CHAPTER - VI

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Discussion of the findings which resulted from the investigation is as follows:

6.1 ENROLMENT TRENDS OF WOMEN AND MEN AT HIGHER LEVELS OF EDUCATION

Decline in enrolment trends of both men and women at Higher Levels of Education during the academic years 2001 to 2009 could be attributed to varied reasons such as lack of persistence in students because of failure in the previous year or students presuming difficulties due to change of courses at higher level of education. It could be brain-drain i.e. students with high percentage of marks leave the State for better facilities and for brighter future. Might be also that in the midst of the course, the students discovered that they could not cope with the studies due to reasons best known to them or because their friends changed or dropped the course so they too followed the same. Change of residence or transfer of parents, financial constraints at home could have forced the students to give up studies and looked for jobs. Once they started working, they would not be interested anymore in attending classes or it could be that they preferred to do distance learning. Knowing that it could be difficult for them to get employment even after their convocation ceremony might be the cause which prevented them from enrolling themselves for any course.

The data revealed that in general the enrolment trends fluctuated from year to year and also from subject to subject among male and female students for both the general
students and the scheduled tribes. So, it cannot be said that even though we are in a matrilineal society, our women are already empowered therefore no need of empowering them anymore. What can be concluded is that scheduled tribes women particularly the Khasi women still need enhancement of their enrolment at the higher education level so that it can help empowering them in other areas too and not only themselves but also their men folk as well.
6.2 STATUS OF WOMEN IN KHASI MATRILINEAL SOCIETY

6.2.1 EDUCATION

Majority of the respondents are graduates and not many go for further studies; they are also from the semi-urban and rural areas, therefore it is not surprising that they have completed only graduation. Actually they have done really well, considering the fact that educational institutions are concentrated mostly in urban places. They have to make lots of adjustments and sacrifices in terms of money, time, strength and energy to cover distances in order to reach these centres of education. Besides, lack of proper foundation in village schools, they need to struggle a lot during their studies in order to make sense of what they receive and learn. Students studying in women’s colleges seem to be more serious with their studies. Maybe because there are fewer distractions and that they are single-minded at least while they are within the campus. If they want to, they can perform really well. There are some women graduates who have come out quite safe and unharmed through the entire treadmill of modern higher education. This is all due to their exceptional energy and ability. These women are found to manage quite successfully their family of normal size. Many spinsters and widowed graduates are serving the cause of education in India in a very splendid manner.¹

It was found that boys and girls have equal access to education more so up to upper primary level. According to the census of India-2001, the female literacy rate in Meghalaya is roughly 60 per cent while that of the male is 66 per cent, thereby depicting gender disparity. Corresponding with the finding; the Educational Survey (1960-1961)

indicated that disparity between the sexes is less pronounced than it was, but there is still
a need for more educational facilities for women. There is no question that the
importance of educating our women is fully and universally understood; the Constitution
confers upon them an equal right of access to all educational opportunities, but those
opportunities are as yet limited. An extract from the Report of the University Education
Commission, 1948-49 (Radhakrishnan Commission), sums up the need: ‘There cannot be
an educated people without educated women. If general education had to be limited to
ten or to women, that opportunity should be given to women, for then it would most
surely be passed on to the next generation’.\textsuperscript{2} Non-discriminatory education benefits both
girls and boys and thus ultimately contributes to more equal relationships between
women and men. Equality of access to and attainment of educational qualifications is
necessary if more women are to become agents of change. Literacy of women is an
important key to improving health, nutrition and education in the family and to
empowering women to participate in decision-making in society. Investing in formal and
non-formal education and training for girls and women, with its exceptionally high social
and economic return, has proved to be one of the best means of achieving sustainable
development and economic growth that is both sustained and sustainable.\textsuperscript{3}

Women have the freedom to develop their vocational and technical skills according to
the findings. It has already been observed that vocational and technical education has
special importance for the scheduled castes and tribes not only because they can profit
more this training in terms of raising their productivity but also it is comparatively within

\textsuperscript{2} Ibid. p. 15.
\textsuperscript{3} Department of Public Information. Women: Platform for Action and the Beijing Declaration, (69). New
easy reach of these groups both because of its shorter duration and lower eligibility requirements and availability of variety of monetary incentives.⁴ In the state of Meghalaya, the type of employment that is desired by most youth is in the government areas and the rate of unemployment is highest among general graduates. Therefore, there is a need to take a step forward in promoting vocational and technical education including professional courses in the state so that people have better scope and wider choices to exercise. This is an imperative since there is a serious shortage of skilled professionals amongst the people of Meghalaya working in different fields.⁵

Education has helped in living a better life was another finding of the study. The ultimate end of education is to create better human beings who can make their world a better place to live in. Women’s role in contemporary society is to transform society for the better. Since women are considered as prime movers of the society, their education should assume greater relevance in the process of the development of the society.⁶ An increase in the female literacy and educational level will have wide, positive effects on combating exploitative practices manifest in spheres like marketing labour, as also enhancing professional capabilities in day-to-day economic chores like collection of minor forest produce as also population control, morbidity, health care, nutrition, hygiene and sanitation.⁷ The Khasi women’s contribution has been worthwhile as they have been able to involve themselves not only in the process of development but also in the process of betterment of each locality by uprooting social evils like drug and

alcoholism from the society. The emergence of women agencies has brought new energy and introduced new activities among the young generation women. This is evidenced by increasing association of young women in social services, health care, marketing of handicrafts, cultural and in media activities.⁸

Education taught the need to exert oneself since the process of modern education inculcates the values of personal and economic independence, self-reliance and assertiveness, this was also found in the study. The socialisation process encourages women’s dependency, submissiveness, conformity and passivity. On the one hand women are expected to be self-sacrificing, meek and quiet at home, on the other hand, the same women are expected to be independent, self-confident and assertive at their places of work. If women remain at home they are called ‘drags’ and if they choose to work out, they are considered ‘tough’.⁹ Raghavan in her remarks observed that today’s young women are different. They have developed the communication skill and they are articulate as well as knowledgeable to make their points of view so efficiently, that their presence cannot be ignored anymore.¹⁰

Khasi women have availed themselves of the facilities in higher education and specialized fields. They have thrown themselves whole-heartedly in social works and social welfare programmes both in rural and urban centres. They have expressed themselves through various political and non-political organisations and platforms. But

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they have been restrained by their traditional role to really venture publicly in this area. In recent times, however we see a change of attitude and a growing desire on the part of women to be involved in politics. There is also another area in which women have been tremendously supportive but have not really taken a leading role. Among Christians, there is not a single ordained woman pastor or deacon. This is not to say that women do not speak out on religious topics. They do but only within a certain context, but never as pastors or priests. In today’s world, women including Khasi women are becoming increasingly competitive and aggressive in certain areas and situations. This is so, as they become aware of societal problems and are more knowledgeable about their rights and what they really want. Where men are more reluctant to push forward, women have not hesitated to take a stand, especially in what they consider important in issues relating to morality, to the future of society, to social evils and undesirable elements in society. Education does help one to understand one’s partner better as revealed by the respondents. Though this is directed at our womenfolk, education being considered an equalizer in society is expected to make an effect on men too in this regard. As we need both hands to make noise, so also both women and men need to lend cooperation to one another to have understanding couples. Vedic India believed thoroughly in the divinity of motherhood, and wife is considered not as a tool or an ornament in the household, but as a real companion and minister of the husband. The influence of a cultured wife over her husband is simply indescribable. Wife is not the slave of a husband; she can elevate and ennable her husband’s life. In case the wife is a woman of high principles and lofty purpose, then man would find in her a great source of help for carrying him through all

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the difficulties of earning livelihood and facing this world with all the temptations.\textsuperscript{12} In partnership model, both men and women have to give regard to one another. In this scenario, there would be fewer gender based division of labour as parenting and house-making would be a joint-responsibility. What we need is not to recognize only the ‘sameness’ or ‘exclusiveness’ of the men and the women, but also the appreciation of one another’s independent existence as equivalent.\textsuperscript{13} A society’s stability and vitality can be maintained only if men and women play complementary roles, with equally important status in their own sphere of activities and domains. The loss of status, the indignity inflicted and the suppression of one sex by another create disharmony and imbalance in society.\textsuperscript{14}

The respondents are also of the view that education has helped women to manage better in their family. A woman is born to be a mother, a teacher and the head of a family. Her education must fit her for these heavy tasks.\textsuperscript{15} Educated women have healthier children. When women are educated it has a great impact on the children’s health and education than when men are educated. There is a close correlation between infant mortality and the ratio of women’s secondary education to men’s. Educated women also have fewer children. Children of literate mothers in India are found to spend two more hours per day studying than the children of illiterate mothers.\textsuperscript{16} Women are found behind the success of every man and every nation. The influence of women on men has been felt in every age and society. However, the progress of a family, a state and the world largely depends

\textsuperscript{12} S.R. Sharma: \textit{op. cit.} pp. 48, 52-53.
\textsuperscript{13} J.B.G. Tilak: \textit{op.cit.} p. 298.
\textsuperscript{15} S.R. Sharma: \textit{op. cit.} p. 17.
\textsuperscript{16} J.B.G. Tilak: \textit{op.cit.} pp. 40-41.
upon the education and development of women. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru rightly said that if we educate a boy, we educate a person but if we educate a girl, we educate a family.\textsuperscript{17} It was necessary that women should get higher education to contribute to the nation-building processes, in the North East. They could better instill the human and national values in the children in each family; the love for the country and for all its peoples and the pride and appreciation for the culture and traditions of the country.\textsuperscript{18}

Respondents agreed that being educated it does help for sure to tackle with a lot of hurdles and oppositions particularly for wives with growing up children. At least if husbands are understanding and cooperative, it propels women to give their best in whatever they do. Gendered construction of roles poses several constraints on how women workers were perceived by prospective employers. Several of the constraints such as household work burden, marriage and reproductive roles, lower skill formation, restricted mobility that are inter-linked with late working hours, work safety etc. influenced employers willingness to hire women workers, still employers acknowledged several positive attributes i.e. commitment, lending dexterity and creativity to work, decorum and honesty of women workers.\textsuperscript{19} The job involvement of professionals in terms of willingness to stay back for extra work, concern about performance at work, putting heart and soul into the job and thinking about unsolved official problems is quite high.\textsuperscript{20} The credit for emphasizing the economic content of women’s rights and obligations goes to Nehru. Impressed by the progress attained by women in the Soviet

\textsuperscript{19} J.B.G. Tilak: op.cit. p.170.
Union he introduced the concept of ‘equal obligations’ along with ‘equal rights’. He pleaded that women must be trained “in every department of human activity” so that they can play an effective part in professions and other spheres.  

Education has helped women to be more resourceful in their job was absolutely agreed by the respondents. Educated women process information better and also use goods and services more effectively. Women’s productivity is increased, their bargaining position is strengthened and the options open to them - increase, when they have access to education. If the non-market factors like health, nutrition and children’s education, which are related to human resource development and other factors like fertility, infant and child mortality, which have a bearing on population growth are taken into account, these add up to a sizeable outcome arising out of women’s education. In other words, if we were to look upon the impact of education on women outside of the narrow criterion of economic productivity, then the returns to investment on female education will outstrip those on male education (Behrman, 1993, pp. 394-5).22 Majority of the professional women considered themselves highly self-sufficient and efficient at their work and were confident about themselves in managing the various work situations. They exhibited a high sense of self-efficacy, meaning a belief that they can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the desired outcome. They are people with high expectations, are more likely to take risks, set more difficult goals, persist longer at chosen activities and are more involved in what they do.23 More and more linkages are being developed between education and work. There is a great need to create labour

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22 J.B.G. Tilak: op.cit. p.42.
23 P.Arora: op. cit. p. 234.
force which would be capable of work in the growing complexity of technological application; proper attitudes and skills for employability have to be developed among the youth; there is a shift in proportion of women leaving the home and entering the work force.\textsuperscript{24}

Women do make use of their leisure time which was revealed by the respondents. People who manage to have spare time or who can create space for themselves can make the best use of the time for a beneficial cause either for themselves or for others and not to spend it in unhealthy ways. There are others who consider leisure as a waste of time, therefore allow no space for rest or relaxation for themselves even if they duly deserve it. Unknowingly, they devalue themselves and are not of benefit for others either. Every woman has a right to leisure, for without it she is virtually a slave. Modern housekeeping has greatly improved and the present labour-saving devices are allowing women some leisure. In families where elderly women look after the routine work, the younger woman can find a great deal of spare time. In the case of educated couples who can help each other in housekeeping, a wife has more spare time at her disposal.\textsuperscript{25}

The study also found that women do have a say in the education of the children. In general, the children of working mothers do well in school; they have high achievement motivation and are relatively independent. Children do better when their mothers work by choice, they are devoted to their work and provide high quality supervision. The home is the first and most important school of the child. A mother has been constituted by God as the first and most effective teacher. She is irreplaceable. One good mother is

\textsuperscript{24} J.K. Pillai: \textit{op. cit.} p. 67.
\textsuperscript{25} S.R. Sharma: \textit{op.cit.} pp. 43 and 63.
worth a hundred schoolmasters. The child loves his/her mother and trusts none else in the world and this makes him/her receive with implicit confidence and unquestioning faith whatever she teaches him/her. He/she learns the lessons at the mother’s knee with all eagerness.  

Though a majority of women respondents agreed that they encourage their children to take up the unconventional courses, yet at the same time Khasi parents are quite protective of their children both boys and girls alike, not wanting them to venture out too far from home. May be they have reasons best known to them, but of late since they discover that there is not much scope within the state, they are beginning to let go of their children. Though they are not that many as yet, there are those who have taken up unconventional courses of study. In general higher education where women have exclusive institutions in large numbers, there are hardly any institution of engineering and technology education, exclusively meant for women which can attract women in considerable number. The engineering and technology professions are treated as hard subjects and hence are men’s territories. That means, engineering and technology profession involved heavy instrumentation, difficult terrains and difficult work conditions and hence women cannot deal with those contexts. The costs involved are too much in educating a woman in engineering and technology. So parents often discourage their daughters from undertaking such education and instead prefer their sons to go for engineering and technology education.  

Though the jobs in computer science are in-house and not so hard in terms of the machinery with which they may have to deal with,

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27 J.B.G. Tilak: op. cit. p.28.
the place of work can be anywhere in the country or even across the continents. So, the parents may not wish to send their daughters to far-off locations, away from home. Thus, the family of the women student often plays an important role in making subject choices for her. Interestingly when it comes to the choices made for the sons, the parents would think in terms of the future employability of a particular subject as in the case of daughters, the focal attention will be on the abilities of pursuing a particular branch of study and so called ‘harshness’ or ‘softness’ of the discipline.²⁸

Education cannot be denied that it is by and large a means of employment but it has a broader spectrum as well opined the respondents. Educated women marry later, want fewer children and are more likely to use effective methods of contraception. Large differences in fertility rates are found between women who have completed at least seven years of education and women who have not completed primary education. Education is a human right and an essential tool for achieving the goals of equality, development and peace. Non-discriminatory education benefits both girls and boys and thus ultimately contributes to more equal relationships between women and men. Equality of access to and attainment of educational qualifications is necessary if more women are to become agents of change. Literacy of women is an important key to improving health, nutrition and education in the family and to empowering women to participate in decision-making in society. Investing in formal and non-formal education and training for girls and women, with its exceptionally high social and economic return, has proved to be one of the best means of achieving sustainable development and economic growth that is both

sustained and sustainable.\textsuperscript{29} Education especially of women improves health outcomes like life expectancy and mortality rates that indirectly contribute to production. Besides, education leads to personal development, it also raises awareness and leads to greater participation in civic life. The numerous benefits of education in improving social as well as economic conditions in terms of reducing poverty, unemployment and inequality, improving health, thereby promoting economic growth and development thus cannot be overlooked.\textsuperscript{30}

Education has empowered women to take decisions that matter at home and outside it, as affirmed by the respondents. The Education Commission (1964-66) has rightly observed that in the modern world; the role of women goes beyond the home and bringing up of children. In the struggle for freedom, women fought side by side with men. This equal partnership will have to continue in the fight against hunger, poverty, ignorance and ill health.\textsuperscript{31} Most women are mothers at heart. Their world view and perspective are slightly different from men; however educated, qualified and rational they are. They carry the household mentality of cleaning up and arranging things to the larger society, although this may not be true of all women. For Khasi women, concern for home and concern for society spring from the same sense of responsibility and motivation. She is still the preserver and the custodian.\textsuperscript{32} A literate woman is ready to learn more about the world beyond her home and is willing to interact with neighbours, relatives and friends on

\textsuperscript{30} S. Das and A. Dubey: \textit{op. cit.} p.80.
\textsuperscript{31} Quoted in J.K. Pillai: \textit{op. cit.} p. 39.
\textsuperscript{32} I.M. Syiem: \textit{op. cit.} p. 34.
matters of her health, her children’s education and income generation and saving. Kusum mentioned that the educational programme might need focusing on upgradation of life skills that promote a healthy life, which is essential for meaningful participation in society and fulfilling day-to-day responsibilities. It should play an important role to prepare girls and women to face the challenges of life inside and outside home, at the workplace and public places.

Respondents are in the affirmative that education does empower women in making decisions regarding reproductive health and it is very true for those who are in the urban setting because majority of them get the opportunities and the facilities needed. But in actual fact, wherever a person may be, it is her right therefore she can fight for it. The problem is that she may not be even aware of this. The human rights of women include their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. Equal relationships between women and men in matters of sexual relations and reproduction, including full respect for the integrity of the person, require mutual respect, consent and shared responsibility for sexual behaviour and its consequences. It is the woman who has to shoulder the responsibility of bearing children, looking after them and bringing them up in a civilized way. The right to decide the size of the family should therefore belong to her. The woman should be conscious of this right which she must learn to exercise for her own good, for the good of the family and for the good of

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34 M. Bandyopadhyay: op. cit. pp. 28-29.
the country. The State of World Population Report 1994 states very clearly, “Empowering women means extending choices; choice about if and when to get married, choice about education, employment opportunities, controlling the social and physical environment: choice about if and when to get pregnant and ultimately about family size…” With greater access to education, employment and contraception, many women are choosing to marry later and have fewer children. Those who wait to marry and begin child-bearing have better access to education and greater opportunities to improve their lives.

The finding also found that education had no negative impact on women’s life, few respondents do not rule out such presence. There is no gainsaying the fact that, at its best, school, college and university education in India has produced scholars, engineers, technologists, doctors and management personnel of a quality comparable with the very best products of the best universities of the world. However, it is also true that, against this small minority of quality products, the preponderant majority come out of institutions of higher education, perhaps with a little more of book learning and of course a degree, but with very little capacity for self study, poor language and communication skills, a highly limited world view and hardly any sense of social or national responsibility. Even amongst the gifted with their sharper perceptions, who get the opportunity of studying in institutions of excellence at very little cost to themselves, there is no evidence of the expected commitment to social responsibility. The same applies to the products of better quality schools. In fact this problem at the school level is

36 S.R. Sharma: op. cit. p. 46.
37 Quoted in J.S. Apte: op. cit. p.28.
even more acute because few elite schools concern themselves with developing a sense of social obligation amongst their pupils. The result is that not only an opportunity has been lost to create in the students, during their formative years, sensitivity to pain and poverty but the result is a kind of snobbishness which distances the products of these schools from the realities of their environment.

Apart from evaluating examinees on the basis of rote learning and memorizing, their annual periodicity creates an environment in which students tend to while away their time for most part of the year and gear themselves to work for the last three or four months. For obvious reasons, lack of continuity in application results in the building up of unbearable pressures at the end of the year which find expression in boycott of examinations, leakage of question papers, mass-copying, payment of bribes to evaluators and other unethical practices. Consequently, degrees and grades do not generally command credibility as a whole with the public as well as employers in the public and private sectors and the whole process of higher education has become warped, disoriented and dysfunctional, producing a large number of unemployable young men and women. With the advancement and development of education also, the womenfolk are easily influenced by the life style of other societies. They thought the change is the standard and position, perhaps unintentionally, but they forget that once practised; like going to the club, drinking and gambling, these will become habitual and have a vital effect on the children. We have education but what we need is character.

