CHAPTER-IV

SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF THE WOMAN LEGISLATORS OF ASSAM

In modern society where decision-making is a collective process, political power has tremendous significance. Power helps one to stress one’s will on the others. In a democratic society political activity is a joint effort of both men and women and this includes voting, contesting elections, campaigning, party activities etc. So far as the political power of women are concerned it means the degree of equality and freedom enjoyed by women in the shaping and sharing of power and the value attached to this role by society.

The aspiration of the Indian women to have the right to franchise and to have equal status in politics have been fulfilled in independent India because provisions has been made for Universal adult franchise without any discrimination on the basis of caste, creed, colour, sex or wealth. The Constitution of India has adopted Parliamentary system of Government both at the Centre and in the States. Parliamentary system in our country requires a representative democracy i.e. the members are popularly elected by the people of our country. The minimum age to become a member of the Lok Sabha is 25 years and 30 years in case of Rajya Sabha.

The study of the woman representatives in the Lok Sabha from Assam reveals a very poor trend because male always dominated the Lok Sabha elections. From 1952 to 1999 only 28 women contested in the fray and 12 were elected. Of the 12 elected women except Renuka Debi Barkataky and Bijoya Chakraborty, all were Congress members. Out of these 12 members, Renuka Debi was elected for two terms, Jyotsna Chanda for three terms and Bijoya Chakraborty for one term; and Ranee Narah for two terms.

Surprisingly enough, the number of woman candidates from Assam in the Parliament after independence is not at all satisfactory. Only 12 woman candidates were elected to the Lok Sabha from Assam since 1952. Bonily Khongmen was the first lady from Assam to represent in the Lok Sabha. The representation of woman legislators in the Rajya Sabha from Assam is also not satisfactory and only 7 women represented up to now.
Social Background of the Women in the Lok Sabha

The Chapter attempts at an analysis of the social background of the woman legislators represented to the Lok Sabha from Assam since 1952. Woman members of the Lok Sabha are –

1. Bonify Khongmen was born on 25th June at Jawai in the United Khashi-Jaintia Hills District of Assam presently Meghalaya, was the daughter of a village doctor. She was the first lady member elected to the Parliament from Assam. She was matriculated in 1928 from the Welsh Mission Girl’s High School, Shillong. She was graduated from the Diocesan College of the Calcutta University in 1932. Thereafter, became a teacher and Head mistress of Ridgeway Girl’s School, Golaghat, Assam (1932-34) for two years. She then taught and was appointed as Headmistress of the Assamese Girl’s School, Shillong (1935-40), till 1940-46 when she relinquished her post on being elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly (1946-52). She married in 1934 to W. Khongmen, an advocate of Assam High Court. They have four sons and one daughter. In 1946, she was represented to the Assam Legislative Assembly from the Shillong constituency and had the distinction of being not just the only woman member but by virtue of being a Deputy Speaker as well, was the first woman to hold such a post in that august body from 1946-1952.

After independence, she was the only lady candidate who contested in the Lok Sabha election in 1952 as Congress nominee from the Autonomous District constituency of Assam and presently Meghalaya, was returned by an overwhelming majority of votes to the House of the people. While as member of the Assam she was unanimously elected as a member of the Gauhati University Court, and besides she served in important Committees and Select Committees of the Assembly. She served as the Panel of Chairman to preside over the Lok Sabha and was the first and only woman member of the Estimates Committee. In 1955, she was sent as a delegate to the United Nations Assembly at New York. She was member of the several tribal educational institutions in Shillong. She also took initiative to establish basic training school for the Hill Tribal people of Shillong. Between 1957-63, she was appointed as member and subsequently Chairperson of the Assam Public Service Commission. She was a member of the Union Public Service Commission from 1963 to 1970, being the first woman of that august body. She then served as Chairman of the
Nagaland Public Service Commission between 1970-74. She became the Chairman of the Nagaland Pay Commission in 1965 after which she retired. Apart from her service career, she was a social worker. She was associated with many social organizations. She was a member of the Young Women Christian Association, Chairman of the Eastern Indian Women’s Association, Chairman of the Meghalaya chapter of the Indian Council of Child Welfare and other organizations concerned with the subjects of education. She was closely associated with the upliftment of a lot of the physically handicapped persons and also with her Church activities. She contributed many articles to various newspapers. ¹

2. *Rani Manjula Devi:* Rani Manjula Devi was the daughter of Maharaja of Pitampuram. She was born at Pitampuram, Godavari District of Andhra Pradesh on January 5th, 1912. She had her early education at Church Park Convent School, Madras. She was married to Raja Narayan Deb, in 1932. Rani Manjula Devi was the pioneer of women movement in Goalpara District of Assam. She joined the Assam Pradesh Mahila Samiti as executive member in 1947. She was elected as President of All India Mahila Samiti. She remained as Provincial President for 12 years. She started Women’s Anath Asram at Rupshi. She also started Sales Emporium at Dhubri for destitute women. She was elected President of All India Women Conference, Assam Branch 1949. As pioneer of Women’s movement, she was the executive member of National Council of Women of India and Indian Conference of Social work. She attended International Council of Women’s Standing Committee Conference, England. She was a social worker and did relief works during the earthquake and floods in Assam. Under her initiative the Assam Pradesh Mahila Samiti was affiliated with the World Organization of A.C.W.W. She led the delegation of Mahila Samiti at the Associated country of women of the world held at Manila. She attended the International Conference of Theosophical Society, Shillong.

Rani Manjula Devi, a politician and social worker, was the Chairman of the Dhubri School Board. She was the Vice President of Assam Food Council. In 1952, she joined the Congress party, Assam.

She was the founder of Jayanta Academy of Fine Arts. She was elected to the Lok Sabha in 1957 from the Goalpara constituency. ² She was also represented in the

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¹ *Who’s who Lok Sabha, 1952, Lok Sabha Secretariat, Delhi*
² *Who’s who, Lok Sabha, 1957, Lok Sabha Secretariat, Delhi.*
Assam Legislative Assembly from the Kokrajhar East constituency in 1962. She was the member of the Central Silk Board, All India Handloom Board. She was member of the Estimates Committee. She was the Panel of Chairman.

3. **Mofida Ahmed**— Mofida Ahmed, daughter of Md. Barua Ali, born at Jorhat town in 1921. She studied at home. She was married to Asan Uddin Ahmed on December 11, 1940. She served the National Savings Scheme in an honorary service from 1955 to 1957. She was the Joint Secretary of the Red Cross Society, Jorhat, (1946-49). She was the Convener of the Women Department of the Congress at Golaghat since inception in 1953 to the end of 1957. Mofida Ahmed remained as Assistant Secretary; Tezpur District Mahila Samiti from October 1951 to January 1953. She also served the maternity welfare centre and rescue of fallen women. In 1957, Mofida Ahmed represented the Lok Sabha from the Jorhat constituency as Congress nominee. In 1962, also she contested from the same constituency but was defeated. ³

She has contributed many articles to the Assamese journals. She had a number of books published in Assamese like Biswadeep, Bapuji, and Bharatar Nehru etc. She was interested in education. She was also from a middle class family. In 1955, she joined the 10th General Assembly of the UNO, New York as Indian delegate. She also contributed many articles to newspaper. Though she became the member of the Lok Sabha in 1957 but her social activities started before her political activities.

4. **Rashida Hatijtje** — She was born at Tezpur on April 24, 1926. She had her early education at Silchar, Mission School. She completed her college education at Lady Dubin College, Calcutta. She was married to Md. Mainul Hauque Choudhury on December 1948, who was a Minister in Indira Gandhi Cabinet. They had one son and daughter.

