

CHAPTER- 7

CONCLUSIONS

This analytical and statistical study on food security and pattern of consumption of food by women has very precisely mapped out many important findings of great theoretical value which were not within the grasp of earlier research studies. Moreover, the findings would definitely provide both logistics and vital empirical support required for any future study on food security and women. The main results and unique features of the study are briefly summarised here.

The respondents of the study in total is 300 and the respondents in all the three districts belong to three communities viz, Scheduled Tribe(ST), Scheduled Caste(SC) and General Caste. In each district the respondents are categorized on the basis of the communities, that is, 30 respondents from Scheduled Tribe(ST) category, 30 respondents from Scheduled Caste(SC) category and 40 respondents from General caste category comprising 100 respondents in total. Again the respondents are women and they are from different age groups, different educational status, different economic background and some are earning women while some are not. Many of the families of the respondents are nuclear families. The literacy rate of the respondents is comparatively not very high in all the three districts. Majority are class 10 qualified that is 39 percent of the total respondents studied upto class 10, 15 percent studied till class 5, then 13 percent are HSLC qualified, HS passed are 10 percent and only a few studied above HS that is only 7 percent, some are illiterate too that is 16 percent. Then majority of the women respondents are involved in activities like rearing of cows, goats, pigs, poultry, weaving, etc. along with performance of daily household activities. Most of the women of both higher and lower income groups are engaged in many farm related activities which greatly adds in the family income directly and indirectly and also ensures food security of the household. Main source of income of most of the women households is agriculture. Monthly income of the respondents households' is also

not very low. Only a very less number of households' monthly income is less than 5,000 rupees that is only 15 percent. Maximum level of majority of the respondents households' income is less than 10,000 rupees that is 38 percent and between 10,000- 20,000 rupees is 25 percent. Even 22 percent of the households income is above 20,000 rupees. Only 15 percent of the households' monthly income is less than 5,000 rupees. Moreover, the monthly expenditure on food is very positively related to monthly income of the households and is very satisfactory. Monthly food expenditure of households between 3,000-5,000 rupees is 33 percent and above 5,000 rupees is 32 percent which is quite encouraging. 28 percent spends 2,000-3,000 rupees on food monthly and only 7 percent of households' food expenditure is less than 2,000 rupees. This clearly reveals that food expenditure occupies primary position in all the households' total monthly expenditure. In addition to that it is also a determinant of food security of women to a considerable extent which was very clearly shown in the statistical analysis in earlier chapter.

The food cooked daily in most of the households by women is also very satisfactory but the level of knowledge of nutrition and food security among the respondents is not very high. A greater number of the respondents are completely unaware of proper diet for a woman to lead a food secured life. They do not have any idea about the basic necessities for a woman in terms of food mainly. Although they take part in various food related activities from morning till night and ensures household food security but they themselves do not enjoy a food secured life. They cook food like rice, dal, vegetables, fish, eggs, chicken, etc. regularly and feed their family members. However, 87 percent of them are not aware whether the food items which they cook fulfills the basic nutrition requirements of themselves and other members of their families or not. 76 percent of the respondents in all the three districts are without any knowledge of balanced diet for themselves to lead a sound healthy life. Expecting mothers require special care and nutrition but in the study in this case also the picture is very disappointing. Most of the respondents, that is, 69 percent do not know about the special requirements of women.

In all the three districts in the study it has also been discovered that almost all the women respondents are least bothered about their health and their food security status.

They do not consider necessary to eat a quality amount of food and at right time daily. In comparison to the men, the food consumption pattern of the women respondents of the study is not very encouraging. The women in the three districts is found to be engaged in various hard works but most of them do not eat the sufficient amount of food necessary for their labour. In fact, they themselves are satisfied with their lives, and they never complain for their due share. In the households women's great role are incomparable with the men, they are the worst sufferers both in direct and indirect manner in all aspects. The respondents in the study hardly get leisure. They goes on performing various activities to make their family members to live comfortable and sufficient lives. They are the main agent of development of the households. In terms of food security of households already it has cited above that they are considered to be main factor. In spite of this the food security status of the women is very low. They always think to feed their children, husbands and other members firstly. By doing so they gets satisfaction. Majority of the women respondents eat last in all the districts irrespective of caste and class. Of the total sample, 63 percent of them always eat last. While eating last the cream of the food is always eaten by the menfolk and the women many a times are left without appropriate amount of food. 40 percent of the respondents do not get sufficient amount of food and this is a serious implication of eating last. Eating last has other implications too like food becomes cold, the women have to eat alone and this reduces the interest of eating and the women eats very less amount of food which hardly fulfills the nutrition requirement of them. Even as a result of lower intake of food in the study it has been also found that many of the respondents are suffering from various health problems too. 49 percent of the total respondents are suffering from problems like low blood pressure, headache, gastric, nerve problem, body ache, vision problem, heart problem. All these health problems are result of only lower level of food consumption by them. In the process ultimately this creates the most serious problem of food insecurity among the women section particularly rural women. In the whole world at present without security of women in all aspects a nation cannot achieve any greater success as a society moves towards development and growth through the potential of women and when this women factor is deprived of their share no matter the reason, then it is very difficult for the society to make greater development. In this study the findings clearly shown that women are always the worst and

