Constitutional Provisions on Women Empowerment
5.1 EVOLUTION OF PANCHAYATS IN ASSAM

The study of local government would not be complete without knowing the early beginning of the panchayat system, its provisions, operation and maintenance of essential public services at local level. The constitution of India came into operation on January 26, 1950. It is now a Sovereign Democratic Republic in India. Mahatma Gandhi’s model of Panchayati Raj found mention in the Directive Principles of State Policy of our constitution (Article 40) which remained a key principle of socio-economic development in our democracy.

Local self governing institution is the best training ground for attaining good citizenship and nurseries for the future parliamentarians and national leaders.

There is a good deal of dependence on the success of the local self government. All democracies in the world consciously try to develop local government institutions, India is no exception. Long before the independence of the country, the leaders realized the importance of such institutions. Gandhiji wanted the Swaraj, based on the resurgence of villages. The fathers of our constitution gave it an honoured place in the constitution. S.N. Mishra, Shweta Mishra and Chaitali Paul discussed the reason for describing Panchyatai Raj Institutions as the instrument of decentralization in their book
Decentralised Planning and Panchayati Raj. The authors state:

‘Panchayati Raj Institutions in India are the prime instruments of decentralization at the grassroot level. They assume importance due to the need to contain the relentless demographic pressures and optimum use of scarce resources for development. They act as vehicle in carrying back to the people that really belongs to them.’

The Part IX of the constitution mentioned three tier system of Panchayat, namely (a) the village level (b) the district panchayats at the district level and (c) the intermediate panchayat. The burden of welfare democracy rests primarily on the success of the panchayats.

The Panchayati Raj institutions existed in our country and the village was considered as a socio-economic unit, self sufficient in itself meeting all needs from its own resources. The much graver political turmoils affecting kingdoms hardly touched the rural people. The word panchayat came from the root word ‘panch’ meaning five. Five elders meeting in a village solved all issues amicably. The freedom fighters were influenced by the concept and wanted to use it in a new shape and in a new context after the independence. It is true that, during the rule of Lord Ripon (1880-84), the local self government institutions were introduced in the British Ruled India but the real taste of development was not felt by the people.

Lord Ripon’s apparent good work was nullified by the extra
doses of centralization under Lord Curzon and there was widespread discontent in India. The future administrations wanted to reverse the trend by introducing some measures to strengthen local government in the Country. The Assam Local Self Government Act was enacted in the year 1915 for the general welfare of rural masses. But the Act during implementation had to face a number of difficulties. A village was considered too small and compact. One village may not be interested in the development of the neighbouring village. The aim of local self government is to bring the whole rural areas under development schemes. During the colonial rule, the concept of rural development was too limited. Secondly, the Non-cooperation Movement created literally an upsurge in the minds of the people. The millions joined the movement which affected the activities in the local government. The rural people were also greatly affected by the emotional appeal of the movement and joined it in large number and it took the shape of a mass movement and as a result, the eager participation of the people in the collective works in the village was absent and the rural bodies established under the Act suffered greatly. Thirdly, a village authority was considered suitable only for minor works. Fourthly, the village authority did not take any step to educate the villagers in the principle of self-help. And finally, the district authority, who was his...
generally a British civilian officer, did not have any sympathetic attitude towards village panchayats. So this Act was replaced by the Rural Self-Government Act, 1925 which contained a number of provisions such as the units for local self-government would include more than one cadastral village. Also the village authority might be entrusted with certain functions such as water supply, sanitation, medical relief etc.

The village authority was consisted of more than one person. In places where no recognized forms of village organization were found, the rule was that only one person would run the affairs of the village panchayat. However, objections were raised against the single member panchayat authority. The select committee held the view that sometimes it is desirable to have such single member village panchayats. The Act had a long objective to create a spirit of self reliance and confidence among the rural people to administer their own affairs. But most of the village people lacked proper education and experience to discharge such functions resulting in a failure of the official efforts. Immediately after independence, the Panchayat Act of 1948 was enacted dividing rural Assam into rural Panchayat areas as only 422 rural panchayats could be established out of 742 planned but the real beginning of the panchayat administration started under the Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1959
In 1952, Community Development Programmes were introduced and these CDP blocks became the central point of all future developments. When the Panchayati Raj Act was passed in 1959, the decentralization at grass-root level was accepted as the general principle of development. This programme introduced a new unit in local administration, the block, comprised of one hundred villages administered by the officers of the state government. The panchayats previously acted only in an advisory capacity for the community development programmes, now assumed full executive responsibility. The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee (1957) was set up by the National Development Council which suggested the full utilization of the CDP blocks under a three tier system of Panchayati Raj as part of 'democratic decentralization'.

The Act made the subdivision (Mohkuma in local language) as the highest unit of the rural local government in Assam. The Mahkuma Parishad, Anchalik Panchayat and Gaon Panchayats were taken as units.

The state reverted to the two-tier system under the Assam Panchayati Raj Act 1972 which abolished Anchalik Panchayat and established Gaon Panchayat and Mahkuma Parishad. But the State
Government replaced the 1972 Act by the Assam Panchayati Raj Act 1986 and re-established three-tier system in rural Assam. Though the new Act became operative from September 1990, the elections to the Panchayati Raj bodies were held only in February 1992.

The important changes in the 1986 Act were as follows:

i) The 1986 Act introduced three-tier system – Gaon Panchayat at village level, Anchalik Panchayat at the block level and Mahkuma Parishad at sub-divisional level.

ii) For the first time tea gardens were included in the Panchayati Raj system.

iii) The Gaon Panchayats were to consist of 10 elected members and Presidents of Gaon Panchayats were to be elected directly. One member from Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe should have representation in the Gaon Panchayat if their population is up to 33.33 per cent.

iv) If the population of Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe was more that 33.33 per cent, then the Gaon Panchayat President and Anchalik Panchayat member was to be elected from amongst Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe.
v) Thirty per cent of the seats for Gaon Panchayat and Anchalik Panchayat were to be reserved for women and the allotment was through lottery system.

vi) The Anchalik Panchayats were to be formed by the Presidents of its Gaon Panchayats and one member elected per Gaon Panchayat. One co-opted member was from the co-operative societies located within the jurisdiction of Anchalik Panchayat. All MPs and MLAs from the area were ex-officio members of Anchalik Panchayats. The State Government had the right to nominate such number of members as deemed necessary but without voting right.

vii) The different categories of members of Mahkuma Parishad are as follows:

Presidents of Anchalik Panchayats, the Deputy Commissioner, Sub-Divisional Officer, District Heads of various departments as nominated by the State Government and the MLAs and MPs representing the area.

viii) The term of the Panchayati Raj Institutions were five years.\textsuperscript{15}
The basic idea of Panchayati Raj is to involve the people in the management of the affairs of their own area because it is the people who know what their problems are and what could be the best solutions to suit their requirements. The 73rd Constitution Amendment Act 1992 made the working of the panchayat system more meaningful. The Act came into force on April 24, 1993 in which efforts are made to make the whole institution more participative and people oriented. There was an attempt to plug the loopholes in the system with an important provision for the reservation of seats for women. The democracy is, in a way, a process of decentralization where more people can participate. The 73rd Amendment of the Constitution is a landmark in the history of the evolution of the Indian Constitution. It heralded a historic transition to decentralize political power to the grassroot level.

