit is given normally 12-8 weeks before the birth and in case of death of the child the woman still can avail it.

Janani Suraksha Yojana under MoHFW was introduced in 2005 which was a step to provide one-time cash incentive to pregnant women for institutional/home births through skilled assistance.

Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana under MoWCD introduced in 2010 to provide a cash incentive of Rs. 4000 to women who are 19 years or above for the first two live births.

Sabla or Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls under MoWCD was launched in 2011 with an aim for empowering adolescent girls of 11-18 years of age with focus on out-of-school girls by improving their nutritional and health status and upgrading various skills like home skills, life skills. This programme merged Nutrition Programme for Adolescent Girls (NPAG) and Kishor Shakti Yojana (KSY).

Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana under Mop&NG was launched on 1<sup>st</sup> May, 2016 to provide free LPG connections to women from below poverty line.

Sukanaya Samridhi Yojana under MoWCD launched in 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 2015 to ensure equitable share to a girl child in resources and savings of a family in which she is generally discriminated as against a male child.

National Food Security Act, 2013 is a special act for food security for all in India and also at the same time special act for women empowerment and healthy development of women. It along with with the aim of providing subsidized foodgrains to the poor in India, also aims at providing cash benefits to pregnant women and pregnant women, lactating mothers and children of certain categories are eligible for daily free cereals. Moreover, issuance of ration cards to the eldest woman in the household who are 18 years or above is a very important step towards women development. This Act was implemented in Assam in December 2015.

The government of Assam recognized the importance of food security for all and accordingly has been implementing PDS and TPDS since long time for the welfare of the society. Again for the women particularly the government of Assam also launched various schemes so that proper healthy development takes place in Assam of all the population. The list of some of the schemes meant for women are discussed below.

‘Mamata’ scheme was introduced in 2010 and the scheme seeks to reduce infant mortality rate and maternal mortality rate by insisting on a post-delivery hospital stay of 48 hours of the mother and the new born so that any complication can be addressed by skilled doctors available at government health institutions. Also after discharge from hospital the mother receives a ‘mamata kit’ which contains essential baby products like baby powder, baby oil, mosquito net, flannel cloth, etc.

‘Mamoni’ is another scheme to provide cash assistance to pregnant women for nutritional support at Rs. 1000 in two installments who registers in government health institution in their place. Under this scheme pregnant women are need to undergo at least 3 ante-natal checkups.

‘Majoni’ scheme has been launched for providing social assistance to all girl children born in the family upto second order by giving fixed deposit of Rs.5000 for 18 years. This scheme is applicable to those families who are limiting themselves to two children.

Selected women beneficiaries of BPL category are provided with free LPG connection under Randhanjyoti scheme.

On 2016 another Maternity scheme was launched namely Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan with the main aim of examining pregnant women on the 9<sup>th</sup> of every month for safe delivery.

A view of the above discussed schemes for women specially by both the national and state government clearly indicates that in India and also in the part of Assam women are considered to be an important part of the society and removal of their grievances too. Therefore, at various point of time various schemes have been launched by government for the women section in particular. The only ray that will definitely move India to the path of all round development is women development and equality between men and women. As women in large number suffers from various problems and they are deprived, therefore, the

government has come forward to stop this menace from the society through introduction of many special schemes for the women in all areas of life.

## EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

4.7 In the whole world South-Asia is the region where the most severe anti-female gender discrimination exist. It has found that among adults strong gender differences are made in education levels, employment and in earnings too<sup>13</sup>. Even in illness men are treated more often than women in the region. Extreme son preference in the world is found in South-Asian countries<sup>14</sup>. The extreme form of gender discrimination is manifested in female infanticide. Sex selective abortion is still in existence leading to natality inequality between the genders<sup>15</sup>. As a result of the practice of gender discrimination in the region including India, women's rights are violated even before they are born in many cases or shortly after times when they are the most innocent. Female mortality rates is higher than men due to this gender discrimination only. Women are discriminated in the pattern of food consumption as a result of which they experience very poor health condition and this leads to low birth weight babies in future.

