CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

The idea of the woman's emancipation has drawn much of the attention of the gender scholar's and theorists and which would serve as the theoretical framework of the chapters that comprise the present compilation. The emancipation of women has been an era of march that started at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Patriarchal ideology dominated the society in such a way that there was no space left for women. Only some women of extra ordinary talent broke the patriarchal notions and they were successful in social and political life. Subordination of women can be traced back to some reasons. Various forms of social and psychological control compelled women to keep them homebound. Physically women are less powerful and the dominance of men existed over them. The traditional image of the male is that they act as the protector and guardian of women. As women are physically weak so they need protector to defend them. This is the age-old tradition and women never protested against it. Economically women are dependent on men. Previously women were never allowed for job and they were to depend upon men for their economic needs. The mental treatment given to women that they are the part and parcel of home and cannot have anything outside. The traditional ideas of women that they should be kept happy inside the home. They are the instrument of serving and pleasing the male members of the family. From generation to generation mothers teach daughters to please men, providing instruction that prepared the new generation to assume the roles of mothers and housewives.

Deprivation of women is not a Nation-wide event but their condition is almost same throughout the world. Women all over the world, east-west, and north-south have not only been marginalized but had suffered ruthlessly. The subordination of women has been felt acutely all over the world. There was the worldwide hue and cry against the tortures of women. The religious leaders and the social reformers vehemently protested against the ill treatment towards women and fought to establish

1. Mehta, Rama, Socio-Legal Status of Women in India, Mittal Publication, 1987, Delhi, p-7
2. Ibid, p-2
4. Ibid,
the rights and dignities of women. Women are the worst sufferers of all the natural calamities and events. Historical instances show that there was many struggles in the world but not a single event of women’s struggle.

**Feminist Theory**

Women have been marginalized in every walk of life. Feminist movement started in most of the countries of the world. Rosemarie Tong defines Feminism as a struggle to end the sexist oppression. It is a struggle to eradicate domination against women. Feminism does not intend to benefit any particular class or group of women but the benefit of the whole women community as a whole. It investigates and enquires the root cause of women’s marginalization and the injustices done to them. Various Feminist movements emerged in different times and they are—Liberal Feminism, Radical Feminism, and Socialist Feminism etc.

The various Feminist theories though differ in their conception towards women but there is unanimity amongst all the Feminists that women are handicapped because they are bereft of powers, therefore, they may be endowed with ‘Power’. In other words they should be empowered. Women’s political rights are also included in the agenda of the Human Rights. The women’s movement started all over the world and the development of Nation means the development of women. The conditions of women in the developing countries are extremely low and below standard and sometimes they were dragged to the position of animals. Everywhere in the world there was the demand of safeguard of women’s rights and liberties.

Gender disparities are pervasive in various layers of social existence as its tentacles are spread across the various segments of the society. They are deprived of even bare human necessities and the question involves the rights and empowerment especially for the women. Here the rights and empowerment of women consist of social, economic and political rights. Women should fight against all the discriminatory social practices, which dragged them to the lower status. The empowerment of women is necessary not only in name but in real sense where women can actively participate

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6 Ibid, p-19
7 Singh, Pitam, Woman Legislators in Indian Politics, Concept Publishing Company, 2003, New Delhi, p-2
in all the social spheres including political empowerment. In the economic sphere, women's labour is underestimated and they are either unpaid or less paid.

Political power plays very important role in the domination of women. Politics is the area where the entry of women is very poor. Women are unable and unfit for the job due to the gender discrimination practiced in our society, which compelled women to think in the negative way. So, women are to be brought forward.

Politics has to be engendered. There is the vast difference between the theory and practice. Indian Constitution has provided enough space for the political participation of women but practically the election results do not focus the adequate representation of women in the elected bodies. This is the scenario of all the political parties regardless of their size and function. Their representation in the Parliament, in the State Legislative Assemblies are not even 10 percent. Women constitute 50 percent of the total electorate but they have never been able to get adequate representation either in the Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha or in the State Legislative Assemblies.

Today women are coming forward to join various challenging jobs—Indian Administrative Service, Indian Police Service, Judiciary, political parties, pilots and even at grass root politics. But in each step they have to qualify themselves with proper entrance test and in most of the cases they get limited opportunities. Female leader's success to the apex bodies is not an easy process. They had to face many hurdles to gain political power. They hesitate to enter into politics due to the increasing amount of criminalisation of politics and they easily become the targets of violence. Owing to the increasing amount of mafia politics, women feel lack of security and very few women can face such challenges.

The question of women's participation in the political process and decision-making bodies forms a key concern of the women's movement in India. Their poor representation becomes critical especially in the declining sex-ratio, increasing rate of violence and crimes against women and their marginal status in employment, education and health sector. There are certain basic points that the various Feminist's scholars feel women must be conscious that the true concept of political participation

8. Ibid., p-4,
be realized by the mass of the women sections of the society. Political participation does not mean the mass participation of women in the exercise of right to vote. If so, then Kerala, the most developed State where the rate of women’s literacy is high and the highest percentage of the number of women exercise their voting right, then why the number of woman legislators in the electoral politics is very low? The power of voting cannot change the patriarchal pattern of administration to a democratic one. It requires the equal participation of both the sexes in the decision-making body.

The next point to be noted down is that the woman legislators who participated in the National and State politics have been able to promote the interest of women because the representation of women is necessary to deal with the women problems. It is true that the woman legislators are to put pressure and convince the male colleagues and take them along for the struggle to bring about the steps related to women problems. The problems needed to explain about the role of woman legislators in handling with the various women issues. Only a handful number of woman legislators cannot solve women problems. The society is modelled wholly on the patriarchal style and there is the need of strong woman leaders who can fight against the traditional patriarchal notions of the State. Often a vastly expanded participation and wide mobilization of a socially weak community (in this context women), has led to the strengthening of the present pattern of development rather than directing this pattern to their own development.9 The values of equality (Constitutional, Economic, Political) or right (property, access to resources) may be meaningful only when women possess and exercise them for bringing about a change in their own position as well as of the society; otherwise they will merely add up to strengthening, reinforcing the existing social system by operating within the framework of patriarchy.10

**Demographic Pattern of Assam**

India has the second highest population in the world. So naturally the country has the second highest females in the world. In 1971, the female population was 264 million in India. The sex ratio is 930 females per thousand males in 1971. The number of female was 934 in 1981 and in 1991 it was 927 female per thousand male and in

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9. Ibid, p-6
10. Ibid,
2001, it was 933 per thousand male. In India, the number of female is always less than male and Assam has the same tradition of less number of female population.