The features of the constitution seventy third Amendment Act are as follows:

i) A Gram Sabha is to be formed at a village consisting of persons registered in the electoral roll of the village.

ii) All the seats of Gaon Panchayats and Anchalik Panchayats are to be filled by persons directly elected from the territorial constituencies in the Panchayat.

iii) The chairpersons of Gaon Panchayats and Anchalik
Panchayats are to be directly elected.

iv) Reservation of Schedule Caste and Scheduled Tribe seats in proportion to the respective population.

v) Reservation of not less than one third of total number of seats for women.

vi) The reservation of seats for the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women chairpersons in the Panchayats.

vii) The village panchayats are to be empowered to prepare plan for economic development.

viii) Five Year term of panchayats are to be fixed up.

ix) A Finance Commission is to be set up by the respective Governor of the state within one year from commencement of the 73rd Amendment Act 1992 and at the expiration of every five year to review the financial position of the panchayats and to make recommendations to the Governor.

x) The Governor of state is to set up an Election Commission to look after the preparation of electoral rolls and to conduct elections to Panchayats.17

The bane of a system is the process of centralization which
creeps into the working of the government where all decisions come from the top ignoring the people at the grass roots. The democracy does not end with the Lok Sabha and the Assembly, it goes further down. There was a possibility of democracy breaking down under the impact of the centralization. In the real time, the negative effect of the process of the centralization was realized and the 73rd Amendment Act to the Indian Constitution was made operational. The panchayat system is the foundation of the democracy and the success of the former can be measured by the success in the panchayats. With this amendment, the structure of government has changed permanently from a two tier system to three-tier system—union, State and Panchayats. It is easy to pass a law, but it is tough to implement it.18

There is a unique provision in the Constitution to enumerate powers between the Centre and the states. On the close studies made, the powers heavily tilted towards the Centre. The local government is a state subject and no state government would like to surrender this vital powers. The success of 73rd Amendment rests on the implementation by the state government in right spirit and through the state laws to be passed by their legislatures. All states are not equally effective in decentralization of powers. Some states ominously lagged behind in the administration of the Panchayati
Raj. They took the whole as a mere political exercise and the actual implementation of programmes as merely a routine matter not ever interested in its long term effects. As the Central Government puts pressure on the state governments, the state governments were literally forced to make laws hurried. Even the MPs and MLAs consider the 'local domain' their own exclusive domains and try to dominate over the activities of the panchayats.\(^\text{19}\)

As a result of the passing of the 73\(^{rd}\) Amendment Act, the Assam Government enacted Assam Panchayat Act 1994 which contains almost all the features of 73\(^{rd}\) Amendment Act. The Panchayati Raj Institutions continue to be the Three Tier bodies with only modification that Zilla Parishad was established in place of Mahkuma Parishad. The reservation for women was increased from 30 per cent (as per 1986 Act) to 33.3 per cent in the 1994 Act.\(^\text{20}\)

In spite of poor resources, panchayats came to occupy an important place in rural Assam. Though the functions of Panchayats are generally limited to sanitation and primary health care, supply of drinking water, construction and repair of roads and bridges etc. the general awakening of the people which the Panchayati Raj has brought about through the 73\(^{rd}\) Amendment of the Indian Constitution should be considered to be an important achievement. Not only this, women of rural areas take interests in the solutions of
their own problems. Many women know the true nature of rights given to them and some are eager to learn breaking the social barriers. They are coming out and taking active part in administration. It is hoped that the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act will usher in a socio-political change in the life of rural women.

Bureaucracy is an essential part of the administration and the latter cannot go without it but the unrestrained bureaucracy is a real danger, it may corrupt the administration. It is the incorruptible people's representatives who guide the system affectively. The incorruptibility of our representatives is not ensured always. An honest representative guides the officers in the proper manner and brings out the best from them. Ultimately, it is the people who judge how the system works. The system works for their benefits.21

5.2 THE DESCRIPTION OF DIFFERENT GAON PANCHAYATS UNDER KATIGORAH CONSTITUENCY

The Katigorah Constituency under Assam Legislative Assembly covers a vast area extended to the Bangladesh and the Meghalaya border. The constituency is divided into two blocks – Katigorah and Kalain. Before 1993, there was only one block, the Katigorah Development Block. The Kalain Development Block was established in 1993. Initially, six gaon panchayats were there in the constituency, namely, Bikrampur, Kalain, Gumra, Rajatilla,
Katigorah and Fulbari. From 1993, these six panchayats were divided and the number of panchayats was increased to 25.

While most part of the Katigorah Block is situated on the bank of river Barak, the Kalain Block is located at the foot of Barail Hills. Almost all the tea gardens of the Katigorah constituency come under the Kalain Development Block.

The Katigorah Development Block consists of 10 Gaon Panchayats and the Kalain Development Block consists of 15 Gaon Panchayats. Each Panchayat caters to the needs of around 10,000 people.

The population patterns, geographical location, social and economic conditions of the different panchayats are discussed below:

PANCHAYATS UNDER KATIGORAH DEVELOPMENT BLOCK:

LEVERPUTA GAON PANCHAYAT

This Gaon Panchayat consists of the following villages:

(a) Voterchak (b) Leverputa I (c) Leverputa II (d) Saidpur I, (e) Saidpur II (f) Saidpur III (g) Chandinagar I (h) Chandinagar IV (i) Salimabad.

The major part of this Gaon Panchayat lies on the bank of river Surma. It is situated at the Bangladesh border. Leverputa is the most
backward Gaon Panchayat of the Katigorah constituency and not only this, the village Salimabad is the most isolated village of the constituency. It is located in midst of a water body locally called haor and the village is not easily approachable. The residents live in a wretched condition throughout the year, in the rainy season, it is waterlogged and in the dry season, the path to the village is slushy and weeds cover it. This is an example of an interior village in the constituency.

The Panchayat consists of about 60 per cent Bengali Hindus, 40 per cent Muslims. Bengali Hindus mainly consist of scheduled castes who are Kaibarta fisherman community. Muslims are from General and OBC community.22

There is no communicable road in this Gaon Panchayat. The only way to move is on foot and boat. The source of income of the inhabitants is agriculture and fishing. Health facility is nothing but a dream for them. There is no health center in the surrounding 10 kms.22

HARINAGAR GAON PANCHAYAT

This Gaon Panchayat consists of the following villages:

(a) Harinagar I (b) Harinagar II (c) Harinagar III (d) Harinagar IV (e) Haritikar I (f) Chandinagar II (g) Chandinagar III
The population pattern of this Gaon Panchayat consists of Hindus (60 per cent) and the Muslims (40 per cent). The Hindus are mostly from general and scheduled caste communities. The Muslims are registered as general and OBC community.

This Gaon Panchayat is backward and backward in all respects. There is no good road in this Gaon Panchayat area. However a Kaccha road from Rajatilla goes through this Gaon Panchayat to Kinnarkhal. And the movement of vehicle is restricted during dry season only. In this Gaon Panchayat, there is a place of historical importance called Haritikar (the last capital of the Kachari Kingdom) where the river Barak bifurcates into two branches, Surma and Kushiara.

The sources of income of the people of the area are cultivation and fishing. Due to poverty among the general population and its location far away from the nearest road points, the Gaon Panchayat is backward in respect of education also. There is no primary health center in the surrounding 10 sq kms. area.23

RAJATILLA GAON PANCHAYAT

The villages under this Gaon Panchayat are (a) Nazatpur (b) Karaikandi I (c) Karaikandi II (d) Madarpur (e) Teletikar I
This is another historically important Gaon Panchayat of the Katigorah constituency. It is said that the last Kachari king took shelter here and raised a land area (tilla) to protect the enemies and that is why it is called Rajatilla.

The Rajatilla Gaon Panchayat consists of approximately 40 per cent Bengali Hindu population. The rest are the Muslims. The bulk of the Hindus belong to the scheduled castes and only a few families are included in the general category. The source of income of the people is agriculture and cultivation. The only communicable road is Katigorah Chaurangee-Rajatilla road. Not only educationally backward but there is no health facility also. People are to go to Katigorah mini Primary Health Centre for treatment which is about 6 kms away from Rajatilla.

KATIGORAH GAON PANCHAYAT

The villages under this Gaon Panchayat are (a) Niz Katigorah III (b) Jagadishpur I (c) Jagadishpur II (d) Jagadishpur III (e) Lahamali (f) Lathimara (g) Jagadishpur IV.

The population pattern of this Gaon Panchayat shows that the Bengali Hindus and the Muslims are evenly distributed in the village. The source of income of the people of the area is mostly
farming and fishing. As the area is centrally located, comparatively better educational facilities are available. This is reflected in the better literacy rate in this place. Health facility is available at Katigorah Mini Primary Health Centre.

Siddheswar Pragati Sangha - the famous NGO of the Katigorah constituency has done consolidated activities to improve the health status of mother and child and the overall socio-economic conditions of the people of the area. They are also trying to improve the economic conditions of women by organizing Self-Help Groups.25

SIDDHESWAR GAON PANCHAYAT

The villages which fall under this Gaon Panchayat are:

(a) Siddheswar I (b) Siddheswar II (c) Katigorah I (d) Katigorah Cha Bagicha (e) Katigorah II (f) Jagadishpur IV.