Women are the main caretakers but they do not get a free environment to care for themselves. Decision-making power is invisible among women in many households in the region. Women are the most vulnerable from the point of view of both food as well as nutrition security. Women plays a crucial role in overall food system from production to consumption level. But the tragedy is that women role is always ignored and women are completely bypassed either in the development process or in getting benefits of development process in India. Women ensure nutrition security of their households firstly through acquisition of food and secondly through preparation of food for consumption by the family members. A major influence of women's education has been found on health and nutrition status of family. Women's education enhances child's health and survival. Burden is found to be always more on women section than men but they gets the least share in benefits and

opportunities, even access to quality and quantity food. Taking a note on the sufferings and discriminations meted out against women in the society of India, it becomes very much clear that the most important reason for all the sufferings of millions of women in India is possibly due to their lower social and economic status, and absence of decision making power even within the family. In order to get the full benefit of all their contributions, opportunities and also the benefit of food and nutrition security, women must be empowered first. They must be empowered to have access to their rights as equal partners of the men section in the social and economic development of the country. Women must participate in all decisions not merely in the work load. Women's decision-making in food related activities, family administration and caring of children and health and women's access to resources is considered to be the most intra-household dynamics of food security and also in the process of empowerment. Education of women increases the level of participation of women in decision-making. Empowerment of women is of utmost importance both in terms of employment and education as a means to improve health and nutrition of women particularly and also overall status of food and nutrition security of the country. Health security is vital requisite for food and nutrition security. Women empowerment and achievement of food security of all also demands the role of the Panchayats in the rural areas. Panchayats has tremendous potential for ensuring women's empowerment as well as food and nutrition security as it is a local government in which for participation of women in the running of the state machinery 30 percent seats reserved for women to ensure the benefits of various welfare programmes reach the poor. The Panchayats can play an important role in monitoring some of the vital services like PDS, Integrated Child Development Services, Reproductive and Child Health Programme, etc. and also can improve the effectiveness of the services. Through Panchayats local women could be organized in groups for production of low cost nutritious foods for children. Proper awareness can be created about the various government schemes and services meant for women only. Nutritional awareness can be developed among women. Through training among women members in Panchayats in basic concepts of food and nutrition, the awareness can be created so that they disseminate the same to the community. Health of the women population is of paramount importance in health and nutrition security of the whole general. But in India in the lives of most of the women hardly

any health security could be found. There are so many detrimental factors which are affecting the health of the women mainly social and cultural norms influences more. Daily energy intake of women is much below the energy output in most regions of the country and this revealed by numerous surveys conducted by the National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau. The quality of life of millions of rural women in India including rural women in Assam is very disappointing. Women always make various forms of sacrifices for their husbands, in-laws and children. Even women sacrifices their food need for other members of their family. Due to this ultimately the rural women especially become the victims of undernutrition and various types of nutritional deficiencies which is discussed earlier. Therefore, an effort is necessary to create sufficient conditions for empowerment of the womenfolk so that a sustained development of the women, food secured life and free from health hazards takes place and in the process the overall growth and development and the survival of the society can be brought. Capacity building of the women is very essential to make them live a stable and self-sufficient secured life. In Indian society even today always patriarchal values are protected at the cost of the women's rights and opportunities. Women though participated in the national struggle for freedom and praised from the ancient society still they are the most deprived section. In India along with other parts of the country there are many feminist movements have taken place still many women have not reached their respective position. Gender bias practices takes place against women in all areas of life in the society of India. It is therefore, very necessary for making women more and more empowered so that the society as a whole prosper to the fullest level as with the presence of inequality no justice can take place nor any complete success and development of the society as a whole. Empowerment does not mean only getting jobs, rather the true empowerment of women should start from the household unit itself through giving women the power to participate in various decisions concerning family first. Due recognition and appreciation to the various incredible works of women is also empowerment. No doubt today many women have reached great heights of success but at the same time many are living miserable life deprived of all opportunities and rights. So, they must first realize their caliber and strength as individuals and should eradicate themselves first from the spell of the evil practice of patriarchy. As many women themselves accepting themselves to be subordinate to the men, they must be convinced to believe that

they are not subordinate to men by any means, further moving faster than men and can do everything that men does. Infact, women can do all such things which a man cannot even dream of doing. Women must step forward first to remove all discriminations against them and stop all injustice. To make this earth the best place to live in, the first and the most urgent need is women's empowerment as without women no society cannot even survive. In rural areas many self-help groups have been already formed which is definitely a very sincere effort to empower women section<sup>16</sup>. Panchayats and reserved seats for women in this institution is another major step for empowering them. But various other measures are also to be taken in addition to these especially to make the rural women empowered and free from all hazards of live. Women must raise their voice and should not hesitate to stop any kind of injustice and torture against them that kills their security of life completely. Policy-makers must take even more concrete steps to empower the womenfolk with concrete policies. Although the government both the national and state have undertaken many initiatives and affirmative actions for protection and security of women, still many women are still experiencing a insecure and full of suffering life. So, gender equity in order to make possible empowerment of women in social and economic dimensions is very necessary. For this many more reforms should be done. Restrictions against women in relation to education and their abilities should be reduced. Control over resources in households is also a sincere effort of empowering women. Jobs prospects must be made brighter for women. Women must be able to exercise their choices. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has even recognized the necessity of investing in capabilities of women and empowering them to exercise their choices and in return it will contribute towards growth and overall development.



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