According to the Census of India, the population of Assam is registered as 22,294,562 with a growth rate of 52.44% during the period 1971-1991. The density of State is recorded as 286(1991) and 186 in (1971). So the density of population of Assam has gone up to 340 in 2001 and the sex ratio in the State shows an improvement from 923 in 1991 to 932 in 2001. The literacy rate for Assam as per Census of 2001 comes to 64.28 percent with 71.93 percent for male and 56.03 percent for female. The ratio of the female to male decreasing day by day but there was a bit change in 1981 but the ratio again fell from 934 in 1981 to 929 in 1991. High mortality rate among the adult female is one of the main reasons. This is mainly due to the malnutrition and morbidity. This demographic imbalance represents the situation and status of girls and women is reflected in disproportionate sex ratio. The female death rate is higher than the male. Child death is also another cause of imbalance in the sex ratio of male and female. Parents don’t care about the female babies and the amount to be spent on girl child is less than that of the male babies. Female babies die due to the lack of nourishment, lack of proper food, health and hygiene problem. Another recent development is the detection of female child, which has become rampant in some parts of the country even in Assam too. Most of the parent’s don’t want to take the risk of birth of female babies. So, if this system of discrimination continues in the society, the female population will decrease rapidly which will threaten the political participation of women in general.

Higher rate of female mortality is to a large extent determined by the poor nutritional status of female child compared to the male. The data obtained from the Sample Registration bulletin published by the Registrar General of India depicts some idea about the trend in the birth and death rates and infant mortality rates in the State. According to this source, in most of the years from 1991 to 2002 birth rates, death rates and infant mortality rates were found

11. Mukherjee, Sanu, Fatima etc., Demographic Profile of Northeast India, Omsons Publications, Rajouri Garden, New Delhi, p-14.
13. The Assam Tribune 3rd June ’05
to be higher in the State than that of the country as a whole.\textsuperscript{14} During the year 2002, the birth, death and infant mortality rates of Assam have been 26.6, 9.2 and 70 per mile as against 25.0, 8.1 and 63 per mile respectively at all India level.\textsuperscript{15} The table 1.1 shows the birth, death and infant mortality rates of Assam and India from 1991 to 2002.

Table—1.1

Birth, Death and Infant Mortality rates of Assam and India (per mile)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Birth Rate</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Death Rate</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Infant Mortality Rate</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>India</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>72</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>68</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source—Economic Survey, Assam, 2004—2005

The low rate of female is responsible for various reasons. Once a girl is born, the cycle of under nutrition begins. Female children are to survive with less food and less breast milk and are fed at long intervals than boys. Girl children in the family with their mothers eat last and hence least. Hence under nutrition is also responsible for the low growth rate in the country. The low level of sex ratio is son preference, low value of girl child, neglect of girl child resulting in higher mortality at younger age, female infanticide and female foeticide, higher childhood mortality and male bias in enumeration of population has adverse impact of frequent excessive child bearing on health of women, especially of those in the reproductive age group and higher incidence of certain diseases in women is considered to be the major factor for the declining of the sex ratio over the last decades.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid,
Table—1.2
The Growth of Population of Assam according to sex after each Census

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>42,98,773</td>
<td>37,30,088</td>
<td>80,28,856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>57,98,376</td>
<td>50,38,953</td>
<td>1,08,37,329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>77,14,240</td>
<td>69,10,912</td>
<td>1,46,25,125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>1,04,67,461</td>
<td>94,29,382</td>
<td>1,98,96,843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>1,15,79,693</td>
<td>1,07,14,869</td>
<td>5,22,94,562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>2,66,55,528</td>
<td>1,28,78,491</td>
<td>1,37,77,037</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


According to the Census of India from 1951 onwards the female population in the State of Assam are always less than the males. It is seen in the Census of 2001 that the population of Assam stands at 2,66,55,528 of which 1,37,77,037 are males and 1,28,78,491 females. The decadal growth of the State's population works out to 18.92 percent during the decade 1991-2001 as against 21.34 percent for the country as a whole.

Table—1.3
Percentage of Rural and Urban Population in Assam according to sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Year</th>
<th>Percentage of Urban</th>
<th>Rural Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table 1.4 shows the number of females per thousand males in Assam.

Table—1.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Female Per Thousand Males</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>932</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source—Census of India.
The sex ratio in the State shows a discouraging trend since 1931. In 1921 it was 908 and in 1931, the female per thousand male populations came down to 886 and remained the same during 1941. In 1951 the sex ratio in the State decreased to 876 per thousand males. In 1971, the sex ratio in Assam shows an improvement from 876 in 1961 to 902 in 1971. The Census Report of 2001 shows an increasing trend in the sex ratio of females per thousand males and it is 932 in 2001 as against 923 in 1991. The sex ratio in Assam is always below the National level. Thus the demographic characteristics of Indian women in general and women of Assam in particular indicate widespread differences and the lower status of women with respect to population, health and mortality.

Sex ratio is an important demographic feature for any population. A very unique feature of the population of India is the significant shortage of female in the country decade by decade. In one Indian context the sex ratio has a special significance as it reflects a declining tendency, which means that the female population is gradually declining, than the male population. The figures of India’s female population shows a continuous steady fall in the proportion of female to male that has been going on since 1901.

**Status of Women**

A status is a position in a social group or groupings in relation to other positions held by individuals in the same group or groupings. It determines the amount of authority wielded or the degree of submission required. It is the most essential part of life. It gives direct and indirect advantages to an individual. It is enjoyed by both men and women. The creation of the world is not the handiwork of men only. Both men and women equally shared in this creation.

The status of women is mostly determined by the structure of the society or family.\(^7\) The position of women in any society is a true index of its culture and advancement.\(^8\) A country is called more advanced if its women are advanced. A society cannot progress without the contribution of womenfolk. In general women

\(^7\) Medhi, Kunja (editor), Women and Social Change, Women Studies Research Centre, Gauhati University, p-257.
\(^8\) Barua, Sabita, a Thesis submitted to the Gauhati University, p-23.
are regarded as property of others in a patriarchal society. She is moulded accordingly by neglecting all her potential qualities and this type of attitude is harmful to the whole society. In general women plays a decisive role in most of the patriarchal societies. The maintenance of home and proper care and rearing of the children depend upon mothers. The status of women in the society not only in our country but also throughout the world is inferior to men. In the more advanced Nations too, women enjoy lower status in relation to men. Though women performs 50% of the world’s labour still their position is not up to the mark. Inspite of their crucial role both in the family and outside world, they have not been given equal status in the family and outside world, and have not been given equal rights in social, economic and political fields.