The predominant populations in the Panchayat are about 70 per cent Bengali Hindus and 30 per cent Bengali Muslims. The Hindus are divided into general, scheduled caste and Adivasi (Tea garden labourer) categories.

Being adjacent to 44 National Highway, this Gaon Panchayat is much more educationally advanced than other Gaon Panchayats under the Katigorah Development Block. The sources of income of
the people are fishing, agriculture, business and service.

The better road connectivity helps slightly better health facilities. There are self help groups for women organized by DRDA (District Rural Development Authority) and one local NGO, the Siddheswar Pragati Sangha.26

KATIRAIL GAON PANCHAYAT

The villages under this Gaon Panchayat are:

(a) Mohanpur I (b) Mohanpur II (c) Siddhipur (d) Katirail (e) Nun Nagar.

The population segments of this Gaon Panchayat are, 80 per cent Bengali Hindus, 15 per cent Bengali Muslims and 5 per cent Adivasis.

This Gaon Panchayat is located just at the side of 44 National Highway. This is an educationally advanced Gaon Panchayat. The people of the area live on agriculture, fishing, business and service. The Katigorah Mini Primary Health Centre is not far away from the Panchayat area, the private doctors are also available and as such the people enjoy a little improved health facilities.27

GOBINDAPUR GAON PANCHAYAT

The villages which fall under this Gaon Panchayat are:
(a) Sibnarainpur (b) Gobindapur I (c) Gobindapur II (d) Gobindapur III.

About 60 per cent Bengali Hindus and 40 per cent Bengali Muslims are there in this Gaon Panchayat. A few dalit families also live in this panchayat area. The caste Hindus and the scheduled castes make the Bengali Hindu population.

The people of the area live mainly on agriculture and fishing. Some people work as daily wage earners in Hindustan Paper Corporation (HPC) at Panchgram which is just adjacent to Katigorah constituency. As the river Barak touches the eastern boundary of this Gaon Panchayat, some natural water bodies are there, a large number of inhabitants live on fishing.

The educational facilities for the people are limited to L.P. and M.E. Schools. Students aspiring for further studies, go to Katigorah or Fulbari where the high schools are available. However, girls are attending school in appreciable number. There is no government health centre in this panchayat area and as such people are to go to Katigorah Mini Primary Health Centre for treatment.

TARINIPUR GAON PANCHAYAT

The villages which fall under this Gaon Panchayat are:

(a) Tarinipur I (b) Tarinipur II (c) Tarinipur III (d) Niz Fulbari (e) Kalinagar.
The population is almost nearly the Bengalis and the Hindus among them constitute nearly the 40 per cent of the population and the rest are the Mohammedans. Among the Hindus, the majority belongs to the caste Hindu and scheduled caste communities. Sialtek Bazar in this Gaon Panchayat is the oldest market in the valley. It was an important place under the Kachari rule. Tarinipur Gaon Panchayat is flood prone as the river Barak flows by its borders. The source of income of the people is mainly agriculture and fishing. It is an educationally backward Gaon Panchayat. There are only a few L.P and M.E. schools cater to the needs of the children aspiring for education. No High or Higher Secondary Schools are located there. The area is devoid of any health facility. People are to go to Katigorah for treatment. Though Rajnagar-Katigorah metalled road goes through this Gaon Panchayat, the communication inside the Gaon Panchayat is very poor. People mostly move on foot and during rainy season by boat.29

FULBARI GAON PANCHAYAT

This Gaon Panchayat is composed of the following villages:

(a) Nij Fulbari II (b) Nij Fulbari III (c) Sripur I (d) Sripur II (e) Gonirgram I (f) Gonirgram II.

Here most of the people are Muslims and Hindus. About
70 per cent Muslims and 30 per cent Hindus are there in this Gaon Panchayat. Hindus are mainly from the scheduled caste communities. A few families of Nath community (OBC) are there.

It would not be out of place to mention here that Fulbari is the home town of Late Nihar Ranjan Laskar, MP. The source of income of the people is agriculture and fishing. The river Barak flows on one side of the Panchayat area making the villages under this Panchayat flood prone. Though the Rajnagar-Katigorah metalled road crosses the Gaon Panchayat area, the villagers most often walk the distance in absence of vehicles. The people depend on their bare legs and in some circumstances, on boat. The nearby Government Health Centre is Gonirgram Health Centre which falls under Borkhola Constituency.

DUDHPUR-GONIRGRAM GAON PANCHAYAT

The villages under this Gaon Panchayat are -

(a) Dudhpur I (b) Dudhpur II (c) Dudhpur III (d) Gonirgram III (e) Gonirgram IV (f) Mahadevpur.

This is one of the developed Gaon Panchayats under the Katigorah constituency. Seventy per cent of the populations are the Bengalis, the Hindus (30 per cent) and the Muslims (60 per cent). The Bishnupriya Manipuris form the rest. The Bengali Hindus are
mainly from scheduled caste community. The source of income of
the people is agriculture, fishing and handloom production. All
families of Bishnupriya community are involved in their traditional
handloom production.31

There is a branch of the Canara Bank, located at Gobindapur
which caters to the needs of the villages and the loan assistance is
available to the farmers and small entrepreneurs. The Canara Bank,
Gobindapur and Katigorah Gramonnayan Parishad, a well-known
local NGO, jointly formed a few female self-help groups.32

Dudhpur-Gonirgram Gaon Panchayat is connected to Silchar –
the headquarters of Cachar district by road through Rajnagar ferry
and Altaf Setu via Ranighat and to Katigorah by Rajnagar-Katigorah
metalled road. The area has got a number of good educational
institutions including a Higher Secondary School. Due to the
presence of Government Health Centre (which falls under Borkhola
constituency), the people of the Gaon Panchayat enjoy good health
facility also.

PANCHAYATS UNDER KALAIN DEVELOPMENT BLOCK:

GARERVITAR GAON PANCHAYAT

This Gaon Panchayat consists of the following villages:

(a) Garervitar I (b) Bauri Para I (c) Bauri Para II (d) Nunchari Bara
It is situated at the foot of Barail Hill and in the North it is connected to the adjacent district, North Cachar Hills. The population pattern of Garervitar Gaon Panchayat is composed of about 95 per cent Bengali Hindu, 4 per cent tribal and 1 per cent Muslim. Bengali Hindus are mainly of the people of general category. The other communities live in this area are Dimasa, Adivasi, Khasi, Assamese, Nepali and Patro (a community hailed from Tripura and settled here).

The source of income of the people is mainly agro based and a large number of people carry out their livelihood collecting different forest products and selling these in the nearby market.

The well-known Harang River – the so called ‘sorrow of Katigorah’ crosses this Gaon Panchayat in a meandering course in the north south direction. The historical importance of Garervitar Gaon Panchayat is related to its name ‘Gar’ which means wall and ‘vitar’ means inside, i.e., this Gaon Panchayat is situated inside a wall. Though it is named as such, the wall is now found in a dilapidated condition. In earlier times, the fort served the purpose of an active administration. It was made of soil and it formed the eastern boundary of the Gaon panchayat. The legend is that the wall
was made by a Kachari king to save his kingdom from the invasion of outsiders, mainly Manipuris and Nagas. The wall looks like a long tilla and some Bengali families are residing now inside the wall.33

SEUTI GAON PANCHAYAT

The villages under this Gaon Panchayat are:

(a) Seuti I (b) Seuti II (c) Seuti III (d) Seuti IV (e) Goragram (f) Garervitar II.

Like most of the Panchayat, its population is also a mixed one, 40 per cent Bengali Hindu, 40 per cent Muslim and 20 per cent Bishnupriya Manipuri and a few dalit families comprise the population. The Patni and the Namasudra Communities make the Hindu population and they are classified under the category, scheduled castes. Among the Muslims, a small percentage of the people belong to the fisherman community.