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6.2.2 **SOCIAL**

As regards the size of the family, the respondents say both the partners together make the decision; which implies that there is dialogue between the couple and the decision taken is with the understanding of both of them. This is a healthy sign for the future which means that our womenfolk are being consulted, they are being considered by their men. This is the need of the hour because in this age and era, no one can be taken for granted or be sidelined. It is good to give people a chance to express themselves. The concept of equality thus had to be widened to cover a whole range of inequalities in such a way that the space for feminine assertion which any one structure contained would be preserved, while inequalities would be removed. At the same time, demands for equality with men grew slightly less important than before, as more and more demands for the right to control over one’s own life began to be made, among which, one of the most important was the woman’s right to control over her own body. The late twentieth century feminists asserted that a woman’s body must not be treated as the subject of social control. Putting it in another way, the focus of campaigns for an improvement in women’s lives has changed from needs to rights and within this from the restricted right to parity in selected areas to the larger right of self-determination.\(^{41}\)

When faced with indecisiveness, the respondents opine that both the parents come to a consensus regarding the indecisiveness of any decision to be taken and if this is correct, our people are heading towards the right direction. Khasi society is afflicted by the problem of too many authorities in one household. The wife is often cornered into a

\(^{41}\) A. Sen: *op. cit.* p. 17.
situation where she has to choose between her husband and her clan. Not being able to withstand their pressures, she yields to their wishes and discards her husband’s advice.\textsuperscript{42}

Children take their surnames (\textit{jaid}) from the mother is supported by the respondents. Mostly, the Khasis fear that adoption of father’s title might lead to marriage between blood relatives on the mother’s side, a taboo and a great sin a Khasi can ever commit. The practice of adoption of father’s title is found among those who live outside the Khasi domain but whenever they come back to the Khasi fold, they revert to the mother’s title. In the urban areas however this identification is irreversible and they adopt different methods for this. One recent trend is to use the titles of both the parents; the father’s title is prefixed to that of the mother. Yet another method is to suffix father’s personal name to one’s personal name followed by the mother’s title.\textsuperscript{43} In areas where the kin is relinquishing more of his duties, paternal responsibility and authority likewise increased. For the last few decades, a growing trend for children to socially identify themselves with their father by adopting his name was observed. The plurality of cultures which are predominantly patrilineal especially in urban setting reinforces this trend to adopt the father’s name and encourage stronger paternal enactment.\textsuperscript{44}

According to the respondents, love-marriage is being preferred to arranged-marriage. People in Meghalaya are at liberty to make a choice of their partners. They dislike arranged-marriages even though they are aware of the advantages and disadvantages of


\textsuperscript{44} I.M. Syiem: \textit{op. cit.} p. 33.
both. Marriages for the Khasis are both family arranged and love. Generally the latter dominates the present matrimonial ties, the system of concubinage in which the couple seeks to settle down without a formal marriage also prevails. The couple having developed acquaintance generally reports the matter to their respective parents who seek to consummate it into marriage; if they fail to secure the consent from both sides, concubinage may develop.\textsuperscript{45} The customary ‘parent-settled’ marriages are giving way to ‘self-settled’ marriages depending on individual choice and selectivity. There is all the more insistence on uxorilocal marriage, for a woman prefers to marry a person willing to come and live with her.\textsuperscript{46} A young man of marriageable age fixes upon a girl as likely to become a fitting partner; probably he has been acquainted with the young woman for some time before, and is on more or less easy terms of intimacy with her. He mentions the name of the girl to his parents and uncles and aunts in the house, and they agree or disagree, as the case may be. Sometimes marriages are arranged by the parents of the young people themselves. Having agreed the fitness of the bride, the young man’s parents send a male representative of the family or in some cases a man unconnected with the family, to arrange matters with the parents of the bride. The latter then ascertain their daughter’s wishes. The parents then investigate whether there is any taboo, such as clan relationship, between the young woman and her intended, in the way of the marriage. If there is found to be no such hindrance, they fix a date for finally arranging the marriage.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{46} J.N. Chowdhury: \textit{The Khasi Canvas}. Meghalaya: Quinton Road, Shillong. 1998, p. 149.
\textsuperscript{47} P.R.T. Gurdon: \textit{The Khasis}. Delhi: Low Price Publications 2010, p. 128.
Early marriage is the cause of family breakup, affirm the respondents. This tendency is rampant especially with those who are not as educated as yet; they lack foresight of the outcome of such a hurried involvement in something which needs serious consideration. Educating women will not only enable them to get better jobs and even be economically self-sufficient or independent, but the whole society will gain. They will get married in late age; the income of working women brings financial stability in homes and increases their desirability as marriage partners. The wife’s income may keep the marriage intact and the likelihood of divorce may be decreased because the income provided may improve the quality of family life (Moore and Sawhill, 1984). Mothers in one-parent families are becoming increasingly younger and the relatively high divorce rate among women who married at an early age (Norton and Glick, 1986). The women of younger age group are less experienced, have less job skills and face a lot of economic deprivation. 48

When couples are divorced, women usually take care of their children and they consider it as social status, with the respondents who do not seem to mind it either. When there is marital conflict of ‘ego’ and ‘inter-role conflict’, both the partners are conscious of their status. They do not make compromises for petty matters, they deflate each other’s ego on very minor issues and unfortunately, the end result of this battle is very fatal i.e. the life of innocent children is at stake. 49 In the event of a divorce, the mother is always allowed the custody of the children. To the mother, on the other hand, the children cherish a very

49 Ibid. p. 152.
strong affection, all their sympathies and affections binding them closely to the mother’s kin which the latter would be bound to maintain them.\textsuperscript{50}

Often women do have a say in the marriage of their children asserted the respondents. When the daughters other than the youngest and the sons marry, they usually establish their own families with parental or family help, if needed such as the allotment of a plot of land, or the gift of some money etc. Parents give a part of their earning to male children also; this is particularly found with people who are in services and professions. As the husband has assumed greater role in family affairs, he is also treated as head of the family in place of the mother. These changes are mostly taking place in urban areas rather than in rural areas.\textsuperscript{51} What is worth observing here is that women now do have an equal and significant role to play in the decision-making process but this is restricted within the sacred portal of her family as keeper of the hearth and the home. One can see a clear-cut division of role of women in private and public domains.\textsuperscript{52} At certain age, the children have also a right to offer the opinion in matter of decision on some of the family matters. As parents of the modern days, we should not forget that the children have a place and a right to be heard.\textsuperscript{53}

There are respondents who are having their own land through inheritance or they bought it and there are those who stay in rented houses. The crux of the Khasi rule of inheritance, as explained by Nakane (the Japanese lady anthropologist), is that the

\textsuperscript{50} P.R.T. Gurdon: \textit{op. cit.} p. 81.
\textsuperscript{53} S. Rynjah: \textit{op. cit.} p. 50.
ancestral property, without deviation must follow the matrilineal descent line. When a Khasi man builds a new house for his wife and children, the house and his acquired property automatically belong to his wife and children to the exclusion of his other matrilineal kin. Duncan expressed his views that the Khasis base their customary laws of inheritance on the tenets of their ancient religion. Now that many have become Christians and have given up those religious rites and forms of worship according to the old belief, the system of holding lands based strictly on the performance of those religious rites and functions can no longer hold good. This is particularly true of a general saying that the Khatduh (youngest daughter) gets all the properties because she looks after the religion of the family. Therefore, it is for the parents themselves to divide their properties as they think best.  

The family property is being inherited by the youngest daughter mostly but in certain cases it is equally shared among siblings. The youngest daughter is strictly the custodian but not possessor of family property; she might dispose of some articles of property but not the ancestral residence. The residential house of the youngest daughter is not counted as her private or personal property; it is an ancestral property. The youngest daughter inherits the largest properties though other sisters also get a share from their parents, depending upon the richness and the capacity of the parents to distribute. If the parents are not rich enough, the youngest daughter inherit solely. The youngest daughter cannot dispose off the ancestral property without the consent of her sisters and her brothers or

54 J.N. Chowdhury: *op. cit.* pp. 145-146 and 151.
the uncles.\textsuperscript{56} The community is gradually moving to an equigeniture mode of succession and inheritance. Many parents in the urban setting are found giving a share of their property to their destitute sons and daughters other than the youngest although still the Khatduh (youngest) herself maintains the family, house and the major share of property. The institution of Ka Khatduh is exposed to vulnerability and many boys find themselves as ‘outsider’ in their own houses. ‘Money matters not the custom’ has been the reaction of some boys. This has impelled many parents to think that their sons and elder daughters should also get something from their property and savings.\textsuperscript{57}

When there is no helper to do the household chores, it is the whole family who does the work according to the finding. Many wives of professionals and managers participate in their husbands’ careers by entertaining business associates, performing household and child-rearing tasks. A professional woman should take up such a job which does not fully make her tired at the end of the day; jobs which do not require too much mobility, are less strenuous and less tiring.\textsuperscript{58} In the Khasi family the mother reigns supreme in the management of the household called ‘Ka Rympei’, the hearth of the house or the kitchen. Besides rearing the children, preparing the food, the mother is also responsible for the budget and economy of the family. In olden days she still finds time in helping with the cultivation or business in the market, besides the household chores. She is responsible for division of minor work in the family, as training for each of them.\textsuperscript{59} Women need to work outside the family very often. In a land where women are also free to do and


\textsuperscript{57} M. Sasikumar: op. cit. p. 69.

\textsuperscript{58} A. Sen, et al.: op. cit. pp. 164-166.

\textsuperscript{59} S. Rynjah: op. cit. p. 48.
practise any trade and profession, the present age offers many varieties of employments. Hence our women folk are also working mothers and in this aspect also they are fore-runners to work in offices, banks etc. Thus, besides the household chores, they are now also supplementing to the family incomes, savings etc.\textsuperscript{60} A great majority of women are working these days to supplement their husband’s income. There are also many unmarried women who are career minded and are working to fulfill their intellectual pursuits. Most of the educated women work today by choice and not exclusively out of compulsion for economic reasons. Within the dual career family, the wife must negotiate with her husband about her traditional role to cope with the associated problems of job and family obligations. As women have increasingly become employed outside the home, they have begun to share the duties and responsibilities of the traditional male provider role. However, men have not adopted the duties and responsibilities of women’s traditional family work to the same degree as women have been sharing the provider role.\textsuperscript{61}

Women are members of the different Religious, Social, Governmental and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) or Community Groups as opined by the respondents. The emergence of institutions and organisations like NGOs, other bodies of civic society like women’s groups, is an indicator of pluralism and increased participation in societal development. During the last one decade, in Meghalaya, a good number of NGOs and Women’s bodies of civil society have come up. This is a positive development that promotes participation of people in societal and civic matters. Whether it is uranium mining or sex education or civic amenities like roads and traffic control,
more and more voices are being heard from these organisations. The governmental, non-governmental, women’s organisations as well as the men folk have to play a vital role in making gender equity a reality. Women should be allowed to make decisions by giving them all possible encouragement. Women are working in non-profit organizations also and they have the potential to work in these service-oriented organizations where “service is the motto and profit is not the motto”. Such non-profit organizations can run only with the help of devoted and dedicated persons who actually work for a noble cause.

Women participate actively in community meetings and there are those who seldom do so. Pakem explained that in Meghalaya we have a social situation where a particular custom like women’s participation in modern institutions may not be a constraint to development, while exclusion of women may be a constraint to modernization. The District Councils, under the Sixth Schedule to the Indian Constitution have been empowered to regulate social customs. Pakem said that regulation does not mean preservation of social customs alone; it also includes the power of abrogation of unreasonable customs or of promotion of social customs beneficial to the society.

Women are sharing equal responsibility with men in the development of society in all its aspects. Women in Meghalaya play a very important role in the development and upliftment of the society in general under different women platforms like Ka Synjuk Ki Kynthei, Ka Lympung Ki Seng Kynthei, Khasi Women Welfare and Development

Association, Meghalaya Women Alliance and other localized women organisations. Women in Meghalaya are competitive, intelligent, practical, hard working and are very creative, they must now assert themselves. They must be given opportunities for greater participation and representation in the policy and decision-making bodies so that they can speak for themselves and voice their agenda. This will undoubtedly help in the progress and development of the state and the nation as a whole. The Khasi women’s contribution has been worthwhile as they have been able to involve themselves not only in the process of betterment of each locality by uprooting social evils like drug and alcoholism from the society. The emergence of women agencies has brought new energy and introduced new activities among the young generation women. This is evidenced by increasing association of young women in social services, healthcare, marketing of handicrafts, cultural and in media activities. The women’s values, experiences and know-how can influence decision-making despite the hidden gender disparity that dominates in the state assembly, employment, social and in other professional fields. In order to initiate a breakthrough and to accelerate development with gender equity, social networks of women should be strengthened and women’s participation in the decision-making should be enhanced.

The matrilineal system gives status to women in the society asserted by the women respondents. The Khasis when reckoning descent, count from the mother only. Woman in this society enjoys special status, respect and freedom. She is regarded as goddess of the house. However in the customary laws the role of woman is confined to motherhood,

housekeeping, custodianship of family property and helper in the agricultural field. In the Khasi family the youngest daughter is the custodian of family wealth and property. Khasi woman also has the freedom to choose her husbands. All these reveal that she has a distinctly higher position and status than the woman in other societies though she has absolutely no role in the sphere of politics and administration.\textsuperscript{67} The status of Khasi women in the present days are changing drastically from the home-maker to a career or professional woman, holding facets responsibilities at home and in the society. This status is seen in their marriage and maintenance.\textsuperscript{68}

Women seem to be aware that a complaint can be filed if they are being subjected to cruelty according to the finding but whether they are making use of the awareness or not is a different matter. Though in the matrilineal society of Meghalaya, women are free from many of the social restraints and problems of the larger Indian society, women have subsumed to be weaker physically as well as mentally by the society. This has led many women to bear violence in multiple forms silently within the four walls of their homes. Even in a matrilineal society, homes are not free of domestic violence with consequential effects on women and children. Family violence is a cognizable offence but very few women take advantage of it due to ignorance of the legal rights and provisions.\textsuperscript{69} One of the crimes under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) is cruelty to women: torture both mental and physical (Sec. 498-A IPC). In tune with the various provisions of the Constitution,


the state has enacted much women-specific and women-related legislation to protect women against social discrimination, violence and atrocities. In a democratic system of government, laws cannot be implemented without the active participation and collaboration of the people. Many of the laws enacted for the benefits of women are not implemented effectively due to the apathy and indifference of the law-enforcing agencies; such as police, bureaucrats, lawyers and judges. The situation can be changed only by awakening the conscience of the people especially women regarding their duty to become active partners in implementing the laws made for their benefits. The effective implementation of the laws thus depends on the women folk to equip themselves with the knowledge of the laws and to come forward to voice for their rights in case of any violation.\textsuperscript{70}

A woman can file an application for maintenance without filing for divorce with women affirming it, hopefully those in need of it avail of the opportunity. There is no custom for payment of bride-price among the Khasis because possibly of the matrilineal organization of their society. The question of payment of compensation consequent upon divorce, therefore, hardly arises. Gurdon however noted that when a wife did not consent to live with her husband nor to accept a divorce, a difficult situation sometimes arose. It was in the event of such contingency that necessity of assessing compensation (\textit{ka mynrain} or \textit{ka thnem}) occurred.\textsuperscript{71} Early marriage and co-habitation are increasing in the state particularly in the rural areas and among school drop-outs. Therefore, it may be suggested to authorize local councils (\textit{durbars}) to register such marriages and be authorized to issue certificates of registration at their levels and make the same valid that

\textsuperscript{70} F.L. Nonglait: \textit{op. cit.} 2011.

\textsuperscript{71} J.N. Chowdhury: \textit{op. cit.} p. 148.
in case of separation; women victims can claim maintenance from the father of their children. Registering the marriages will help in cases of bigamy also, as the men and women both will have certificates to prove their point. The National Commission for women in order to push for making marriage registration a compulsory step had proposed the draft bill ‘Compulsory Registration of Marriage Act 2005’.

### 6.2.3 ECONOMIC

It is heartening to learn that majority of the respondents have their own land for residence. It can also be because people are educated therefore having been employed and earning, making it possible for them to buy their own plot of land when available.

The impression and generalization that all women inherit property is no more relevant in the present economic condition in the society and in the state as a whole. Malngiang in his seminar paper opined as follows: “Empirically speaking, it will not be wrong to say that such properties are found to be in small quantities. It is quite evident that there are families and clans in the rural areas who do not have any land of their own to cultivate. Amongst them, there are many who have to depend on daily earning or wages. Similarly a large proportion of population in urban areas does not have either a land or a house of their own. There are also members of big families who either have just a small house with no compound or land. We also witness a number of married women including the youngest daughters who have to stay in rented houses…” The need for survival and

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74 C. Nongbri and V. Pakyntein: *op. cit.* p. 194.
search for new land for agriculture and residential purpose made mobility or migration a common practice.\textsuperscript{75}

Women responded that they are employed full-time. Housewives are actually employed full-time with their dawn to dusk (if not beyond that) household chores and more so when they have small children at home. But since they are not paid for it, not many give much consideration to them. A professional, along with pursuing a full-time job or a career, taking care of home and child is also confronted with the task of maintaining satisfactory relationships with other members of the family.\textsuperscript{76} Highly educated wives who are employed have higher marital satisfaction than homemakers when they are working to fulfill their intellectual pursuits, they are working out of choice, they are working on part-time basis and they receive whole-hearted support, cooperation and approval from their husbands. The employed wives have low marital satisfaction if they are not highly educated, have low incomes, are working out of compulsion, are holding full-time undesirable jobs, are also looking after household jobs etc.\textsuperscript{77} The decision to work can be influenced by economic or non-economic considerations but the desire to continue to work is primarily a measure of the level of motivation. Professionals derive satisfaction of economic needs, needs for security, affiliation needs, feelings of self-respect and prestige, opportunity for independent action and decision making, sense of recognition and achievement from their work.\textsuperscript{78}


\textsuperscript{76} P. Arora: \textit{op. cit.} p. 182.

\textsuperscript{77} A. Sen, et al.: \textit{op. cit.} pp. 94 and 100.

\textsuperscript{78} P. Arora: \textit{op. cit.} p. 229.
Women specify their jobs as casual labour, social service, agriculture and government service. The Census Report of 1901 shows some 14,000 “general labourers” in the district, the greater number of whom are porters and coolies, both male and female, employed on road work and on building. There is also a fair demand for Khasi domestic servants, both among the Europeans, the Bengali and Assamese clerks who are employed at the headquarters of the Administration. The manufacture of country spirit gives employment to a considerable number of persons, most of whom are females.\(^79\) The planting is generally done by women. As a cultivator (usually a woman) goes on dropping seed-potatoes into the holes, another throws a little manure from a basket over the seeds and lightly covers up the holes with earth. That the Khasis have a number of sayings and proverbs associated with agriculture unmistakably point to the fact that agriculture is native to them and they have pursued it since time immemorial.\(^80\) On the Khasi uplands in and around Shillong and the neighbouring townships, women are occupied mostly with trade and cultivation mainly, although a section cater with opening tea-stalls and supplying meals and other items including indigenous rice cakes. Educated ladies are occupied in offices, schools, hospitals and other vocations.\(^81\)

It is surprising to discover that even in our matrilineal society which prides itself that our womenfolk are economically empowered, not even half of the population of the women respondents keep with them the money they earn. A recent ILO study (2004) observes that the situation of economic security is worsened by the fact that policies and institutions do not realize that promoting women’s control over their incomes and

\(^{80}\) J.N. Chowdhury: *op. cit.* p. 82.
\(^{81}\) H.Bareh: *op. cit.* p. 92.
resources would help boost growth and development; that this is one of the “main forms of gender inequality across the world and systematically neglected in social policy and income statistics. Access to capital can enable women to get control over land and related productive assets. Without reasonable income security, people lack real freedom to make rational choices and be socially responsible. Without collective and individual voice, the vulnerable will remain that way” (ILO 2004:275).\(^8^2\)

Women are free to spend money for their own personal needs; respondents are in the affirmative which is a blessing but not all. Women sacrifice all their happiness and comforts for the sake of families, especially their children. These working women are handicapped to such an extend; they do everything for others and nothing for themselves. They do not have any pocket money for themselves even to meet some of their personal needs.\(^8^3\) When women become income earners; they are able to use more of household income to improve their own well-being, thus reducing poverty within households. It further improves women’s mobility, social visibility, dignity and self-esteem (Kelkar, Nathan, Johan 2004). Women are able to direct more of the household income towards their own and their children’s well-being and even control or reduce wasteful consumption, as in the case of alcohol consumption by men (Nathan, Kelkar 2004). Perhaps because of women’s gender responsibility of provisioning the household (acquiring and processing food), women tend to spend more of the income they control for household consumption goods. This is in contrast to the behavior of men who tend to spend more of the income they control on themselves, alcohol entertainment etc. and


consequently neglects the consumption needs of children and others in the household. What this shows is that the well-being or poverty-reducing impact of an increase in household income is greater when the increased income is controlled by women than when it is controlled by men. The poverty-reducing impact of development interventions increases when women’s agency is enhanced within the household.\textsuperscript{84} Nowadays, it can be perceived that both husband and wife are sharing their joint-responsibilities in their family matters which may be the outcome of their education particularly as regards decision on the daily family budget. Perhaps in few societies are women as fortunate as in matrilineal societies such as Khasi society; they can undertake any work jointly with their husbands or separately. Husband and wife in fact have almost an equal status in the family, they also share equally in duties and responsibilities, as well as decision-making, regarding matters concerning their home and children.\textsuperscript{85} In the Khasi family, besides rearing the children, preparing the food, the mother is also responsible for the budget and economy of the family. In olden days she still finds time in helping with the cultivation or business in the market, besides the household chores.\textsuperscript{86}

Women are free to practise any trade or profession because there is no barrier for our women to take up any job though the reasons, purposes or intentions may vary from individual to individual or from family to family. The present age offers many varieties of employments hence our women folk are also working mothers side by side along with our men folk. In this aspect also, our women are fore-runners to work in offices, banks etc. Thus, besides the household chores, they are now also supplementing to the family

\textsuperscript{84} G. Kelkar: \textit{op. cit.} pp. 4694-4695.
\textsuperscript{85} I.M. Syiem: \textit{op. cit.} p. 23.
\textsuperscript{86} S. Rynjah: \textit{op. cit.} p. 46.
incomes, savings etc. Women still have to take on the parallel roles of wives, mothers and kitchen mistresses even if they have a well-placed job outside the home. A woman’s option to work is still considered secondary. What a man earns is considered the main income. So unless these mindsets change and women assert their right to earn and for shared parenthood within the home, economic empowerment will still be an ideal that can only be striving for but will never achieve. Respondents do avail of every employment opportunity besides white-collar jobs. Modernisation and urbanisation open the gate to various means of livelihood, such as white-collar salaried jobs and a range of other occupations. Trade and commerce flourish with the introduction of cash economy. People need not depend only on agricultural activities. The inclination of younger people to seek white-collar jobs has no doubt been influenced by security of service and the generous provisions made of employees such as Dearness Allowance, Compensation Allowance, advances for house-building, leave travelling concessions and generous leave rules including maternity leave. Khasi women monopolise embroidery work particularly on the jainsems which are an essential part of the Khasi woman’s dress and also tasselling work on the Jainkups.

Most women say they still stick to traditional roles like teachers, nurses, clerks while others are not. Women today are found virtually in every kind of occupation from academics to the corporate sector. Their numbers however, are very few and most of

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87 Ibid. p. 50.
89 C. Nongbri and V. Pakyntein: op. cit. p. 196.
them are mostly found in gender-stereotyped jobs. All over the world, women are encouraged and legally supported to step out from their homes to express themselves in various spheres of activity. They have distinguished themselves as teachers, both in schools and at the university level, as nurses and doctors, as engineers and architects, as administrators in state and central services, as lawyers and magistrates and as entrepreneurs and business women. They have availed themselves of all the facilities in higher education and specialized fields. They have thrown themselves wholeheartedly in social works and social welfare programmes both in rural and urban centres. Among the working wives, most prefer teaching as a profession or business, for the main reason that it gives them more time for their families. Internationally, women are most often concentrated in “feminized” professions; such as nursing and teaching, office work, care of the elderly and disabled – termed horizontal occupational segregation – where they tend to remain in lower job categories than men. Typically, because these functions are carried out by women, they are the lowest paid, in addition to offering limited or no opportunity for advancement.