first victims of any kind of difficulty and problem in a society. From birth till death a woman plays various roles in their families and the society as a whole, and it has already been established that their contributions is the main road towards development for the society but their relative position and representation in many cases is found to be not encouraging at all even today.

In a holistic household food security analysis, the nutritional status of every individual in the household is very important. Equity is a major determining factor along with adequacy and efficiency for an individual's food security. But in the districts of Kamrup(Rural), Lakhimpur and Cachar districts of the study equity is found to be maintained very less in the households of the respondents. Gender factor influences a lot regarding food security status of the women members of the households. Variations in food consumption prevail due to gender biasness in majority of the households of the respondents although the percentage share of women's work is the greatest for food related activities in the three districts. Another fact has also been revealed in the study that gender biasness in most of the cases has been created by the women themselves. Among the women respondents in the study irrespective of anything it has been found that majority of the women consider themselves to be inferior to the males. They do not understand their strength. Fairer sex is the most deprived in all spheres of life and this is partly because of their lack of awareness of many share and partly due to their unwillingness to claim for their due share. The respondents of the study are found to accept biasness as a part of their life. They think they are born to serve the malefolk. In the study it has already been stated and shown in the analytical chapters that women in majority always work more but eat less. They are the main labour force but percentage level of their food intake is the least. They eat last and serve the men first which in turn makes them victims of the problem of food insecurity. They faces major health problems which is also a big challenge to the food security goal. Despite women being the main source of achievement of household food security, they never enjoy a food secured life and this is not exceptional to any caste or class. Almost all women are leading a food insecure life. Human Development in a nation implies various types of security of all people and food security is one of the securities already mentioned in earlier chapters. But no nation

can achieve the target of human development and particularly food security when one section is deprived. In a democratic country like India, the women after so many years of independence are not independent in the real sense. Only India has achieved independence politically. Democracy demands one very important feature to be maintained, that is, equality between men and women, but it is very disappointing to state that in this territory men are getting special privileges at present too in most of the households. Women are always expected to sacrifice and which is done by most of the women willingly. At this age also so many crimes against women prevail everyday, women are tortured, women face atrocities, humiliation, negligence in India. Women in many households lack the decision-making power which is an important quality to reach a higher position in the society later on by them. Many things influence women's decision-making power in various households positively like age, education and their level of access to resources. Empowerment of women is necessary for getting rid of the injustice and discriminations meted out to them in any society. It must be cited here that ensuring food security of all women in a society is the greatest empowerment of women. Gender factor is always been the obstacle in the lives of women in getting opportunities in many cases since time immemorial in India. Undoubtedly, since ancient times women and their immense contributions have been praised, but it is also a fact that this women section is the most vulnerable section of any kind of problem. The rural women especially carry out innumerable productive activities for survival, growth and development. But the worst fact is that the effective labour of women is always kept out of analytical framework for long. Women are the true source of wealth but the significance of women's labour is not appreciated by all in the present society. The productive utilities of women's role in order to be maintained, women must be secured and protected. Gender discrimination in all forms must be abolished in a nation. It is also a responsibility of any nation and people of the nation to make understand all women particularly the rural women to recognize their capability and their contribution. They should be made to understand that they are not weaker section, in fact, the most powerful section without whom no nation even cannot move towards development. The women must believe that food is equally important for both men and women and therefore, they should also consume appropriate and nutritious food regularly. They must recognize the necessity of living a healthy life and for that the need

of consuming quality and quantity food. The biasness to which most of the women are victims can be ended completely only when the women stop treating themselves as inferior to men. Gender should not be used as a weapon to create barrier in the opportunities of women. In the study gender is found to be one of the major factors in terms of food insecurity of the women. This 'gender' concept is spreading very negatively in the society of India even today and areas like education, health, income, access to food are greatly influenced by this idea of gender in many parts and households of India in this age of science. Education strongly contributes to nutritional status of individuals, and therefore, lack of proper education in many instances of the study resulted in poor nutritional status of women. Moreover, maternal nutritional knowledge influences nutritional status of children.