She was a social and political worker. She was associated with the Congress party since 1950 and served the party. In the Lok Sabha election of 1977, she was elected to the Lok Sabha from Silchar constituency as a Congress candidate. She was a member of the Bharatiya Gramin Mahila Samiti, New Delhi. In the Lok Sabha election, she contested from her old constituency but was defeated.

³Ibid
So, she was from an economically well-to-do family. Her social and political career started after her marriage. Her husband was a Minister at the Centre and automatically she got the privilege to enter into politics.

5. Renuka Debi Barkataky: — Renuka Debi Barkataky was the daughter of Rudra Kanta Sarma, who was a doctor. She was born at Gauhati on November 29, 1932. A science graduate of Guahati University, she had her education at Cotton College, Gauhati. She was married to Munindra Mohan Barkataky in April 1959. They have one daughter.  

As a political and social worker, she was associated with Congress party for 16 years and later with Congress (o). She was the Secretary of Women’s Department, Assam Pradesh Congress, 1955 and worked as in-charge of Women and Children Wing; Constructive Committee, Labour Cell, under P.C.C up to 1962. She was the Secretary of the Reception Committee, Pragjyotishpur session of Indian National Congress. She was the President of the Indian National Trade Union Congress.  

She was associated with many voluntary organizations and remained as Secretary and President of those organizations. She was the Chairman of State Bharat Sevak Samaj. She was the General Secretary of the Eastern Indian Women’s Associations. She was the General Secretary of the Bharat Seva Mission, Vice President of All India Sports Council for deaf. She was the General Secretary, 4th Congress of All India Federation of the deaf. She was the Treasurer, Indian National Trade Union Congress, Assam. She was member of the General Council, Indian National Employees Association, Delhi. She was President of the Assam Government Employees Association, All Assam Treasury Officers Association, All Assam Industrial Workers Union, All Assam Hospital Worker’s Union, All Assam Cinema Karmi Sangha, All Assam Municipal Worker’s Union and All Assam P.W.D Worker’s Union.

In 1962, she was elected to the Lok Sabha from Barpeta constituency as Congress nominee. She was Secretary of A.P.C.C.(O) in 1961. In 1972, she was elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly as an Independent candidate from the Hajo constituency. In 1972, she was the Deputy leader of U.L.P., Assam Legislative Council.

4. Materials collected from interview with Renuka Debi Barkataky.
5. Who’s who Lok Sabha, 1962, Lok Sabha Secretariat, Delhi.
Assembly. In June 1975, she was in jail for 19 months under the maintenance of Internal Society Act. She protested against the injustices done to the prisoners in the jail whenever she was in jail during the emergency. She also participated in the Socialist movement led by Jay Prakash Narayan.

In 1977, she was elected to the Lok Sabha from Gauhati constituency as Janata party candidate. During that period there was a revolutionary change. The Congress party was completely defeated and Janata party with the assimilation of four parties i.e. Indian National Congress, Bharatiya Lok Dal, Bharatiya Jan Sangh and the Socialist party formed the Government. So, she became the member of the Janata party and contested the 1977 Lok Sabha election with the ticket of Janata party. She was elected and Janata party formed the Ministry under the leadership of Morarji Desai. Morarji Desai appointed Renuka Debi Barkataky as Minister of State for Education and Social Welfare. So she is the first woman Minister from Assam appointed to the Union Council of Minister. At present she is the honorary Chairperson of the Red Cross Society.

She is especially interested in welfare activities of physically handicapped and destitute. She has attended United Nations meeting at Vienna, Geneva and at Sri Lanka during her Minister-ship. She has attended many International Women Conferences. She has travelled many countries like U.S.S.R, U.K., U.S.A, Cairo, Japan, Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines, Burma, a few countries of Europe and Arab world. She is from a family where she got all the facilities. Her father was a freedom fighter. She did not get any political backing, came to politics at her own initiative.

6. *Jyotsna Chanda*: Jyotsna Chanda, daughter of Mahesh Dutta, was born at Silchar in March 28, 1904. She had her early education at Mission Girls’s High School, Silchar and college education at Diocesan College at Calcutta.

She was a social worker and she was associated with all educational institutions and social welfare organizations in Silchar District. She was the President of the Silchar B.T. College, Managing Committee and Cachar Tea Employees Union, Silchar. She was the Vice President of the All India Sarada Sangha. She was elected President

of Srihatta Sanmelani held at New Delhi in 1960. She was member of the Assam State Social Welfare Board. She was appointed as Jail visitor of the district Jail in 1931-32 and was the first woman Jail visitor of Assam. She was the Chairman of the 1.Silchar School Board 2. Silchar District Social Welfare Advisory Board; 3. N.F.Railway Employees Union. She was the member of the Silchar Municipal Board, Gauhati University Court, Assam Text Book Committee, Assam State Advisory Body for Social Education, Assam State Planning Advisory Committee, Assam State Council for Child Welfare, N.F. Railway Zonal users Consultative Committee. In 1948, she represented the Silchar Municipal Board at the All India Local Bodies Conference held at New Delhi. She also represented in 1948 in different Conferences and Organizations including the All India Conference or Community Development held in Aurangabad, Maharastra in 1958-1959.

Jyotsna Chanda represented in the Assam Legislative Assembly in 1957 from Silchar constituency as Congress nominee. In 1962, she was elected to the Lok Sabha from Cachar constituency as Congress candidate. Thus from the State politics she entered in the National politics. In 1967, 1971, she was again re-elected to the Lok Sabha for the second and third term consecutively. Jyotsna Chanda involved herself in solving the National problems. She was a member of the Lok Sabha for three consecutive terms as Congress candidate. She was a politician and a social worker who was more interested in religious services, spread of education and rehabilitation of displaced persons. The dedication to the society helped her to become renowned politician of Assam.

7. Bijoya Chakraborty :- She is the daughter of Beda Kanta Thakur, and was born at Baligaon in Jorhat District of Assam on October 7th 1940. She had her early education at Jorhat Girls High School, and passed her matriculation examination in 1956. She had completed her graduation degree in 1961. She was M.A. in English from the Banaras Hindu University in 1964. Her father was a businessman and freedom fighter. She was married to Jiten Chakraborty on June 1st, 1960, who was a double M.A. and B.T. Her husband was an academic officer in S.C.E.R.T Department. They have one son and daughter. She joined Mangaldoi College, as lecturer in English.

Bijoya Chakraborty was connected with the student’s union from the school days. She was the active participant of Assam movement against foreign nationals
since 1979. She was in jail on a number of occasions during 1980-82. She was associated with Praja Socialist party, 1963-77. She was the President of 1. District Moina Parijat, Mongoloi 1970-73. 2. District Table Tennis Association, Mangaldoi, 1978-84. She was the district President of (i) Mangaldoi Rickshaw Thela Association, 1979-84 and (ii) Mangaldoi Harijan Santha, 1975-85. She was the Vice President of All Assam Moina Parijat, 1969-71. She was the Joint Secretary of All Assam Women Writers Association, 1976-81. She was the Adviser of All Assam Mahila Parishad, 1985-86. She was the District Secretary of Janata party, Mangaldoi, 1977-78. In 1986, she was elected to the Rajya Sabha as an A.G.P. candidate and remained as member of the Chamber up to 1992. She is the first woman representative in the Rajya Sabha from a regional political party. In the Lok Sabha election of 1999, she contested from the Gauhati constituency as a B.J.P. candidate. After leaving the A.G.P party she has joined the B.J.P. party and till now she is the prominent leader of the B.J.P in Assam. In 1999, she became the Minister of State for Water Resources and Irrigation in the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Ministry.