The occupation of the inhabitants of this Gaon Panchayat is agriculture. Some people are involved with brick industries also. Females of Bishnupriya community produce their traditional handloom products. The scheduled caste communities besides cultivation are engaged in the production of bamboo handicrafts. Among the Bishnupriya Manipuris, in average one member of each family is engaged in a government or a private company. Bhubaneswar Sadhu Baba, the saint of the Bishnupriya Manipuri Community is venerated in a shrine named after him and it is
situated in a village called Bhubaneswarnagar, a Bishnupriya Manipuri dominated village of Seuti Gaon Panchayat. The village Bhubaneswarnagar is also known as ‘Baropoaya’. It is said that the first Manipuri man who settled in this village had twelve male children, for which the name of village was given ‘Baropoaya’ which means 12 sons.

As there are some low lying tracts in this Gaon Panchayat, so fishing and fish production is also a part of income of the people of this area and a section of the population are engaged in fishing as a profession. One third of this Gaon Panchayat goes under water during the time of the monsoon.34

BURUNGA GAON PANCHAYAT

The villages which fall under this Gaon Panchayat are:

(a) Burunga I (b) Burunga II (c) Burunga III (d) Burunga IV (e) Bihara III (f) Daralcherra Khasia Punjee (g) Daralcherra Punjee.

Burunga Gaon Panchayat is inhabited by a mixed population. There are about 30 per cent Bengali Hindus, 35 per cent Bengali Muslims, 32 per cent are the Bishnupriya Manipuri population and 3 per cent tribal. Tribal community is dominated by Khasi people. Besides these, there are a small number of people from Muslim fisherman, commonly called maimals. A handful of Adivasis also live here.
50 per cent of land of this panchayat area is high land i.e., not affected by flood while rest 50 per cent of land are flood affected. About 90 per cent people of this Gaon Panchayat live on cultivation and fishing. The eastern part of Hilara Railway Station i.e. the village Gendamara and Kanairgul fall under this Gaon Panchayat. These villages are inhabited by Muslim fishermen community. The vast water bodies surround these villages and the fishes collected from these water bodies meet the needs of fishes in the adjoining areas and also a part of the needs of the Barak Valley.

Manipuri women are involved in their handloom production which is one of their sources of income also. Main crops of this Panchayat are rice, vegetables, betel nuts, fruits etc. Milk production is also a source of income for the people of this Gaon Panchayat. The agriculture shows a sign of development in some parts of the panchayat and some farmers are earning profits out of their efforts in the fields, but the literacy rate is not so high. As there is no high school, so the students are to go to Kalain or Bihara (Garervitar Gaon Panchayat) for getting high school level education.35

BIHARA GAON PANCHAYAT

The villages that fall under this Gaon Panchayat are:

(a) Bihara IV (b) Bihara V (c) Bihara VI.
The population pattern of this Gaon Panchayat is as follows—10 per cent Bengali Hindus and 90 per cent Bengali Muslims. Here the Muslims are from the OBC category, the bulk of them are from the fisherman community.

This is one of the most backward Gaon Panchayats of the Katigorah constituency. It is backward due to the lack of communication, education and health facilities. It is one of the low lying areas of the constituency which remains submerged under water for about 6 months in a year. During rainy season, boat is the only means of communication. There is no metalled road in this panchayat area. The only means to reach different villages of the Gaon Panchayat is on foot in dry season and by boat during the rainy season.

The source of income of the people is mainly fishing. Some of them try to cultivate rice once in a year and as such the people are very poor and economically wretched. Due to the lack of facilities, the literacy standard of the people is lower than the standards in other gaon panchayats under the Kalain Development Block and as such the female literacy rate is also very low in the panchayat.

The health facility is absolutely inadequate and most of the time, it is not available to the ordinary people. People use to carry patients on their shoulders for many kilometers to reach nearby
primary health centre at Kalain which is about 8 to 10 kilometers away from Bihara Gaon Panchayat. During the flood, cent per cent people get affected and lose their belongings. A large number of children die every year due to waterborne diseases. The mothers are neglected both before and after pregnancy. They do not get even the basic immunizations supplied by the Government Health Centres.36

KURKURI GAON PANCHAYAT

The villages that fall under this Gaon Panchayat are:

(a) Kurkuri I (b) Kurkuri II (c) Kurkuri III (d) Kurkuri IV (e) Bhangarpar (f) Kurkuri Tea Estate (g) Katirail I (h) Rajagorh Hill Punjee (i) Ailatol Tea Estate.

Kurkuri Gaon Panchayat is inhabited by a mixed population. There are about 25 per cent Bengali Hindus, 20 per cent Bengali Muslims, 50 per cent Adivasis and 5 per cent belong to the tribal people. Tribal people are mainly from the Khasi community. The Christianity influenced many tribal people in the area.

The Saint Biani English medium school is situated at a place called Padritillah in the Kurkuri Gaon Panchayat. The Catholic Mission is located within the school. The Mission is engaged in some social activities, particularly among the tribal people in this area.

The people at large pursue various professions for their
livelhood, agriculture, horticulture, fishery, diary, tea industry etc. However, a large number of people belonging to the low income group work as the daily wage earners to augment their small income from fields. As 50 per cent of land of the panchayat is hilly, the land for paddy cultivation is less and as such people earn their livelihood as the daily wage earners. The well-known water body ‘Jolamara Bil’ is situated in this panchayat area. This water body yields a huge quantity of fishes every season and the water body locally called ‘beel’ is leased out to the lessees. The income is very high from the fishes but the proper statistics on pisciculture in this great water body are not made public. As a result, the appreciable part of the money, it is alleged, are siphoned out and few people are getting richer by the deal detriment to the interests of the people of the area at large.37

KALIBARI GAON PANCHAYAT

The Kalibari Gaon Panchayat is composed of the following villages:

(a) Kalibari - Pechacharra Tea Estate (b) Kunapara Tea Estate (c) Mazenta Tea Estate (d) Boalcharra Tea Estate (e) Singhduar Tea Estate (f) Baikunthapur Tea Estate (g) Sundaura (h) Bombijaw Punjee (i) Ailatal Khasia Punjee (j) Sindura No. 3 Khasia Punjee. (k) Sindura No. 9 Mikir Punjee (l) Boalcharra Mikir Punjee
Boalcharra Khasia Punjee (n) Konapara Khasia Punjee (o) Konapara Mikir Punjee (p) Ailatal – Nuncharri Mikir Punjee. The above mentioned tea estates are the subsidiary gardens to the main gardens (seven in number).

This Gaon Panchayat is an Adivasi dominated area having 75 per cent of the population; others make the rest of the population (Bengali Hindus 10 per cent, Bengali Muslims 10 per cent and the tribals, the Khasis and the Karbis, 5 per cent).

It is situated at the foot of Barail Hills and as such most of its land are hilly and tea gardens. A part of Kurkuri and Kalain tea estate fall with Kalibari Gaon Panchayat. As most of the areas are tea gardens, the people are mostly dependent on tea industry. A small part of population depends on agriculture and milk production. Khasi and other tribal people depend on Jhum cultivation which includes pan, betel nut, fruits and vegetables.

The rate of literacy is below the national average in the constituency. There are no secondary level educational institutions in the panchayat area. Only a few L.P. and M.E. Schools are there but due to the absence of good road communication, many parents and guardians cannot take the opportunity to send their children to the schools far away from the place. There is no proper health facility in this panchayat area, the nearby tea garden health centre is not much
equipped to serve even its workers adequately.38

KALAIN GAON PANCHAYAT

The villages that fall under this Gaon Panchayat are:

(a) Dhunkar (b) Brahmangram (c) Tarapur (d) Soligram
(e) Bhatgram (f) Khayajani (g) Mongram (h) Vitorgool (i) Ghilatal
(j) Kunapara Grant.

There are about 55 per cent Bengali Hindus, 40 per cent
Bengali Muslims and 5 per cent Adivasis. This panchayat area is
fortunate enough to have the best road communication system as the
NH 44 bisects the panchayat in the middle. The Shillong and
Guwahati bound buses and trucks stop at Kalain increasing its
importance as the resting place. It is one of the developed Gaon
Panchayats under the Katigorah constituency. The National
Highway connects Silchar-Natanpur road and Silchar-Jaintia Road at
Kalain.