Deficiency in terms of iron, vitamin, iodine, calorie has become major health issue of most of the women in India. Particularly, rural women in large number suffers from such deficiencies. Maternal mortality rate is still not declining in India due to occurrence of such deficiencies. Protein-calorie status is not similar between males and females. A gap always exist between man and women. A sex-bias is observed within many households in terms of pattern of food consumption. Even the study showed that gender factor to a considerable extent exist in terms of enjoyment of a sound and secured health. Monthly income no doubt influences a lot on food expenditure of a household, but it is evident in the study that monthly income of majority of the households is quite satisfactory and expenditure on food is also high and is proportionate to income. Hence, food expenditure and income of households is not the sole factor which influences food security status of women in the study. In fact, the study results suggest that women of households with high income and also women of lower income households suffers from the food insecurity problem. A social factor is strongly related to the food security of the women and that is 'gender bias'.

The obtained results thus suggest that in order to improve the food security level of women particularly rural women, the national nutritional programmes should be developed. In this connection it should be stated that since many years the government of both the national and state level adopted many schemes and policies specially for the

women. To bring development, various special packages for women have been introduced by the government. There are many policies for women's education, for pregnant women, lactating mothers, employment of women, and so on. Most importantly the National Food Security Act of India, 2013 also incorporated special provisions for women and to achieve food security of women and to empower them. But on the basis of the findings of the study it is found to be important for the government to take more concrete steps and develop those policies for women. Moreover, proper implementation of policies and schemes is possible through the cooperation of the women for whom it is meant. So, the women must be made aware of those policies meant for them, they must be understood about the features of the policies and they must be aware about the necessity of the special policies for their upliftment. Even for better achievement of food security goal, the nation must reduce the gap between food security status between men and women. Gender related discrimination should be stopped and for that more and more awareness must be spread among the population. Particularly the women must be taught regarding equality and its importance, their contributions, and also their strength and capacity. It must be incurred in their minds that they are not inferior to men in any way. Proper measures must be undertaken to make the women aware about the importance of food security in life. The programmes should be developed in such a way that it targets the women's food habits and provide them more opportunities for increasing the awareness among them regarding importance of food security and also increasing food security status of them. Government must also take adequate steps to end malnutrition among women. Moreover, it is an obligation of the government to strengthen the Public Distribution System (PDS) in terms of wider base and extended service. Food items should be made affordable so that price do not become an obstacle in a household food security level ultimately of the food security level of the women of the household. Whatever policy regarding food security and women the government introduce at the household level and national level, an understanding is necessary that is, the policy is to empower women and enhance food consumption pattern of women. Steps should also be taken to improve the infrastructure of the women of poor households so that they live a dignified life. Even it would be fruitful to organize meetings on food, nutrition and what kind of food a woman should eat, how to achieve food security and so on and recognized doctors, teachers,

nutritionists must participate along with rural women. Quality of human resource will need to be improved through better health care and education and this should be kept in mind while introducing a policy.

Democracy will be successful in India only when food is served in every plate of the total population and each and every individual both men and women lives self-sufficient life and peacefully. India has achieved self-sufficiency in food production, yet food insecurity remains unabated. In this globalised era, Human Development Index (HDI) is considered to be important for rating countries and according to HDI India is not in a high position. Food security is a very important component of human development now, therefore, it is the core responsibility of the government to create such conditions that each and every person gets sufficient food to eat and also enjoy nutrition secured life. For this the government must come in collaboration with International Organisations too. Food security is one of the greatest goals in India and this target should be achieved. No individual should be kept out of the target of food security. Women particularly should be targeted more as they are more subjected to food insecurity. It is wished that this holistic approach to food security brings pleasure and prosperity in lives of women. It is in this context that we may recommend the need for a national policy that takes into account the issue of consumption of food by women with which the whole question of development of the personality of women as well as the entire development issues are closely related to.