She was connected with many Social Organizations. She is connected with the social activities. She is also connected with many Women Organizations. She has written a number of poems, short stories, novels, features, write-ups and light essays. She served as columnist in the Assam Tribune from 1964-68 and published three novels in Assamese entitled “Najal Phiningath”, “Abhijan” and “Karagar.”

She was from a freedom fighter’s family who learned the social service from childhood. She has a brilliant career and highly profiled job, which ultimately helped her to win elections.

8. Ranee Narah: She is the daughter of Dil Mohammed, born on 31st October 1965. She is B.A. She was married to Sri Bharat Chandra Narah, who is a Minister in the Tarun Gogoi Ministry of Assam. In the 12th Lok Sabha election of 1998, she has contested from the Lakhimpur constituency as a Congress nominee and was elected. But the 12th Lok Sabha did not last long and was dissolved. 8 She again contested in the 13th Lok Sabha election from her old constituency and was elected with the Congress party ticket. She was connected with many organizations of Assam.

7. Materials collected from interview with Bijoya Chakraborty.
The study of her social background reveals that she is from an economically sound family and was married to a Minister. So, she bears a great political support from her husband that helped her to come to politics.

**Social Background of the Woman Legislators in the Rajya Sabha**

The Constitution of India provides that any citizen attaining the age of 30 years can contest in the election of Rajya Sabha. There are 245 members in the Rajya Sabha and out of these 245 members, the President nominates 12 as representatives on the ground of literature, science, art and social services.

From 1952-2003, only seven women were elected to the Rajya Sabha from Assam. They are:

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<th>Name</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Puspalata Das</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Bedavati Buragohain</td>
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<td>Usha Barthakur</td>
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<td>Bijoya Chakraborty</td>
<td>A.G.P (B.J.P)</td>
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<td>Basanti Sharma</td>
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<td>Joysree Goswami Mohanta</td>
<td>A.G.P</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Anowara Taimur</td>
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*Puspalata Das*: Puspalata Das was the daughter of Rameswar Saikia. She was born at North Lakhimpur on 27th March 1915. She was the pioneer of freedom movement. Her dedicated service to the people of Assam cannot be forgotten. She studied at the Panbazar Girls High School and passed the matriculation examination as a private candidate. She was M.A. in Political Science from the Banaras Hindu University in 1939. She studied at the Law College, Gauhati in 1940 but gave up her studies to join the Non-violence movement started by Mahatma Gandhi in 1941. She also joined in the Charka Sangha of Mahatma Gandhi at the age of six years. Puspalata Das was an active freedom fighter. She was detained as security prisoners till 1945 for participating in the struggle for freedom and later she was released.  

Puspalata Das was married to Omeo Kumar Das in 1942, who was a freedom fighter and a follower of Mahatma Gandhi. In 1952, she was elected to the Rajya Sabha.  

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Sabha as a Congress candidate. She again was re-elected for the second term in 1958. In 1967, she was elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly from the Dhekiajuli constituency as a Congress candidate. After the split of the Congress party she resigned from the party. But she continued her social service till the last part of her life. She was associated with many social organizations.

Puspalata Das was an active social worker but in spite of her daily routine she did continue her literary works. She has written articles in the ‘Akan,’ ‘Arin’, ‘Bahi’, ‘Jayanti’, ‘Nabajug’ etc. She was also the pioneer of women movement. Puspalata Das stressed on women politicians to be more active and dedicated to the public service. She was honoured with ‘Padmabhusan’ by the Indian Government in 1999. She died on 9th November 2003. The social background of Puspalata Das reveals that she was the pioneer of freedom movement from her childhood. Her husband was a freedom fighter and legislator in the Assam Legislative Assembly. So her background helped to become one of the veteran politicians of Assam.

2. Bedavati Buragohain: She was elected to the Rajya Sabha in 1960 as a Congress candidate. Her biographical data and social background are not available.

3. Usha Barthakur: Usha Barthakur was born in 1908. She was the daughter of late Lakhiprasad Barua. She passed the matriculation examination in 1935. She was B.A., B.T. She was married to Chandra Nath Barthakur. They had two sons and two daughters. She served as an honorary teacher of the venture Girls’ High School, Nowgong. She was the founder of that educational institution and after receiving her B.T. degree she became the Assistant Head Mistress of the school.

She was one of the pioneers of female education in Assam. She was also one of the founders of Assam Mahila Samiti. She submitted a memorandum to Maulana Kalam Azad, Union Minister of Education, about the girls’ education in free India. She was the first lady candidate who was elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly after independence in 1952.

She was first elected in 1952 from the Samaguri constituency as a Congress candidate. In 1957, she was re-elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly for the second time and became the first lady Deputy Minister in the State for Health and

Social Welfare after independence. She was in the office of the Ministership from April 1957 to December 1957. In 1967, she became the member of the Rajya Sabha as a Congress nominee and went to Michigan city of U.S.A. and joined in the International Conference of Associated countries.

She became the President of the Assam Pradesh Mahila Samiti. In 1976, she was the President of Nowgong District Congress. In 1977, she was selected as leader of an Indian women group, which represented the country at the International Conference in Russia. She suggested solutions for the various problems of the girls. She had some publications 'Bapujir Atmakatha', and 'Mata Kasturba' in Assamese. She has also contributed many articles to the Provincial periodicals and magazines.

4. Basanti Sharma:- Basanti Sharma was the daughter of Ananda Barbara, born at Tinsukia on 1st March 1944. Her father was a civil servant. Her mother was Hemi Barbara. She passed her matriculation examination from the Tezpur High School. She was passed her Pre-University and B.A. examination from the Handique Girls College and Darrang College. She was a teacher in the Don Bosco High School. She married to Manabendra Sharma, who was a member of the Parliament. They had two boys. After the death of her husband in 1991, she joined politics. On September, 1991, she became the member of the Rajya Sabha as a Congress candidate. As a member of the Rajya Sabha she was connected with many Committees—(I). Committee on Rules (II). Committee on Government Assurances (III) Petroleum Committee (IV) Empowerment Committee (V) Forest and Aviation Committee and (VI). Defence and Civil Aviation Committee. She became the Chairperson of the State Women Commission. As Chairperson of the Women Commission, she travelled Tea Garden areas, jail, and civil hospitals to investigate the condition of women in these areas. She is the executive member of the A.P.C.C. She has travelled many countries. The social background of Basanti Sharma reveals that she got enough scope to become leader but she joined politics only after the death of her husband.

6. Jaysree Goswami Mahanta:- She is the daughter of R.C. Goswami and Ratna Goswami. She was born at Gouripur, Dhubri District of Assam. Her father was a teacher in Gouripur. She passed her matriculation examination from the Girls'
High School; Gouripur. She passed her B.SC from Cotton College and M.SC. from the Guahati University. She had her Ph.D. degree and served as a lecturer in Cotton College in the department of Zoology. She was married to Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, who was the Chief Minister of Assam in 1985-1990 and 1996-2001. He was then re-elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly in 2001 and remained as legislator. They have two sons and one daughter. 12

Joysree Goswami joined politics during her student life. She was an active member of the student's agitation against the foreign nationals. She was the Vice President of A.G.P. She was elected to the Rajya Sabha in 1998 and remained as member for two years. She was the member of the Petroleum and Mineral Gas Standing Committee, Home Standing Committee, External Affairs Advisory Committee, and Railway (N.E) Advisory Committee. Her social background reveals that she was active in politics during her student life and after her marriage became the wife of Chief Minister of Assam which ultimately helped her to get involved into politics.