Most of the people are engaged in cultivation and petty
business. A good number of young people work in the nearby state
Meghalaya. They are engaged in the collieries of the Jaintia Hills of
Meghalaya and also in the small businesses in the Lad Rymbai and
Khliheriet areas as these places are located near the NH 44, an
important livewire road that connects Guwahati with this part of the
Cachar district. The Kalain Bazar of this Gaon panchayat of the same name is a growing market as it is strategically located with good communications and it has already emerged as the important business centre of the district of Cachar. There is no other market in the Katigorah constituency which has the better advantages than Kalain. A 30 bedded community hospital was established near the bazaar and the people from the remote corner of this constituency come here to avail the facility. Some non government private practitioners are available here.

Besides, L.P., M.E. and High Schools, there is one Higher Secondary School and a College also. As a result, along with the male literacy, rate of female literacy is also high. There are different Government Offices at Kalain Bazar. Two branches of the Nationalised Banks (The United Bank of India and the Panjab National Bank) are located here.

LAKHIPUR GAON PANCHAYAT

Following are the names of different villages which fall under this Gaon Panchayat:

(a) Baraitali I (b) Baraitali II (c) Baraitali III (d) Lakhipur I (e) Lakhipur II (f) Lakhipur III (g) Baraitali IV (h) Baraitali V (i) Manipur I (j) Manipur II.
The population is diverse and evenly distributed among the three communities, the Bengali Hindus (30 per cent), Bengali Muslims (35 per cent) and the rest, the Bishnupriya Manipuris.

Most of the areas under this Gaon Panchayat are plain land. The source of income of the people is mainly cultivation, fishing and Manipuri handloom production. About half of the Lakhipur Gaon Panchayat gets affected by flood water almost every year. So cultivation and harvesting depends purely on nature. The educational status is not encouraging. Except few L.P. and M.E. Schools there is no high school in the area. So the students of this Gaon Panchayat go to Kalain for getting higher education. As no medical facility is there, the people attend nearby Kalain hospital for treatment.

**BHAIRAVPUR GAON PANCHAYAT**

The villages under this Gaon Panchayat are:

(a) Bhairavpur I (b) Bhairavpur II (c) Bhairavpur III (d) Bhairavpur IV (e) Bhairavpur V (f) Bhairavpur VI (g) Natanpur (h) Digabor Grant.

This Gaon Panchayat shows the general pattern of the population distribution with the Bengalis forming the bulk of the population (80 per cent) divided evenly between the Hindus and the
The Adivasi population constitutes the rest. The Bengali Hindus are mainly of scheduled caste communities who are lagging far behind from economic and educational point of view.

The main source of income of the people comes from farming and fishing. A large section of young people is working as daily wage earner in Meghalaya.

Most of the area becomes inaccessible during rainy season. Only a few L.P. and M.E. schools are there and that is one of the reasons for the educational backwardness of the people of the Panchayat. The means of communication is much less than sound and the health facility is inadequate to serve the population. For minor health problem, they have to go to the nearby Kalain Community Hospital.41

GUMRA GAON PANCHAYAT

The villages under this Gaon Panchayat are:

(a) Khelma I (b) Khelma VI (c) Khelma VIII (d) Kraigpark Bagicha (e) Kraigpark Khasia Punjee.

Gumra Gaon Panchayat consists of about 50 per cent Bengali Hindus, 30 per cent Bengali Muslims and 20 per cent Adivasis. Hindus are mainly of scheduled caste community. Kraigpark Tea Garden and a small part of Kalaincherra Tea Estate come under the
jurisdiction of this panchayat area and as a result of which a good number of Adivasi people live there. A few Khasi families also live within the jurisdiction of the Gaon Panchayat.

As the National Highway 44 bisects the constituency and crosses the territory from the south east to the north west direction, the area is having small and medium size markets at Katigorah, Kalain, Gumra and Digorkhal. It is thus, deriving benefits from the presence of a national highway of great importance, making the means of communication of this panchayat better than panchayats away from the national highway. Gumra Bazar is one of the big business centers of the Katigorah Constituency. Many Government offices, police investigation centre, police check gate, bank, guest house etc are situated in this panchayat area. People from surrounding five Gaon Panchayats come to Gumra Bazar to sell their products as well as purchase essential commodities necessary in their daily life. A large part of population is surviving on business and works related to business. Others are engaged in agriculture, pisciculture, tea cultivation etc. It is an educationally well provided Gaon Panchayat having L.P., M.E. and High Schools. There is no health centre in the panchayat area but the communication system is better and people can travel to the Kalain Community Hospital for treatment. 42
KHELMA GAON PANCHAYAT

The villages under Khelma Gaon Panchayat are:

(a) Mahadevpur IV (b) Khelma II (c) Khelma III (d) Khelma IV (e) Khelma V (f) Khelma VII.

The Bengali Hindus constitute 90 per cent of the population and nearly all of them are from the Kaibarta and the Baishnab communities and the rest are the Bengali Muslims. The Kaibartas fall under scheduled caste category and Bishnabs are of general category.

This gaon panchayat is below the national level in health care, literacy and economic standard. The total Panchayat area remains waterlogged for about 8 months in a year. The only means of communication is foot and boat. The source of income is fishing and daily wage labour. Very few of them are engaged in cultivation of rice and vegetables.

There is no appreciable improvement of the female education and it stagnates at the bottom. There is no high school in the Panchayat area. Only a few L.P. Schools are there. The working population in the panchayat are mostly farmers and daily wage earners. They do not have any time to go to school. Another cause for the educational backwardness is the absence of roads and in the rainy season, the conditions turn worst. Children cannot go to school...
as the whole area is submerged under water, sometimes the rain water enters the class rooms and the students remain at home to avoid disasters.

The area is deprived of basic health facility. People are mainly dependent on self-declared doctors (quacks). Poor sanitation and lack of drinking water facility makes the condition grave. A large number of people mainly children die of diarrhoea and other water borne diseases.

However realising the grave situation, Deshabandhu Club, the local NGO came forward and they are constantly at work for the improvement of health of mother and child and the economic upliftment of women. A large number of female self-help groups have been formed at the initiative of the Deshabandhu Club.43

PAIKAN-DIGORKHAL GAON PANCHAYAT

The villages under this Gaon Panchayat are:

(a) Sarashpur (b) Rajyeshwarpur I (c) Chandipur (d) Paikan Gobinderkupa (g) Kalaincherra Grant.

There are about 60 per cent Bengali Hindus, 25 per cent Bengali Muslims and 15 per cent Adivasi people live in the panchayat area. There is one large tea garden called Kalaincherra which falls within the jurisdiction of this Gaon Panchayat, it has one
associate tea garden also (locally known as phari tea estate) called Gobinderkupa. It has a sprawling area and they in combination forms a large estate. At present, the garden in general seems to have lost the old charms. The production declined and the labour force often faces hunger. The illicit sexual relationships come from grave ignorance and deprivations. The rapid spread of aids among the tea garden workers is a danger which the aids surveys in the gardens indicate (survey of the NGO, Deshabandhu Club). The tea garden workers come from the Adivasi groups and their number is substantial. They were brought to the tea gardens from the Adivasi areas of Jharkhand and Bengal. There are a few khasi families also. The main source of income comes from agriculture and tea gardens. Many are engaged in strenuous living by working in the brick kilns. Some other people earn their livelihood from forest products.

The literacy rate among the Adivasi people is generally low which is reflected in the pattern in this gaon panchayat area. The area is situated at the foot of Barail Hills and most of its land is above flood level, and as such the panchayat area is not affected by flood. The health status of the people is very poor as there is no Government health centre.44

MAHADEVPUR GAON PANCHAYAT

The villages under this Gaon Panchayat are:
(a) Mahadevpur I (b) Mahadevpur II (c) Mahadevpur III
(d) Talkargrant (e) Damcherra Punjee (f) Lakhicherra Punjee
(g) Banam Punjee (h) Talkar Bil (i) Rajyeswarpur II.

It is another Gaon Panchayat which has a mixed population of about 70 per cent Bengali Hindus, 25 per cent Bengali Muslims and 5 per cent tribal people. The 5 per cent tribal people are composed of Khasi and Karbi. Bengali Hindus are mainly from scheduled caste community. There is a small Metei Manipuri population in the panchayat area and a few adivasi families live here.