Indian women played a dominant role in shaping the history of the country.\textsuperscript{19} They have taken gallant role in the history of the freedom movement. There are so many prominent woman potentialities in the political field too. But a few women’s advancement does not generalize the higher status of women in the society. In our country, in most cases, the position of women is like a slave. She is silent spectator. In her husband’s home, she has neither liberty nor rights to take part in the decision-making. This deplorable position of women has reduced them to a silent symbol of suffering, deprivation and negligence.

There were many attempts to raise the status of women through various legislative steps. The social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ranade, Vivekananda organized reform movements to raise the status of women. After independence, the Government of India took various steps to assign equal status to women in the economic, social and political fields. Women of Assam have a glorious past of their own. They have taken part in the freedom movement and sacrificed their lives. Sati Jaymati, Mula Gabharu, Bhogeswari Phukanani and Kanaklata became famous in the minds of the people of Assam for their heroic deeds.

Status of women in the society depends upon the nature of its economy and attitude of the society towards women. A society is called progressive whenever its women are in a better position. Traditions has put Assamese women just like the rest

\begin{footnote}{19}\textit{Ibid.}\end{footnote}
of the country where women are in a deplorable status although Assamese women occupies a little superior position than many sisters in other parts of the country. Some evil customs like dowry, bride burning, sati etc. were not vogue in Assam. But presently some of these evil practices are gaining ground in Assam.

In the traditional society the women are not allowed to take part in the decision making process. The traditional society considered women as fit for household purpose. In Assam, the role of women in politics is not satisfactory and it is due to the low status of women that very few women have participated in the decision making process. Women in general cannot become active in politics due to the lack of familial and social support in favour of them.

**Concept of Legislature**

In the modern era, Legislature has occupied an honourable position but in the olden days laws were not made but discovered. There were folk laws which were based upon customs and traditions of the people and the Government and the religious authorities run according to these folk laws. With the passage of time folk laws became less important and laws came into existence and later Parliament came into being.

The Legislature most commonly known as Parliament is regarded as having the most celebrated place in the political organization of a country. The word Parliament meant “a Talk” is derived from the French word “Parler” (to speak or parley) and the Latin Parliamentum. Modern Parliaments arose through a fusion of the legislative and judicial functions and the voting on taxation or supply. A Parliament was really a meeting of the King-in-Council to which the judges were summoned for consideration of pleas and petitions to the King to redress grievances. The Legislature is regarded as the “mirror of the will of the Nation”. It is the media through which the public will can be focused and redressed. It is the representative body, which is constituted by the people and the most powerful instrument in the hand of the people. Hence, Legislature is also connected with the phrases as “embodiment of the general will of the community”, “a committee of grievances”, “a Congress of opinions”.22

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20. Hazarika, Dr. Niru, Changing Status of Women, Journal Published by the Department of Political Science, Gauhati University.
A Legislature’s success and longevity depends upon the level of member’s awareness and of their obligations towards the people and their responding to the aspirations of the people and the commitment of our public functionaries in the implementation of the approved policies and programmes. The success of democracy is not possible only with the male sections of the society. A powerful Legislature is that type of Legislature where both the sexes equally share powers and discharge their duties and responsibilities.

**The Legislature in Assam**

Assam, the centre of the Northeast of India had a glorious history of her own. It has a rich heritage with different race, religion and culture described as “mini India”. It came under the British rule and was not a full fledged Province administered by a Chief Commissioner. The Indian Council’s Act of 1861 provides for the creation of Provincial Legislature for the first time in India. The Legislative Council of Eastern Bengal and Assam was created in 1905. Under the Government of India Act, 1909 the strength of the Eastern Bengal and Assam Legislative Council was increased to 40 and Assam was allotted 5 seats. There was no provision of woman members in the Assam Legislative Council.

In 1912, when Assam was reconstituted into a Chief Commissioner’s Province, it was given Legislative Council of 24 members, the Chief Commissioner nominated 13 members and 11 members were elected. There was no provision of woman member in the Chief Commissioner’s Province. Under the Government of India Act of 1919, Assam became a Governor’s Province in January 1921. It was one of the eight Provinces of India to have introduced diarchic system of Government on an experimental basis. According to the provisions of the Government of India Act of 1919, the strength of the Legislative Council was increased from 24 to 53. Out of the 53 members 41 were elected and 12 members were nominated and of which 7 were officials and 5 were non-officials. It is to be noted that this Act provides for separate representation and accordingly the seats were distributed. The Government of India Act of 1919 did not provide any space for the representation of women in the administration.

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23. Fifty Years of Assam Legislative Assembly, A Short Glimpse, A Journal of the Assam Legislative Assembly, Secretariat, Dispur, p-2
26. Ibid, p-5
The following table 1.5 shows the number of elected members in the Legislative Council under the Government of India Act of 1919.

Table—1.5
Number of Elected Members in the Legislative Council in 1919

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Labour</th>
<th>01</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Backward Areas</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohammedan</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Mohammedan</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce and Industry</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Government of India Act of 1935 was implemented in 1937. It is a landmark in the process of development of legislative system for a number of reasons. The Act provided for the State autonomy and Ministers are responsible for administration and the expansion of the qualification of elections. As per the norms the Legislature was designated as the Assam Legislative Assembly. So the Act provides for Bi-cameralism i.e. the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council. The strength of the Lower House, i.e. the Legislative Assembly was increased from 53 to 108. There was no provision of nomination of member in the Act and only one seat was allotted to women. For the new Assembly the seats were allotted as follows—

Table—2.1
Allotment of Seats in the Assembly in 1937

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>01</th>
<th>General Seats</th>
<th>47</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>Planting Group</td>
<td>09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>Commerce</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>Plain Tribal</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>Hill Tribal</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Indian Christian</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

27 Ibid. p-21  
28 Ibid. p-103.
Thus the Assam Legislative Assembly was wholly an elected body and the members were elected on the basis of community and special interest. The Assembly enjoyed 5 years term, which could be extended or rejected by the Governor. The Legislative Council was the Upper Chamber of the Assam State Legislature. The total number of members in the Legislative Council was fixed to be not less than 21 and not more than 22 members. It had the tradition of permanent body of the British House of Lords and not subject to dissolution and one third of the members were to retire after every third year. The Legislative Council is the Upper House and can be compared with the Council of States or Rajya Sabha. There was no provision of woman in the Legislative Council. The seats were distributed in the following ways-

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mohammedan</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Nominated by the Governor</td>
<td>¾</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>21 or 22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Upper House i.e. the Legislative Council was however abolished on the wake of attainment of independence on 15th August 1947. Since then, the Assam Legislative Assembly is having the Unicameral status which was a distinct phase of transition in the annals of Assam Legislative Assembly. After the partition of India in 1947, Syhlet District of Assam was transferred to East Pakistan and as a result the strength of the Assam Legislative Assembly was reduced to 71. The seats were distributed as follows—32 General members, 5 SC, 16 Mohammedan, 1 European, 1 Indian Planting, 1 Commerce and Industry, 1 European Commerce, 5 Labour, 1 Indian Christian, 1 woman, 4 Plain Tribal and 5 Hill Tribal. After independence, the strength of the members of Assam Legislative Assembly increased from 71 to 108. Only one seat was allotted for woman in the Assam Legislative Assembly.