*Social Background of the Woman Legislators in the Assam Legislative Assembly from 1952-2001.*

A brief history of the Assam Legislative Assembly is essential to have a clear idea of the background of the woman legislators of Assam. The Assam Legislative Assembly has had a glorious history of her own, popularly known as the ethnological museum of India. Assam has been described as mini-India, having a rich cultural heritage with diverse race, religion and culture. Assam under the provision of India Councils Act, 1861 did not have her own democratic institution. However, way back in 1861, the alien rulers passed the Indian Council Act, but strongly enough Assam did not figure in the Scheme for granting Legislative Council and instead tagged with the Eastern –Bengal in 1905, under the title ‘Legislative Council of Eastern- Bengal and Assam’, much against the will of the people. However, after a prolonged struggle, Assam was granted Legislative Council in 1913, under the Government of India Act of 1909, with 34 members of whom the Chief Commissioner of Assam nominated 13 and 21 were elected by the people. The Legislative Council of Assam first met on 6th January, 1913 at 11 a.m. at Shillong which was presided over by Sir Archdale

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12.Materials collected from interview with Jayasree Goswami Mahanta
Easle, the then Chief commissioner of Assam. Thereafter the strength of the Legislative Council was raised to 53 members with effect from 1st April 1921. Of the 53 members, 41 were elected community-wise and the rest were filled by nomination and this status of the Council continued till the Government of India Act of 1935 made provision for Legislative Assembly in each province as a result the Legislature of Assam became Bi-cameral. The strength of the Assam Legislative Assembly was raised to 108. Legislative Council is the Upper House with strength of 22 members and however it was abolished in the wake of attainment of independence on 15th August 1947.

After partition of India in 1947, Sylet District of Assam was transferred to the then East Pakistan and as a result the strength of Assam Legislative Assembly was reduced to 71. The strength of members was again raised to 108 after independence. The people of Assam elected all the members of the Assembly. Out of 108 members, 77 seats were allotted for the General people, 5 for S.C., 7 for Plain Tribal and 19 for Hill Tribal. Assam had a number of districts inhabited by Tribal people. Since their ways of life and culture widely varied from the people belonging to mainstream, they demanded separate States to preserve their cultural status. As a result Nagaland was created in 1963, Meghalaya was created in 1971 and Mizoram became a Union Territory in 1971. Thus two new States and one Union Territory were carved out of Assam and this had the effect of reducing the area as well as population of Assam.

The First Legislative Assembly which was created by the Government of India Act of 1935, assembled for the first time in the Chamber of the Assam Legislative Assembly on 7th April 1935. The elected representatives of the First Assembly till the partition of India in 1947 consisted of members from Sylhet, which is now a part of Bangladesh, and members from Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram, which are now, separate States. Shillong was the capital of Assam. After the creation of Meghalaya Shillong continued to be the joint capital of Assam and Meghalaya. In 1973, the capital of Assam was shifted from Shillong to Dispur. Nagaland was curved out of Assam in December in 1963, and reduced the strength of members of the Assam Legislative Assembly. However, after the 1961 Census the strength of the members of Assam Legislative Assembly again rose to 126 in the General election of 1967.

13. The Journal of Assam Legislative Assembly, April, 1998, p-20
Out of these 126 seats, the seats were distributed as follows:- 1. General-92, 2. Scheduled Caste—8, 3. Plains Tribal—11, 4. Hill Tribal—15. With the creation of Meghalaya as a full-fledged State and Mizoram as a Union Territory in 1972, the strength of the Assam Legislative Assembly was again reduced to 117 which was again raised to 126 in 1978 after 1971 Census.

The present strength of the Assam Assembly is 126. There is no provision of nomination. All the members are elected by the people. Article 172 provides the duration of the State Legislature as 5 years and accordingly each Assam Legislative Assembly continued to function for five years except the 5th Assembly which had a duration of six years.

The Constitution of India has adopted the same pattern of administration i.e. the Parliamentary system of Government both at the Centre and in the States. Following the First General election held in 1952, a broad-based Assembly was ushered in with 126 elected members on the basis of adult franchise as provided under the Constitution. During the period of spanning over more than six decades, many illustrious sons of outstanding calibre occupied the high seat of presiding officers, Ministers and members and performed the role of a custodian of the people's deity but the number of woman representatives in this august body are still marginal. From 1952 to 2001, 12 General elections were held to the Assam Legislative Assembly and only 54 woman members came to power and out of that 5 were again re-elected either to the Lok Sabha or to the Rajya Sabha. Out of the remaining members some of them were elected for two or three terms. The maximum number of woman members elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly was in 1996 and in 2001.

This Chapter focuses about the Social Background of the Woman Legislators in the Assam Legislative Assembly.

*Padma Kumari Gohain:* Padma Kumari Gohain was born on 24th February 1913 at Shillong. She had her early education at Shillong. She was married to late Jogesh Chandra Gohain, a noted political leader of Assam. They had three sons and one daughter. She dedicated herself to the cause of Nation under the able guidance and inspiration of her late husband, who was an active member of the Assam Legislative Assembly. Padma Kumari Gohain became an active member of the Indian National Congress and held that office for 12 years. She was an elected member of...
the Dibrugarh Municipal Board. She was the member of the Assam Congress Pradesh Committee from 1952 to 1960. She was the Chairman of the Dibrugarh Mahakuma Parishad in 1964 and Chairman of Dibrugarh Central Bank. She was the President of Cooperative Bank, Bharat Sevak Samaj and Land Mortgage Bank. She was the author of (Madhuri), her other publications are—Sesh Nishar Jonak, (short stories), Roon Joonar Sapon. She was the editor of ‘Sarathi’, a monthly magazine for women.14

She was first elected in the Assam Legislative Assembly in 1957 from the Moran constituency as a Congress candidate for three consecutive terms. She was appointed as Minister of State for Social Welfare, Relief and Rehabilitation in the B.P.Chaliha Ministry. When B.P.Chaliha resigned and Mohendra Mohan Choudhury formed his Ministry, P.K.Gohain was appointed as Cabinet Minister for Social Welfare and Sericulture and Weaving. She was the first woman Cabinet Minister. She was born in a middle class family and was the wife of a noted political leader of Assam, which ultimately helped her to make a political career.

*Lily Sengupta:-* Lily Sengupta was born on 15th April 1926. She was married to Niranjan Sengupta in 1945. She was a social worker and took active role in many constructive works amongst labourers and Harijans. She was closely associated with various cultural organizations and educational institutions, cooperative institutions, Mahila Samiti and Mahila Congress. She was the Treasurer of I.N.T.U.C., Vice-President of Assam Chah Majdoor Sangha, Vice President of Dibrugarh District Congress and A.P.C.C. and educational institutions, cooperative institutions and Mahila Samitis.

In the Assembly election of 1957, for the first time she contested from the Lahowal constituency as a Congress candidate and was elected by an overwhelming majority of votes.15 In 1962 and 1967, she was elected from the same constituency as a Congress nominee. On the floor of the Assembly she played an active role. She travelled many countries like Switzerland, Germany, Belgium, and U.K.

*Pranita Talukdar:* Pranita Talukdar was the daughter of late Padma Ram Barua, who was a senior advocate of Gauhati. Her mother was late Pabitra Kumari Barua. She was born in 1934 at Uzan Bajar of Gauhati. She passed her matriculation

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examinitation from the T.C. High School, Gauhati in 1950. She passed her P.U. and B.A. from the Handique Girls’ College. She had her M.A in Education from the Gauhati University. She also obtained her B.T. degree. She was married to Ghanashyam Talukdar who was a member of the Assam Legislative Assembly. They have three sons and one daughter.  