Women can start their own business and the findings show that they are really very emphatic with their ‘yes’ and that they can do it. Women entrepreneurs had cited a variety of reasons for establishing their own enterprises. ‘To command one’s own organisation’, ‘to be busy’ and ‘to be economically independent’ were considered important. These women had started their own business primarily due to having

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92 I.M. Syiem: *op. cit.* pp. 29 and 33.

experienced the inability to fulfill ambitions within more conventional career structures. In this way they share a common motive with the male entrepreneurs who had also started their own business because they were unprepared to adhere to the supervision and control of others. Thus, it may reasonably be concluded that the female entrepreneurs perceived entrepreneurship as a means of earning quick money. The emergence of women in the economic scene as entrepreneurs is a significant development in the emancipation of women and for securing for them a place in society. They can contribute to the economic productivity of the nation as well as serve the society at large by opening new vistas for the educated unemployed youth, needy women and handicapped people. The association of women with economic enterprises should also usher in an era of clean business ethics.94

Women make use of the various facilities given by the government, banks and other financial institutions when they are in need and when the different facilities are available. Several incentives have been offered which consist of reclamation of land, subsidising the transport cost of fertilizers, increase of wet rice lands etc. The complicated land holdings in Khasi Hills District have barred the District from obtaining recognition from the banking institutions. The villagers are well conscious of the resources which abound but because business organizations, transport facilities and other connected institutions have not been properly nurtured, conditions are still deplorable. Incentives to be imparted to develop economic consciousness will largely be helpful. The coming in of the banks such as Meghalaya Co-operative Apex Bank Ltd., the Shillong Co-operative

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Urban Bank Ltd., etc. is helpful in financing business enterprises. The youth must make use of the various facilities given by the Government, banks and other financial institutions for self-employment and make proper use of the same. The Government has a great role to play; it must have a relevant economic policy in relation to the needs of the people. There must be a selected scheme of industrial planning; training in trade and industrial management, selected industries must be set up to open more avenues for employment.

Women are competent enough to carry out entrepreneurship (business etc.) according to the finding. As in many other spheres, so in the matter of conducting business, the womenfolk predominate. They are most conspicuous by their presence and in the seriousness of business pursuit but this is not to say that the Khasi men are less inclined in going to the market. Khasi women have been found to be as economically enterprising as men. They have been traditionally involved in economic activities, in trading and commercial ventures. This traditional trait is evident in the increasing number of women entrepreneurs engaged in private business in today’s modern society. Women also work in the fields side by side with the men folk. They have their hands full with the household work besides eking out their livelihood. Prominent entrepreneurs like Mrs. Dolly Khonglah, Mrs M.J. Passah, Mrs. Edwina Lyngdoh, Mrs. Obilet Tariang and many more are coming up as successful business women.

97 J.N. Chowdhury: op. cit. p. 68.
98 I.M. Syiem: op. cit. p. 28.
Respondents affirm very strongly that women do play a productive role in the family’s economy. Women’s groups do provide a forum for women to come together, share ideas, exchange information and develop a support network. Yet strategic shifts in access to resources and benefits can only emerge if men too support such a shift and take on a more equal share of both productive and reproductive work. In the context of structural reform, poor men too are facing a crisis in terms of accessing productive assets, markets and income, leading to a crisis of masculinities that is often reflected in growing trends of violence against women. If gender equality is indeed to be achieved, there is need to pay attention to the interests of women, but also to men and to shifts in gender relations occurring on account of contextual changes.\textsuperscript{100} From times immemorial, Khasi women were active participants in supplementing family income by tilling the soil, cultivation, looking after domestic animals and such other occupations that did not require too much muscle power. Women were also shrewd traders in the market places, selling fruits, vegetables, betel-nuts and other products.\textsuperscript{101} The Khasi matrilineal society represents a very unique combination of female’s higher economic and productive roles with the maintenance of the conventional reproductive roles. Matrilineal society allowed them important and indispensable space in the private sphere, their greater roles in the economic sphere is also much more significant.\textsuperscript{102}

Women do take the decisions on administration of land and property on one’s name but not everybody is able to do it. Khasi matriliny with respect to land and power is a unique

\textsuperscript{100} N. Rao: “Women’s Rights to Land and Assets: Experience of Mainstreaming Gender in Development Projects” \textit{Economic and Political Weekly}. Vol XL Nos 44 and 45. Mumbai: Hitkari House, 6\textsuperscript{th} Floor, 284, Shahid Bhagatsingh Road. 2005, p. 4707.

\textsuperscript{101} J. War: \textit{op. cit.} p. 18.

system. The youngest sister’s (khatduh) role as custodian of the family property indicates some access to the family wealth, especially for expenditures related to family affairs. However, she could not sell or dispose the ancestral property (nongtymmen) unless she had the consent of the family council consisting of her maternal uncles, her brothers and her parents (if still living). Such cases were considered only in dire circumstances. Thus the khatduh had no absolute authority over land if this is part of the nongtymmen which must be handed on to the next generation. However, she and her sisters had access to, and control of, such land and wealth (in the form of gold, silver, corals, cash etc.) which had been given as personal shares or gift from the family self-acquired property (nongkhynraw), was entirely managed by the person(s) concerned, male or female. It appears that Khasi customary laws sanction same rights over land and hence give women access to ‘the seats of decision-making and power’. This is in contrast to the basic pattern of land inheritance which is ‘patrilineal, controlled, owned and distributed by men to men’.  

Access to bank credit was a dismal picture as learnt from most respondents. Immediately after the creation of the State of Meghalaya, the Meghalaya Co-operative Apex Bank Ltd., set up in 1971 was the only banking institution in the Khasi Hills that was organized to operate in the co-operative sector. This bank caters to most of the needs of the local people. Co-operative Credit societies, set up subsequently with this principal source of finance, began to advance credit to their members in the rural areas and today they have come a long way to meet credit requirements in the rural sector.  

Government strategies for women’s economic empowerment have been multi-

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103 J. War: op. cit. p. 16.
104 I.M. Simon: op. cit. p. 119.
dimensional. These include poverty eradication scheme, micro-credit programmes and various forms of support for women workers. Self-Help Groups (SHGs) of women are at the frontlines of poverty alleviation efforts and the micro-credit movement.\textsuperscript{105} The Banking Division, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Commerce, along with financing and credit institutions and public sector banks are providing credit and finance facilities under different schemes. However, various studies show that there is a gap in the requirement of credit among rural poor families and actual credit flow. National Bank of Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) provides assistance to NGOs/Voluntary agencies for marketing of non-farm products by rural women; NABARD also links SHGs with the formal banking system.\textsuperscript{106}

Gender division of labour is not practised in Khasi society as found out from most respondents but others asserted that it is still in existence. Robinson wrote that the Khasi men were of a volatile disposition which took them away much from home and that while they were either engaged in trading with the Low-Landers or merely sauntering about the hills and dales in pursuit of sports and amusement, the domestic occupation devolved upon the women. It is no wonder therefore, that woman was the real mistress of the house, and had to bear a great deal of the burden of managing the household affairs.\textsuperscript{107} Gender roles are clearly defined and men expect women to perform the domestic roles of wife, mother, cook, washer-woman and also to care for the infirm and elderly in the family. Besides the above chores; women in the rural hamlets also have to


\textsuperscript{106} Ibid. no. 3.2.3, p.42.

\textsuperscript{107} J.N. Chowdhury: op. cit. p. 69.
collect firewood and water, sometimes from a great distance away. Families engaged in the slash and burn methods of agriculture require the support of women for planting, weeding and harvesting food grains. Women are therefore multi-taskers and contribute more than their share to the family kitty. But since their labour is not classed as ‘work’ because it does not fit into the normative paradigm of economic theories, women are classed as unpaid workers.\textsuperscript{108} Few instances of men taking up some domestic responsibilities, particularly when women are away on training or doing some subsidiary domestic work like cleaning food for cooking, though not taking responsibility, but these are still very few instances. More widespread is the acceptance of some disruptions of family life, such as meals being late when there is a meeting. But overall, it is still true that women are almost entirely responsible for domestic work, which means that the price they have to pay for some improved well-being and increased self-respect and influence in household matters, is that of increasing their hours of work. Importantly some men are beginning to realize the opportunity cost of women’s labour and this makes them ready to share some of the ‘domestic’ tasks, like fetching water, drying paddy and taking care of children.\textsuperscript{109}

Existence of gender division of labour is discovered that it does affect certain women’s ability to contribute to issues outside their homes while the others say just the contrary. Even in matrilineal communities, such as the Garo and the Khasi, as Agarwal (1994:150-51) notes ‘property rights did not alter the overall gender division of labour’ or ‘guarantee women the same sexual freedom as men’. Husbands, brothers and maternal

\textsuperscript{109} G. Kelkar: \textit{op. cit.} p. 4696.
uncles had the ‘formal managerial authority over land’ and furthermore, customary institutions and juridical power were a male monopoly; even the Khasi women heiresses did not have the kind of local influence, the chiefs commanded.\textsuperscript{110} Since the gender division of labour is clearly marked, women are literally tied to their homes and their house-work, making it impossible for them to step out into the public domain and to engage in hard-boiled politics. Men and women have definite biological roles and there has never been any quarrel about that role. Gender roles need to be redefined so that they are just and equitable.\textsuperscript{111}

\section*{6.2.4 POLITICAL}

Women believe that they should have the right to attend \textit{durbar} according to the finding. With education and being in a cosmopolitan society, women nowadays more than ever before feel that they should have the right to attend \textit{durbar} which is the best forum to be able to express themselves and voice their opinions. Traditionally, women in Meghalaya are not allowed to attend \textit{durbar} but it is quite evident that in today’s world there is no activity that can be achieved without women’s participation.\textsuperscript{112} While traditional structures and systems excluded the women of Meghalaya from the power structure there were interesting turning points, which though small, were significant for the women of Meghalaya. Contrary to a feeble argument in favour of the reproductive roles of women as bliss, there is now a dominant need for according more space to them in the village councils and other democratic local bodies as well as in the state and central bodies.

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{111} P. Mukhim: \textit{op. cit.} pp. 44-45.
\end{thebibliography}
through which their voices could be heard.\textsuperscript{113} For the purpose of administrative convenience and to look after the common affairs, village council or \textit{durbar shnong} was constituted. The General Assembly consisted of all adult male members of the village. Women had no right to attend such meeting, this is because of the strong beliefs of the Khasis that when a hen begins to crow, the world will be full of confusion and will invite its own calamity. Hence, women are the keepers of the trust and the custodians of the clan and the land.\textsuperscript{114}

Respondents answer in the negative that women are permitted to attend \textit{durbar} and they are in the majority too, others say that sometimes they are allowed to do so. Even if women are permitted to attend \textit{durbar}, it is not always and everywhere that they are allowed to be active members instead they are just spectators or observers. There have been sporadic efforts to locate a space for women in the \textit{durbar} in some pockets of the state where the men agreed to allow women on specific conditions, nor could the liberal constitutionalism per se overcome the conventional political behaviour particularly of the women.\textsuperscript{115} Women are restricted from attending \textit{durbar} unless specifically called for specific purposes when the services of women are required. While women have a say in household matters, men hold all major areas of decision-making.\textsuperscript{116} Women according to the ancient Khasi ‘\textit{Riti}’ (related to matters concerning running of the \textit{durbar}) have no power and participation whatsoever in the \textit{durbar}. However today, time has changed and women are allowed to attend and be members of the \textit{durbar} but their participation is very marginal though occasionally they hold the executive positions. There is no written law

\textsuperscript{114} E. Jyrwa: \textit{op. cit.} p. 55.
\textsuperscript{115} A.K. Ray and R.P. Athparia: \textit{op. cit.} p. 22.
\textsuperscript{116} C. Nongbri and V. Pakyntein: \textit{op. cit.} p. 204.
to exclude women from the political domain, however when we turned to the rural areas we found a different picture. Here the ancient Khasi ‘Riti’ still plays an important role, people still look upon it as sacrosanct. Thus in the rural situation, question of participation in the *durbar* does not arise.\(^{117}\)

Sometimes women do take part in the decision-making of their local *durbar* or any other organisation when they are permitted to do so which is a positive sign for our society. Unless women are actually involved in village councils and local civic bodies in a big way, they will not be able to address the problems that they actually face in the society. The growing incidences of crime like rape, murder and domestic violence can be addressed only through the participation of women in the decision-making bodies.\(^{118}\)

Regarding participation of women in decision-making bodies from the grass roots to the national and international levels; women are capable of taking up the assignments as chairpersons and members.\(^{119}\) Even matrilineal Meghalaya has its male preserve which women do not have access to. Women are excluded from decision-making in their traditional institutions. Although the culture is matrilineal, the world view is very much patriarchal.\(^{120}\) Women in Meghalaya must be given opportunities for greater participation and representation in the policy and decision-making bodies so that they can speak for themselves and voice their agenda. This will undoubtedly help in the progress and development of the state and the nation as a whole.\(^{121}\)

\(^{117}\) I. Chaoudhury and S.W. Blah: *op. cit.* pp. 89-90.
\(^{118}\) Ibid. p.87.
\(^{120}\) P. Mukhim: *op. cit.* p. 45.
\(^{121}\) M.P.R. Lyngdoh: *op. cit.* p. 100.
Sometimes decisions taken on the suggestions of women at local councils or *durbars* or at state level etc. are being implemented which may depend on the locations of their residences. Traditionally, the political role of women is that of a consultant through the adult male members of the domestic groups. With regard to judicial system woman cannot be a member of the jury but she has a right to be heard. Women have no right to decide and participate in their respective village councils. As a protest against this in some localities of Shillong, women movement for emancipation has started since 1988. The women demanded full participation in their respective local village councils (*durbar shnong*). Moreover, in some localities of Shillong town, women have got space in the village councils as elected or nominated members. For many, particularly in the urban areas it means a great initiative for women empowerment, it has caused substantive change in the role and status of women. But on the other hand, political participation of women in the village councils is rather remote. Women cannot enter the village councils as elected or nominated members. This is so because majority of the Khasi villages have not shifted from the traditional practices.  

To be a member of any political party, the respondents responded in the negative. Most of these respondents are from rural areas where they do not even get a chance to participate in village or district councils, so for them to be a member of any political party is next to impossible. Presently, political parties are simply using women for their political gain and rarely give them a real chance to involve in politics and become

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122 E. Jyrwa: *op. cit.* p. 61.
leaders. More and more women are now actively participating in the political process but only a few women hold elected positions, fewer still are so placed as to be able to influence in political thinking. There is greater awareness among women of the power that the right of franchise has given to them, but the extent of awareness varies significantly between different groups and different religions. The levels of literacy and urbanization have an impact on the awareness, but the political parties have generally been indifferent towards women and treating them more as appendices to men.

Respondents believe in women joining politics, but surprisingly hardly can they be spotted on the job. Maybe even though they want to see other women joining in politics but for themselves, they find it difficult to make it possible due to reasons best known to them. Meghalaya is no exception when it comes to public life, the mindset and long held views and attitudes about women still pose a major obstacle for women to enter electoral politics. To any ordinary woman it is still very difficult to create space in electoral politics which is at par with men. But this is not to say that women have remained outside the political ambit. They have carved out their own roles but those are limited to playing foot soldiers to political parties and their candidates. Women are good campaigners and they have a strong influence on their peers. Hence even male candidates use them for door to door canvassing. Women also make very reliable polling agents. When they sit at polling booths to identify genuine voters, they do so with a sense of responsibility and commitment. They do not leave their posts until the polling is

125 C. Nongbri and V. Pakyntein: op. cit. 203.
over and the ballot boxes are sealed. Many Meghalayan women participated in modern political institutions like late Mavis Dunn Lyngdoh as the Cabinet Minister of Assam under the Government of India Act, 1935 and others. Thus, Pakem explained that in Meghalaya there is that social situation where a particular custom like women’s participation in modern institutions may not be a constraint to development, while exclusion of women may be a constraint to modernization.

Respondents are not willing to take part in politics, our women need to take politics seriously and get themselves involved if they are carved out for it. They have to begin familiarizing themselves with its preliminary steps but it is not enough to remain only there instead they need to get themselves educated too. Women’s equal participation in political life plays a pivotal role in the general process of the advancement of women. Women’s equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women’s interests to be taken into account. Without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women’s perspective at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved. Political participation means right to vote, to contest and campaign, to become a member of any political party and to do any other political activity. In our country there is no constitutional bar to women to join the political arena. The Constitution has made efforts to remove all gender bias so as to ensure equal status to them.

126 P. Mukhim: op. cit. p. 44.
It is heartening to note that a sizeable number of women are willing to take up politics as they understand it, which goes to show that they are ready for any sacrifice inside the home and outside it which involves specific personal attributes and requirements. A large number of women either because of personal inclination or individual social situations prefer and successfully combine full time housework with full time career. The rewards of striving in both the directions are conceived as greater exposure, not greater status but greater esteem; not primarily extrinsic rewards but satisfaction (Turner). It is however surprising that a society which has emancipated women so much without their fighting for it could produce so few women politicians, this may be due to the fact that it is hard for Khasi women to break the traditional norm. It is difficult for them to give their opinion in public, in an arena or platform which they had always conceded as men’s place. State activities were always considered as male activities (Ka kam ki rangbah). This is not to say that Khasi women are not qualified to stand for elections or are not involved or concerned in politics. They have expressed themselves through various political and non-political organisations and platforms. But they have been restrained by their traditional role to really venture publicly in this area. In recent times, however, we see a change of attitude and a growing desire on the part of women to be involved in politics. The role of women in changing power structure in the Khasi society can be seen in the light of widening of traditions in keeping with the demands of change and development in present times. Traditionally the Khasi women were kept out of the public sphere of politics and governance. Over the years the situation has changed to a certain extent. One can see a few women stepping into the world of politics. But their representation is so small that their presence is hardly felt. One can see fewer

130 Quoted in P. Arora: *op. cit.* pp. 114, 122.
representations of women in the State Assembly Autonomous District Councils and in the urban *durbars*. It appears that the Khasi women are less assertive in the matters of politics and governance. Tacit withdrawal of Khasi women from the political process may be explained in terms of their passive attitude both in the urban and rural areas towards politics and governance, insignificantly though fewer of them have come forward to contest in elections.  

Even If given party ticket, women express their doubts in joining politics but the rest are ready by all means. This speaks loud and clear that our women still shy away from public domain may be due to no fault of their own inspite of being quite strong and powerful within the family. True democracy demands effective participation of the women who constitute half of the population. They need to understand that only as voters and campaigners they would not be able to make democracy a success. Women of Meghalaya have shown deep public concerns in different public meetings, processions, hartals and even joined as volunteers in the Non-Violent Direct Action. In any election, the women voters outnumbered the men voters. Some women also hold key positions in political parties. Women’s Wings exist in all political parties, but they do not come forward so much to contest in the elections. The political parties therefore have a role to include women in the electoral fray by giving them tickets during election. Today, women have come forward in the executive committee of some *durbars* and with this ice-breaking; gradually few women also came forward to contest election in District Council and State Legislature. This could break the traditional rigidity in the power structure though it could not reverse the traditional structure of power. The Constitution

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133 M.P.R. Lyngdoh: *op. cit.* p. 98.
introduced universal adult franchise and consequently, the number of women voters increased enormously. After the attainment of statehood in 1972, considerable number of women contested election. Compared to this, the percentage of successful candidates was not satisfactory; this may be due to the traditional mindset of the women. Till date there are many clans whose women inspite of being highly educated and employed keep themselves aloof from active politics.\footnote{S. Nessa: op. cit. pp. 79-80.}

In a democratic society, it is unthinkable that only men should have the right to politics. In Meghalaya, there are two types of political institutions: the modern institution and the traditional institution. Customarily, the Khasis believe that women should be confined to domestic field. Man as the “protector” has the duty and responsibility to manage the political affairs of the village.\footnote{E. Jyrwa: op. cit. p. 61.} The village council as a traditional institution with the sole political and administrative authority regulating and managing social order of the village or intra-village affairs, and its politico-juridical affairs continues. But as a traditional institution and according to customs and traditions, only male adults are its members. It excludes women and young people and the physically challenged persons.\footnote{A.K. Nongkynrih: “Quality of Governance, Decentralisation and Institutional Reforms” in \textit{Meghalaya Human Development Report 2008}. Shillong: Government of Meghalaya. 2009, p. 281.} Politics and Administration are considered the prerogatives of men. A Headman inevitably heads the village level traditional administration called \textit{Durbar}. Thus, this level of administration is completely under the domain of men.\footnote{C. Nongbri and V. Pakyntein: op. cit. pp. 203-204.} Women however, are no longer passive but articulating their rights. They are keen to prove that they are no longer inferior to men. They are successfully articulating their hopes and aspirations in
recent times. A woman wants to be looked upon as a person in her own right. Women must be allowed to express their rights and assert their identity and actively participate in all spheres of activity to earn full respect and honour in society. The history of women’s participation in the political process in Meghalaya can be traced in the Government of India Act – 1935. Later, under the liberal constitution, the women got political rights in all the state institutions of governance including the Autonomous District Council, the State Legislative Assembly and the Parliament. The Khasi women are never allowed to take part in the politics and administration of the village. This is the domain of the male folk of the society. With the change of time the women have come forward and have got directly involved in the political and administrative spheres. Unlike in the past, the women have in the present times emerged as active participants in politics and are associated with different non-government organisations. The presence of Local Women Organisation (Seng Longkmie) in all the localities for the betterment of the society gave the women opportunity to work for common good.

Even though women feel that men do not prevent them from political involvement yet in reality men to a certain extent indirectly prevent women from political involvement besides tradition. Inspite of having matrilineal system, tradition has debared the women from participation in the political and administrative affairs. The latter are considered the men’s domain. Women in the matrilineal society of Meghalaya have no active roles in the public domain. Khasi women were barred from attending any of the councils.

141 M.P.R. Lyngdoh: op. cit. p. 93.
(durbars) be it at the village or state level. The simile – ynda kynih ka ‘iar kynthei, pyrthei ruh lawai (meaning when the hen crows, the world is nearing its end) and ksan rympei rem durbar (meaning a winner in the family, a loser in the council) – repudiate women active participation in politics. These sayings insinuated that though women are pivotal in the affair of the family and clan, men are decision-makers in the public sphere.\textsuperscript{142} Traditional institutions are male-centric in composition and have no space at all for women and as a result, women have no political voice. In fact, political mobilization among women is still at a nascent stage, women are deprived of political space not because they are not competent but because men are not ready to share power. Politics has been a male domain for too long and any attempt by women to capture political space is seen as a direct threat to male hegemony.\textsuperscript{143} The situation has changed after the Independence of the country and under the liberal constitution. Khasi women are no longer barred from participating in the political and administrative matters. After the creation of Meghalaya in 1972, a number of Khasi women came forward to contest elections. In the Autonomous District Councils also there were a number of Khasi women representatives who were either elected or nominated. Now Khasi women also attend durbar in some localities.\textsuperscript{144} A section of the women of Meghalaya came forward in the electoral politics. But retrospection into their electoral performance reveals that their participation has not been significantly progressive and they were unable to position themselves in the public domain although a handful of them came to occupy important political positions from time to time. While much of the reasons for such a trend lies in

\textsuperscript{142} C. Nongbri and V. Pakyntein: \textit{op. cit.} p. 192.
\textsuperscript{143} P. Mukhim: \textit{op. cit.} p. 44.
their passive political behaviour, the women in Meghalaya in fact could not come out of the generic structural limitations of their society, economy and culture. Low participation could not reverse the male dominated power structure in the Khasi society.  