After independence, the first General election to the Assam Legislative Assembly was held in 1952 and there were radical changes in the composition of the Legislative Assembly. There was the provision of reservation of seats for SC and ST and the special constituencies were abolished and the strength of Assembly was fixed

29. The Journal of the Assam Legislative Assembly, April 2nd '02, Assembly Seretariat, Dispur, p-15.
The seats were allotted in this way- 77 seats were for the General, 5 seats were for the SCs, 7 seats for the Plain Tribal and 19 for the Hill Tribal.

In the Lok Sabha election of 1952, the total number of seats in the House from Assam was 12 and one seat was reserved for the SCs and one seat for the STs respectively.

The following table-2.2 shows the number of seats allotted in the Assam Legislative Assembly, Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha from 1952 to 2001.

Table—2.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Election</th>
<th>Assam Legislative Assembly</th>
<th>Lok Sabha</th>
<th>Rajya Sabha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>1983</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<td>1985</td>
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<td>1989</td>
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<td>1991</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data relating to the General election to the Lok Sabha in Assam reveals that the Congress party was the king maker in the earlier elections. The Lok Sabha elections from 1952 to 1999, in which the Congress party played the dominant role. In the Lok Sabha election of 1952, Congress has secured all the 11 seats it contested in that year. In the Second and Third Lok Sabha elections the party got 9 seats, in 1971 it won 13 seats, 10 in 1980 and in 1983 bye-election also got 2 seats and 4 seats in 1985 continuously. Congress party played the master role from 1952 to 1971 continuously and in 1977 there was a change in the National politics. Janata party with the assimilation of 4 parties under the leadership of Morarji Desai came to power, which was a kind of revolt against the Indira Gandhi regime, but in Assam.
Congress party was able to secure 10 seats inspite of party’s serious defeat throughout the country. The Congress party’s popularity shows slightest decreasing trend from 1980.

The males always dominated the Lok Sabha elections. In the Lok Sabha election of 1952, Bonily Khongmen was the only one woman elected from Assam. In 1957, two women represented to the Lok Sabha from Assam and they were—Mofida Ahmed from Jorhat and Rani Manjula Devi from Goalpara constituency. The Third Lok Sabha election was held in 1962 and two women represented to the Lok Sabha and they were—Jyotsna Chanda from Cachar and Renuka Debi Barkataky from Gauhati. Jyotsna Chanda was the only lady candidate who represented to the Lok Sabha for three consecutive terms in 1962, 1967 and in 1972 respectively. In 1977, Rashida Haque Choudhury was elected from Silchar and Renuka Debi Barkataky from the Gauhati constituency. No woman was elected to the Lok Sabha after 1977 to 1998. It is in the Lok Sabha election of 1998 that Ranee Narah was elected from the Lakhimpur constituency. In the Lok Sabha election of 1999, two women were elected to the Lok Sabha from Assam and they were—Ranee Narah from Lakhimpur and Bijoya Chakraborty from Gauhati constituency. From 1952 to 1999 only two women became the Minister of State in the Union Council of Ministers and they were—Renuka Debi Barkataky and Bijoya Chakraborty.

**Status of Women in the Lok Sabha**

The number of female members elected to the highest legislative body of the Nation depicts a dismal picture. Only a few women elected to that august body from Assam since 1952 and through all India basis it is only 3% to 8%. One must say that lessons of history have been repeatedly ignored and the indifference towards women’s representation persists. Women constitute between 45 to 50 percent of the country’s total electorate.

Although outnumbered by their male counterparts, they have, with great spirit left indelible impressions on the sands of time.31 Though the number of woman representatives in the Lok Sabha from Assam and from other States were few but

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their performance is significant and their contribution can not be neglected. Woman members of the older Lok Sabha with their colourful presence proved their dynamism in the area of legislation and debate. Within a short period of time they introduced many important Private Members Bills like the Dowry Restraint Bill, Hindu Marriage Amendment Bill, Indian Adoption of Children Bill and Suppression of Immoral Traffic and Brothels Bill etc. Most of these Bills were put up for discussion and passed, enhancing both position of women and the fair M.P’s reputation. So the woman representatives from Assam in the Parliament also played an active role in the Parliament. The role-played by Bonily Khongmen, Puspalata Das, Jyotsna Chanda, Renuka Debi Barkataky and Bijoya Chakraborty etc. remained evergreen in the history of Parliament

The situation in Assam is same with the rest of India. The social pattern, ethos, the treatment and thinking about them are not changed in Assam. From 1952 to 1999 the total number of women represented to the Lok Sabha are only 12. In the same way 7 women represented in the Rajya Sabha from Assam up to 2000. In the Assam Legislative Assembly the number of woman members from 1952 to 2001 are 54.

**Assam Legislative Assembly**

An analysis of the election results of the Assam Legislative Assembly from 1952 to 2001 reveals that male members continued their domination over the female. Only a minimum number of women represented in the State politics of Assam. In the First election of 1952, Usha Barthakur was the only woman elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly from the Samaguri constituency. The Second Assembly election was held in 1957 and five women were elected and they were—Usha Barthakur, Jyotsna Chanda, Kamal Kumari Barua, Padma Kumari Gohain, Lily Sengupta. The next General election to the Assembly which was held in 1962 represented by four women and they were— Begum Afia Ahmed, Kamal Kumari Barua, Padma Kumari Gohain, Lily Sengupta. The fourth General election to the Assembly was held in 1967 and five women were elected and they were—Rani Manjula Devi, Pranita Talukdar, Puspalata Das, Padma Kumari Gohain and Lily Sengupta. The next General election to the Assam Legislative Assembly was held in 1972 and highest numbers
of women were elected during this period. The elected women were—Renuka Debi Barkataky, Tarulata Bora, Swarna Prova Mahanta, Rebati Das, Anandi Bala Rava, Pranita Talukdar, Syeda Anowara Taimur and Satyabti Goswami.