She joined the Baranagar Girls High School as the Head Mistress in 1960 and served that school up to 1966. She became the lecturer in Education in the Baranagar College for 4 years. Her husband was the founder member and Principal of the Baranagar College after losing the Assembly election. She was closely associated with children and cultural organizations of Assam. She was the Joint Secretary of Youth Congress of Assam Pradesh Congress Committee. As a member of the cultural delegation from Assam joined the Youth Festival, New Delhi in 1967. She was the member of the Cultural Sub-committee in the International Women Year. She was the Chairman of the All Assam Folk dances. She was the member of the Mahila Samiti. She was the member of the All Assam Pradesh Mahila Samiti. She was the Joint Secretary of the country Women Association of India. She was the President of the Children Welfare Organization. She was associated with Raj Lakhi Kala Kristi Organization. She was the Vice President of the Barpeta District Congress Committee. She was the Chairman of the Barpeta District Board. She was the Principal of the Barpeta Girls’ College for 16 years. She was the Governing Body member of the Baranagar College, Sorbhog. She was also the Governing Body member of the Barpeta Girls’ College.

In 1967, Pranati Talukdar was elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly from Sorbhog constituency as a Congress candidate. In 1972 Assembly election, she was re-elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly from her old constituency as a Congress candidate. In the Assembly election of 1978, she contested from her old constituency and was defeated. She was the member of the Library Committee.

Anandi Bala Rava: Anandi Bala Rava was born at Na-Chungi village of Jorhat Sub division in 1938. She was a graduate and had her early education at Jorhat and Goalpara. She was married to Hakim Rava, who was a member of the Assam

Legislative Assembly in 1959. She served as senior basic teacher of Jorhat Subdivision from 1957-1959, later she resigned and joined in the community development of L.S.E.O.in 1959 and served that institution up to 1962. She joined Dudhnoi Girls’ High School of Goalpara as Assistant teacher in 1965. Later she became Assistant Head Mistress and then Head Mistress of the School up to 1972. She was General Secretary of the Goalpara District Mahila Samiti. She was the General Secretary of the All Assam Tribal Sangha Session held at Modhapur in Jorhat 1958. She was the member of the State Social Welfare Board, Assam. She was elected as a Commissioner of Goalpara Municipality. In 1972, she was elected to Assam Legislative Assembly from Dudhnoi constituency as a Congress candidate. She also contested in the Assembly election of 1978 and in 1985 from her old constituency as a Congress candidate but was defeated. She was from a middle class family and her husband’s political career helped her to come to politics. 

Satyabati Goswami:- She was born in May 2nd, 1927. She was educated at Jorhat and Calcutta. She was an M.A. She was a politician and journalist. She was married to Hareswar Goswami, who was the Speaker of the Assam Legislative Assembly. They have two sons and two daughters. She was associated with various women’s organizations especially with the Indian Council of Social Welfare. She was the reporter of the Assam News of Bombay Weekly ‘Janata’ for a year. She began taking part in politics indirectly since 1948 but she started her active political career since 1968. In 1968, she contested in the Assembly bye-election as an Independent candidate from Chaygaon constituency but was defeated. She participated in the second refinery movement of 1970 and led a procession of women and girls defying prohibitory orders and was arrested. She joined the Congress party in 1972. She was elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly from Chaygaon constituency as a Congress candidate.

She has translated some books like ‘Eleanor Roosevelt’, ‘Life of John Fitzgerald Kennedy’, and ‘Hungarian Revolution’ in Assamese. Her social background reveals that she was from a middle class family who got every scope of self-development. Her political career also started with her husband who was a veteran political leader of Assam.

17. Who’s who Assam Legislative Assembly, 1972, Assembly Secretariat, Dispur.
Swarna Prova Mahanta:- She was born at village Borjhar in Tezpur Subdivision in 1924. She was educated at Tezpur and Gauhati. She was M.A., B.T. She was the Head Mistress of Sootea Girls' M.V. School from 1943 to 1945. She served as Assistant teacher in Tezpur Girls' School in 1947 and Sootea Aided H.E. School from 1950 to 1954. She was Welfare officer of Central Social Welfare Board from 1957 to 1961. She was the Head Mistress of Sootea High School till 1972. She was the Zonal Organizing Secretary, Assam Pradesh Mahila Samiti. She was the Convenor of the Women Department of Bharat Sevak Samaj, Tezpur and was executive member, Assam Chah Karmachari Sangha, Na-Duar Circle. 18 She was elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly in 1972 and appointed as Minister of State for Social Welfare, Sericulture and Weaving in the Sarat Singha Ministry.

Rebati Das:- Rebati Das was the daughter of Golap Das, who was a S.D.C. by profession. Her mother was Madhabilata Das. She was born at Tezpur in 1932. She had her early education at Tezpur and passed Pre-University from Tezpur College. She was married to Sashadhar Das, who was a serviceman. They have one son and four girls. She was associated with the Congress party and Assam Pradesh Mahila Samiti since 1950. She was the social worker. She was the President of the Anchalik Panchayat. She was also the President of the Mahakuma Parishad. She was the founder of the Jalukbari High School. She was the founder President of the L.C.B. College, Gauhati. She was the leader of the Cooperative movement in Assam. She was elected as Convenor of the Executive Committee of Gauhati District Committee. She was the President of the Mahila Samiti, Pandu. She was elected Vice President of Gauhati Mahakuma Parishad. She was the President of Ambikagiri Girls High School, Maligaon. She was the member of the All India Handloom Handicrafts. She was the General Secretary of the Mahila Congress. 19

In 1972, she was elected to Assembly from Jalukbari constituency as a Congress candidate. The social background of Rebati Das reveals that though she joined politics at her own initiative but she was in an atmosphere of politics. She had many relatives, who were active in politics and which acted as an inspiration to her entry into politics.

18. Ibid.
19. Materials collected from interview with Rabati Das
Tarulata Bora: She contested in the Assembly election of 1972, from the Saikhowa constituency as a Congress candidate and was elected. In the Assembly election of 1978, she contested from the Sadiya constituency as Janata party nominee and was defeated. (Her biographical notes are not available).

Syeda Anowara Taimur: Syeda Anowara Taimur was born in November 24, 1933. She was an M.A in Economics from Aligarh Muslim University. She joined as a Lecturer in D.C.B. College at Jorhat and then joined in Administrative Staff College, Gauhati. She was Convenor of Women's Front, Assam Pradesh Congress Committee. She was General Secretary of the Assam Pradesh Mahila Samiti. She was member of the Central Women's Advisory Council, All India Congress Committee. She was a member of Indian delegation to International Women’s Conference and Seminar on Family Planning, Yugoslavia in 1969, International Peace Congress, and U.S.S.R in 1973. She has contributed many articles on women’s welfare to various newspaper and periodicals. From 1972 to 1983, she was elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly for three times. She was State Minister of Education in Sarat Singha Ministry. She became the Chief Minister of Assam from 12th December 1980 to 19th March 1981. She also became the Cabinet Minister for Public Works in Hiteswar Saikia Ministry from February 1983 to December 1985. She again became the Agricultural Minister in 1991 in the Hiteswar Saikia Ministry. In 2003, she was elected to the Rajya Sabha. So, she had a long political experience.