Respondents are sure that reservation of seats for women will help them to participate in politics. Reservation of seats for women no doubt is likely to inspire larger number of women to participate in politics even with all its pros and cons. The 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Indian Constitution have mandated a reservation of one-third of seats for women in village, block and district level elected bodies. There is also one-third reservation for women in positions of chairpersons and deputy chairpersons in these institutions. With power sharing and responsibilities of recognized Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), women are gaining control over resources for development and social change. According to a recent study, nearly one million women representatives have been elected to the grass roots level position across the country.  

On the one hand, reservation of seats for women unnecessarily introduces an element of protectionism and deepens the imbalance. Separate constituencies for women would narrow their outlook and this would prove to be a retrograde step, departing from the principle of equality. If granted, it would be difficult to withdraw and would perpetuate the unequal status presently existing. Women elected from reserved constituencies would be perceived as ‘soft’ and ‘weak’, thus defeating the very goal of empowerment of women. Reservation of seats has not solved the problems of the dalits and the tribals of the country; it is

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doubtful if it will solve the problems of women. The women’s cause in India has always been championed by all progressive elements, men as well as women and hence to expect only women to speak on behalf of women would be undesirable. Reserving seats for women may favour only women belonging to political families.

On the other hand, reservation of seats for women will definitely ease out difficulties faced by women in getting elected in the open system; domestic responsibilities, social inequalities, physical and sexual vulnerabilities, threats of money power and muscle power. The reservation system has the potential to motivate women and political parties when there is reluctance on the part of political parties to give tickets to women or the possibility of women losing faith in the political process and becoming passive spectators. A country cannot survive politically with only one part of society involved. For a good and successful policy, both men and women have to share the responsibility. A larger presence of women will have a sobering effect on male politicians and could act as a deterrent towards the increasing criminalization of politics. The reservation policy is not an end in itself; it should be seen as a means to achieve greater gender equality, letting women’s voice be heard in politics. The bill would break the male bastion of power, providing the ‘critical mass’ necessary to be effective in decision-making bodies and broaden the base of women’s representation in the legislative bodies.\(^\text{147}\)

Respondents are positive that competent and sincere women are being projected as party candidates. Our society seems to be by and large incapable of seeing eye to eye with those who are competent and sincere, more so if they are women. Instead of encouraging

them and build them up, they are being pulled down and if they are sincere, then they are being sidelined. One of the indicators for monitoring progress and gender equality and women’s empowerment relates to the number of seats held by women in State Legislature and Parliament. Representation of women in the State Legislature and in Parliament continued to be very low. Studies have however, shown that the unwillingness of the political parties to field women candidates is one major reason. The overall environment faced by women both in and outside the household is also identified to be a very pertinent reason. Women who can create independent space for themselves are more likely to be active participants in politics (Chibber, 2004). 148 Women are more adjusting, sensitive, compliant and this could be an asset in the new concept of participative management, feel many women managers. As women are good at communication, the degree of confrontation is much lower, making them easy to work with. ‘Women managers are more patient and more understanding than their male counterparts. Their sincerity index to the job, organisation and their profession is far higher’ says Virmani and Thadani, Director NIIT feels that discrimination against women particularly at senior levels is disappearing and if a person is sincere, hardworking, earnest and willing to learn, then gender is irrelevant. 149 Nomination would be on merit, sincerity, dedication etc. for the purpose of development if the authority concerned is sincere enough. 150 Khasi women are competitive, intelligent, hardworking and very creative and these values and qualities might be properly used in the decision-

making process only when they are represented in the Local, State and National politics.\(^{151}\)

The public needs to be sensitized on the right of women in politics, the respondents express themselves in the affirmative and very much so, otherwise there will be a missing link in the way politics can be shaped by the other half of the population. Progress will remain elusive until gender discrimination is put to an end and women are empowered with knowledge, rights and awareness about themselves and their environment. There is a growing awareness that women should be looked upon as persons in their own right. They must be allowed to have sufficient space for development in every sphere of life and should keep pace with time. To achieve these, women must stand up and fight to obtain their rightful place.\(^{152}\) The Khasi women organisations do not enlighten the people on the importance of political representation. Most of the women organizations have social agenda and do not involve in politics. Khasi women activists and organisations should come forward and enlighten the Khasi women on the importance of women participation in public life. Wider entry of women into the Legislature and Councils would be of immense significance to the state and to the country as a whole.\(^{153}\)

\(^{151}\) S.S. Gupta: *op. cit.* p. 131.
\(^{152}\) D. Nag: *op. cit.* p. 56.
\(^{153}\) S.S. Gupta: *op. cit.* p. 131.
6.3 OPINIONS TOWARDS EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN KHASI MATRILINEAL SOCIETY

6.3.1 EDUCATION

Education as one of the forces which has great impact on the status of women is being agreed upon by the respondents. Seeing the impact of education on girls and women, it can be divided into the direct impact on the individual and the household and that on the economy and the society. The individual benefits directly through the potential to have higher earnings through the higher knowledge and skills that have been acquired through education. Second, the individual has better control over resources. The economy benefits through better technology absorption and diffusion with a population that is increasingly educated, it gains through a rise in productivity. Countries today are better able to produce goods to export and participate in the increasingly globalizing world when the majority of their women force is educated.\textsuperscript{154} Of late and in the present transitional phase of the society, many changes have taken place which have also tremendous effects on the society in general and the status of women in particular. There are various other changes due to the impact of such forces like formal education etc.\textsuperscript{155}

Education as an important agent of changes in the socio-economic and political fields is being agreed upon by the respondents. Education was introduced in the hills by the British, which is an important agent of change. Changes were brought in the socio-economic and political fields, and the Khasi who had been able to maintain social and

\textsuperscript{154} J.B.G. Tilak: \textit{op. cit.} p. 39.

political isolation were opened up to the outside world.\textsuperscript{156} Of the several dimensions of the development of women, education has been one of the most important. Education is regarded as a crucial step in emancipating women and preparing them for an effective role in social, economic, political and public life.\textsuperscript{157}

Education has brought about a revolution in women’s world and their status is one of the findings. The educated woman has realized she cannot remain confined to the four walls of her home if she has to play her multi faceted role. She realizes that she is at level with the man, his equal and not his subordinate. In fact the Indian woman is moving towards an ideal balance of traditional and progressive values. More and more women are taking advantage of higher education. It is now being increasingly realized that education is the major instrument which societies can use to direct the process of change and development towards desired goals. It provides for vertical mobility and can thereby help to equalize status between individuals coming from different social strata. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights regards education as one of the basic rights of every human being. The movement for improving women’s status all over the world has always emphasized education as the most significant instrument for changing women’s subjugated position in society, the better a woman’s education, the greater the availability of social opportunities.\textsuperscript{158} Literacy and education among women have added more colours and more strength to the women in the family as ‘working mothers’ in

\textsuperscript{156} M.P.R. Lyngdoh: \textit{op. cit.} p.20.
\textsuperscript{157} J.B.G. Tilak: \textit{op. cit.} p. 20.
\textsuperscript{158} A. Sen, et al.: \textit{op. cit.} p. 129.
various establishments with the same earning capacity as the man or even more in some cases.\textsuperscript{159}

Lack of education in Khasi mothers makes them blind and indifferent to the plight of their sons has been agreed by the respondents. Traditionally in Khasi society, whatever a man earns before marriage belongs to his clan. Unlike his sisters he has no claim to the family heirloom. He does not inherit any landed property from his parents. On the day of his marriage he leaves his home with just a suitcase of clothes and starts life from scratch. Though he has learnt to accept his custom, it is also true that he is constantly interacting with people of other societies. Hence he cannot but compare his status to theirs and feel that he is a victim of an unjust system. The Khasi male then must be very resilient to be able to withstand dubbings and maintain his equilibrium in the midst of so many pressures. Obviously such people cannot be of much use to society, much less contribute anything to it. And one must certainly admire those who have been able to triumph these setbacks and emerge from the trauma unscathed and as wholesome personalities. Perhaps these are the few who still contribute to the growth of society and because of whom matriliny still survives. Those whose personalities are deformed are the ones who come across as irresponsible, weak and unassertive. They drink away their woes, desert their wife and children and curse the system that has warped their personalities.\textsuperscript{160}


\textsuperscript{160} P. Mukhim: \textit{op. cit.} p.37.
According to the finding an educated woman understands her partner better and by educating the woman, the man too benefits. An educated wife will help her husband, he will be able to talk to her and share his joys and sorrows. An educated man cannot share his life with an illiterate wife. Education will make a woman a better wife, a better daughter-in-law and a better mother. She will, by her learning and wisdom contributes to family peace and happiness.\(^\text{161}\) In their struggle against racism, colonialism and neo-colonialism, the women in developing societies and emerging economies have felt a sense of unity with their male counterparts.\(^\text{162}\) The main force behind women’s studies is the movement to assert the interests of women as a sex. It does not mean women wanting to be men or women wanting to dominate men but it is a demand to restore to half of humanity its rightful place in society, to restore to women their humanity.\(^\text{163}\)

Women are excelling in the fields of education with respondents agreeing to it. Proponents of women’s colleges argue that women students perform better and also take on leadership roles naturally since they are not under stress due to the presence of men and also see only women in all the leadership roles. These colleges also provide exclusive space to women.\(^\text{164}\) The Khasis took themselves quickly to western education. According to the erstwhile census reports, Khasi women took the lead in female literacy. A distinguished lady, the late Miss Mavis Dunn Lyngdoh, was the first Woman Minister in Assam in the Saadullah-Coalition Ministry and probably one of the first woman Ministers in the whole of India.\(^\text{165}\)


\(^{162}\) J.B.G. Tilak: *op. cit.* p. 295.

\(^{163}\) J.K. Pillai: *op. cit.* p. 82.

\(^{164}\) J.B.G. Tilak: *op. cit.* p. 219.

\(^{165}\) H. Bareh: *op. cit.* p. 94.
Large-scale awareness in education at all levels is necessary for women’s political empowerment. The concept of empowerment signifies greater access to knowledge and fiscal resources on the one hand and greater autonomy in personal matters and sharing of power at the domestic and political level on the other. It implies greater control over the circumstances that influence one’s life and greater freedom from the shackles of customs, faiths, beliefs and traditions. Education can definitely play a vital role in this empowerment process.\textsuperscript{166} The International Education Commission mentions that, “Providing women and girls with an education which will, as quickly as possible, bridge the gap separating them from men and give them the chances for action and empowerment hitherto withheld from them in the workplace, in society and in sphere of politics, is more than an ethical imperative.” The countries across the world now need to consider education of girls and women as an important investment in human development as well as human right. Capacity building programme needs to emphasize on self-development of women building a positive outlook. Formal education and various training programmes for development of leadership quality among women can serve this purpose, ultimately resulting in their political empowerment.\textsuperscript{167}

Education facilitates women’s empowerment since it cannot be given but develop from within. Power is not a commodity to be transacted nor can it be given as alms. It has to be acquired, exercised, sustained and preserved. Women need to empower themselves with the help of education and they deserve to be empowered not as a favour to themselves but as the right step towards meting out full justice to themselves.\textsuperscript{168}

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\textsuperscript{166} J.B.G. Tilak: \textit{op. cit.} p. 286.
\textsuperscript{167} M. Bandyopadhyay: \textit{op. cit.} pp. 2 and 17.
\textsuperscript{168} J.B.G. Tilak: \textit{op. cit.} p. 287.
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Education and training are considered key to empowerment of every individual, including women. It is thus required to see that the educational policy needs to provide adequate opportunities to women enabling them to take part in the process of decision-making. Access to information technology and its proper use make women confident enough to become economically as well as politically active. Access to higher education for women is crucial in this context. So literacy and school education, proper policy planning and implementation for making higher education more inclusive are necessary for meeting the strategic interests of women that ultimately results in their empowerment. It is often experienced that women are less corrupt and conscious about what they are doing. This has actually helped the process of empowerment.\textsuperscript{169}

Educational opportunities have improved the status of women. They will get married in late age; plan small families; rear, nurture and educate their children. Women’s education must be practical and well-adapted to their needs especially in relation to health, nutrition and legal rights.\textsuperscript{170} With the acceptance of gender equality in our Constitution, the country’s planners and policy makers have acknowledged the principle of equality of access to education for women. Raising the status and work potential of women have been the major development plans for the future development of the country. This has come in the wake of the recognition of the role of women in the national development and their contribution towards the advancement of the community and the nation.\textsuperscript{171}

\textsuperscript{169} M. Bandyopadhyay: \textit{op. cit.} pp. 4 and 16.
\textsuperscript{170} A. Sen: \textit{op. cit.} p. 31.
The growth and development of education facilitate women in increasing political consciousness and participation. In this new age it is not possible to confine women exclusively to their homes and families. Education is making great strides every day. Women are now given franchise and they are sure to take active part in many social, political and industrial activities in the world which is a fulfillment of the aspirations developed in the home.\textsuperscript{172} Gandhi also stressed the need for educating women. His call to women to join the political movement brought women out of their homes in large numbers from all parts of India and from varied backgrounds and had a catalytic effect. So far as higher education was concerned, while there continued to be stress on role socialisation as the primary function of education, there were some who looked upon higher education as training for jobs or even for inculcating critical thinking.\textsuperscript{173} Incorporation of problems and perspectives of gender discrimination as a legitimate area of concern in higher education would be a healthy development. The type of education that is imparted to women should enable them to participate successfully in the process of decision-making.\textsuperscript{174}

Women leaders generally come from the well educated. In the pre-Independence period, the leadership was in the hands of upper-class, upper-caste urban educated women. They were active within the nationalist movement and pressed for the removal of harmful social customs. After Independence, the methods used to promote women’s cause-the maintenance of close ties with political leaders, lobbying in Parliament and conducting proceedings, lectures and debates in English, were ones in which very few women could

\textsuperscript{172} S.R. Sharma: \textit{op. cit.} p. 62.
\textsuperscript{173} S.R. Bakshi: \textit{op. cit.} pp. 186 and 204-205.
\textsuperscript{174} J.K. Pillai: \textit{op. cit.} p. 94.
participate. Women leaders in early twentieth century were by and large, educated and belonged to families closely involved either in social reform or in the independence movement and in the activities of the Congress or in both. Thus, the leaders of the women’s movement in the early stage represented the elite.\textsuperscript{175} Since the women are highly qualified professionals they are expected to be competent, efficient, skilled and proficient in their work. Each profession requires supervisory skills, managerial skills, personal work style, leadership style and obviously professionals experience varying degrees of stress.\textsuperscript{176} It is only when women are confident and comfortable with their personal identity of \textit{being} woman that they become capable of nutritive power, a power that engenders growth and releases the power within others. They become capable of a different kind of leadership-based not on principles of domination, hierarchy and violence, but rather on principles of inclusion, solidarity, communication and circularity-which believes that the good of all is better than the good of a few.\textsuperscript{177}

Khasi women should be imparted with proper political education in order to make them conscious about their political rights. It is however recognized that political education is essential for preparing future citizens for participating in the process of democracy. This would mean that political issues might be debated within the precincts of the university at the intellectual level but the administrative system of the university should not be used or subverted for the ends of any political party. This view would necessarily predicate the exercise of self-restraint by all concerned i.e. the Central Government, the State Governments and also by other parties not in power. There is an urgent need of

\textsuperscript{175} S.R. Bakshi: \textit{op. cit.} pp. 77 and 184.
\textsuperscript{176} A. Sen: \textit{op. cit.} p. 189.
\textsuperscript{177} P. D’Souza: \textit{op. cit.} p. 158.
establishing a consensus on this issue, whether legislative measures are called for also needs consideration. Though women’s participation in the political process has increased, both in elections and in their readiness to express their views on issues directly concerning their day-to-day life, their ability to produce an impact on the political process has been negligible because of the inadequate attention paid to their political education and mobilization by both political parties and women’s organizations. Parties have tended to see women voters as appendages of the males.

Education is considered as the only way to raise the status of women with respondents agreeing to the opinion. The Constitution of India and the legal codes bestowed upon women the privilege of equal rights with men, the same facilities of education, the same opportunities of profession and employment. But the bulk of Indian women are deprived of this boon of raised status, mainly because majority of them are devoid of education, even the elements of literacy. Although education is regarded both as an end in itself and as a means of achieving an end, it has always been emphasized as the most significant instrument for improving the status of women in society. Women need to understand that education is the most powerful weapon to come out of superstition, social evils, outdated customs, narrow vision and wrong notions. Education alone will remove the stigma of dependency attached to the social life of women and ensure self-respect and self-esteem and ultimately enhance the status of women. Education is a major instrument of social change and transformation. Realising the importance of this aspect NPE (1986) has

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emphasized that “Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. In order to neutralize the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well conceived edge in favour of women. The National Education System will play a positive, interventionist role in the empowerment of women. It will foster the development of new values through redesigned curricula, text books, training and orientation of teachers, decision-makers, administrators and the active involvement of educational institutions”.  

Education should aim at upgrading functional literacy skills for women. The National Literacy Mission and Total Literacy Campaign have made considerable contribution towards improving literacy rate of women. However due to the absence of follow up activities these efforts could not be sustained and as a result the neoliterates lapsed back to illiteracy. Moreover, literacy that does not help bring in additional earnings becomes useless to women in the rural areas, whose main concern is to improve livelihoods. It is in this context that functional literacy becomes a felt need for women in rural areas who live in poverty. This kind of literacy will enable them to earn higher wage which in turn will make them feel secure and confident. They will become aware of their basic rights to food, shelter, health and education and the right to live a safe life. This is the essence of empowerment and functional literacy is one of the tools towards achieving it.  

Women should be enabled to benefit from an ongoing acquisition of knowledge and skills beyond those acquired during youth. This concept of lifelong learning includes

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knowledge and skills gained in formal education and training, as well as learning that occur in informal ways, including volunteer activity, unremunerated work and traditional knowledge.\textsuperscript{183}

Respondents are not too happy to agree that the husband should take decision regarding the schooling of children which means to say that all is not well with this opinion. Children belong not only to the father but also to the mother as well. As much as the father is interested in the schooling and well-being of the children, so is the mother. Therefore both the father and the mother need to consult each other while planning for the future of the children. If they truly love their children then they will be too happy to take the better decision of the two as regards anything that pertains to the children or the family as a whole. Many a time, it is the children who suffer when both the parents differ with each other. If the children are grown up enough to understand, they too should be consulted so as to get their ideas even if the final decisions still rest with the parents. “An educated woman almost always has more value and status in the eyes of her husband, her family and her community. She is more likely to share in family decision about how many children to have, how to bring them up, how to spend money, how to organize domestic life”- Gertrude Mongella, Secretary-General of the Fourth World Conference on Women. Educated Women tend to make more independent decisions and stand up for themselves.\textsuperscript{184}


Ensuring equal access to education, women will increase their participation in decision-making bodies at every level is the finding. That removal of illiteracy is possible has been demonstrated by many countries which regarded it as an essential pre-condition for the meaningful participation of the masses in the process of political decision-making and national reconstruction.  

Equality of access to and attainment of educational qualifications is necessary if more women are to become agents of change. Literacy of women is an important key to improving health, nutrition and education in the family and to empowering women to participate in decision-making in society. Women’s equality in power sharing and active participation in decision-making in political process at all levels will be ensured for the achievement of the goals of empowerment. All measures will be taken to guarantee women equal access to and full participation in decision-making bodies at every level, including the Legislative, Executive, Judicial, Corporate, Statutory Bodies as also the Advisory Commissions, Committee Boards and Trusts etc.

Equal access to education for girls and women will help eliminate poverty. UNESCO states in Women in a Changing Global Economy, 1994 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: The success of development efforts depends upon making women full partners. To be certain, education by itself is not a panacea, but it is necessary if often insufficient for the advancement of women and girls. It is in schools and adult education programmes that the journey out of poverty and towards

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employment and decision-making power begins.\textsuperscript{188} As education invests the woman with an increased income earning potential, it acts as a key input of poverty reduction. In fact education has been found to be the best means of poverty reduction. This coupled with the fact of the “feminization of poverty” (namely the fact that women account for seventy percent of the world’s poor and that the proportion of female population that lives in rural areas in conditions of extreme poverty has risen by fifty percent in the last twenty years) only points to the crucial role that education plays in the elimination of low economic status of women. Investing in women’s education is the best poverty counter measure (Oxaal, 1997).\textsuperscript{189}

There is a need to create a gender sensitive educational system where curricula and teaching materials remain gender-biased to a large degree and are rarely sensitive to the specific needs of girls and women. This reinforces traditional female and male roles that deny women opportunities for full and equal partnership in society. Lack of gender awareness by educators at all levels strengthens existing inequities between males and females by reinforcing discriminatory tendencies and undermining girls’ self-esteem. The lack of sexual and reproductive health education has a profound impact on women and men.\textsuperscript{190} Creation of an educational and social environment, in which women and men, girls and boys are treated equally and encouraged to achieve their full potential, respecting their freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief, and where educational resources promote non-stereotyped images of women and men, would be

\textsuperscript{188} S.P. Agrawal, et al.: \textit{op. cit.} p. 318.
\textsuperscript{189} Quoted in J.B.G. Tilak: \textit{op. cit.} p. 40.
effective in the elimination of the causes of discrimination against women and inequalities between women and men.\textsuperscript{191}

With education, women are becoming more conscious about their political rights and privileges. Education has a direct impact on women empowerment as they become aware of their rights, their capabilities and get a chance to become independent (Neeta, 2000).\textsuperscript{192} A majority of women do not see gender equity as a desirable objective. They may realize only their family, community or caste identities, or yet again they may just perceive existing inequalities as God-given truth. As a result they are hesitant to articulate their own rights and needs politically. Having been taught from a very young age to put their trust in men, they have allowed men to represent their interests and solve their problems, without realizing that often this involves a ‘conflict of interests’ for men.

6.3.2 SOCIAL

Respondents agree with the opinion that a Khasi, tracing his/her descent from the mother is still relevant today. This strengthens the social structure of the Matrilineal Society of Meghalaya and awakens the few who demand for empowerment of the father or for a change to patrilineal system. Martin Fritz, the Director of German Radio based in New Delhi was of the opinion that matriliney is a fine structure that probably needs some modifications to keep up with the changing times. Being part and parcel of a patrilineal set up, Fritz felt that the women of Meghalaya should not give up their valuable rights.