The general people are very poor. Their source of income is based on agriculture and fishing. Large part of the area is flood affected. General education is limited up to Lower Primary level. There is no health facility for people of the area. People generally move to Kalain (10 kms) or Jalalpur (7 kms) for basic medical help.

However, Deshabandhu Club started forming self-help groups for women in some villages of the Gaon Panchayat for the economic development of women.45

KUSHIARKUL GAON PANCHAYAT

The villages which fall under this Gaon Panchayat are:

(a) Tarapur (b) Gumragram (c) Biswambharpur (d) Kushiarkul
(e) Baleswar grants (f) Digomahadevpur (g) Malidahar Mikir Punjee
This Gaon Panchayat has also a mixed population of about 60 per cent Bengali Hindus, 30 per cent Bengali Muslims, 5 per cent adivasis and 5 per cent tribals. Hindus are mainly from scheduled caste community. The Khasis and Karbis constitute the main tribal communities inhabiting this panchayat area.

The area is just adjacent to Meghalaya and Bangladesh border. The source of income of the people is derived from cultivation and fishing. The Jalalpur tea garden is close to the panchayat and some inhabitants get the benefits from it. Most of the people are nearly living at the subsistence level and some how eke out their living engaging themselves in daily wage work. They are deprived of any type of educational and health facilities. Though Jalalpur Health Centre is not far from this Gaon Panchayat but due to lack of proper means of communication, people are unable to take their patients to the health centre. Moreover, the condition of Public Health Centre is deteriorating day by day and service of doctors and nurses is not always available to poor people. There is a general apathy towards any public service in the rural areas and the public health centre, instead of improving, declines every where. The Adivasi and tribal people suffer from negligence in this Gaon Panchayat. Many
pregnant mothers and children die due to lack of any type of treatment.\textsuperscript{46}

**JALALPUR GAON PANCHAYAT**

The villages under this Gaon Panchayat are –

(a) Natanpur Grant (b) Natanpur (c) Karaballa (d) Rongpur (e) Jalalpur I (f) Jalalpur II (g) Pirmagar (h) Nischintipur.

There are about 50 per cent Bengali Hindus, 35 per cent Bengali Muslims and 15 per cent adivasis live here. The Jalalpur tea garden was established in the nineteenth century is still large tea estates which employ adivasis as the workers. This Gaon Panchayat lies on the border of Bangladesh and as a result of which the problem of infiltration always affect the people of the area. Very often, the poor people of Bangladesh cross the borders, enter India secretly under the cover of darkness at night and take away the cattles and other domestic animals.

However, being located on the bank of the river Surma, production of vegetables are plenty during winter season. The inhabitants of this Panchayat area live mainly on cultivation and fishing. There is a road bridge over the river Baleswar which maintains link with the outside world.\textsuperscript{47}
5.3 REPORT ON FIELD STUDY

In a country like India where Parliamentary democracy is in practice, it is expected that women should play a very meaningful role and as such, conditions should be so created that women can actively participate in the functions of the government. For that situation to prevail, women must be politically empowered. Unless women get the share of the decision making powers in the specific problems where their interests are involved, political empowerment of women is not possible. 48

It is debated throughout the country, the question of political empowerment of women and their active participation in the affairs of the country. The job is not easy and some women at the top have already achieved it. The better exposures give better participations. The real emancipation comes at the rural level where the millions live. 49

It was the dream of Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation to strengthen the grassroot of democracy. Taking this point in view, since 1959 several attempts have been made to make the Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) as a necessary accompaniment to change and development. After the independence, the rural local self government in the name of the Panchayati Raj acquired due importance and it is now a provision of the Directive Principles of
State Policy that guides us in the village reconstruction. During the colonial rule, there were efforts at building up the local self government but it was just a beginning, not of the size of the Panchayati Raj we want to build up in our democracy. The success of the Panchayati Raj ensures the success of our democracy.\footnote{50}

In 1989, the then Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi (1984-89) sincerely tried to provide constitutional sanctity and the administrative priority for the Panchayati Raj Institutions. After undergoing many struggles, the Panchayati Raj Institutions achieved a new meaning and new dimension when the system underwent thorough revisions and some amount of imperativeness was added to the whole operation, women were given reservation at the panchayat offices. They are now made part of the decision making process in the system. The Constitutional Amendment was made in April, 1993 by way of 73\textsuperscript{rd} Amendment Act.\footnote{51}

One of the landmarks in the change is the provision for reservation of seats for women including scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, it is a step for achieving political empowerment for women.\footnote{52}

In this chapter, an attempt has been made to present the opinion and status of women panchayat members as to what extent they are empowered, so as to show the functional utility of...
Panchayati Raj Institutions in their respective Blocks envisaged in the 73rd Amendment Act.

It is considered that the women representatives working at the grassroot level will have the better knowledge about the working of different aspects of Panchayati Raj Institutions. Their views on local and domestic matters may help in understanding problems in proper perspective ensuring their level of political consciousness.

In our present study, the Katigorah constituency, there are 264 Panchayat members. There are 110 panchayat members in the Katigorah Development Block which is composed of 10 Gaon Panchayats and 154 members in the Kalain Development Block which is composed of 15 Gaon Panchayats as per the Panchayat election, 2001.

With the passing of 73rd Amendment Act, good number women have been elected to the three tiers of our panchayat. As such there are 36 women members under the Katigorah Development Block and 51 women members under the Kalain Development Block.

To assess the political awareness among the women members elected for the Gaon Panchayats, an interview schedule is used. About 50 per cent of the women panchayat members of each block is
purposively selected and interviewed through this schedule. Care is taken to include the members from different economic groups and the communities. The schedule is so designed as to collect necessary and relevant information from the sampled women members. Information on aspects of their attitudes towards the new assignment, their level of participation in panchayats, their political awareness and gender specific relations are collected by means of direct personal interviews conducted with the help of the schedule.

**TABLE 5.1**
PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN THE KATIGORA CONSTITUENCY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the constituency</th>
<th>Total number of members</th>
<th>Total number of women members</th>
<th>Women members in percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Katigorah</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>32.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Zilla Parishad, Silchar.

**TABLE 5.2**
PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN THE KATIGORA AND KALAIN DEVELOPMENT BLOCKS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Blocks</th>
<th>Total number of GP members</th>
<th>Total number of women members</th>
<th>Women members in percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Katigorah</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>32.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Zilla Parishad, Silchar.

In the earlier chapters, it is found that in Assam, 33.3 per cent seats are reserved for women at the Panchayat level but in the table 5.1 and 5.2, we find that in the Katigorah constituency as a whole...
and Katigorah Development Block in particular, 32.95 and 32.72 women members are represented at Gaon Panchayat level. The Kalain Development Block is represented by 33.12 women members satisfying the constitutional norms.

TABLE 5.3
SELECTION OF RESPONDENTS ON THE BASIS OF CASTE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Blocks</th>
<th>Total number of women respondents interviewed</th>
<th>General</th>
<th>SC</th>
<th>ST</th>
<th>OBC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kalain</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katigorah</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Figures indicate the percentage of total respondents surveyed in the given Development Blocks.

Source: Field Survey.

As seen from the table 5.3, out of 87 elected women Gaon Panchayat members, 44 (50.57 per cent) members from Kalain and Katigorah Development Block are interviewed. 56.81 per cent from general category, 29.54 per cent from scheduled castes, 2.27 per cent from scheduled tribes and 11.36 per cent from other backward Communities are interviewed. Though there is no reservation for the people belonging to OBC at the panchayat level but they are interviewed as separate category to know their level of political emancipation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Educational Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sample Blocks</td>
<td>No. of respondents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalain</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katigorah</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Figures indicate the percentage of total respondents surveyed in the given Development Blocks.

Source: Field Survey.

As found out from the table 5.4, of the 50.57 per cent respondents, 40.90 per cent, 34.09 per cent and 25 per cent respondents are interviewed from married, unmarried and widow categories respectively. It is remarkable to note that besides unmarried a good number of married and widowed women also joined the grass root politics of the country.