In 1977, there was the change in the Central administration and Janata Party with the assimilation of four parties came to power at the Centre. Only one woman member represented the Sixth Assam Legislative Assembly and she was Anowara Taimur. The next General election to the Assam Legislative Assembly was held in 1983 and only two women were elected to the Assembly and they were—Syeda Anowara Taimur and Mridula Saharia. The Eighth General election to the Assam Legislative Assembly was held in 1985. This time people of Assam expressed their view in favour of a regional political party named Asom Gana Parishad. During this period four women were elected and they were—Kumari Rabidas, Amiya Gogoi, Rekha Rani Das Boro and Jyotsna Sonowal. In the Assembly election of 1991, again Congress party came to power and four women were elected and they were—Syeda Anowara Taimur, Rupam Kurmi, Renupama Rajkhowa, and Amiya Gogoi.

The Tenth General election to the Assembly was held in 1996. In this election again Asom Gana Parishad came to power and nine women were elected. The elected women are—Pramila Brahma, Rekha Rani Das Boro, Rupam Kurmi Renupama Rajkhowa, Amiya Gogoi, Pranati Phukan, Sushila Hazarika, Hemo Prova Saikia and Alaka Sarma. The next General election to the Assembly was held in 2001 and ten women were elected. The elected women are—Pramila Brahma, Hosenara Islam, Sarifa Begum, Pranati Phukan, Rupam Kurmi, Ajanta Neog, Uttara Kalita, Jonjonali Barua, Komoli Basumatary, and Hemo Prova Saikia. Rupam Kurmi died before the expiry of her term and Jibontara Ghatoar was elected through bye-election and the number of woman members in the Eleventh Assembly remained ten.

What is Political Participation

The term political participation may be defined as the process, through which a person displays a role in the political life of his/her society, has the opportunity to take part in deciding common goals and the ways to achieve these goals. The idea of
political participation is closely connected with the concept of power. Politics is a study of an exercise in power, any political participation should mean a participation in this exercise of power, the power to effectively influence the decision-making processes and policies, to reverse the existing situation wherever they are disadvantageous and to bring about the necessary social changes. According to Sidney Verba and others, political participation refers to "acts by those not formally empowered to make decision—the acts being intend to influence the behaviours of those who have such decisional powers." Verba notes that successful participation refers to those acts, which have the intended effects. Political participation does not mean only the exercises of power but all the activities relating to the exercises of power. Political participation means voting in the elections, campaigning for elections, supporting the pressure groups, active membership of a political party, holding party offices, providing leadership to the party, contesting elections, arranging party funds and make a direct connection with the leaders, presenting various problems of the people to the leaders etc. Thus political participation means carrying out all those activities, which are necessary to capture power because power is the ultimate aim through which the hopes and aspirations of the people can be fulfilled.

So, political participation is the necessary ingredient of every political system. But a few people capture political power and this section wants to continue administration forever. There is lack of chance of participation by the mass of the population. But in the modern system of administration this affair of the State, political participation fosters stability and order by reinforcing the legitimacy of political authority. Since political participation is mainly seen in receiving benefits through taking membership of the political parties and they take institutional forms to express their dissatisfaction with development. The political participation also leads to the question whether one should act or not to act or whom they should follow and here lies the ideologies of political parties. People generally choose to participate in the activities of the party, which they support. The political participation of the citizens

33. Kaushik, Shushila, Women and Political Participation (an article), edited by Singha, Niroj, Women in Indian Politics, Gyan Publishing House, 2000, New Delhi, p-33
36. Ibid.
lies in the activities of the people in the Government directly or indirectly through demonstrations, mass rallies, mass protests, campaign for increased rate of goods etc.

Soysal defined the term participation that covers all the forms of actions by which the citizens take part in the operation of State machinery. Participation helps to educate people about the civic rules and regulations. So political participation is the main device of democracy. In the traditional society the Governmental power is concentrated in the hands of a few elites where as in a more advanced Nation the principle of active citizenship i.e citizens are not only confine themselves with the work of voting right but all other duties and responsibilities related to it. Political participation is the responsibility of the conscious citizens to influence the Government through various ways. The scope of political participation is not confined with in the jurisdiction of political right only. So a wide spectrum of political activities ranging from mere participation to public office holding is available to the citizens of the most countries. Various factors determine people’s political involvement. These factors are different attitudes of the individuals, beliefs and thoughts and personality traits. political participation is related to the various voluntary services, which directly influence the political system of the country. These voluntary services are—

1. Casting of vote by the citizens in which people take much interest. People treat election as a festival in which there is no personal gain is attained by the citizen.

2. By supporting particular principles and fighting under the banner of a particular ideology through membership for which they attain no personal benefit.

3. Making personal connections with the politicians/ legislators to handle various problems of the society. Here the political involvement of the people lies in the motive of service to the society.

4. People serve the society through taking membership of the political parties. They perform various party activities and the said party in which membership is taken is in power tries to solve the local problems through political involvement.

5. Leading the party as representative of the people and making communication about the various information and activities of the Government to other citizens.

37. Ibid,p-68
So political participation does not mean only to cast vote and contest in the elections but it includes (a) all the activities to influence the Government and by influencing forcing the Government to change the decision of it which are against the interest of the public through public pressure.(b) it includes all the electoral activities like casting of vote, contesting elections as candidates, campaigning for elections, lobbying etc.(c) and finally through demonstrations, strikes, protest movements, rallies and resort to violence etc.

Lester W. Milbrath has ranked the political activities in a hierarchical order. This hierarchical order is Gladiatorial activities. They are—running a party office, to carry out party activities, to be a candidate for office, to raise party funds, to vote in the elections, to attend party meetings, campaigning for elections, attending party rallies, organizing party meetings, assisting monetary benefits to a candidate, wearing a party sticker or a party button, or a party cap, or a party pen and other symbolic things to campaign for a party political party, attempting to another in voting a certain way.

Thus political participation consists of all those activities from top to bottom that has the direct connection with the decision-making bodies. At the top level it is exercised by the participants who occupied high position in the political system and at the lower level it is occupied by the participants who are members of the different political, semi-political, quasi-political institutions which include political parties, trade unions, pressure groups, interest groups etc. The Centre for the study of Developing Societies (CSDS) in their All India Survey in 1967 elections classified the electorates into five categories on the basis of their political participation.

1. There are some political participants who are apathetic i.e. they are members of the political parties but wholeheartedly not interested in politics due to various reasons.

2. Peripheral type of political participants are those who cast their votes in favour of a political party and candidate, have some interest in politics but sincerely can not support politics due to the existing corruption in it.

3. Auxiliaries’ type of participants is the active participant who takes much interest in politics. They exercise their voting power with great interest. They are active workers of the political parties and they think politics as part of their life.

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38. Ibid., p-70
39. Ibid,
4. Spectators are those people who only cast their vote in favour of a particular political party and candidate and they have some ideas and information about politics but they are not active in politics rather they are interested in other activities.