Mridula Saharia: Mridula Saharia was the daughter of Bhadreswar Das. She was born on December 1st, 1943 at Patbaushi of Barpeta District. She passed her matriculation examination from the Panbazar Girls’ High School, Guwahati in 1959. She passed her P.U and B.A. examination from the Handique Girls’ College in 1961 and in 1963 respectively. She passed her B.T examination from the Gauhati University.

She was married to Ramesh Saharia, who was an M.A. and L.L.B and also was the ex-Minister in the Assam Legislative Assembly. They have one son and daughter. She was the Head Mistress of Tangla H.E.School. She was connected with various social activities. In 1983 Assembly election, she contested from Panery

21. Materials collected from interview with Mridula Saharia.
constituency as Congress candidate and was elected. In 1985, she also contested from the same constituency but was defeated. She became the first Chairperson of the Assam State Women Commission on 1994. She became the Chairperson of the State Women Commission for the second time. She was the life member of Assam Science and Society of the Nari Adhikar Surakhya Samiti. She was the President of the Saudau Asom Mahila Unnayan Samiti. She was also the President of the Kannya Mahavidyalaya. She was the President of the Tangla College (1975), President of the Tangla Girls' College. In 1996, she became the General Secretary of the A.P.C.C. She got enough scope of political backing from her husband. She replied that she joined politics only after the death of her husband.

Jyotsna Sonowal: - She was the daughter of Lakhinath Sonowal. She was born on 1st July 1956. She had her M.A. degree in Economics from the Gauhati University. She was married to P.N. Sonowal. She was connected with many social activities. In the Assembly election of 1985, she contested from the Sadiya constituency as an A.G.P. nominee and was elected. She has published short stories, articles and poems in the newspapers and magazines. After her marriage she had no connection with the A.G.P party but she has contested as an Independent candidate in the different Assembly election but was defeated. So, the social background of Jyotsna Sonowal focuses that she was the active participant of Assam agitation led by Assam Students Union against the foreign nationals. From her student life she joined into politics. 22

Amiya Gogoi: - She was the daughter of Kuladhar Bargohain. She was born on May 21st 1946. She passed her P.U. in Arts. She was married to Ganesh Chandra Gogoi. They have three sons. She joined the Indian National Congress in 1973. After the split of the Congress party joined A.I.C.C (I) on December 1977. She contested from the Duliajan constituency as a Congress (I) candidate and was defeated in 1978. In the Assembly election of 1985, she again contested from the Duliajan constituency from the same party and was elected. 23 In the Assembly election of 1991, she again contested for the third term and was elected and became the Minister in the Hiteswar Saikia Ministry. She was interested to mix up with the cross sections of people

23. Ibid.
especially rural folk and work for their well being. Her social background reveals that she came to politics at her own initiative.

*Kumari Rabidas:* Kumari Rabidas was born on January 1st, 1957. She was the daughter of Gurucharan Rabidas. She passed H.S.L.C examination in 1974 and Kovid (Hindi) in 1973. She was married to Lalit Prasad Rabidas. They have five children. She was an active social worker and political worker. She was the organizer of the Mahila Samiti in Karimganj. In the Assembly election of 1985, she contested from the Ratabari constituency of Karimganj District as Congress nominee and was elected. The social background reveals that she was from a Tea Tribe Community and always fought for the development of her Community. She was from a middle class family and entered into politics for her Community.\(^{23}\)

*Rekha Rani Das Boro:* She was born on 13th August 1960 at Ranakuchi in the Tihu town of Nalbari District. She was the daughter of Birendra Kumar Das Boro, who was M.A, B.T, a teacher by profession. Her mother was Jyanda Das Boro, a housewife. She passed the H.S.L.C. Examination from the Tihu Girls High School in 1975. She passed the P.U. and B.A. Examination from the Handique Girls College in 1977 and 1979. She had her M.A. in Philosophy from the Gauhati University in 1983. She was an active member of the All Assam Students Union. She had participated in the Assam agitation in 1979 under the banner of All Assam Students Union against the illegal migrants. She was the executive member of the Asom Gana Parishad(A.G.P) and then became the Vice-President of the State Body. She was the President of Asom Mahila Parishad. She was the Chairman of the Asom Mahila Samabai Bank.\(^{24}\)

She was married to Robin Deori, an Engineer by profession. They have one daughter. She was elected to Assam Legislative Assembly from Barama constituency in 1985 as A.G.P nominee. She became the Minister of State for Social Welfare, Sericulture and Weaving in P.K.Mahanta Ministry. She was in office from December 1985 to January 1990.

She travelled to Japan. She contested in the election of 1996 from Barama constituency and was elected and became the Minister.

\(^{23}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{24}\) *Materials collected from interview with Rekha Rani Das Boro.*

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Kamal Kumari Barua:- She was born on 27th May in 1921 at Dibrugarh. She was the daughter of Kanaknath Dutta Saikia, who was a Government Servant. Her mother was Niroda Bala Saikia. She passed the H.S.L.C examination in 1938 from the Jorhat Girls’ School. She passed her P.U. and B.A. examinations from the J.B College, Jorhat in 1940 and 1942 respectively. She passed her M.A. degree from the Calcutta University. Prior to her entry into politics, she was the Lecturer and Head of the Department of Assamese in J.B. College, Jorhat from 1946 to 1962. She took part in freedom movement when she was a student. She was a social worker and was not in politics before 1957.

She was married to Hem Chandra Barua, a Government servant. They have two boys and three girls. She was the A.P.C.C member. She was also the A.I.C.C member. She was the Chairman of the Anganabadi centre. She was the President of the Sadou Asom Maina Parijat. She was the President of the Chenamora Parishad. She was Chairman of the Nikhil Bharat Harijan Sangh. She was the member of the Governing Body of the Gauhati College. She was the Chairman of the Pub-Guwahati High School. She was the member of the Assam State Jail Committee. She was the Chairman of the 14 High Schools in Katonigaon.

In the Assembly election of 1957, she contested from the Katonigaon constituency of Sibsagar District as Congress nominee. At that time Congress party reserved 25% seat for women and she was elected. In the Assembly election of 1962, she was elected for the second time as Congress nominee from Katonigaon. She was Minister of State for Education, Social Welfare, Finance, Information and Publicity, G.A.D and S.A.D. She was the President of Mahakuma Parishad and was member of Assam Jail Commission. She was Chairman of Assam State Social Welfare Advisory Board from 1969 to 1975. After the split of the Congress party in 1969, she resigned from the party. The social background of Kamal Kumari Barua reveals that she was from a up to-date family and got every facility for her self-development. So, there was enough scope for her to come to politics.

Pramila Bramha:- She was born on 1950 at Debargaon, Kokrajhar District of Assam. Her father was Kamakhya Prasad Brahma, who was a businessman and

25. Materials collected from interview with Kamal Kumari Barua.

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mother was Thageswari Brahma. She passed the H.S.L.C. examination in 1967. She passed the P.U and B.A. (Hons.) examinations from the Kokrajhar College on 1968 and 1973 respectively. She was married to Nani Gopal Brahma, who was in Government service. They have two girls and one boy. 26

She was an active social worker since her student life. She was associated with many youth organizations since her student life. She remained as President of All Bodo Mahila Parishad. She is also connected with many social organizations of Bodo society. She is the most active lady legislator, who is directly related with the people of her community. She was first elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly in 1991 from Kokrajhar East constituency as an Independent candidate. She was re-elected from the same constituency in 1996 for the second term as an Independent candidate. In the Assembly election of 2001, she was elected for the third term from her old constituency. She was connected with many Committees of the Assam Legislative Assembly. So, the personal information of Pramila Brahma focuses on the fact that she was from the Bodo community and she is very conscious about the grievances of the people of her community. The motive of service to the people paved the way to her entry into politics.