\textsuperscript{193} P. D’Souza: \textit{op. cit.} p. 160.
“If aberrations exist within the matrilineal system they can and should be removed. But certainly that does not warrant a complete switch-over to patriliny, more so when women in the rest of the world are fighting for greater liberty and equality of status with men”, maintains Fritz.\textsuperscript{194}

If the youngest daughter only should inherit property, respondents disagreed to it who may be the older siblings of the families both boys and girls. Educated parents if they are well-off, share what they have among their children. But according to tradition or customary law, the youngest daughter inherits a larger share of the property because family reunions and gatherings are held in her house, her brothers and sisters too find refuge in her family should there be any untoward incident in their lives. If parents are not so rich then any of the children who look after them till their last days, she/he deserves to inherit the property or belongings.

Respondents disagreed to the opinion that a man has no place in his own family or with his wife and children. The feeling that man has no place in his own family or with his wife and children is a misconception. This can be an imagination which is only in the mind of certain men folk. It is their creation to cover up for their ‘easy-going’ attitude. Right from their tender age, it is difficult to fathom that parents/guardians will not relate with their sons/daughters in a similar if not exactly in the same manner by providing for them the basic necessities of life, love, care, education and others. Once they can stand on their own feet, they need to build on the strength of the foundation received. It is understandable if children have no parents/guardians to guide them. To those who feel

\textsuperscript{194} P. Mukhim: \textit{op. cit.} p.35.
otherwise, male irresponsibility springs from the fact that he cannot add to the continuity of his clan since his children do not take his clan’s name. Feeling of inferiority in boys prevents them from performing up to their optimum level even in schools. They are listless, lack concentration, have no ambition in life and generally fall into the category of under-achievers. Because of the general feeling of insecurity and unimportance men often bolster up their ego with a few pegs of liquor. It is evident that the male shirks responsibility because he thinks he is not capable of performing. This general feeling of insecurity which begins in his young adult life, later leads to breakdown of marital relationships and adds to a number of broken homes.  

The opinion that children are no longer taking their surnames from the mother is strongly disagreed by the respondents except a few, may be due to sentimental reasons or emotional attachment with the fathers of children whose mothers are dead or have deserted the family as it is in rare, isolated cases. Certain families are even pressurized by their fathers to use their surnames or titles. The problem here may arise that in later years when these children have come to their marriageable age they will not be able to trace their mother’s clan and in fact marry someone from their own lineage, within the same title. This is considered incest, a taboo for the Khasi society, a belief that children born from such union may not be normal, there will be misfortune and that they will not thrive. Societies all over through all ages look at incest with dread and scorn. The Khasi mythology speaks of the bright beautiful sister sun cursing her brother moon and splashing him with ash because he attempted to seduce her. Incest is considered a sacrilege i.e. the greatest unforgiveable sin against God and people. In olden days, incest

195 Ibid. pp.35-36.
could invite death penalty from the ‘Kur’ (clan) because close relations considered it a
great shame to the whole clan. 196 Few respondents, felt that some take the surnames of
both the mother and father may be due to their affection of both parents.

To the opinion that if a couple should have no daughter, the property goes to their sons is
agreed with, which is far better than complicating matters by adopting a daughter to run
the show. Here again if the couple is well off, they can divide the property (that is
moveable and not the immoveable one which is to be done according to the law), among
the boys if they are more than one or else give to the son who takes care of the parents
especially in their old age. The self-acquired property of the couple, discernible from the
ancestral one, may be entitled to a son or shared among the sons if there be no daughter
in the house. In another case, a capital may have been provided by the mother to her son
in case his wife is poor for establishing himself and his family. 197 This can be witnessed
after their marriage, when they settled with their wife and children, when they are short
of anything they do not hesitate to turn to their parents for help. Again, wealthy parents
nowadays do give shares to their sons although in smaller proportions against the larger
reserved for the daughter and entitling such recipients to transmit the property thus
bequeathed to his wife’s kinship lineage. Sons otherwise get only small gifts with
personal belongings taken out when they are married. Nowadays, if a man shares with
his mother any business, he gets a dividend. The father has the right to transmit his self-
acquired property after his marriage to his children. 198

Challam, (ed.) The Dynamics of Family System in a Matriliney of Meghalaya. Shillong: Tribal
197 H. Bareh op. cit. p.70.
198 Ibid. p.70.
Respondents disagreed with the opinion that women’s position in matrilineal society has reduced men’s status. Why should this be if it is understood that women and men first of all need to complement one another. According to the Khasi Matrilineal Society, women are not everything. Ray stated the fact that the position of Khasi women is not as supreme as it has been portrayed; the females were made custodians of the family property and not the rightful owner. The women’s authority was shared by the Maternal Uncle and so the actual position of the male was not unlike that of the women in a patrilineal society. He further pointed out that land though was owned by women in the traditional matrilineal society, they have no right to dispose it. Further, the women had a limited voice in family matters as well as in politics, so why project them as most powerful. It would be a mistake to suppose that the father is a nobody in the Khasi house. It is true that the k*n or mother’s elder brother, is the head of the house, but the father is the executive head of the new home, where, after the children have been born to him, his wife and children live with him. It is he who faces the dangers of the jungles and risks his life for the wife and the children. In his wife’s clan he occupies a very high place, he is second to none but the maternal uncle, while in his own family circle, a father and husband is nearer to his children and his wife than u k*n. The Khasi father is revered not only when living, but also after death and special ceremonies are performed to propitiate his shade.

The Law of Inheritance is responsible for men’s undesirable behavior in society is being disagreed upon by the respondents. It does seem to be a bone of contention though it

should not be because majority of people living in urban areas do not own property and therefore the possibility of children both male and female inheriting property is not there; but in many cases, parents give the best of education to sons too. Even in some families who own a house, it is inherited by the youngest daughter. The other children both male and female have to start their families in rented houses. If the older daughters of the family can cope with this system, why should the sons feel deprived and reduced in status and show signs of undesirable behavior in society. In fact, both in urban and rural areas, sons are given equal encouragement to study as their sisters.

Regarding the comment that women lack rational thinking capacity, women respondents could never agree to it. No statement with reference to anything can be generalized that easily, much less regarding human persons. There may be women who may have less reasoning power but are endowed with aptitudes which others do not possess. This can be true not only for the women but for the men too. The few respondents who are neutral towards this opinion may not have given much thought to it but those who agreed that women lack rational thinking capacity may be they are the ones who have less respect towards women and who are bias towards them or they are women themselves who never got any opportunity to improve themselves or to use their rationality except to be dictated by those who think they are the only rational beings.

Between career and family, women are to give top priority to their families is agreed upon by respondents. Family has always been the first priority of women except for stray cases once in a while, more so when the children are still very young to be left with caretakers or with someone in the family when they have not attended school as yet and
if the family can manage without any extra financial help. When the household is economically sound, it is a good choice to give top priority to the family instead of career. But when the father of the family cannot make both ends meet, it is there where women are forced to sacrifice the family for the sake of sustaining the members. Scares, Phillips and Mc Carney (1989) concluded that husbands’ supportiveness may help employed-women manage their multiple roles. Some of their support may be practical like performing traditionally female household chores; other forms of support may be primarily psychological for example, being understanding of multiple role demands (Gray et al). Women should be offered with new schemes to enhance their responsibilities. This applies more especially to needy women in the urban, semi-urban as well as in the rural areas. Women need these schemes because they may be unemployed or even if they are employed, they may be earning meagre income or they may be single parent who badly need help during this time of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation.

Respondents agreed regarding Compulsory Registration of Marriage to be regularized or coded to prevent women becoming single parents. Registering the marriages will help in cases of bigamy also as the men and women, both will have certificates to prove their point. The National Commission for Women, in order to push for making marriage-registration a compulsory step had proposed the draft bill ‘Compulsory Registration of Marriage Act 2005’. In this Act, the Commission has recommended for the enactment of

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201 Quoted in P. Arora: op. cit. pp.53-54.
a uniform law relating to marriages, providing for compulsory registration of marriages. The aim of the law was to prevent child marriages and also polygamy in the society.  

As regards the opinion that a change is noticeable particularly in the authority of the father who is having more say in the affairs of the family, the respondents agreed to it which hopefully is a change for the good of the family. There is a growing trend towards father-control and greater independence of action and decision making on the part of the father. In areas where the kin is relinquishing more of his duties, paternal responsibility and authority likewise increased. The personality, economic and social status of the father also greatly affected the attitude of the children and the maternal kin towards him. The fathers of families themselves, who have fully realized that in the absence of the uncle as the centre of authority and economy, of discipline and government of the family, have to step in. They are convinced that this is a new responsibility imposed on them by history, a responsibility that they cannot possibly shirk if they wish to become full-fledged men, with a dignity and honour proper to them. They believe that in this way, they can acquire genuine authority, spontaneously recognized by their wives and children; thus they can have that necessary power of discipline, indispensable for the smooth running of their families.

Land-ownership definitely heightened the status of women in society is the finding. Land-ownership nowadays is quite difficult because there is scarcity of land to be

203 I.M. Syiem: op. cit. p.33.
owned. Lands are classified under two main divisions: ‘public’ and ‘private’ lands. Private lands may be subdivided into ri-kur or lands which are the property of the clan and ri-kynti, family or acquired landed property. Ri kynti are private lands which have been either acquired by a man or woman individually or in the case of a woman, inherited from her mother; such lands must be entirely distinguished from the lands of the clan. In the Khasi Hills nowadays, a man may leave such lands provided they were acquired after marriage, either formally by will or informally to his children for their support. However all lands acquired by inheritance must follow the Khasi law, by which property descends from the mother to the youngest daughter, and again from the latter to her youngest daughter. Ancestral landed property must therefore be always owned by women. Daughters, other than the youngest daughters are entitled to maintenance from the produce of such family lands.\textsuperscript{205} Land-ownership for women will be of great help for them especially in times of desertion by husbands or when fathers of families die, because children always stay with mothers except in rare exceptional cases.

Respondents agreed that the mother gains custody of the children in case of breakage of marriage, which adds advantage to maternal control. Respondents say that breakdown of families exist and automatically the children are left with their mother to care for them and this in a way increases her power of control and discipline. In other societies too, children under eighteen years of age are with the mother and it is only later that they can make their choices. In the event of a divorce, the mother is always allowed the custody of the children. For the mother, the children cherish a very strong affection, all their sympathies and affections binding them closely to the mother’s kin. The great drawback

\textsuperscript{205} P.R.T. Gurdon: \textit{op. cit.} pp.87-88.
attaching to divorce in ordinary communities i.e. the effect that it has on the lives of the children of the marriage, does not apply to the Khasis, for with them the children always live with their mother and their mother’s family, which the latter would be bound to maintain them in the event of a divorce.206

Failure of the parents to provide a share for their newly married daughter leads to greater dependence of the woman upon her husband opined the respondents. This is particularly true if the woman is not employed therefore needs to depend on the earnings of her husband. But in today’s society, it would have been better if both the woman and the man have jobs before they think of marriage. Even if they have no children, it is always safe and secure to be able to stand on one’s own feet, to be interdependent rather than to be dependent or independent. Dependence may be alright for a while but not for long especially when children are there and livelihood is so costly, it is not just the daily basic necessities of life that need to be catered to, but also to have the foresight for investment in education, health or any unforeseen events and others.

Respondents agreed to the opinion that the youngest daughter although she inherits ancestral property is not free to deal with it as she pleases. Ancestral property is the property that has been inherited from the ancestors for the many different generations of families which the youngest daughter cannot just dispose of it whenever she wants or even when she needs it, she only looks after it and takes care of it. The youngest daughter is strictly the custodian but not possessor of family property. She might dispose of some articles of property but not the ancestral residence. In indigenous families, she

206 Ibid. p. 81.
performs religious household ceremonies, yet her greater duty is to take care of her aged parents. She is in charge of the family sepulchres. In Christian families, she still exercises her moral duties and obtains the biggest portion although she has no longer real religious duties to perform. She acts under limits since she cannot go against the decision of her maternal uncles or family council under whose advice she carries out her duties. The residential house of the youngest daughter is not counted as her private or personal property; it is an ancestral property. 207

Custodianship of the ancestral property generates conflicts and involves adjustment which many households go through. Property and its related economic implications is a vital aspect of any society. Since Khasi Society has devised and evolved the method of transmitting property through females, it naturally follows that the maternal males will evince a keen interest in its management and disposal. In having a major part in decision making regarding such property, they are safeguarding the economic interest of their own matrilineal group. It may be pointed out here that the institution of the Khatduh is a vulnerable one. Mismanagement, abuse or loss of property can pose a serious threat to the economic stability and continuity of the maternal group. This is where the role of the maternal uncle can be a positive one. This is also one area where the progenitor (father) can help to maintain the normative pattern by safeguarding the economic and moral interest of his own group. He can also create a situation of conflict of interest whereby the Khatduh suffers a loyalty crisis. As long as the maternal kin is strong and supportive, the word of the maternal uncle is upheld. The maternal kin can impose its own sanctions

207 H. Bareh: op. cit. p.71.
on non-conforming members. In a closely knit traditional society where there is a face to face primary relation, such a system of control works.208

The youngest daughter’s house is looked upon by the members of the matrikin as a refuge in any contingency. The youngest daughter’s house forms a meeting place of her kith and kin. She is bound to take care of her unmarried brothers and sisters. She is the guardian of the parentless and homeless members of her family; the mother acts as a moral force to unite the family.209 Along with her rights, the youngest daughter has her duties and responsibilities. She is responsible for caring and looking after her parents and other members if they suffer from any hardship or misfortune, she has also to make arrangement for the performance of religious rites and ceremonies. The youngest daughter’s house has special sanctity as this is the ancestral house of generation of youngest daughters which provide refuge or shelter for the indigent and improvement of the members of the family.210

Inheritance of ancestral property takes place strictly through the female line, confirms the finding. The ceremonial religion among Khasis especially that of the home is in the hands of the women; it is therefore perhaps not to be wondered at considering the important status assigned to women by the Khasis, that they should inherit the property and not men. The rule among the Khasis is that the youngest daughter ‘holds’ the religion and it is here that the members of the family assemble to witness her performance of the family ceremonies. Hers is therefore, the largest share of the family

208 I.M. Syiem: op. cit. p.32.
property, because it is she whose duty it is to perform the family ceremonies and propitiate the family ancestors. The other daughters however, on their mother’s death are entitled each of them to a share of their mother’s property.\textsuperscript{211} Mother kinship is dominant and inheritance is matrilineal. The mother is the custodian of family rites and property; she is succeeded by her youngest sister who becomes the keeper of the property. Her elder sisters also secure shares of inheritance in the form of landed or family property, jewelleries and ornaments, vessels and other articles of household furniture and goods.\textsuperscript{212}

Khasi women are going through a stage of transition and adjustments in attitudes and social roles. Our women folk are working mothers, they are also fore-runners to work in offices, banks etc. Thus besides the household chores, they are now also supplementing to the family incomes, savings etc. With the advancement and development of education, the women folk are easily influenced by the life style of other societies. Imitation and copy of others should have a proper scale to balance with the tradition and custom prevailing in one’s own land. Healthy changes befitting educationally, economically and socially should be welcomed.\textsuperscript{213} Due to different social developments, mothers have acquired enough powers in our society. The Khasi society has undergone through a series of changes. In the present transitional phase of the society, many changes have taken place which have also tremendous effects on the society in general and the status of women in particular. The traditional pattern of family has changed. There are various other changes due to the impact of such forces like Christianity, formal education, new means of communication, mobility of individuals, employment opportunities, etc.

\textsuperscript{211} P.R.T. Gurdon: \textit{op. cit.} pp. 82-83.
\textsuperscript{212} H. Bareh: \textit{op. cit.} p.69.
\textsuperscript{213} S. Rynjah: \textit{op. cit.} p.50.
Women in the society have therefore to adopt and adapt themselves to the changing environment.\textsuperscript{214}

Respondents disagree that love-marriage which is commonly practised among the Khasi people is the cause for family break-up. What is being noticed currently is that there are a number of divorces and broken homes even among other societies who practise arranged marriages. Marriages are both family arranged and love and generally the latter dominates the present matrimonial ties. The system of concubinage in which the couple seeks to settle down without a formal marriage also prevails. The couple having developed acquaintance generally reports the matter to their respective parents who seek to consummate it into marriage; if they fail to secure the consent from both sides, concubinage may develop.\textsuperscript{215} Divorce is common, and may occur for a variety of reasons such as adultery, barrenness, incompatibility of temperament etc. Among the Khasis, it is not the custom to enforce restitution of conjugal rights; as a rule when husband and wife cannot live together amicably, they agree to divorce one another; but occasionally it happens that either the husband or the wife will not agree to a divorce.\textsuperscript{216}

\textbf{6.3.3 ECONOMIC}

Respondents agree to the fact that economic power enjoyed by a man over his wife and children gives rise to other social discords. It is doubtful that this trend is not happening, but the fact that a small majority of people agree may mean that the others are not going through the same or similar problem or it can be that they are denying its occurrence or

\textsuperscript{214} L.S. Gassah: \textit{op. cit.} p.8.
\textsuperscript{215} H. Bareh: \textit{op. cit.} p. 75.
\textsuperscript{216} P.R.T. Gurdon: \textit{op. cit.} p.79.
they are trying to hide it, not wanting to expose anything of the like. A man may enjoy economic power because he may have come from a well-to-do family or because he is educated and therefore he is employed. Observing our men folk, majority of them use their economic power to entertain themselves rather than attending to the needs of the family. This then can cause misunderstandings, frictions and other evils in society. On the other hand, when the rest of the respondents either disagree or remain neutral seem to be a good sign which say that women must have been educated, employed, empowered and so economic power is on their side. Women with weak economic background experience the greatest difficulty in carrying out their responsibilities as the custodians of their family is found out by the study. Women and more especially the youngest daughters of families who are custodians of the family property, the ancestral property will surely experience the greatest difficulty in carrying out their responsibilities in times of family celebrations such as weddings, deaths, ceremonies, anniversaries, family reunions and others. Since planning and execution of decisions rest not solely on them but on the male members of families such as uncles, brothers and husbands too may come into the picture. So if women have weak economic background, they can be dislodge economically by the male members of the family if they enjoy more economic power and are not so understandable towards the females’ responsibilities having been entrusted to them by the ancestors. This calls forth our women for the need to strengthen their economic power and responsibility right from tender age, not to follow only traditional roles and beliefs that only males are good for calculations, for reasoning out things and the other stuff such as these.
Respondents agree to the opinion that Khasi women are free to take up economic activities. In a land where women are also free to do and practise any trade and profession, the present age offers many varieties of employments. Hence our women folk are also working mothers, so you will find that in this aspect also our women are fore-runners to work in offices, banks etc. Thus, besides the house-hold chores, they are now also supplementing to the family incomes, savings etc. It is wise for Khasi women to take up economic activities especially if they belong to female-headed families; they will need to see to the basic needs of the children and other dependents, also for education, health and unforeseen events. To be able to do this, they need education or rather education has taught or helped them to be able to take risks ‘as a function of skill not of chance’. We are now living in a world of cut throat competition where the economic activities of the people are so demanding and varied, a correct way to approach economic prosperity vis-à-vis economic problem is very much wanted.

In Khasi society women are economically empowered, the mother reigns supreme in the management of the household called ‘Ka Rympei’, the hearth of the house or the kitchen. Besides rearing the children, preparing the food, the mother is also responsible for the budget and economy of the family. In olden days she still finds time in helping with the cultivation or business in the market, besides the household chores. Many Khasis, both male and female, live by daily labour employed on road work and on building. In Shillong, the Government offices and the printing press give employment to a certain number of Khasis. There is also a fair demand for Khasi domestic servants. The

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217 S. Rynjah: op. cit. p. 50.
218 C. Wolflang: op. cit. p. 18.
219 S. Rynjah: op. cit. p. 48.
manufacture of country spirit gives employment to a considerable number of persons, most of whom are females. Nowadays, a good number of female students are taking up unconventional subjects in higher education which will help empowering them economically.

Women are found in every profession including bureaucracy and business entrepreneurship. There has been a considerable increase in the number of jobs in public services under the Central Government, the State Government and local administrations like the Khasi Hills District Council and the Shillong Municipality during the past three decades. The inclination of younger people to seek white-collar jobs has no doubt been influenced by security of service and the generous provisions made to employees such as Dearness Allowance, Compensatory Allowance, advances for house building, leave travelling concessions and generous leave rules including maternity leave. The number of women engaged in these services is quite substantial. Teachers, doctors, advocates and engineers constitute the most important section of the learned professions. With the increase of literacy, an increase in their number has been inevitable. The number of beauty parlours has also increased. Dry-cleaning which is so necessary in a place where people generally use woolen garments is largely concentrated in Shillong. There are a number of people engaged in these trades including women. Khasi women monopolize embroidery work particularly on the jainsems which are an essential part of the Khasi woman’s dress and also tasselling work on the jainkups.

Not even half of the population of respondents seemed to be at ease with the opinion that there are inherent differences between men and women that limit capacity of women to


perform effectively on jobs. It just shows that today’s women are on different types of jobs which do not require so much of muscle differences or physical stamina. Such differences can also vary from place to place, because a woman from rural area can be much stronger than a man from urban and semi-urban places. With education, women can even do much better than their men counterparts in the same or similar type of job except for childbirth which men cannot do it. There is something about conventional wisdom, quite contrary to the research evidence that persists in viewing men and women as basically different. The reason for this perception also stems from the fact that women have been projected differently, both socially and otherwise: family, division of work and adult work patterns all convey the idea that women should be dependent and to an extent subordinate to men. There are various challenges and dilemmas the professional women experience working understandably both for economic and non-economic objectives, including a sense of autonomy arising out of combination of a full-fledged professional role with the role of a home and child manager.222

Women respondents disagreed that the husband should take decision regarding change in wife’s job. Even from a human point of view, every person need to get a chance of making one’s own decision unless asked for. But if a wife feels the need to change or not to change her job then it is up to her to make that decision, it is unnecessary for the husband to make that decision for her unless she needs him to help her in that. It is a good sign that more than half of the population disagree to such opinion. It shows that women have come of age educationally, have trained themselves to reason out, to make decision for what is good and feel good for themselves. The lady knows better what

222 P. Arora: op. cit. pp. VII-VIII.
aptitudes and skills she has for the job or what problems and challenges she is facing in the workplace. Therefore she is the best judge of the situations and circumstances of life to be able to make and take the right decisions for herself.