5. Politist is that type of political participants who have greater interest in politics. They vote and engage in political activities with high level of interest and information.

Thus political participation includes all those activities, which are related to the political system. The various activities are—exercising voting power in favour of a particular candidate, campaigning for a particular party and candidate, getting out votes, organizing party meetings and rallies, attending party meetings and rallies, organizing protest movements against the decisions of the Government and for various demand of the people, distribution of pamphlets, attending public meetings and rallies, membership of the political parties, other type of campaigning activities and making contacts with the Government officials and legislators relating to the solution of various problems of the people.

If the term political participation is used in a narrow sense of share in the Government then it is a serious limitation because very few women have entered in the domain of politics but if the term is used in a broader sense of sharing all the activities relating to the political system, women have a great share in the system because women are supportive to politics i.e. women are used for protest movements, demonstrations, flag bearers, campaigns for elections, shouting slogans etc. but very few women are projected as candidate for elections. The available data on women in the political process bears evidence to the fact that due to a curious combination of some social, economic and political variables, women are left on the periphery of the political participation remains elusive for most of them inspite of the voting rights and capturing a few positions or power.  

The position of women in the Indian political scenario remains by and large low profiled and unrecognized except a few who are from the elite families, who are closely related to the political leaders through blood or through marriages.  

41. Srivastava, Rashmi, Empowerment of Women Through Political Participation with special Reference to Madhya Pradesh (an article) edited by Sinha, Nirej, Women in Indian Politics, Cyan Publishing house, New Delhi, p-199
political participation of women in our country are not up to the mark. Women occupied mostly 50 percent of the population but their numbers in the administrative body are not even 10 percent of the total members. This is due to the fact that political parties are the kingmakers and they never want to keep space for women and if so their interest will be hampered. They prefer a male candidate suitable for election and ultimately many aspirant women are to contest election as Independents where is the little chance of winning. Again women do not want to enter in the pollution of politics where politicians always give the false promises to the people, which the women are not. Naturally in the present political world, there is the excessive use of money and muscle power, manipulation and criminalisation of politics. Women don’t find them safe in the political world and naturally their safe place is home. Women are alienated from the politics due to their dual role i.e. both at home and outside responsibilities which make them overburdened with their duties and automatically they become less interested in politics and it has hampered their participation in politics.

The political scenario relating to Assam is not very much different from the National one. A small group of women came out for open political activities due to mainly their close relationship with political leaders. The profile of woman legislators of Assam reveals that very few women have participated in the electoral politics of Assam but their participation at grass root politics is very encouraging.

**Women and Political Parties:**

The result of the various elections reveals that political parties consider women as a backward section of the society, which needs special provision and steps to bring them with the equal footing with men. In our country the male members dominate the political parties. Though very few women have been able to occupy important position in the party both at the National and State level. There have been many political personalities among women at the helm of various parties. Late Indira Gandhi was the leader of the Congress party, Sonia Gandhi is the leader of Congress at present, Mayavati of the Bahujan Samajwadi Party, Mamata Banerjee of the Trinomool Congress and Uma Bharati of the Bharatiya Jana Shakti etc. In Assam, no woman has occupied the party leadership but there are important woman personalities in the different political parties. Even the regional political party like A.G.P which came
into existence after the Assam agitation by the A.A.S.U against the foreign nationals did not assign party leadership to any woman where the sacrifice of the women can not be denied at all. Among the political parties, Indian National Congress has projected maximum number of woman candidates for elections. Late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi has declared reservation of 30 percent of seats for women among members of Parliament, but still up to the 14th Lok Sabha election the number has not crossed even 10 percent. The number of woman members did not increase even during the regime of undisputed woman leader Indira Gandhi. The party is very liberal in selecting woman candidates for various elections. In Assam, both in the National and State politics, maximum number of woman members came from the Congress party.

In the B.J.P, which was formerly known as Bharatiya Jana Sangh supports the advancement of women and special steps to remove their social and educational disabilities. There are a few female members in the party executive but the leadership is never handed over to a woman. The picture in Assam State B.J.P Committee is same. The party has encouraged the political participation of women but very miser to select women as candidates.

The Communist party of India and the Communist party of India (Marxist) hold almost similar views about women and are critical of the poor progress in the field of women’s welfare since independence. Though they demand that women can achieve freedom only under the Socialist system and there is enough number of women among their members which constitute 1.1 percent of party’s membership with one woman out of a total of thirty one members in the Central Committee.

The A.G.P, which is a regional political party of Assam, viewed the problem of women from the point of welfare measure. Male members run its leadership. Though the party has women’s wing and the leadership is run by a woman but the number of woman members are still negligible. The party leadership was never vested to a woman where there are so many aspirant women to become the leader of the party.

43. Ibid
Thus the attitude of all political parties towards women is almost same. The political parties are not willing to take the risk by selecting women as candidate for elections. Women are used as sincere workers who carry out campaigning during elections, to provide relief services in the natural calamities and after the task is over they are sent back to their home and hence women are satisfied with this type of substitute works. They never claim leadership and equal representation. The socio-economic structure of the Indian society is such that generally Indian women don’t enter into politics. Political parties who are doubtful about women’s selection gets the chance and in spite of dedicated women workers who are reluctant to politics nominates male candidates in place of women. There is the general apathy, underestimation of women, potential and other subtle discrimination against women. Again political parties don’t consider women as best suitable candidates for election. They are considered as liabilities, inexperienced and resourceless. Generally women are not selected for election unless they are backed by some Godfather or patronage of political families or if they are selected for a constituency where is the lack of chance of winning. The political parties are very sympathetic towards women regarding their poor representation in the elected bodies but practically they never question relating to the patriarchal notions about women’s role in the family and which ultimately protects her participation in the political field. Some courageous women from the middle class families may overcome the constraints of domestic and patriarchal notions and take the responsibility of politics.