So far educational status is concerned, 54.54 per cent, 36.36 per cent, 6.8 per cent and 2.27 per cent respondents belong to the educational status of Lower Primary, High School Leaving Certificate (HSLC), Higher Secondary and Under Graduate Category respectively. It is evident that less qualified women are coming more to the local politics than the women with higher qualification.
As revealed from the table 5.5, 56.81 per cent of the respondents depend on agriculture, while 34.09 per cent on business and rest 9.09 per cent depend on other sources of income. No respondent is found to be involved with any type of service. It is very significant to note that most of the respondents are drawn from the agricultural background which implies that a good number of women are joining politics from grassroot level.

Table: 5.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Blocks</th>
<th>Total number of respondents</th>
<th>Agriculture</th>
<th>Business</th>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Kalain</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Katigorah</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>(50.57%)</td>
<td>(56.81%)</td>
<td>(34.09%)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>(9.09%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Figures indicate the percentage of total respondents surveyed in the given Development Blocks.

Source: Field Survey.
As revealed from the table 5.6, 50 per cent respondents belong to the Congress party, i.e. the party which is in power in Assam, 43.18 per cent respondents belong to BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party). While 4.54 per cent respondents contested election as independents, 2.27 per cent are from the CPI (M) which means that the women candidates do not have free opinion on the question of contesting elections implying that they require strong supports from behind. The support base comes from many sources. Man who backs her must have a base or an organized political party backs her with men and money.

As we find from the table 5.7, 47.72 per cent respondents participate in different local movements like movement for the construction and repairing of roads, construction of well, small embankment for agricultural purposes, maintenance of local markets etc. While 52.27 per cent respondents do not participate in any

### TABLE: 5.7
RATE OF PARTICIPATION IN ANY MOVEMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Blocks</th>
<th>Total Number of respondents</th>
<th>Participates in movement</th>
<th>Does not participate in movement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalain</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katigorah</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>(50.57%)</td>
<td>(47.72%)</td>
<td>(52.27%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Figures indicate the percentage of total respondents surveyed in the given Development Blocks.

Source: Field Survey.
movement which means that they are not very concerned about local problems and thereby lack political awareness which drives one to take active part in the solution of different socio-economic problems of the locality.

**TABLE: 5.8**

RESPONDENTS' FAMILY POLITICAL AFFILIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Blocks</th>
<th>Total Number of respondents</th>
<th>Having family with political affiliations</th>
<th>Having family with no political affiliations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Kalain</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Katigorah</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Total</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(50.57%)</td>
<td>(84.09%)</td>
<td>(15.90%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Figures indicate the percentage of total respondents surveyed in the given Development Blocks.

**Source:** Field Survey.

As seen from table 5.8, 84.09 per cent respondents have some family political background and they contested elections on the basis of that family support while only 15.90 per cent respondents have no such political background. They contested election on their own volition which was found in few women Muslim Panchayat members also who in spite of their family's traditional conservative background, gathered courage to contest Panchayat election independently of their family.
As revealed in the table 5.9, there is a correlation between the tables 5.8 and the table 5.9. In the table 5.8, 84.09 per cent respondents have family with political affiliation while in the table, 5.9, 90.90 per cent respondents contested election as nominee of political parties. So, a good number of women members have family political affiliation. The majority of the members contested election on the banner of the political parties. Again, in the table 5.8, 15.90 per cent respondents have no family political affiliation and in table 5.9, only 9.09 per cent respondents contested election independently which implies that not the political awareness decides their candidature, it is the family background counts for a woman to contest election which is also presented in the table 5.10.
TABLE 5.10
AGREEMENT ON HOLDING PANCHAYAT ELECTION ON PARTY LINE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Blocks</th>
<th>Total number of respondents</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Kalain</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Katigorah</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Figures indicate the percentage of total respondents surveyed in the given Development Blocks.

Source: Field Survey.

In the table 5.10, the reflection of table 5.8 and 5.9 is found. In the table 5.10, 38.63 per cent respondents strongly agree on the holding of Panchayat election on party line while 56.81 per cent respondents just agree to hold panchayat election on party line. More or less all the respondents are of the opinion of holding election on party line. Probably they think that unless they get political backing they won't get family help and will be unable to win the election.

TABLE 5.11
IMPRESSION ON THE IDEAL GAON PANCHAYAT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Blocks</th>
<th>Total number of respondents</th>
<th>Gram Swaraj</th>
<th>Local self government institution</th>
<th>An agency of the Government</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Kalain</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Katigorah</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>(50.57%)</td>
<td>(34.09%)</td>
<td>(54.54%)</td>
<td>(11.36%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Figures indicate the percentage of total respondents surveyed in the given Development Blocks.

Source: Field Survey.
As is borne out by the table 5.1, 54.54 per cent respondents have a favourable image of Gaon Panchayat as a Local Self Government institution. 34.09 per cent respondents are for Gram Swaraj while only 11.36 per cent respondents think of Gaon Panchayat as an agency of the government. So the women members are more or less aware of the provisions in the government programmes and they want the panchayat system to thrive instead of seeking development through the government machinery.

TABLE: 5.12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AWARENESS ON THE 33.3 PER CENT RESERVATION FOR WOMEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sample Blocks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katigorah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Figures indicate the percentage of total respondents surveyed in the given Development Blocks.

Source: Field Survey.

Table 5.12, indicates that the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution and the historic 33.3 per cent reservation for women are not engaging the attention of rural women. 63.63 per cent respondents are aware about 33.3 per cent reservation for women while 36.36 per cent are not aware of it. In the interviews and interactions with the respondents, it is found that some of them are too busy with their household activities and they have no time to
discuss the matter. A revealing fact is that some of the respondents who are not admitted in the college level education, are aware of 33.3 per cent reservation for women while some members who are endowed with higher education beyond the school level, have no idea about the said reservation. It implies that mere educational degree does not ensure awareness about the vital things affecting the lives of the rural women, an awareness campaign is necessary to bring home the true meaning of political empowerment.

TABLE 5.13
WHETHER 73rd AMENDMENT EMPOWERED WOMEN OR NOT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Blocks</th>
<th>Total Number of respondents</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Partially</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalain</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katigorah</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>(50.57%)</td>
<td>(79.54%)</td>
<td>(4.54%)</td>
<td>(15.90%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Figures indicate the percentage of total respondents surveyed in the given Development Blocks.
Source: Field Survey.

As may be seen from the table 5.13, while 4.54 per cent respondents do not think that 73rd Amendment has really empowered women, 15.90 per cent think that it has partially empowered women, 79.54 per cent respondents admitted that 73rd Amendment Act was a great landmark in the history of the women emancipation. It must be admitted that the amendment has
empowered at least some women of the area. The Act has an impact on the lifestyle of some of the rural women. The bereft of the constitutional empowerment, the rural women would have always lagged behind at the political level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Blocks</th>
<th>Total Number of respondents</th>
<th>Done by themselves</th>
<th>Not Done by themselves</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalain</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katigorah</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>44</strong></td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
<td><strong>25</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(50.57%)</td>
<td>(43.18%)</td>
<td>(56.81%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Figures indicate the percentage of total respondents surveyed in the given Development Blocks.

**Source:** Field Survey.

It is clear from the table 5.14 that 43.18 per cent of the respondents are of the opinion that they themselves do their work while 56.81 per cent respondents honestly confessed that their functions are not done by themselves, rather it is performed by some male members on their behalf (may be one of their colleagues or husbands).

At this crucial moment when everybody is happy over the passage of the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution and the 33.3 per cent reservation for women and some states of the country made
remarkable progress in this field, it is a revelation that the women folk in the constituency are guided by their husbands or other powerful men who actually control the business from behind.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Blocks</th>
<th>Total Number of respondents</th>
<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Not Satisfactory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalain</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katigorah</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(50.57%)</td>
<td>(81.81%)</td>
<td>(18.18%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Figures indicate the percentage of total respondents surveyed in the given Development Blocks.