Respondents disagreed with the statement that whatever assets are brought by joint-income should be in husband’s name. First of all, if assets are brought by joint-income then it is a joint-venture therefore needs to be in both the names of the husband and wife if they choose to. Secondly, our society follows the matrilineal system, thus the assets actually need to be in the name of the woman, the wife because it is she who manages the daily household expenses. Unlike the man, very often does not spend money on entertaining herself. As in the case of patriliny, even if the wife slogged as much or even much more than the husband, still she will not get anything in her name. A theme is explored in “India’s working women – A Special Issue” social welfare by opinion poll of working women which reveals her trials and tribulations. She is burdened exhaustively, lonely, not understood and usually misunderstood person. In this period of transition, she is neither accepted as an equal partner at home nor given that equality outside home.  

A wife’s career is of equal importance as that of a husband’s career is being agreed by the respondents. Even though ours is a matrilineal society it is also a society whereby everyone is of value. A wife’s career is of no difference from a husband’s career if both because of educational qualification or the lack of it has managed to get a job and be employed as far as they take life seriously and not play up with it. With hard work, how meagre the income may be, they will be able to save and contribute together towards family welfare. ‘Further, a larger proportion of women’s income is spent for the welfare

of the household and children’ (Blumberg 1988).224 Such kinds of respondents are really educated ones who do not look only at themselves and their own, without valuing others. This is how we empower each other by focusing on the positive thus uplifting one another. For those who disagree, it can be because they feel their career is of more importance than their partner, they fail to realize that it is not really the amount brought in that makes it important but the strength and the energy that is put into it that makes the difference.

A huge majority of respondents disagree with the opinion that Khasi women cannot be efficient scientists, engineers etc. If women of other societies especially those of the patrilineal or patriarchal societies who have been so much subjugated by their men folk can make it, then there is no doubt that Khasi women too can be very efficient scientists, engineers and others. Khasi women are freer to follow their own inclinations so if they want to and they are called to those lines of professions and careers, they have the capabilities and are industrious enough, not leaving any stone unturned. They will do extremely well as they have proved themselves in other areas too. If they say that they cannot; it may mean that they are not being supported enough more so by their men if they are married, to help share in their workload at home and in the workplace.

Respondents disagree with the opinion that Khasi women are not enterprising, if given the chance, any woman and more so Khasi women who possess an independent behavior or attitude and with so much go in them from tender age will prove their enterprising spirit. Observing them from childhood and placing them side by side with their brothers,

they do take their stands. As they grow up they do not usually play up with their studies and show responsibility even with household chores. Self-discipline in most cases, they grow to be mature young people who can be entrusted with any undertaking. Just with a bit of encouragement and support, they will bloom and do well in life and in turn will empower their men folk. Married women not so much for their own sake but for the sake of the family will do anything, will go to any length of trouble even without wanting or eager to prove to anyone that they can be enterprising.

Respondents disagree that women are not professionally ambitious. This can be true with Khasi women except that may be they cannot afford to be so if they do not have the corresponding education or qualification. This can happen with women from both urban and rural areas. For women from the outskirts of the city may feel that they are not apt with the standards of city life even though they too with education may be eager to be professionals in one area or the other. But a number of them have proved themselves that they can make it. As Arora (p.96) puts it, ‘the word profession is used in its broad sense of a learned profession or occupation that requires specialized knowledge and carries prestige’. Certain learned women may not be professionally ambitious not because they do not have any ambition but it can be because of the circumstances they are in; they have priorities to choose from, which need immediate attention.

Respondents disagree that the household responsibilities exhaust women’s energies therefore they cannot do justice to their jobs. Women prove that they are hard-working, do not shirk responsibilities whether within the household or in the workplace. They are self-forgetful, for in spite of being exhausted they still manage to stretch out, it means
that they have a cause to work and live for, a target to reach out and most of the time it is not for themselves but for their dependents. If more than half of the population of the respondents disagree that women cannot do justice to their jobs because of their household responsibilities, it sounds as if they are ready for more challenges. Women are capable of coping with life’s ups and downs, they are well able to look and find ways and means of dealing with situations in hand. A good number will not simply give-in or just give-up that easily. The more strings they need to pull in life, the more experiences they get therefore the more adjustments they can make with not too much difficulty or exertion.

Existing micro-credit mechanism should be strengthened particularly for women below poverty line are being clamoured by respondents. It goes without saying that mechanisms such as micro-credits need to be strengthened not only for women below poverty line but also for women-headed families because women are the ones who need to make both ends meet. They run the family, see to the upkeep and maintenance of the home, are aware of how much expenses they incur and so on. ‘Micro-credit programmes are the best instruments for poverty alleviation and they also empower women. Women’s participation in micro-credit programmes as a poverty reduction strategy is often encouraged with an instrumentality to achieve smaller families, improve contraceptive use and child survival’. 225 ‘Reviews of microfinance efforts from various parts of the world suggests that, by and large, access to microfinance has had a positive economic impact, that this impact has been often larger for those closer to poverty line than those further away and that they increase with duration of membership or intensity of loans as

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members begin to invest in assets rather than consumption’ (Morduch and Haley 2001, Hulme and Mosley 1996).  

Not even half of the respondents agree to the fact that the status of a woman depends on the economic status of the family because with education, women have their own individual pride. If personally they are educated; they have good jobs and can fend for themselves then their status do not have to depend on the economic status of the family unless they are married women so this can be true. “Poverty and vulnerability are not purely economic phenomena, reflecting what people have; they are also social phenomena, reflecting who they are. While women’s needs and interests cannot be equated with the impact at the household level, they are not independent of them either. Women, along with other members of their households, have a stake in the overall prosperity and well-being achievements of their households”.

Respondents agree to the opinion that women are flourishing in business not because of inheritance but because of their enterprising spirit. Being a matrilineal society, our women need to have so much go in them to bear the brunt of life. Added to their enterprising spirit, they are also very self-sacrificing and self-forgetful. If because of inheritance women are flourishing in business then sons too would inherit that same spirit. Previously, women are not given the chance of doing any business, therefore are not able to prove themselves. But now with education and dearth of employment, it kind

\[227\text{ Ibid. pp. 4710–4712.}\]
of forces the families to let women venture into something they have never trodden before and they are doing really well. ‘In most cases, though the law of inheritance is vested in the females yet they are flourishing in business because of their enterprising spirit to pursue a vigorous economic activity, capable for risk-taking as a function of skill, not of chance. Such characteristic must be instrumental, to shoulder responsibility matched by organizational skill. Thus it appears that entrepreneurship has no direct bearing on the law of inheritance or in the matriline’. 228 ‘It is encouraging to note that women are competent to hold independent business or in partnership which amounts to shouldering huge responsibilities of management, administration, finance, quality control etc.’ 229

Women’s role in economy has its impact on the economic growth and development of the state. “It has been pointed out by some people that the matrilineal system of inheritance which is along the female line has its impact on the economic growth and development of the state”. 230 ‘In rural areas where agricultural and related activities dominate, the actual contribution of women towards the economy is significant. Women in both urban and semi-urban areas do not regard themselves as being gainfully employed, although they work at home in a variety of ways viz. embroidery, tailoring etc. to supplement the household income. Although women in Meghalaya contribute to the economy, yet their contribution to the family income in particular and to the society in general, is to a certain extent undermined’. 231

228 C. Wolflang: op. cit. p.18.
230 M.P.R. Lyngdoh: op. cit. p.20.
231 C. Nongbri and V. Pakyntein: op. cit. p. 201.
The daughters are entitled to the family property, respondents agree to the opinion. Property and its related economic implications is a vital aspect of any society. Khasi society has devised and evolved the method of transmitting property through females.  

‘The rule amongst the Khasis is that the youngest daughter has the largest share of the family property, because it is she whose duty it is to perform the family ceremonies and propitiate the family ancestors. The other daughters however on their mother’s death are entitled, each of them to a share of their mother’s property, although the youngest daughter gets the lion’s share’.  

Her elder sisters also secure shares of inheritance in the form of landed or family property, jewelleries and ornaments, vessels and other articles of household furniture and goods, but the largest share including the mother’s residential house is hers (youngest sister).  

Sons are entitled to moveable property agree the female respondents. Amongst Khasis, property which has been acquired by a man before marriage is considered to belong to his mother. After marriage, if there are children, the case is different, provided that the property has been acquired by the man after marriage. A capital may have been provided by the mother to her son in case his wife is poor for establishing himself and his family. Again, wealthy parents nowadays do give shares to their sons although in smaller proportions against the larger reserved for the daughter and entitling such recipients to transmit the property thus bequeathed to his wife’s kinship lineage. Sons otherwise get only small gifts with personal belongings taken out when they are married. Nowadays, if

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232 I.M. Syiem: *op. cit.* p. 32.
234 H. Bareh: *op. cit.* p. 69.
a man shares with his mother any business, he gets a dividend. The Meghalaya Government passed an act known as the Meghalaya Succession to Self-Acquired Property Act, 1984 which received the assent of the President in 1986. The Act enables the parents to bequeath their self-acquired property by the will system to any of the children sons and daughters. It is believed that the passing of this Act will increase male motivation and help in the economic well-being of the sons.

The khatduh (youngest daughter) is the custodian of family property is being agreed upon by the respondents. The youngest daughter is strictly the custodian but not possessor of family property. She might dispose of some articles of property but not the ancestral residence. She performs religious household ceremonies. Yet her greater duty is to take care of her aged parents. She is in charge of family sepulchres. In Christian families, she still exercises her moral duties and obtains the biggest portion although she has no longer real religious duties to perform. The residential house of the youngest daughter is not counted as her private or personal property; it is an ancestral property. The youngest daughter’s house forms a meeting place of her kith and kin. She is bound to take care of her unmarried brothers and sisters. She is the guardian of the parentless and homeless members of her family. The youngest daughter cannot dispose of the house without the unanimous consent of her sisters. If the youngest daughter dies, she is succeeded by the next youngest daughter and so on.

236 H. Bareh: *op. cit.* p. 70.
6.3.4 **POLITICAL**

The respondents agree to it that the political empowerment of women must begin as a bottom-up exercise rather than a top-down approach confirmed the finding, then only will the majority of the common people have a chance to participate and to make contributions towards their own empowerment. The inclusion of gender as an issue for development assumes the inherent inequalities, which persist in the ‘top-down’ or ‘trickle-down’ approach. It visualizes both men and women as contributive partners in development. It gives expression to the emergence of creativity, self-reliance, blossoming of thoughts, drawing on external and internal resources to secure self-determination, self-identity and personality development on the basis of ‘being model’ of development in lieu of ‘having model’ of development which promotes consumerism, unhealthy competition and conflicts.

The principal differences between empowerment and the other approaches are a rejection to top-down strategies, the inclusion of consciousness-raising, a recognition of women’s triple roles – production, reproduction and community – and a belief in the importance of women organizing by and for themselves.

As a woman, awareness about rights and duties are important for a meaningful participation in the grass root level institutions agreed the respondents, otherwise a woman will just attend meeting because she is being invited or for any other reason but cannot make any worthwhile contribution. Since the Women’s Conference in Nairobi in 1985, many grass root groups have been working to create new awareness of women’s rights, including their rights within the family and to help women achieve those rights.

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They have set agendas and carved out a space for women’s issues. The political system or network is already established in the organization and without access to information about the implicit norms, power coalitions and acceptable strategies; accomplishment of the goals may not be possible. Women lose sight of the fact that it is not enough to be good at your job but you must also be effective in terms of learning to operate with the organisation’s informal power structure.

Political power is still eluding the women of Meghalaya except for very few. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment brought about the grass root system of governance on the Panchayati Raj with 33 percent of the elective posts reserved for women. The system has not been applied in Meghalaya which falls under the Autonomous District Council created under the 6th Schedule of the Constitution. There has been some move to usher in some modification in the Autonomous District Councils for their administration to be more direct with the people at the grass root level but nothing tangible has yet come about. With women contesting election in District Council and State Legislature, it could reverse the traditional structure of power and this is already happening though in small stride. By its very nature, women’s politics represents the interests of the marginalized, because at its heart it is a search for human transformation. They are raising their voices against discrimination and injustice in social, economic and political spheres. Politics for them does not mean only activities of electing representatives and governing. It also includes efforts at raising consciousness and changing the unequal

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243 J.K. Pillai: op. cit. p. 91.
244 C. Nongbri and V. Pakyntein: op. cit. p.204.
power structure for a just and equal system. According to the study (2003), nearly one million women representatives have been elected to the grassroots level position across the country. Out of 475 zilla parishads in the country, 158 are chaired by women. At the block level, out of 51,000 members of the block samitis, 17,000 are women. In addition, nearly one-third of the mayors of the municipalities are women.

The percentage of successful women candidates is not satisfactory may be due to the traditional mindsets of the women themselves. Majority of women do not take part in politics because it is considered as a dirty game and not their domain and society too take women as not fitting for politics therefore will not vote for them. Nehru was rather suspicious of constant evocations of the past; “I must confess to you that I am intensely dissatisfied with the lot of the Indian women today. I have a feeling that these echoes from the past are raised chiefly to hide our present deficiencies and to prevent us from attacking the root cause of women’s degradation in India today”. He coaxed them that being half on the population of the country they should not allow themselves to be treated as dolls or playthings. He pleaded that women must be trained “in every department of human activity” so that they can play an effective part in professions and other spheres. He wanted women to be assertive and fight for their own rights. This emphasis on equality and independence led him into abandoning some of the existing conventions, re nomination a woman to the Congress Working Committee. Faced by the criticism of women’s organizations, he retorted sharply, that it “would be wrong to

imagine that your rights will be given to you or that they will drop down from somewhere, if you simply sit at home.” 247 Quite often, people say that women do not support women and this is true of most people and most groups who have been oppressed for a long time. You accept the position that the oppressor has kept you in. When one of you breaks out and challenges the status quo, then others in disbelief, perhaps in fear or may be jealousy, say you should not be so daring, so ambitious.248 Regarding political participation of women, women’s attitude in particular and public in general need to be changed.249

According to the finding, respondents disagree that women are not fairly represented in government and politics. This is true of representation in Government but not in politics. Women gained voting rights at Independence, and over the years the number of women voters has shown a steady rise but women are under-represented in governance and decision making positions. Apart from Parliament and Assemblies, women are also seriously under-represented in other spheres of decision-making. Lack of political reservations to women is one of the major constraints for under-representation of women in governance.250 In 1935 prior to independence, the then Governor of Assam created a reserved seat, the Shillong Assembly Constituency, Assam. In the election held in 1937, Mavis Dunn Lyngdoh won and was the 1st lady in the North East and the 2nd in India to hold the office of a Minister. In the election held in 1946, Mrs. Bonily Khongmen won

the seat and again in the 1st general election in 1952, she came out victorious and entered Parliament as the 1st lady MP from the then state of Assam, since then there has been no lady MP from the state until 2008. Since the time Meghalaya attained its statehood (1972), only eight women were elected to the State Assembly. Women elected to the Autonomous District Councils too were very few.\textsuperscript{251} It is important to look seriously into the issues of violence against women being used as a tool to restrain them from entering mainstream politics. The number of women in leadership positions at local, village, district and national level has to consistently rise. There is a growing demand among women’s groups for reservation of seats for women at all levels of the political power structure.\textsuperscript{252}

The role of women in the changing power structure of Khasi society is in keeping with the demands of change. It needs to be said however that though the system appears to be stable and continuous and contemporary social patterns have the external appearance of a continuing matrilineal organization, the internal structure has altered because of many changes occurring in the society resulting in a number of deviations from Khasi matrilineal principles. There are trends towards virilocality and neolocality (particularly in the larger towns), a contrast to the extended family structure which is a characteristic feature of Khasi matriline. The rules of matrilocality seem to be no longer binding and enforceable. Moreover, tracing one’s lineage through the male line is today often practised and unilinear descent is not a strictly followed code. A sort of bilateral

\textsuperscript{251} C. Nongbri and V. Pakyntein: \textit{op. cit.} p.204. \\
arrangement is often seen to be in existence, where the two principles of matrilateral and patrilateral filiations are both present and interacting in numerous different ways. Property division among the Khasis, for instance, has also moved towards bilaterality where both sons and daughters receive some land and property.  

Respondents disagree with the idea that in Khasi society, women do have space in the political sphere. History was made when Government decided in 1920 to have the first municipal elections and the Chief Commissioner decided to extend the franchise for the first time to Khasi women, who in the matrilineal Khasi society, fulfilled the property holding qualification. The Municipal Act of 1884 was accordingly amended and Khasi women were declared eligible to vote in municipal elections, though not to contest Municipal Elections. This was the situation till 1937 when the Removal of Female Ineligibility (Amendment) Act was passed. Inspite of the extension of voting rights to Khasi Women, till the 1920’s only about 50% of the adult population in the town could vote. The franchise was extended to all women in 1923. Meghalaya is no exception when it comes to public life, the mindset and long-held views about women still pose a major obstacle for women to enter electoral politics. Authority in its real sense is the exclusive preserve of men; they are the sole inheritor of power. Politics and administration are considered the prerogatives of men. A Headman inevitably heads the village level traditional administration called Durbar. Thus this level of administration is completely under the domain of men. Women are restricted from attending Durbar unless specifically called for specific purposes when the services of women are required.

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While women have a say in household matters, men hold all major areas of decision-making.\textsuperscript{255} For any ordinary woman it is still very difficult to create space in electoral politics which is at par with men. Women are deprived of political space not because they are not competent but because men are not ready to share power. Politics has been a male domain for too long and any attempt by women to capture political space is seen as a direct threat to male hegemony. Surprisingly, the very men who excluded women from politics also make use of their resourcefulness as peace negotiators during conflict.\textsuperscript{256}

Unless women are involved in village councils, they will not be able to address the problems in the society. Inspite of numerous obstacles to women’s local political effectiveness, there is evidence around South Asia that women members and leaders in the local governance do manage to articulate their perspectives in matters such as land transfers to women, education, water supply issues, roads, fuel, health care and toilets for women in dalit areas (UNRISD 2005).\textsuperscript{257} So far, a pan-Indian women’s political platform has not emerged. The only way it can happen is if women articulate their own rights and needs politically, as well as address general social issues from the women’s perspective. The potential of such a political platform is enormous if it plays its historic role.\textsuperscript{258} Women’s place in local governance and political participation is crucial so that they can give a lending voice on public affairs. This can happen once women are given access to decision making.\textsuperscript{259}

\textsuperscript{255}C. Nongbri and V. Pakyntein: \textit{op. cit.} p.204.
\textsuperscript{256}P. Mukhim: \textit{op. cit.} p. 44.
\textsuperscript{257}Quoted in G. Kelkar: \textit{op. cit.} p. 4697.
\textsuperscript{258}P. D’Souza: \textit{op. cit.} p. 177.
The growing incidences of crime can be best addressed through the participation of women in decision-making bodies and respondents agree to this fact. Participation in empowering activities can come about purposively or accidentally. It is impelled by a crisis or an accumulated sense of need. Activities can be purely economic, purely educational, socio-political, community-level, or any combination. The sponsoring organizations can be new or existing grass roots groups, overtly political groups, economic development entities, unions or either governmental or non-governmental organization. Participants are often brought into these activities by a neighbor, a friend, a family member, a co-worker or a community organizer.\(^{260}\) Civil Society groups expressed concern at the incidents of violence against women, that as long as there is gender-based violence, it is difficult to claim progress in human development. Gender equality requires protection from gender-based violence in domestic and public spaces, “Violence and aggression against women in public is seen as linked to the rise of conservative forces in society that aggressively and consciously act to prevent women’s public appearances and participation”(Shaheed and Zaidi 2005, 14).\(^ {261}\)

By and large, Khasi women are less assertive in matters of politics and governance agreed the respondents. Men feel women are not of equal status with them therefore they are not giving them any chance to assert themselves. If women have to be appointed to positions of authority, guidance should be given to them in school stage for developing self-confidence, assurance and strength. They have got to learn to be assertive, firm and dynamic. Girls should be exposed to a few models of women occupying superior role.

\(^{260}\) S.R. Bakshi: op. cit. p. 53.
\(^{261}\) In G. Kelkar: op. cit. pp. 4697-4698.
Teachers, especially women teachers, should give extra encouragement to girls, both to believe in their own ability and a sense of self worth, so that they will go for top careers. “…The main force behind women’s studies is the movement to assert the interests of women as a sex. It does not mean women wanting to be men or women wanting to dominate men but it is a demand to restore to half of humanity its rightful place in society, to restore to women their humanity”. Most of the studies from most of the countries on women professionals, in general, report that the aspiration level of women is not very high and that is the reason why most women end up at middle level leadership and hardly one percent rise to the top. Women are quite satisfied with their achievements even if they do not rise to the top. They have anxiety and fear of success and hence try to avoid success. They are not too much concerned about salary or promotion and are more interested with the atmosphere of the work place and personal relationships.\textsuperscript{262} In youth, women are taught to suppress their assertiveness, ignore their own needs and nurture other people. This is the psychological equivalent of binding women’s feet to fit in the shoes in Chinese culture. Most women end up feeling guilty about being assertive, even in self-defence.\textsuperscript{263} Since politics is essentially a male domain, it is important to give women a push at the initial stage of their participation. Gandhi played a pivotal role in making the traditional home bound women to come out of their homes to participate in the freedom struggle. Gandhi’s basic ideas on women’s rights were equality in some spheres and opportunities for self-development and self-realisation. He believed that the decline in women’s position and status lay in male prejudice and arrogance.\textsuperscript{264}

\textsuperscript{262} S.R. Pillai: \textit{op. cit.} pp. 70, 82 and 113.
\textsuperscript{264} S.P. Agrawal, et al.: \textit{op. cit.} p. 158.
NGOs can influence government policies affirmed the respondents and did agree in this matter. Non-governmental organization, women’s organizations and feminist groups have played a catalytic role in the promotion of the human rights of women through grass roots activities, networking and advocacy and need encouragement, support and access to information from Governments in order to carry out these activities. The importance of the United Nations Decade for women and international women’s conferences should not be underestimated, for these forums enabled women to develop the skills required for exercising power and influence, to mobilise resources and articulate issues and to practise organising, lobbying and legislating. Excluded from most political offices, many women have found a voice in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) at the grass roots, national and international levels. NGOs have taken issues previously ignored such as violence against women and rights to reproductive health and brought them to the mainstream policy debate as seen in recent United Nations conferences. NGOs as a group can wield influence broad enough to be active partners with governments in deciding national policies and programmes. Inter-Parliamentary Conference was held in New Delhi on 14th February, 1997 on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women. This is the message of UN Secretary-General delivered by UN Special Adviser to the Secretary-General, Ms Angela King: “As parliamentarians you can keep gender issues high on the public agenda. You can pass legislation and influence public spending. You can press for women’s appointments. Within your respective political parties, you can do as many have done and adopt mechanisms ensuring a minimum representation of women and you can increase your collaboration with non-governmental organizations which have provided an alternative path to power for many

women excluded from traditional power structures”. There are many NGOs and voluntary organizations. However, there is a need to identify those which can deliver the goods and financial assistance. Project works should be extended accordingly on merit basis not on political pressure, favouritism and nepotism.