There are vast differences between a male and female politician’s entry into politics. A man from a simple family with no caste and social backing can reach to the top level of leadership through hard working but it is quite impossible for a woman to reach the top without any backing. Most of the woman leaders in the Parliament and in the State Assemblies came from economically well to-do families or royal background and are high Caste Hindus. The same is in the case of Assam too. So, poor, rural women cannot aspire to start their political career. Only women from the elite background can survive in the political battlefield. The political participation of women can be increased if the political parties adopt liberal attitude towards women. All women irrespective of caste, class and religious differences should be given a chance to participate in politics.
Entry of Women into Politics:

Indian women’s entry into politics started like their male counterparts with the through struggle for India’s independence from the British Colonial rule. However, the Indian women’s entry into the political arena was more a matter of design and accident than a matter of design and premeditation. The active participation of women in the freedom struggle simultaneously developed among them an increasing sense of awareness to organize and lead the cause of their liberation from oppression and subordination. In the revolution of 1857 where the Indian soldiers protested to follow the orders of the British officials, Queen of Jhansi Laxmi Bai fought bravely with the British soldiers for the achievement of freedom. On the initiative of Sarojini Naidu and Annie Besant, a foreign origin woman encouraged the Indian women to fight for the freedom. Women of India strongly protested the “the partition of Bengal” in 1905, joined in the ‘Swadeshi’ movement. Indian women had played very important role in the freedom struggle indirectly. They helped the freedom fighters by supplying food and shelter to the revolutionaries, by donating money and ornaments. Thousand of women faced lathi, bullet and jail. There was no difference of caste, religion and untouchability in their minds.

Women of India organized themselves and formed powerful women organizations and demanded political rights from the British Government. In 1917, the Indian women demanded the voting right for themselves. Some woman leaders were very articulate in their ideas and their awareness of the situation. Sarojini Naidu had petitioned to the British Government and placed the Indian women’s demand for equal voting rights with men. Women participated in the Non- Co-operative movement of Gandhiji. They joined the Congress party and became the active participant of movement. In 1921, women of India got the franchise to a limited extent. Sarojini Naidu became the President of the Congress in 1925 and she was successful in organizing the Indian women for freedom movement. In 1931 women got the right to contest election on the ground that women must have property in her name and she must be a graduate for seven years. So candidature for election to

46. Ibid,
47. Ibid,
women was restricted to the educated and rich women. So women in India entered the political process in the early decades of the present century through their massive participation in the freedom struggle under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.\(^48\) He believed that women had a positive role to play in the reconstruction of the society and that the recognition of their equality was an essential step to bring about social justice. Gandhi had extended his continued and unqualified support to the enfranchisement of women. This led to the massive participation of women in the freedom movement, had a direct impact on the political and social elite, including women of these classes. They participated in the Civil Disobedience movement, the Salt Satyagraha and Quit India movement in 1942. Women of India became successful in getting the right to vote and the right to be elected.

In the election of 1937, 8 women from common constituencies of States and 42 women from reserved constituencies got elected. Women of India lead a very simple life, leave ornaments and costly clothing and begun to wear Khadi cloths. They practiced weaving cloths, went to jails etc. Women’s mass participation in the Quit India movement led them to jails, bears physical tortures, police firing, face tear gas and become victims of bullets. They also tolerate insults and tortures by the foreign Government for giving shelter to the revolutionaries in their houses. So not only prominent woman leaders but thousand of faceless, ordinary wives, daughters and mothers played their active role in the freedom movement, dotting the political history of India with their faceless contributions to the cause. The Constitution of India saluted the massive participation of women in the freedom struggle by equal rights to enter into politics irrespective of gender and other factors.\(^49\)

The women of Assam did play a gallant role in the freedom movement which was a story of their devotion, sacrifice and patriotism. But their sacrifice did not receive due recognition from the people and the powers. The pioneers of freedom movement of Assam are—Kanaklata Barua, Bhogeswari Phukanani, and Tileswari Barua etc. who laid their lives for the cause of the Nation.

\(^{48}\) Sinha Niroj, Women in Indian Politics, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, p-21.  
\(^{49}\) ibid.
Significance of the Study

It is a truism that generally growth with social and distributive justice has been the cornerstone of India's efforts towards planning for development to improve the economic and social life of the citizens. The objective of both social reform and social welfare is to provide meaningful and purpose-full life to individuals. The former mitigates social evils that afflict various sections of society and the latter affords necessary facilities and benefits.

The movements for social reforms in the 19th century had in the first instance started for the spread of education, especially for the women. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Jatiba Pholey, Ranade were among the pioneers of this movement among Hindu women. While Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and later many others including Zakir Hussain spearheaded the movement of education among the Muslims. The abolition of the Sati system was the first social reform step taken up by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, which was followed by reforms in the institution of marriage and family. The reformers though carried on their campaigns for public education through press and platform but had also pleaded for legislative action on the part of the Government to combat the social evils.

Accordingly, the Government has passed various Acts restraining Child Marriage, abolition of prohibition of Widow Marriage and recently abolished Bigamy, allowing share to women in the property of their parents – in –law, abolition of Dowry system etc.

Social reform movements in post independence era are continuing to address themselves to the new emerging social problem as created by population explosion, urbanization, scientific and technological advancements, erosion, age-old social values, generation gaps, disintegration of joint families, violence, poverty, lack of efforts to empower weaker sections etc. In the process of development Government has become more intensively involved in regulating, planning, stimulating and undertaking directly economic, social and commercial activities in various fields significantly. Both men and women in the society will feel the impact of it equally. Therefore in the process of legislation the role of women is as important as that of men.
It is true that the number of woman voters is increasing gradually in our country as well as in our own State of Assam, but the right to vote enjoyed by women especially in the rural areas cannot be considered as a reliable indicator of women's upward movement in the process of acquiring power in the field of politics. This act of rural women is influenced by several social factors. The 73rd and 74th Amendment to the Constitution of India is a very strong threshold to empower women of the rural and urban areas at grass root level through the process of decision-making or legislation. This may be the beginning of the process of women's empowerment through decision-making scope granted to women at the grass root level. Under the above circumstances the proposed study will be of great help to understand the role of women in the process of legislation at the Central, State level and also in the perspectives of social environment of ours.

Scope of the Study

The study intended to focus about the woman legislators of Assam. The study included woman legislators of Parliament and the State Legislature from the first election held in 1952. The General elections from 1952 onwards and the increasing trend of women's participation in the political system are reflected in the study.

Objectives of Study

The objectives of the study are:—

a. Analyze the social and family background of the woman legislators.

b. Highlight the trend in the recruitment of woman candidates by the political parties for contesting elections.

c. Identify the constraints of woman legislators in taking active part in legislation.

d. Focus the role of woman legislators in politics.

Methodology and Sources of Data

The present study has been conceived with the purpose of attaining the analytical approach. For this purpose the data were collected from both the primary and the secondary sources. The data and information were collected from the legislative
proceedings available in the libraries of Assam Legislative Assembly, Dispur and the Parliament, New Delhi have been consulted. The various debates and sessions of the Assam Legislative Assembly and Parliament from 1952 onwards have been studied for the purpose. The various election reports available in the Election Commission Offices, Guwahati have been consulted. Further the reports of the Legislative and Parliamentary Committees too have been ascertained for the purpose. Moreover, the current debate sessions of the 12th Assam Legislative Assembly have been attended to.