Rupam Kurmi:- She was born on 31st March 1955, at Khatkhatia of Jorhat town. Her father was late Bisoo Orang and mother was late Soy Budhini. She was married to late Ceniram Kurmi. She was B.A. and read up to L.L.B. They had two sons. Rupam Kurmi was an active social worker. She was a popular sportswoman during her student life. She became two times champion lady athletic from the Dibrugarh University. She was elected to the Assam Assembly from Mariani constituency as Congress nominee for three consecutive terms from 1991-2001. She was appointed as State Minister and then became the Cabinet Minister. She was the first lady Cabinet Minister from her Tribes 27. She was soft-spoken and sincere in studies. She was closely associated with her society from the student life. She inspired others to work for the welfare of the women and children. She lost her husband at an early age. She also couldn’t continue her third term and died on 2003.

Sushila Hazarika:- She was born on 1st April, 1960 at Panichakuacon,
(Borthuj) in the Jorhat district of Assam. Her father was Bomeswar Hazarika who was a serviceman. Her Mother was Padmeswari Hazarika. She passed the H.S.L.C. examination from the Dohatia Girls’ School, Jorhat. She passed her P.U. examination from the D.C.B. College, Jorhat and studied her B.A. course at J.B. College. 28

She was married to Nalin Chandra Hazarika, who was a political leader. He was a candidate for the Assembly election of 1996 and the election of Dergaon constituency was postponed due to his death. They had three boys. She served in the SC Development Corporation Department at Jorhat branch from 1982 to 1996. She was closely associated with the development of village women since her college days. She was the member of the Mahila Samiti from 1979 to 1981. She was closely linked with the adult education. She was the Vice President of the All Assam Mahila Parishad. She was the member of the party General house (A.G.P). She was the Vice Chairman of the State level Advisory Council for SC Welfare. She was the member of the SC Development Corporation. She remained as member of the Social Welfare of Women Board. She was the G.B. member of the D.K.D. College, Dergaon. She was also the member of the Women Legal Cell and Mahila Prisoners Cell. She is interested in cross connection with the common people. She was elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly in 1996 from the Dergaon constituency in the bye-election, after the death of her husband.

Alaka Desai Sarma:- She was born at Mumbai. She was the daughter of Divyakant Desai, who was a teacher. Her mother was Virmati Desai. Her educational career started at Mumbai. She passed her H.S.L.C. examination in 1973 from the Pune Board. She passed her graduation from the Bombay University, and M.A. from the same University. She is also having her Ph.D degree. She was married to Nagen Sarma, who was Minister of Assam Legislative Assembly. She has one daughter. She was affiliated to the A.G.P. party. She was the Director of Assam Mahila Samikhya. She raised and fought for women issues during her student life. She has participated in the Jayprakash Narayan’s Sarvadaya movement. 29

Alaka Sarma remained as legislator for nine months. She was elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly from the Nalbari constituency in the bye-election of

28. Materials collected from interview with Sushila Hazarika.
29. Materials collected from interview with Alaka Desai Sarma.
2000 as A.G.P. nominee. She is connected with various N.G.O's and women Self Help groups in Nalbari District. In an interview with the respondent, she stressed on economic empowerment of women. She did not raise any issue in the Legislature. So, Alaka Sarma was from a middle class family and got every scope for her self-improvement. Her husband was a Minister in the Assam Legislative Assembly, and after his death she came to politics.

**Komoli Basumatary:** Komoli Basumatary was born at Nagachuba, at Darrang District of Assam on 12th April 1957. Her father was Sambar Basumatary, who was a cultivator and her mother was Dodri Basumatary. She was H.S.L.C. passed. She was a teacher in profession. She is unmarried. She is especially interested in doing social service. She is the General Secretary of the All Assam Tribal Women’s Welfare Federation, 1989-1993. She also remained as Vice-President of the All Bodo Women’s Federation, 1994-1997. She has participated in the student organization during her student life. She was member of the All Bodo Student’s Union. She was also member of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha. She was elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly in 2001 from the Panery constituency as an Independent candidate. The social background of Komoli Basumatary reveals that she was from a very simple Tribal family and there was the lack of facilities. So, through hard work, she came to politics.

**Jibontara Ghatoar:** She was born at Cenamora Tea Estate. She was 45 years of age in 2005. She has started her early education at Cenamora Girls’ High School. She is H.S.L.C appeared. Her father was Moniram Shil, who was a serviceman in the Tea Garden area. Her mother was Basmati Shil. She was married to Paban Sing Ghatoar, who was the member of the Lok Sabha. They have one son and one girl. She was closely associated with the student’s union in the Cenamora Girls’ School. She was Joint Secretary of the students union. She is closely associated with some organizations. She is the member of the A.P.C.C. She is also the member of the Assam Pradesh Mahila Samiti. She was Joint Secretary of the A.I.C.C.(Mahila). She is the Vice President of the Mahila Congress. She was elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly in the bye-election of the Moran constituency as Congress nominee on 13th October 2004. She said in an interview that the condition of women in their society is deteriorating. The women atrocities like wife-beating are compulsory in their society.

30. Materials collected from interview with Komoli Basumatary.
31. Materials collected from interview with Jibontara Ghatoar.
The personal information of Jibontara Ghatoar focuses that though she is from a Tea Tribe family but service to the State was her aim from her childhood. After her marriage, she got an atmosphere of politics. She helped her husband in politics through various ways, who is akin to Congress politics. So automatically, she came to politics.

Jonjonali Barua:-- Jonjonali Barua was born at Jamugurihat. She was 47 years of age in 2005. She was the daughter of late Deba Prasad Hazarika, who was a businessman. Her mother was late Chandra Prava Hazarika, who was school teacher. She is graduate. She was married to late Khirod Barua, who was Minister in the Assam Legislative Assembly. They have one boy. She is the President of the D.C.C (I), Morigaon. She is also the President of the Ghanakanta Barua College, Morigaon. She is the member of the Blind Association; Morigaon. She is specially interested to work for the weaker sections of the society. She is extending social service through Lion’s Club especially to the poor and physically handicapped. She was elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly in 2001 from the Morigaon constituency as Congress nominee. Her social background reveals that she entered into politics after the death of her husband. She was interested into social service more than politics but the sudden death of her husband led her into politics. 32

Hosenara Islam: — She was born on 8th December 1943 at Miapara village, Mankachar. She was the daughter of Boktar Hussain Mollah, who was a businessman. Her mother was Mohitan Nesa Mollah. She read up to Xth Standered class. She was the wife of late Zahirul Islam, who was a Minister in the Assam Legislative Assembly. They have seven boys. After the death of her husband she came to politics. In the Assembly election of 2001, she contested from the Mankachar constituency as N.C P candidate. Her biodata studies reveal that she is a homely lady and enters into politics only after the death of her husband. 33

Sarifa Begum:-- She was the daughter of Idris Ali, who was the Minister of the Assam Legislative Assembly. Her mother was Rahatur Nesa. She was born on 1960 at Nagaon. She passed her H.S.L.C examination from the Nagaon Mission School in 1976. She passed her P.U and B.A. in 1978 and 1983 respectively from the