Women must acquire the ability to look into the powers and working of the Local Council (Durbar) and deliberate on women’s issues. Women themselves must make a commitment to their own advancement. They must have the appropriate credentials; understand the organizational structures and political processes of the institution. They should develop their own networks – organization based, personal as well as professional. To facilitate learning the rules of the game, they should have inner circle support by way of a mentor, man or woman. In the national field, women had already obtained the right to vote in elections to local bodies and they could also be elected as a representative of local bodies. Gandhiji’s contribution to the emancipation of women also was phenomenal. He was a staunch advocate of the equality of men and women and this had a great impact in all walks of life. The freedom struggle under Gandhiji’s leadership attracted many women to enter politics and this also did considerable service to elevate the status of women. They fought shoulder to shoulder with men and won their emancipation as a tribute of gratitude. Traditionally, women were restricted from attending Durbar unless specifically called for a specific purpose. It has been considered abnormal for women to air their views and voice their opinions in public matters. They

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are still to get a place in representing the women’s issues in the local Durbar and of electing its traditional heads where only male members are legible to participate in the election. This is of course taking a different turn in urban areas. In the political arena, participation of women as candidates is still receiving a lukewarm attitude of the male members in particular and the society in general.\textsuperscript{269} Through non-governmental organizations and grass-root organizations, women have been able to articulate their interests and concerns and have placed women’s issues on the national, regional and international agendas.\textsuperscript{270}

There is a need to make room for women in the village councils if their living conditions are to improve. To address the issues regarding women development, it is required to include women in all the boards and committees facilitating the development of pro-women policy. A partnership needs to be built up between different departments like panchayat, social welfare, education etc. and people in these departments need to be oriented in the issues related to gender discrimination and equity.\textsuperscript{271} Durbars are usually held in the open and constitute typical open-door councils. The councillors sit in concentric rows. Voting usually is indicated by the counting of heads which is always preferred to raising of hands. Women are excluded from such sessions but in some places they are allowed to listen to the debates as observers.\textsuperscript{272} They (women) cannot participate in state or Village Durbars neither can they be a part of the jury. Yet the seemingly

\textsuperscript{269} C. Nongbri and V. Pakyntein: \textit{op. cit.} p.195.
\textsuperscript{271} M. Bandyopadhyay: \textit{op. cit.} p.8.
\textsuperscript{272} H. Bareh: \textit{op. cit.} p. 111.
minute power to run the administration of her household has reverted the whole edifice of power.\textsuperscript{273}

Khasi women need to come out of their exclusion from the political sphere asserted the respondents to the statement. The Constitution has granted social and political equality; perhaps India is the first country which decided on adult suffrage at the start of a parliamentary democracy and gave the rights to women at the same time as men. Political franchise extended to women would become meaningless if they are not able to understand the issues their votes are to decide. Social equality are practised by millions of women who have come out of their seclusion, a few pockets of orthodoxy still continues to react.\textsuperscript{274} As more and more women come out of the private sphere and participate in the political process; they could utilize these strengths in the public fora at the service of the world-family. But for this to happen we need to have an adequate representation of women (ideally 50:50) who speak from a woman’s perspective in the decision making processes. Such participation from women could affect the policies and priorities of governance.\textsuperscript{275} In situations of leadership, women avoid appearing more decisive or more knowledgeable than others. Studies of leadership reveal that women are much more likely to become social leaders, responsible for maintaining and supporting good relationships in the group by expressing by agreement and showing solidarity, rather than task leaders responsible for getting others to complete the task (Eagly and


\textsuperscript{274} J.K. Pillai: op. cit. p. 66.

\textsuperscript{275} P. D’Souza: op. cit. p. 178.
Karan, 1991). Many women fear that if they regain power they might become overly aggressive and hurt others.\textsuperscript{276}

True democracy demands effective participation of the women who constitute half of the population and the respondents agree to it. With the realization that real development cannot take roots if it bypasses women, who not only represent half of the country’s total population but also represent the very kernel around which societal re-orientation must take place, the Government has directed all its efforts towards removing various gender-biases and thus guarantee women equal status in the real sense as is enshrined in the Constitution of India. Swami Vivekananda summed up the national problems in India in two words – The women and the people and traced the downfall of India to continued neglect of women and the masses. It is vital for a nation to have a significant involvement of women in the process of change as they constitute around half of the population. Their participation has been since the pre-independence era when a number of women took part in freedom struggle. After independence too, their contribution is significant for which the participation of women in parliamentary elections as voters is a clear indication of this trend.\textsuperscript{277}

Political parties have a role to play by including women in the electoral fray and by giving them tickets during the election maintained the finding. It appears that the structuring of political parties remains the main obstacle in women’s political recruitment. Political parties do not offer candidature to women, they argue against nominating women candidates because they doubt their winning ability but calculations

\textsuperscript{276} R.J. Pendanam: \textit{op. cit.} pp. 51 and 92.
\textsuperscript{277} S.P. Agrawal, et al.: \textit{op. cit.} pp. 134 and 335.
from the official data of the Election Commission clearly negate these apprehensions. The Election data since 1998 show that the success rates of men and women candidates do not differ, but in many cases women candidates are more successful than their male counterparts. These observations cannot be far fetched as party nominations for men and women are totally disproportionate. Therefore the doubt about women’s winning ability does not hold. It also means that both men and women voters are not apprehensive of women candidates. Of course, it is too simplistic to assume that women would en masse vote for women or would prefer women candidates to men candidates, at least at the national and state level elections. Instead the patterns of women’s voting reveal a definite, focused understanding of the political choices they have.²⁷⁸ The political parties have recently started to vitalize the women’s fronts, either as a consequence of the pressure of the women members or for their own electioneering purposes. After Independence, the methods used to promote women’s cause; the maintenance of close ties with political leaders, lobbying in Parliament and conducting proceedings, lectures and debates in English were ones in which very few women could participate.²⁷⁹ In some parts of the country like North Eastern States, women have access to economic power to some extent, but with regard to political power they are under-represented in almost all the political parties and political domain like parliament, cabinet position and legislative assembly.²⁸⁰ Presently, political parties are simply using women for their political gain and rarely give them a real chance to involve in politics and become leaders.²⁸¹

²⁸⁰ M. Bandyopadhyay: op. cit. p.17.
Women’s participation in power politics is essential for women’s empowerment with the respondents who agree to the opinion. Feminists in these societies do agree with their western counterparts that there does exist a gender struggle, gender power play and gender politics to the detriment of the women. They feel that the solution lies in the empowerment of women and transformation of women from womanhood to personhood rather than their emancipation. As such, there is an urgent need to recast, rethink and rejuvenate the very notion of ‘power’, ‘authority’, ‘political obligation’, ‘citizenship’, ‘democracy’ and ‘justice’. In the rapidly changing world scenario, we need to think of ‘power’ in terms of ‘power-to’ and not in terms of ‘power-over’ (Wartenberg, 1992). Achieving the goal of equal participation of women and men in decision-making will provide a balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society and is needed in order to strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning. Equality in political decision-making performs a leverage function without which it is highly unlikely that a real integration of the equality dimension in government policy-making is feasible. In this respect, women’s equal participation in political life plays a pivotal role in the general process of the advancement of women. Participation of women in the public sphere in positions of power and decision-making is a critical indicator of women’s empowerment. This includes governmental bodies, public administration and judiciary, corporate and technical bodies. By allotting Khasi women with party tickets to contest election, it will encourage them to come forward in active politics. The traditional working patterns of many political parties and government structures continue

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282 Quoted in J.B.G. Tilak: op. cit. p.295.
to be barriers to women’s participation in public life. Women may be discouraged from seeking political office by discriminatory attitudes and practices, child-care responsibilities and the high cost of seeking and holding public office. Women in politics and decision-making positions in Governments and legislative bodies contribute to redefining political priorities, placing new items on the political agenda that reflect and address women’s gender-specific concerns, values and experiences and providing new perspectives on mainstream political issues.285

A handful of respondents agree that women lack aggressiveness which is a quality of a successful administrator may be because it is not really necessary to be aggressive in order to be a successful administrator. There can be no empowering either of oneself or of others unless we let go of our own need to dominate. This is a real challenge for women in leadership positions, especially for those who take up professions and posts so far considered to be male strongholds. Being themselves insecure and not having women role models to look up to, many women end up imitating the ‘male model’ of authoritarian leadership, i.e. ‘doing-unto-others-what-they-have-done-to-us’, in fact with even greater vengeance. This is no empowerment, however powerful such women might appear to be. Instead, it just underscores the internalised dependency of women on male models, thereby implying that ‘man is the norm’ for being human and the difficulty women have in liberating themselves from internalized patriarchal values. That is why women’s groups are searching, experimenting and preparing new ways of handling power, encouraging women to act from the centre of one’s being rather than from neurotic needs of seeking approval or complying with expectations. It is only when

women are confident and comfortable with their personal identity of being woman that they become capable of nutritive power, a power that engenders growth and releases the power within others. They become capable of a different kind of leadership-based not on principles of domination, hierarchy and violence but rather on principles of inclusion, solidarity, communication and circularity. Fundamentally, attitudes which society defines as stereotypically masculine such as aggressiveness are considered the norm in politics. One must have these characteristics to be a ‘real’ man and to be a ‘real’ politician. Thus a woman who enters politics is considered to be by definition, aggressive, calculating and practical and not expected to be soft, emotional and personal. Women in such circumstances find themselves entering an alien world. Except for some women, especially at the local level who raise issues from the women’s perspective, most women who join party politics find themselves in an otherwise anti-woman atmosphere.286

Very few respondents agree that the voice of the women is limited mostly to family matters; meaning that if chances are given to women, the sky may be their only limit. In traditional Indian Societies, women were economically and socially dependent on their fathers till marriage, on the husbands after marriage and on the sons later. They were mostly confined to household affairs and they were not allowed to participate in the political and economic affairs of the society. But with independence and attempts at modernization, sex bias and discrimination have been done away with, and the concept of equality of the two sexes have been widely propagated and honoured.287 The views of Jawaharlal Nehru were more in keeping with the modern time; he particularly

emphasized the necessity for women to work outside the home, to be economically independent and not to regard marriage as a profession. He had realized that the economic bondage of women was ‘the root cause of the troubles of Indian women’, and clearly perceived that superficial reforms would not serve the cause of their emancipation. He wanted to modernise Indian society by removing worn out customs, which were a fossilized remnants of the feudal age.\textsuperscript{288} An inkling into women’s position in the past is provided by the general perception that women are fickle minded, weak and unfit to take up any role outside the family. Thus inferior roles were assigned to female in relation to male. The biological differences that women bear children and are on the average, physically weaker than men, reinforced by the cultural norms and the value systems, placed women secondary to men. Today, woman has realized that she cannot remain forever confined to the kitchen and the four walls of her home. She wants to play a multifaceted role to offset the challenges emerging out of the socio-economic changes, taking place in the country. Women are striking balance between traditional and progressive values of the society in transition. It is worth noting the opinion of UNICEF here: “Advocate a broad perception of women in society and in the development process taking the view that women are not limited to motherhood or domestic roles but she should be seen in the totality of women’s role”.\textsuperscript{289}

In our present world, political space to Khasi women cannot be denied ascertained the finding. In the modern age, the role of the women goes much beyond the home and the bringing up of children. She is now adopting a career of her own and sharing equally

\textsuperscript{288} S.P. Agrawal, et al.: \textit{op. cit.} p. 159.
with man, the responsibility for the development of society in all its aspects. In the
struggle for freedom, Indian women fought side by side with men. This equal partnership
will have to continue.\textsuperscript{290} Traditionally, women in Meghalaya are not allowed to attend
\textit{Durbar} but it is quite evident that in today’s world there is no activity that can be
achieved without women’s participation.\textsuperscript{291} Women do participate actively in modern
politics both at regional and national levels. During election, they participate in political
campaign; such as procession, public meetings, giving public speeches and other works.
Women turn out in large numbers to exercise their franchise and women voters exceed
that of men in some polling booths many a time. However, if women are not elected to
the State Legislature and District Councils, this would “deprive them of being involved
in the policy making decision” (Lyngdoh, 1997).\textsuperscript{292}

Developing positive attitude among women towards politics will enhance their status
politically, the respondents agree to the opinion. Deeply entrenched attitudes and
practices perpetuate inequality and discrimination against women, in public and private
life in all parts of the world. Accordingly implementations will require changes in values,
attitudes, practices and priorities at the regional, national and international levels.\textsuperscript{293}
Women’s empowerment is possible only if we pursue the path of holistic development in
which full justice is meted out to women in all walks of life, where women share not
only the obligations but also power on an equal footing with the men folk, where gender
divisions no longer exist and where both men and women are equally free to engage into

\textsuperscript{290} S.P. Agrawal, et al.: \textit{op. cit.} p. 69.
\textsuperscript{291} Department of Social Welfare in collaboration with Women’s Core Advocacy Group. \textit{State Action Plan
on National Policy for Empowerment of Women, Meghalaya.} Government of Meghalaya: The
\textsuperscript{292} Quoted in C. Nongbri and V. Pakyntein: \textit{op. cit.} p.198.
leisure activities they enjoy the most, where politics is made possible for women because of parallel shifts in child-rearing, domestic responsibilities and caring of the elderly and sick. Only such an approach towards women can enhance their self-respect, self-reliance and self-dignity. Education in general and higher education in particular, can play an increasingly vital role in inculcating the right values in commensuration with the new status of the women.²⁹⁴

Raising the status of women in political spheres is by giving them important positions in decision-making bodies assured the finding. A large section of women, particularly in developing countries, are marginalized, considered as caregivers but not to be cared, are not involved in decision-making process and are poorest among the poor.²⁹⁵ Women’s equality in power sharing and active participation in decision making, including political decision making at all levels and in all processes will be ensured for the achievement of the goal of empowerment. All measures will be taken to guarantee women equal access to and full participation in all decision making bodies at every level in the private and public sectors including the legislative, executive, judicial, local, corporate, statutory bodies as also advisory Commissions, Committees, Boards, Trusts etc.²⁹⁶ Many women now have working models and the leadership ability to participate in policy planning and ensure that their priorities will not be sidelined. Women have developed the understanding to sit at those tables and put forward the needs of their occupations, their families and their communities.²⁹⁷ Very few women happen to be in a position to influence political thinking or the decision making process. With a low level of

²⁹⁴ J.B.G. Tilak: op. cit. p.294.
²⁹⁵ M. Bandyopadhyay: op. cit. p.6.
participation in the decision making process at the government level, their impact on the political process and decision making is not significant.\footnote{J.K. Pillai: \textit{op. cit.} p. 68.} Regarding participation of women in decision making bodies from the grass roots to the national and international levels, women are capable of taking up the assignments as chairpersons and members; however nomination would be on merit, sincerity, dedication etc. for the purpose of development if the authority concerned is sincere enough.\footnote{Department of Social Welfare in collaboration with Women’s Core Advocacy Group. \textit{State Action Plan on National Policy for Empowerment of Women, Meghalaya.} Government of Meghalaya: The Department of Social Welfare. 2003, \textit{op. cit.} p. 36.}

Women have got space in the Village Councils as elected or nominated members and the respondents agree to the statement. This is partially true. The irony is that these traditional institutions are male-centric in composition and have no space at all for women. As a result, women have no political voice. In fact, political mobilization among women is still at a nascent stage.\footnote{P. Mukhim: \textit{op. cit.} p. 44.} Women’s roles are indirect and insignificant in the traditional political system. The traditional Village Councils practised male-suffrage, women could not attend such councils in the past. At present, women are able to make a dent in almost all Village Councils in urban areas and few Village Councils in rural areas. Unlike in the past, women are allowed to attend such councils (\textit{Durbar Shnong}). In the urban areas and many villages in Meghalaya, women are co-opted or nominate as office bearers or executive members of the Village Councils. It is note-worthy to observe that women are not able to penetrate or carve a place in the traditional political set-up of \textit{Hima, Doloiship or Nokmaship}.\footnote{C. Nongbri and V. Pakyntein: \textit{op. cit.} p.198.}
Ignorance of women about their potentials and responsibilities has kept them far behind men in the local bodies agreed the respondents. The unequal division of labour and responsibilities within households based on unequal power relations also limits women’s potential to find the time and develop the skills required for participation in decision-making in wider public forums. Non-formal networks and patterns of decision-making at the local community level that reflects a dominant male ethos restrict women’s ability to participate equally in political, economic and social life.\(^\text{302}\) The key issues are the rights and opportunities for women to participate in national and local government on equal footing and take part in economic and social independence. Women must organize themselves; they should be backed by informed men. At the same time, women must engage in political dialogue with governments on gender rights and equality. International human rights instruments and action plans on women’s rights and gender equality must form the basis of action. As regards the role of men, they can play an important role in promoting women’s rights and equality. Men doing their share in taking responsibility for house-work and family care are showing the way.\(^\text{303}\)

A minority of the respondents agree that mere increase in number of reserved seats for women in local bodies does not increase participation of women. The 73\(^{\text{rd}}\) and 74\(^{\text{th}}\) Amendments to the Indian Constitution have mandated a reservation of one-third of seats for women in village, block and district levels elected bodies. There is also one-third reservation for women in positions of chairpersons and deputy chairpersons in these institutions. With power sharing and responsibilities of recognized Panchayati Raj


Institutions (PRIs), women are gaining control over resources for development and social change. At national level, more than a third of these women are chairpersons of Panchayats at different levels. This is happening due to the enactment of legislation to create opportunities for women’s political participation at the grassroots. The 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution have resulted in the entry of nearly a million women in to Panchayats and Local bodies, 1998 data reveals that almost all the states are meeting the quota of 33% women at all three levels. One-third of the total seats of the Panchayats at all levels are reserved for women and one-third of the elected offices of chairpersons at all levels are also reserved for women. The women and the people belonging to the scheduled castes and tribes were always a neglected class who seldom has had chances of holding many positions of power. Now for the first time, key offices of the Panchayati Raj institutions have been reserved for them. This is a provision for empowering the weaker sections of the society. Unless illiteracy is eradicated the empowerment of the people envisaged by the formation of the Panchayati Raj institutions will remain just a dream. However, this Act is not applicable in Meghalaya and women are deprived of the opportunities. Under the British rule, women were given the right to vote through the Government of India Act 1935. This Act also provides for reservation of women to the State Assembly. Thus, two women; Miss Mavis Dunn and Mrs. Bonily Khongmen were elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly before independence of the country from foreign rule (Lyngdoh, 1997). Everybody is complaining about corruption, and women with their one-third representation and

305 A.V. Kumar and M.D. Shaffioddin: op. cit. p. 13.
resource-poor conditions within the home and outside, are expected to carry out the heavy burden of ending corruption. This is an “overly idealistic hope” (Hust 2004:200) and should not be put solely on the shoulders of women. 308 The 11th plan period is committed to ensuring smooth passage of the much-delayed Women’s Reservation Bill ensuring participation of women in governance. There should be simultaneous training and inputs to women in the PRIs (Local Bodies) to enable them to influence gender sensitive local planning and implementation. There is need to ensure collection of gender disaggregated data, including data on the participation of the most deprived sectors such as SC/ST and minority women, in parliament, in state legislature assemblies, in the council of ministers, in the premier services and more generally in the government sector. 309

Respondents disagree with this traditional view that women who muster up enough strength and courage to speak receive very little respect or attention but at the same time, this fact is still very much prevalent in the society. A woman who does step forward in protest of her condition makes herself a target of social disapproval, which can result in ostracism, harassment, violence against her or her family members, or perhaps the worst recrimination for a family at the economic edge of survival-loss of employment. 310

“Every woman has known the torture of beginning to speak aloud, heart beating as if to break, occasionally falling into loss of language, ground and language slipping out from under her, because for woman speaking – even just opening her mouth – in public is

308 G. Kelkar: op. cit. p. 4697.
310 S.R. Bakshi: op. cit. p. 103.
something rash, a transgression” - Cixous.\textsuperscript{311} Women in the matrilineal society of Meghalaya have no active roles in the public domain. Khasi women were barred from attending any of the councils (\textit{durbar}) be it at the village or state level. The simile – \textit{ynda kynih ka ‘iar kynthei, ka pyrthei ruh lawai} (meaning when the hen crows the world is nearing its end) and \textit{ksan rympei, rem durbar} (meaning a winner in the family, a loser in the council) – repudiates women active participation in politics. These sayings insinuated that though women are pivotal in the affair of the family and clan, men are decision-makers in the public sphere. Women have no direct roles in politics, albeit succession to political offices is through the female line i.e. from the current King (\textit{Syiem}) to his sister’s son.\textsuperscript{312}

Women have become aware of their problems and needs but not of their rights, respondents disagree with this since it cannot be generalized. The All India Women’s Conference entered the political arena in 1928 by pledging its support to the cause for independence and by calling for equal rights for women so that they might add their votes to the cause. Mahatma Gandhi encouraged women by saying; “I am uncompromising in the matter of women’s rights. In my opinion she should labour under no legal disability not suffered by man. I should treat daughters and sons on a footing of perfect equality.”\textsuperscript{313} Women will have to be enabled to participate more actively in decision-making structures and processes by mobilising them, making them aware of their rights and entitlements, sensitizing the administrative machinery and reviewing

\textsuperscript{312} C. Nongbri and V. Pakyntein: \textit{op. cit.} p.192.
\textsuperscript{313} S.R. Sharma: \textit{op. cit.} p. 13.
legislation to make them more effective. While women are increasingly using the legal system to exercise their rights, in many countries lack of awareness of the existence of these rights is an obstacle that prevents women from fully enjoying their human rights and attaining equality. Experience in many countries has shown that women can be empowered and motivated to assert their rights, regardless of their level of education or socio-economic status. Women however, are no longer passive but articulating their rights. They are bent on establishing an identity of their own. They are keen to prove that they are no longer inferior to men. They are successfully articulating their hopes and aspirations in recent times. A woman wants to be looked upon as a person in her own right. Women must be allowed to express their rights and assert their identity and actively participate in all spheres of activity to earn full respect and honour in society.