An attempt has been made through Questionnaire to collect information from the woman legislators about their role and performances in the Legislature. But nobody responded to it. Ultimately efforts were made to contact them in person with interview schedule. Woman leaders of the senior age are very responsive and cooperative regarding their personal information and role performances. With the selected woman leaders of both sitting and former about 23, personal interviews were held about their personal information, social background, role performances and issues they raised on the floor of the Legislature.

Woman leaders who were members of the Parliament and due to their busy schedule responded very attentively. Woman legislators of senior age are very curious about the women’s involvement in politics. About 70% of the woman legislators replied that they are to respect their party guidelines and to observe party interests.

The secondary sources were collected from the books and journals available in the libraries of the educational institutions, research institutes and public organizations.

An Overview of Literature

Following books have been reviewed and found as below——

Niroj Sinha, editor “Women in Indian Politics”, (Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2000), it has depicted the role of women in Indian politics.

Vijay Agnew has covered the participation of women in Indian politics before independence in the book “Elite women in Indian politics”, (New Delhi, Vikash Publishing House, Pvt. Ltd.)

Dr. N.L. Dutta, in her seminar paper entitled “Political Status of Women in
Assam since Independence” edited by S.L.Barua (Omsons Publication, New Delhi, 1992). She gives an account of the participation of women in the political processes as voters and candidates in various elections of Assam during the period 1952-1985.

Annapurna Devi in her article “Women in Orissa Politics” edited by Amit Kumar Gupta in the book “Women and Society” (Criterion Publications, New Delhi, 1986) a study in political socialization has pointed that women from upper socio-economic strata with considerable exposure are more likely to join politics.

Dr. Pitam Singh in his book “Women Legislators in Indian Politics” (New Delhi, Concept Publishing Company 2003) has highlighted the role of woman legislators in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly, their involvement in the various Committees of the Legislature and in dealing with the women issues.

Sushila Kaushik in her book “Women in Politics” : Forms and Processes (Published by Friedrich Ebert Stifling, New Delhi, 1992). She has taken the sample of woman politicians from the National, Regional and Local levels which covered the Ministers, M.Ps, legislators, members occupying important positions, members of District Boards, local village bodies and common women. She found that majority of the woman leaders having the middle class urban family background.

Sabita Barua in her Ph.D Thesis submitted to the Gauhati University, entitled, “Role of Women in State Politics” has covered the role of women of Assam in the state politics. She has taken the sample of woman politicians from 1952 to 1985 and mainly the role-played by those in the National and State politics. She found that many woman M.Ps and M.L.As belonged to the political families, with support of their either parents/spouses or any other God Father, they stepped in the politics.

Sudhir Varma has studied women in his book, entitled “Women’s Struggle for Political Space”, (Rawat Publications, Jaipur and New Delhi, 1997) has highlighted the role of women as voters and participants in the various elections.

Dipti Sharma in her Ph.D Thesis submitted to the Gauhati University, entitled, “Role of women of Assam in the Freedom Movement during the period 1921-1947 with special reference to the Brahmaputra Valley” (Students Store, Guwahati, 1995). She has studied the role of women of Assam in the freedom movement during pre-independence period. She found that women of Assam like the rest of India have done a lot and sacrificed themselves for the sake of the country.
V.V. Rao and Niru Hazarika in their work entitled, "A Century of Government and Politics in North East India" has highlighted the role of women in the State politics of Assam since independence (S. Chand and Company Ltd, 1983, New Delhi). They have studied the role of woman legislators in the State politics from 1952.

Rama Mehta in her study "Socio-Legal Status of Women in India" (Mittal Publications, Delhi-1987) highlighted about the Western philosophers ideas and thoughts about the Constitutional provisions for women in the Constitution.

Sushila Kaushik in the article entitled "Women and Political Participation" edited by Niroj Sinha in the book "Women in Indian Politics" (Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi) has focused the participation of women in the democratic process and women in different party positions.

Kalpana Rao in her book "Women in Indian Politics" (Rajat Publications, 1999) has depicted a detailed picture about the political participation of women in Indian politics.

V. Mohini Giri in her book "Emancipation and Empowerment of women" (Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi) has highlighted about the empowerment of women, role of women in the decision-making bodies and Rajib Gandhi's concern for women.

Saraswati Misra in her study about the "Status of Indian Women" (Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi) has emphasized about the participation of women in the Indian freedom movement and in the Indian political system. She observed the reasons of quite less political activeness of women as voters and candidates. The main reasons of increasing events of leaving active politics by women are high expenditure of elections, threats or fear of violence and character assassination.

Rashmi Srivastava in the book "Women in Indian Politics" edited by Niroj Sinha has her article "The Political Scenario in India and Women's Role". She has referred to the women in present political scenario. The reasons for low participation of women in politics have been identified as corruption, criminalisation of politics and male domination in most of the fields.

Neera Desai and Maithreyi Krishnaraj in their book "Women and Society in India" (Ajanta Publications, 1990) have identified women of different political parties actively participate in campaigning and organizing meetings at the time of elections but hesitate to fight election in the Chapter—'Action for Change'. They observed that women of the elite and politicized families always help a smooth entry in politics.
Sarojini Sharan in the same book “Women in Indian Politics” has her article entitled “Women in Decision Making process in political system”. She has referred to those women only who were key political actors in the decision-making processes.

Anuradha Dutta in the same book “Women in Indian Politics” has her study “Political Parties and Women: Aspects of the issue with Reference to the Situation in Assam” She has referred to the political participation of women of Assam in the state politics party wise. She has also identified that Congress party is the only political party, which has projected more women in the electoral politics of Assam.

The various studies related to women have done merely confirm the political impression that a.) Women are not independent voters i.e. in casting their votes women are guided by the male guardian of the family.

b) A majority of the women are still illiterate which restrains them to imply their own decision.

c) Majority of the woman politicians have come from economically well off families and have at least one of her close relative mostly father, mother or husband involved in politics and show linkage of their political career with their families.

d) Sometimes a woman leader’s political career starts with the patronage of a prominent leader who holds an important position in his party and in decision-making Committees of the party.

e) In many cases women lack information and political awareness which prevents them from active participation in politics.

f) In Assam, most of the woman legislators (a widow succession case), a woman candidate mostly succeeds a husband in his constituency on the death of her husband.

The study of the political elites both at the National and State level role performances in Assam and their perception, socio-political changes have acquired great importance. Keeping in view the above point, the State level study of the political elites is likely to be more fruitful. The studies relating to women’s political participation at the State level are rare. A detailed study about the woman Legislators in Assam from 1952 to 2001 in case of woman leaders of the Assembly and their role performances, their problems in the way to politics are very rare.