**Source:** Field Survey.

The tables, 5.15 and 5.14, resemble each other. In the table 5.14, 56.81 per cent respondents do not perform their functions themselves, it is done by other male members and in the table 5.15, 81.81 per cent respondents are satisfied with the working of their male colleagues. It reveals that most of the respondents can perform their household activities as a matter of duty. As panchayat members, they are happy and satisfied that their office duties are performed by others, preferably by other male members.
In the table 5.16, 79.54 per cent respondents think that the entire task of rural development programme should be left in the hands of PRI; only 20.45 per cent respondents are not in favour of this which means slowly and steadily, women members are realizing that the panchayats should handle the local problems without depending on the outside agencies for doing the works on their behalf. It also indicates the level of self assurance they derived by doing their duties as the panchayat members.

**TABLE 5.17**
OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF THE ACTIVITIES OF PRI IN RESPECTIVE BLOCKS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Blocks</th>
<th>Total Number of respondents</th>
<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Not Satisfactory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalain</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katigorah</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>(50.57%)</td>
<td>(43.18%)</td>
<td>(56.81%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Figures indicate the percentage of total respondents surveyed in the given Development Blocks.

Source: Field Survey.
It is clear from the table 5.17 that 43.18 per cent respondents are satisfied with the working of PRI while 56.81 per cent respondents are not satisfied with the working of PRI in their respective Blocks which implies that many things are yet to be done, the functions of the Blocks should be more people oriented so that the dream of Gandhiji to establish Gram Swaraj will be fulfilled.

**TABLE: 5.18**

REGARDING IMPLEMENTATION OF SCHEMES MEANT FOR WOMEN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Blocks</th>
<th>Total Number of respondents</th>
<th>Already implemented</th>
<th>Is going to be implemented</th>
<th>Not implemented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kalain</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katigorah</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(50.57%) (4.54%) (43.18%) (52.27%)

**Note:** Figures indicate the percentage of total respondents surveyed in the given Development Blocks.

**Source:** Field Survey.

From the table 5.17, it is evident that many respondents are dissatisfied with the working of PRI in their respective Blocks. In the table 5.18, 52.27 per cent respondents are of the view that no schemes for women are implemented. 43.18 per cent respondents say that the schemes are planned to be implemented while only 4.54 per cent respondents are of the view that the schemes are already implemented. Some of the schemes which are especially meant for generating earnings among the poor women living in villages are the distribution of sewing machines, the pension schemes for widows,
the grant for the girl child (Mamoni programme), the grant for the mother who delivered a child in hospital (Janani Suraksha Yajana programme) and the regular health tests of the expectant mothers (Majoni Programme). The names are recommended by the Panchayat to the Health Department for the payment. The above schemes are definitely laudable ones and it exhibits the good intentions of the government but the poor recipient women cannot maintain a bank account where the cheques are to be deposited, the assistance of the government go by default in many cases.

TABLE 5.19
WHETHER THERE IS ANY EFFECT OF THE ALL INDIA WOMEN MOVEMENTS ON THE WOMEN OF THE AREA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Blocks</th>
<th>Total Number of respondents</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Partially</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalain</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katigorah</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(50.57%) (13.63%) (75%) (11.36%)

Note: Figures indicate the percentage of total respondents surveyed in the given Development Blocks.

Source: Field Survey.

In the table 5.19, 75 per cent respondents are of the view that there is no substantial effect of the women’s movements on the women of the Constituency. 13.63 per cent respondents think that All India Women Movements affect the women of the area. Some
women (11.36 per cent) feel that there is a partial effect of the women's movements on the rural population as the messages hardly reach the rural people. This perception about women's rights and the outside influence, largely depend on the level of awareness the woman member has about the world wide scenario. The education is a strong factor which connects a rural mind with the changes occurring elsewhere. Many of the women members fortunate enough to enjoy the reservations under the constitution do not have access to education and hardly know the happenings in the country in this field.

5.4 CONCLUSION

In the present chapter, it is found that a large number of women panchayat members are concerned about the different activities of their respective blocks and the various loopholes of administration. They also realize that the Panchayati Raj Institution should not run as an agent of the Government but at the same time a good number of women members do not perform their functions themselves, rather it is done by their male colleagues or their husbands who handle all jobs of public relations and file keeping. While the 33.3 per cent reservation for women brought them to their offices in the panchayat, yet some of the women members have no idea of what 33.3 per cent reservations stand for.
The process of empowering rural women is the declared policy of the government and it is implemented throughout the country. But the mere passage of the Act cannot ensure the rights under the 'reservations'. It should be taken as a social movement and the women themselves must know the importance of it. Before making them politically empowered, some positive steps should be taken for the socio-economic development of women at the grass-root level. Efforts should be there to enlighten rural women. Their educational and health status should be improved. Mere providing them some schemes will not be sufficient - a round the clock vigilance should be there about the implementation of the schemes.

The Panchayati Raj Institution deserves nation's blessings and its success only strengthens democracy in the country. The empowerment of women at this level ensures their participation in the nation building programmes. It is not merely their initiation in the decision making processes, it provides them opportunities to learn the art of administration without losing touch with the soil.53

NOTES AND REFERENCES:

3 R.C. Agarwal (1986), *Indian Political System*, p. 317.
8 V. Venkata Rao (1963), A Hundred Years of Local Self Government in Assam, p. 37.
9 V. Venkata Rao and Niru Hazarika: op. cit. p. 68.
10 Ibid. p. 68.
14 V. Venkata Rao, Niru Hazarika, op. cit. p. 194.
15 B.K. Thapliyal (1999), The Gaon Panchayat and the role of Gram Sabha in governance at the local level.
18 D. Narayana (2005), Local Governance without capacity building – Ten years of Panchayati Raj, p. 2822.

20 B.K. Thapliyal, op. cit.


22 Amina Khatun, Ex-member, Laverputa Gaon Panchayat, elected during 2001 Panchayat election.

23 Chanchala Das, Ex-member, Harinagar Gaon Panchayat elected during 2001 Panchayat election.

24 Satya Ranjan Acharjee, a popular political leader of the area.

25 Kalyan Chakraborty, President, Siddheswar Pragati Sangha, Katigorah.

26 Nazma Begum, Ex-President, Siddheswar Gaon Panchayat elected during 2001 Panchayat election.


28 Maya Rani Das, Ex-Member, Gobindapur Gaon Panchayat elected at the Panchayat Election, 2001.

29 Rahena Begum, Ex-Member, Tarinipur Gaon Panchayat elected at the Panchayat Election, 2001.

30 Sarobala Das, Ex-Member, Fulbari Gaon Panchayat elected at the Panchayat Election, 2001.

31 Mamtaz Begum, Ex-Member, Dudhpur-Ganirgram Gaon Panchayat elected at the Panchayat Election, 2001.

32 Promod Chandra Sinha, Secretary, Katigorah Gramonnayan Parishad— a leading NGO of Katigorah constituency situated at Kalain Development Block.
33 Kali Kumar Saha, Secretary, Deshabandhu Club situated at Garervitar Gaon Panchayat.


35 Krishnadas Sinha, Ex-President, Burunga Gaon Panchayat.

36 Rukna Khatun, Ex-Member, Bihara Gaon Panchayat elected at the Panchayat Election, 2001.

37 Namita Karmakar, Ex-Member, Kurkuri Gaon Panchayat elected at the Panchayat Election, 2001.

38 Niroda Kurmi, Ex-Member, Kalibari Gaon Panchayat elected at the Panchayat Election, 2001.


40 Rekha Malakar, Ex-Member, Lakhipur Gaon Panchayat elected at the Panchayat Election, 2001.

41 Joymoti Bhar, Ex-Member, Bhairavpur Gaon Panchayat elected at the Panchayat Election, 2001.

42 Mainul Haque, a leading citizen of the Katigorah Constituency.

43 Haralal Baishnab, Ex-Member, Khelma Gaon Panchayat.


45 Maya Rani Das, Ex-Member, Mahadevpur Gaon Panchayat elected at the Panchayat Election, 2001.

46 Gita Goswami, Ex-Member, Kushiarkal Gaon Panchayat elected at the Panchayat Election, 2001.
Hazira Begum, Ex-Member, Jalalpur Gaon Panchayat elected at the Panchayat Election, 2001.

Dr (Mrs.) V. Mohini Giri: *Emancipation and empowerment of women*, op. cit. p. 89.


B.K. Thapliyal, op. cit.

Dr. Rabindra Kr. Chaudhury: *Whether Panchayati Raj System in Assam.*

*****