Khasi males enjoy exclusive political powers in society agreed the respondents. Matrilineal Meghalaya has its male preserve which women do not have access to. Women are excluded from decision-making in their traditional institutions. Although the culture is matrilineal, the worldview is very much patriarchal. For the purpose of administrative convenience, a Village Council or Durbar Shnong was constituted. The General Assembly consisted of all male adult members of the village. Persons who had no moustache, with physical deformity and mentally retarded had no right to attend the meeting of the assembly. However, the women had no right to attend such meetings, hence; male adult franchise was the solution. The executive, administrative and political

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317 P. Mukhim: op. cit. p. 45.
functions of the village were vested in the council of elders, the members of which were
to be selected by the general assembly. The head of this council was known as Rangbah
Shnong or Headman whose duties were to preside over the meeting of Council of elders.
Other members of the council were the Tymmen Shnong or Head of the localities of the
village who were also elected by the general assembly. Most of the tribal and local
councils are monopolized by men. Authority and jural power in public decision – making
bodies still rests with men as a gender, (even if not with men as individuals). Women as
a gender are typically excluded from such bodies. This has meant that despite men’s
restricted access to property ownership, their rights (as a gender) of control over that
property, on the one hand and their access to public bodies on the other has often enabled
them to consolidate social prestige and political power. The Khasi chiefs for instance,
command considerable local influence in ways that women heiress appear not to do. In
the formal system of legislative governance, in a house of sixty members, the number of
women representatives has never exceeded three at any given time. It is still men who
have access to and control of law making bodies and local decision-making councils.
Men’s control of this public decision-making domain has given them critical influence
over the modification of legal and social rules. This has meant that although rights in
landed property conferred important benefits on women, their virtual exclusion from
property management and from jural and overall authority has circumscribed the power
they could derive from those rights (Agarwal, 1996).

E. Jyrwa: “Traditional Village Council of the Khasi” in F.A. Khongwar, (compiler) Hynniewtrep Folk

Quoted in M. Behal and F. Warjri: op. cit. p. 12.
Khasi women must be given the right to decision-making outside their homes and hearths and the respondents agree to it. The Education Commission (1964-66) has rightly observed “In the modern world; the role of women goes beyond the home and bringing up of children. In the struggle for freedom, women fought side by side with men. This equal partnership will have to continue in the fight against hunger, poverty, ignorance and ill health”. The basic fact of the subordination of women in society acts as a structural constraint and dissuades women from participation in politics in different ways. Due to the gender-based division of labour, the all-consuming burden of keeping the hearth and home going leaves women with little time for outside preoccupations, while men are able to take part in routine political activities without feeling guilty of neglecting the family. Many decisions are taken behind the scenes and power games are controlled by monetary deals. Since women have little control over finances, they are not considered worth betting on. In such a political climate, participation in politics is not an attractive proposal for women, particularly when the cultural norms for ‘good’ women have overtones of non-material, clean, honest features. Now more and more women are participating in decision-making process but their presence at the top-level decision-making bodies is small.

Women’s positive attitude is seen in their increasing participation in leadership and decision-making at various levels as NGOs. Women have demonstrated considerable leadership in community and informal organizations, as well as in public office. However, socialization and negative stereotyping of women and men, including

321 P. D’Souza: op. cit. p. 162.
322 M. Bandyopadhyay: op. cit. pp.24-25.
stereotyping through the media, reinforces the tendency for political decision-making to remain the domain of men. Owing to their limited access to the traditional avenues to power, such as the decision-making bodies of political parties, employer organizations and trade unions, women have gained access to power through alternative structures, particularly in non-governmental organization sector. Women’s social networks have long provided assistance to individuals, with women providing child care, money, services and information to one another on an exchange basis. When they realize that they have common interests and needs, women use these already developed networks and the interactive style to meet community needs as well. Muller and Plantenga (1990:18) point out that it is not easy to draw a line between home and neighbourhood for women: “The public tap, the bathhouse, the school, the health office, the local market, the bus stop and whatever other neighbourhood facilities there might be, all serve as meeting places”. Women are increasingly moving beyond home and neighbourhood into social and political movements. The organizations they form are recognized by governments, non-governmental organizations and churches and women are seeing themselves as having important roles (Safa, 1990). The real force behind the SEWA (Self-Employed Women’s Association) movement is the self-employed women. They work endlessly, they have strong hearts an ability to be inclusive and they bring a desire for change, for respect and for economic prosperity for their families and communities. With these abilities and aspirations, women are finding ways to unite to overcome their inhibitions and oppressions. Their union testifies to women’s ability to assume leadership and use it in various ways. They have highlighted the economic issues

impacting them, asserted the values they want to advocate in the economy and shaped far-reaching economic and social changes.\(^{324}\)

Women are concerned with their responsibilities to a great extent. Little is known about the relationship between group structure, individual commitment and empowerment. The most often identified format in developing countries is frequent meetings at least weekly, with slowly evolving involvement on the part of women. Often, within two years, the group members become active, empowered women, sharing responsibilities and with a strong social support and friendship network.\(^{325}\) There is persistent belief that inclusion of women into the political process or governance would change the way in which the politics of development is carried out. Women are supposed to be more concerned about the common good: their style of development would be less corrupt and more cooperative. A macro picture based on case studies suggests that a well-established “feature of institutionalized corruption makes it also rather unrealistic to expect women to be more clean politicians than men. Corruption in Panchayat Raj Institutions is apparently a well-oiled machinery. In such circumstances, a representative would need a lot of resources, material as well as immaterial; to fight corruption and women are even more unlikely to have command over such resources” (Hust 2004:199).\(^{326}\) Women also need to learn to cope with stress, combine and organize family responsibilities with office work effectively, to relax as well as be efficient. A good manager has to win friends and influence people. It is not enough to do a good job but a woman has to outperform others, make her success known, try and act as someone with management

\(^{324}\) S.R. Bakshi: *op. cit.* pp. 20-21 and 148.

\(^{325}\) Ibid. pp. 53-54.

\(^{326}\) G. Kelkar: *op. cit.* p. 4697.
potential, convey such attributes as smartness, positive and confidential manner, achieve credibility as efficient, reliable, sensible and practical, develop resilience to criticism and be willing to take risks.  

Men are more concerned with the exercise of power. In an achieving society, men cannot afford to fail and they are always in danger of being despised if they do not move upwards, but not so with women. Usually girls are not taken seriously as careerists as it is considered to be of secondary importance. Men are always expected to hold power, be strong and rational and as a result are forced to conceal their vulnerability and dependence. They are not expected to ask for help unless concealed as a privilege offered to the other and since they are not allowed to express emotions, they could become emotionally stunted and immature or develop unhealthy ways of letting out pent up emotions such as smoking, addictions, alcohol, violence, aggression or sexual abuse. Men who refuse to compete, experience ridicule and scorn from those around them who see their failure to get to the top as a failure to be a ‘man’. Men, as contemporary record keepers and historical interpreters of those records, have focused on those aspects of society that have seemed important to them. Until recently, the questions historians have asked have been directed only at areas led by and of special interest to men. These include politics, war, economic organization and public institutions. Many of the oppressions result out of male exercise of power, overtly or covertly. Along with the control of means of production, unequal power relations are responsible for

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328 Ibid. p. 69.
subordination of women.\textsuperscript{330} Clearly, there are certain advantages to be had in stressing conventional role stereotypes; they not only facilitate male dominance in the field of public power, authority and decision-making but also ensure that women are safely at home, taking care of the future generations of mothers and leaders.\textsuperscript{331}

The problems of women are best understood by women themselves and respondents agree to the point. Governments may offer welfare schemes for women; they may float anti-poverty programmes, they may launch projects for their uplift and they may enact legislation to safeguard women’s rights but the Government policies can only facilitate the process, reduce the hurdles and create an atmosphere conducive to transformation. It is the women who have to empower themselves; unless they themselves become conscious of their oppression, show initiative and seize the opportunities, it would not be possible to change their status. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru once said – “To awaken the people, it is women who must be awakened; once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves”.\textsuperscript{332} While the government and the social sector may be able to ensure that a significant percentage of women enjoy access to important basic resources, gaining control over resources and their benefits is an uphill task. It is women themselves, who will need to get themselves organized, assert their rights and gain control over their lives.\textsuperscript{333} Today one sees a desire among many women for self-determination and control stemming from an enhanced understanding of their oppression as women, an increased burden on them for the survival of their families, and a historical opening, a period of attention to women’s issues and of possible change and

\textsuperscript{330} P. Arora: \textit{op. cit.} pp. 16 and 36.
\textsuperscript{331} S.R. Bakshi: \textit{op. cit.} p. 218.
\textsuperscript{332} J.K. Pillai: \textit{op. cit.} p. 62.
\textsuperscript{333} P.D’Souza: \textit{op. cit.} p. 45.
democratization. The roots of empowerment lie in the multifaceted efforts of many of those who experienced domination to achieve self-determination and to free themselves from external control through revolution, other less violent forms of resistance and nationalism. After attempts to break into leadership positions and to sensitise male leaders to sexism failed, they began to organize themselves as women. Their primary technique was the informal group process of consciousness-raising. Small groups found spaces in their own homes where they “could examine the nature of their own oppression and share the growing knowledge that they were not alone” (Evans, 1979:215). Such groups were easy to form and supportive, reducing women’s isolation and re-socialising them – “transforming their individual subjective reality”. They developed processes that involved “talking together, discovering common problems and thereby understanding the need for collective action” (Evans, 1979:134). Again, women in the community provided role models for the young women organizers.334

6.4 THE EXTENT OF PARTICIPATION OF EDUCATED WOMEN IN DIFFERENT PROFESSIONS

The findings related to the extent of participation of educated women in different walks of life are given below:

There seems to be a big number of working women in the selected professions viz. Banking, Medical, Engineering, Executive, Education, Agriculture and Secretarial except in those which demand late work and involve risks, as in Journalism (one of the selected print media) and the Police Department. This shows that women are still the home-keepers and still give priority to home and family. It is difficult to fathom that even in this matrilineal society, our women still do not have an equal footing with our men folk when it comes to jobs even if they are educated.

Educated women have been participating in all walks of life but they may be just a small minority from the urban or semi-urban settings. By and large, all officers opine that women have done well in the different selected professions except the officer in Engineering who stated that women as also in the case of men do not perform their work as per expected.

Men need to be more understanding, more adjustable, more generous and more supportive of women more so when they are working under them and in need of them. There seems to be a positive consensus of responses regarding gender-friendly policies in the different professions. Being in a matrilineal society, men and women can interact
freely. What can be perceived are those professions with women as Directors or as Human Resource Development officers, they are more understanding towards the needs of their own kind.

Because of problems at the workplace, women hesitate to join certain professions. Officers in the designated professions are of the view that women are facing with certain kinds of problems in the workplace. Male colleagues can be rather harsh with women at times when they cannot perform to the optimum and there are others who make sexual advances. It helps to have a woman at the helm of affairs so that women can go to her in case of any problem.

In the Police Department and in the Executive/Management, they have a woman’s Police Station or a Lady Manager for Human Resource Development for all women related issues. If any woman faces with any difficult problem at her workplace; even a hint of discrimination, she can contact or approach the General Manager or report the same to the Controlling Authority or the Head of the Department either directly or through her immediate Supervisor. Others do not have a specific cell cited by the male bosses that there is no grievance at all which sounds like a fool’s paradise, an abnormal situation. When there are still very few staff members, things are within a manageable limit that can be resolved amicably. The advantages of having Women’s cell is that any complaint of discrimination against women’s staff or sexual misconduct from male colleagues are readily addressed and the existence of such a cell is a deterrent to make male vibes.
Some are very positive with women that they can plan and manage their time properly, that they can reach on time and leave on time. The Police department is an exceptional force and there is no alternative for women who want to join it but be able to make it. With proper division of labour at home, women are as capable as men to fulfill all obligations in their workplace, including working late, travelling, taking pressure and also fulfilling their roles as mothers and care givers. Of course they have to manage their time well and have understanding, gender-sensitive partners. Men are able to go out and work because their domestic responsibilities are taken on by their wives. If both partners work then it follows that both have to also share the domestic chores, care giving and parenting. Gender division of labour will not work anymore once couples are educated and are both working. Both need to be available and ever-ready to stretch out for the smooth functioning of the family.

Women are as late or as punctual as men are, there are times when they are punctual and at other times they are not. Being women does not necessarily make them more or less punctual; it all depends on the mental makeup of the woman. A diligent woman will reach her place of work on time; others will come up with many excuses. One interviewee was quite emphatic that women are not always on time for work which may be due to their dual responsibilities and problems they face at home. In terms of responsibility, a lot depends on the Organizational Head. Majority of the Government employees across the board, both men and women lack responsibility and commitment and actually get paid for doing minimum work. In a small organization; every one works and has to complete one’s share of load, so there is no scope for under-working.
Women participate in all types of jobs but those which involve physical activity; they cannot be compared with men. Women who excel will obviously be those who work hard and are dedicated to the task at hand. There are others who excel in their jobs because they feel the need to prove themselves in their field of work be in any type of society; in order to be appreciated, they need to work harder and try to excel in whatever they do which is more applicable to the younger lot. If there are women who excel, there are also those who slip-shod in their work and leave much to be desired.

This is the world that requires skilled personnel at every level; so whether men or women, it is immaterial. With skills they can perform their tasks including planning, organizing and managing human resources effectively. As regards the kinds of training that are being offered for them vary from profession to profession. This will help them to have more confidence in themselves and at the workplace. Those professions which give no training to their employees asserted that it is the skills and the experiences they get as they work. Time will teach them how to tackle the problems because of their experiences.

The overall functioning roles of women and men are not different at the professional front especially if it pertains to the same job profile except in their style of working and in implementing schemes. However what is different between men and women is that women perform their work in the office efficiently besides their roles as mothers and caretakers at home. Women are expected to cater to the domestic needs more than men even if they are working ladies; this is where the difference lies. If gender-equity is for the woman to take on the work of a man in the workplace, then it needs to be vice-versa
at home where the man is to take on the work of the woman ‘exchanging roles’ so as to level out differences.

People occupy positions because they are capable and have been selected to do so by an interview board. Eligibility criteria for such posts are the same for both men and women. Hence such women have fulfilled all the norms laid down before promotion. These women officers are doing well and at times very well although there are those who hesitate in decision-making. But on the whole; it has been observed that they do perform and excel in their duties, some even go beyond expectations. Education has done its part in empowering women to be in decision-making posts but more women need to be empowered, it has to reach out to the masses.

Certain professions do not give special benefits to women since during appointment nothing of that was mentioned. Besides, the idea of gender-equality reinforces this. However women during delivery get maternity leave but in central offices, this is restricted to two children. Otherwise the same benefits that men get, they also get. Gender-equality is quite strong at the workplace when it comes to benefits for women with no special consideration for them even when they are at the procreation stage. But gender-equality hardly can be expected or least demanded at the home-front with the household chores, rearing of children, attending to the old and the infirm.

Women at work do have the freedom to manage their own affairs even if it is to a certain level because once allocated, they get the opportunity. Women and men have got equal freedom as they are enjoying equal duration of time to manage their own affairs in the
office. So long as women do their duties or are creative enough to do more than what is asked of them they are at liberty to innovate. It all depends on the organization and how the aspirations of the innovative staff can be accommodated. Unfortunately there are very few of them like that. Women seem to be contented with the good atmosphere in their workplace and not competitive enough. Maybe education needs to do more in this.

Education is indeed the building block for women’s empowerment and their upward mobility. It gives them self-esteem and confidence and also allows them several options in life. They can do the work they like best if they are educated and skilled. Educated women look after their children better in terms of health and can offer better educational guidance to their kids. They are also the pillars of society as they can contribute as social workers. One of the factors which has created employment for women is their ability to have quality education. This is where the importance of education is felt and hence is the most significant factor. When there are more educated men and women then there is progress.

It was a general feeling that women’s level of motivation in their work is enhanced by their educational level. Of course to qualify for certain kinds of jobs one has to have a qualification. It is also true that an uneducated, unskilled woman might feel a sense of inadequacy and loss of self-esteem. However respondents are also of the opinion that motivation does not come from being educated alone. Education as seen by many simply as getting a degree is no education. Sometimes the most educated are also the most ruthless and corrupt. Illiterate people can also be enlightened and concerned about
environment and about their neighborhood and have better civic sense than nay educated women.

Professional women do fulfill the conditions of possessing professional level of education and are equally capable in meeting all professional capacities in their respective department. It is always expected that professional people be it men or women should possess certain qualities which make them a class apart from others. These qualities are acquired with time through proper level of education along with experience.

An educated woman will have the confidence and the ability to venture out and stand on her own feet. Income generating capacity of the woman affects the male spouse to take advantage of her dependence, therefore chances of her becoming financially independent are high. Her opinions do matter in the family and her counterpart will have more respect for her thus resulting in an egalitarian family pattern. An educated woman would want her children to take equal responsibilities at home. Boys can be asked to clean and cook as much as girls do. The husband too would be expected to do more than just going to the office to work or going to the fields and coming home at the end of the day without contributing to house work. Egalitarianism which might also mean equal opportunities for both boys and girls has never been a problem in our society. If girls have dropped out of school so have boys and that is due to poverty. But parents as far as knowledge goes, have never discriminated between boys and girls when it comes to education.

Education does make an impact in forming a set of differential attitudes among women. Education can change attitudes; it can transform negative attitudes into positive ones and
therefore help in the mental and physiological well being of the woman and those around her. An educated woman will have a different attitude towards life. She knows she can be independent and needs to be respected for her individuality and not just because she is a woman. There is a shift in attitude with change in income status. Healthy interaction in the workplace helps women to perform better and bring out their creativity and talents. The need to help women give their best by having more personal interactions, relating with them as colleagues, trusting them, encouraging them and sharing of extra knowledge with them. Grade them, based on their performance and not on their gender, understand that they have other responsibilities apart from work and respect that. Make them feel that they can always come forward with any issue and assuring that the matter would be addressed without bias. Propose better salary package and incentives for those who show the inclination to improve and innovate.

Every individual should be able to stand on one’s own feet and earn self-respect. Married women should cease to be dependent on their husbands because work gives a sense of fulfillment and self-esteem though eight hours of work, day in and day out is not a joke. It brings extra money to the family which in today’s inflationary world is a necessity. Responsibility for family is shared with husband but extra income means better education, better nutrition and therefore better health and better opportunities for self, the children and the entire family.

Women are committed to their jobs which can be seen from the way they function, they see through until they finish their task. But there are those who are of the view that commitment depends on an individual whether man or woman since no one is born with
it but develops it for love of the job, out of a sense of duty and responsibility, out of a sense of ethics and so on.

Women do not usually take any risk except in rare cases when there is no more choice e.g. field work, night duties, supervision of work, emergency cases and so on. However, the responses depend very much on the type of work expected from them. It involves taking away time of the family that was not readily accepted by them but fighting for injustice, women can go to any extent. They are more upfront about taking up issues with those in power even if that is at the cost of their jobs. When it comes to Journalism or Teaching, women take more risks by walking the extra mile. The Police department too has many proofs that in the events when situations call for, women do take risks.

Apparently, women are doing very well in their careers and also encouraging others, yet they can still do better with more determination and dedication, by building capacity, by capacitating themselves and by not being satisfied with the status quo, because life is demanding and skill upgradation is needed all the time. But all respondents agree that women can perform still better if capacity building is emphasized, for knowledge and skill become obsolete with the explosion of information in the present day world.

Majority of women hold professional qualification to their credit. To be more effective in their work, they need more training and more capacity building, all organizational, motivational and moral support and also to take up Distance Learning Professional Courses if required. In the field of Journalism, some have a degree in Journalism, others
learn on the job. A degree in journalism is not mandatory but it is good to have if women wish to be professional journalists.

It goes without saying that professions are instrumental in enhancing the economic status of women. Work is linked to economic advancement and women can be encouraged by giving them more chances for further studies in technical education. All educated women need to learn skills and get into the jobs.

Women’s role at home and with the family go unnoticed, of course in professional life women seem to enjoy equal pay for equal work. Government servants are bound by government rules so all employees under the same scale and seniority are given equal pay irrespective of their gender. Hence at the professional level women do enjoy all the benefits as their male counterparts. In the formal sector no one can get away without paying equal wages to women and men. It is in the informal sector that the problem lies. Women labourers still get lesser paid than their male colleagues because the measurement is on the physical strength.

Entry of women into status professions is a radical step towards change. At one point of time, Indian women do not venture into professions but are expected to stay at home and serve the family. With the change in attitude towards this and the need of the hour, more women are seen in professions. It is a positive sign because it brings about enhanced self-esteem and independence; they can defend themselves in the eye of the law. Professional women can make a difference, they can change the society by beginning from their home, they can enlighten their children of the need to face challenges and to
compete for status in today’s life. There is a saying that if you educate a woman then the whole family is educated. There are others who believe in the dignity of labour and that social change has been brought about by radicals at different levels and certainly not by women who are in comfortable jobs and positions, who do not want to take a stand on any issue even if they are anti-women and especially against corruption.

Women working at high levels of jobs are the best people to defy the traditional role stereotypes which make women subservient to men that they enact in the family situation. They are role models in the society proving that women too can climb the ladder of success in any kind of profession. They are more empowered therefore more courageous, it is through enlightenment, through being educated that it can happen. But this does not happen to everybody, it depends on the situation and environment. Some women hold very responsible positions in their jobs but perpetuate patriarchy and gender role stereotypes. Defying the norm requires a movement but also individual efforts at the level of the family and it can begin from women who do not necessarily have education.

There is no discrimination on women in the work place when it comes to promotion. By and large, at least in government and public sectors, women are promoted when they are due. The criteria are based on different designations and the same are applicable for both men and women. It is mostly seniority linked, service rules, merit, qualifications, experiences in handling their work and depending on their Annual Confidential Report (proficiency, punctuality, personal relationship and health).
Participation of educated women in different walks of life is a sign of hope for the future. They can mobilize others so that they too may be empowered in their family, socio-economic and political life. Commitment to uplift society is the answer, this can be done by them to motivate others through different awareness programmes, counselling, discussions and debates including group discussions. If they care enough, there is a ray of hope in the family, workplace and society. Women respondents still feel that there is very little participation of women in areas that require social change. Women are not even challenging the Durbar Shnong from which they are excluded. If Durbars are not challenged they will persist with the status quo and women will always be out of civic grass root governance. So there is not much credit to women in positions of authority because authority comes when you use it for the greater good of society.