32. Materials collected from interview with Jonjonali Barua
33. Materials collected from Interview with Hosenara Islam.
Handique College. She was married to Dr. Ajhar Ali, who was a doctor in profession. They have one son and one daughter. She was the member of the N.S.U.I. She was also member of the Women Youth Organization. She was elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly in 2001 from the Rupahee constituency as Congress nominee. She was member of the various Committees of the Assembly. So, from the childhood, she was in the atmosphere of politics. Being inspired by her father and after the death of her husband, she joined into politics. 34

**Uttara Kalita:** She was the daughter of late Nidhan Talukdar, who was in Government service. Her mother was late Kiran Talukdar. She was born on 5th July in 1958. She passed her H.S.L.C. examination from the Panbajar Girls School. She passed her P.U. and B.A. from the B.Barua College of Gauhati. She was married to Benudhar Kalita, who was an M.A. He was the politician of Assam who contested Assembly election but was defeated in 1991 and 1996 by a marginal vote. After the death of her husband she came to politics. She was the General Secretary of the District Congress Committee. She was the member of the A.P.C.C She was also member of the Mahila Samiti Kamalpur. She was the Chairperson of the Text Book Corporation. She was the President of the Pub Kamrup College, Higher Secondary School, Johar Jyoti High School, Puthimary, Vidya Varathi College. So, she was from a economically well-off family. After the death of her husband she came to politics. 35

**Dr. Hemoprova Saikia:** She was born at village Borduarmukh of Simulguri in Nazira on 21st February 1940. She was the daughter of late Kamal Handique. Who was a head clerk in the Tea Garden. Her mother was late Golapi Handique. She passed the H.S.L.C. examination from the Tinsukia Sarbojonin Valika Vidyalaya. She passed her P.U. and B.A. examination from the Handique Girls’ College. She had her M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from the Gauhati University. She was married to late Hiteswar Saikia, who was the Chief Minister of Assam. They have three boys. She was connected with many social organizations of Assam. In 1978, she was associated with the Mahila Imdad Committee founded by Begum Abida Ahmed, wife of late Fakharuddin Ali Ahmed, former President of India and worked in the field of women’s self employment, relief in districts. In 1983, she was elected as Vice President of Assam

34 Materials collected from interview with Sarifa Begum.
35 Materials collected from interview with Uttara Kalita
Sewa Samity, This organization has been running an orphanage, some colonies for rehabilitation of leprosy patients and a vocational training institute, serving the organization as the President for over a decade 36. She was connected with many educational institutions. She remained as Chairperson of the Governing body of the Dimoria College for more than five years and was instrumental in making the institute an ideal one where a number of vocational courses were introduced and also Post Graduate classes were started. She was the Chairperson of the City College and Narengi Anchalik College, Gauhati. She is the President of the Karmasree Hiteswar Saikia Degree College, Khanapara. Since last late 70’s, she was associated with works like providing relief etc. In 1995, she was elected as Mayor of Gauhati Municipal Corporation for which elections were held after a gap of 18 years. She was also elected as Vice-President of A.P.C.C in the organizational election held in 1994. After the death of her husband in 1996, she contested for Nazira bye-election and won the seat by a margin of more than 13000 votes. In the Assembly election of 2001, she won the Nazira constituency by polling 44,158 votes as Congress nominee. She became the Handloom, Weaving Minister in the Tarun Gogoi Ministry. In an interview she explained about the STEP, Bayan Joyti Achani and Din Dayal Achani which are beneficial mainly for the women.

So, she was from a well-established family. Her husband was the Chief Minister of Assam, so automatically she got an atmosphere of politics. After the death of her husband, she joined politics.

*Ajanta Neog:* She was the daughter of late Sashadhar Das, who was a serviceman. Her mother was Rebati Das who was a member of the Assam Legislative Assembly. She was born in Jalukbari on 13th October 1966. She is B.A and L.L.M. passed. She was married to late Nagen Neog, who was the ex Minister in the Assam Legislative Assembly. They have two boys. She was elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly in 2001 from the Golaghat constituency as Congress nominee. 37 After the death of her husband, she came to politics. She became the Minister of State for Food and Civil Supplies and Tourism with effect from 7th January 2002. Then she became the State P.W.D. Minister. She is fond of working with the poor people. So, the

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36. Materials collected from interview with Dr. Hemo Prova Saikia.
social background of Ajanta Neog reveals that she was from a middle class family. Her mother was member of the Assembly. Her husband was Minister of Assam. She had the enough chance to make herself as good politician of Assam.

**Pranati Phukan:** She was born on 24th April 1963. She was the daughter of Dharmeshwar Chetia. Her mother was Kaushalya Chetia. She is graduate. She was married to late Hari Phukan who was the member of the Assam Legislative Assembly. They have one boy and one girl. After the death of her husband, she entered into politics. She was elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly from the Naharkatia constituency as Congress nominee in 1996. She was elected for the second term in 2001 from her old constituency as Congress nominee. She was appointed as Minister of State for Revenue and Culture with effect from 7th June, 2002. But later on she lost her Ministrieship. The personal information of Pranati Phukan reveals that she was from a middle class family. She was the wife of ex-member of the Assembly and has got the priority to enter into politics.38

**Renupama Rajkhowa:** Renupama Rajkhowa was born on 29th July, 1957 at Sibsagar. She was the daughter of late Bangshidhar Dutta. She is intermediate passed. She was married to late Lalit Rajkhowa, who was an ex-Minister under the Prafulla Mahanta Ministry of the Assam Legislative Assembly. She was affiliated to the A.G.P party in 1985. She was interested in social and organizational work. She was active in social and political activities. She was the ex-social service Secretary. She was the acting General Secretary of Fuleswary Higher Secondary School. She was elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly on 6th June 1991 from the Teok constituency as A.G.P. nominee. In the Assembly election of 1996, she was re-elected for the second term from her old constituency as A.G.P nominee. She became the Deputy Speaker of Assam Legislative Assembly in the Prafulla Mahanta Ministry. The personal information of Renupama Rajkhowa focuses that she was from a middle class family. Her husband was the ex-Minister of the Assembly and automatically she got enough scope to become political leader. After the death of her husband, she entered into political scenario.

The social background of the woman legislators of Assam both in the Parliament and State Legislature reveals that most of the women access to political

38.Materials collected from interview with Pranati Phukan.
life with the support, backing and contacts of the family in particular that of the husband has been a dominant explanation for how women enter political life. It is not possible for women to establish a foothold without patronage from powerful men in party—that too close personal relations as wives, daughters or sisters. Women are selected as contestants not for their service to the party or work in the constituency, but other apolitical considerations. Very few women came in the politics of Assam, have an independent base. Most of the women enter politics as a sister/daughter and wife of some men, who either have died or become invalid to contest elections.

The majority of woman candidates came from relatively well-to do families, with a sprinkling of members of old princely houses. A smaller group comes from families with long political activities. Consequently, they are more articulate and have continued in the struggle for power for a longer period. Again most of the woman legislators are the widows of some renowned politicians of Assam. After the death of their husbands, they easily get the ticket and the death of the husbands paved their way to enter into politics.

Another interesting point to be noted is that most of the woman legislators are middle-aged, generally between 30-55 years. Middle-aged women came to politics because it was easier for them to face their male opponents than the younger women. They suffered less by the propaganda compared to the young women. They are freer from family responsibilities. In youth, the responsibility of childbirth and rearing and caring of children are mainly the duty of the mother. So, the middle-aged women are free from these responsibilities.

Besides the age factor, education and professions, these are other common factors among the woman representatives. If we analyze the data from the first election to the latest one, we notice that woman representatives are not only educated but highly educated with Master degree and Ph.D degrees. From this we can come to the conclusion that educated women are more conscious in acquiring their political right, than the uneducated one.