CHAPTER - VIII

STATUS IN POLITICS

The framers of our Constitution have adopted the English pattern of administration that all executive powers be formally vested in the President and he should act as the Constitutional figurehead of the executive like the English Crown, acting on the advice of the Council of Ministers, responsible to the popular House of the Legislature.\(^1\) The Constitution of India provided the Parliamentary system of democracy in our country where the party that secures majority of the seats in the Legislature can form the Government and the leader of the majority party will be the Prime Minister. If no party can secure majority in that case some parties with common agenda and understanding forms the Coalition Government or Hung Parliament. It has become a tradition of Indian political system from 1977 that not a single party could secure the majority and from that time onwards the single party rule i.e. by the Congress party has broken.

According to Article 75 (1) of the Indian Constitution, the Prime Minister is selected by the President, the other Ministers are appointed by the President on the advice of the Prime Minister, and the allocation of portfolios amongst them is also made by him.\(^2\) The Council of Ministers is thus a composite body, consisting of different categories of Ministers. \(^3\) They are collectively responsible to the House of the People (Art 75,3).

Inspite of the equality of political rights to men and women, female representation in the Council of Ministers at the all-India level has always been negligible. Between 1952-1975, India had only one woman Minister of Cabinet rank besides Mrs. Indira Gandhi. In 1980, none of the Cabinet members in Mrs. Gandhi’s Council of Ministers were women. There was only one woman Minister in Rajib Gandhi’s Government. The same tradition is being followed in the non-Congress Government too.

It is needless to say that the Congress party has dominated the Indian

Notes:
2. Ibid, p-180.
3. Ibid
administrative system continuously up to 1977. In 1977, there was a revolutionary change and the Congress party was defeated. Jawaharlal Nehru remained as Prime Minister of India from 1952 to May 1964. After Jawaharlal Nehru, Gulzar Lal Nanda became Prime Minister from 27th May 1964 to 9th June 1964 (interim). Lal Bahadur Shastri became the Prime Minister in June 1964 and ruled up to January 1966. Gulzar Lal Nanda again became the Prime Minister from 11th January 1966 to 24th June 1966 (interim). Indira Gandhi ushered in power from January 1966 to May 1977. From 1952 to May 1977, there was no woman Central Minister from Assam.

**Woman as Ministers in the Union Council of Ministers**

Renuka Debi Barkataky was the first woman Minister in the Union Council of Ministries from Assam. In the Lok Sabha election of 1977, the Congress party lost and the Janata Party with the assimilation of four parties came to power and Morarji Desai became the Prime Minister of India. Renuka Debi Barkataky was elected to the Lok Sabha from the Gauhati constituency as Bharatiya Lok Dal nominee. Morarji Desai, the Prime Minister of India appointed Renuka Debi as the Minister of State for Education and Social Welfare. She was the first lady Union Minister from Assam. During her Ministership two important schemes were started. These were Adult Education Scheme and Integrated Child Development Scheme. The Integrated Child Development Scheme was started blockwise and this scheme is covered throughout the country. During her period Northeast students got the facility of studying in the C.B.S.E Schools.

She proposed for Women Commission. Though her proposal was not accepted promptly but a Committee was formed to investigate and collect information regarding the status of women. Women Commission was set up when Vishwa Nath Pratap Singh was Union Minister on the basis of information submitted by the Committee. She handled the problems regarding the benefits of pension to the teachers of the Aided Schools in Delhi, Central Schools in Darjeeling. She also dealt with the matters relating to Chairman and members of Social Welfare Board are selected from amongst the prominent social workers of all India status, National plan of action for women, examination of compartmental candidates, non-availability of text books for Eleventh

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4. Materials collected from interview with Renuka Debi Barkataky.
class, provision of hostels for working men and women in the country, students admitted in the schools and colleges in Delhi, study of Sanskrit in Delhi Schools, enhanced stipend for Hindi training facilities, financial assistances for development of languages, U.G.C fund for development of colleges, financial grant/assistance to voluntary agencies for promoting inter-State cultural unity, help for improving professional and financial prospects of primary school teachers. When she was in office attended the United Nations meeting at Iran for women problems and visited Geneva for education and labour matters.

After 1977, except Renuka Debi Barkataky, who was the only lady Union Minister from Assam, no other lady became Minister after that period. Not only Minister, even not a single woman was elected to the Lok Sabha up to 1997. In 1997, Ranee Narah was elected from Lakhimpur constituency as Congress nominee but she could not become a Minister. In the Lok Sabha election of 1999, Bijoya Chakraborty was elected to the Lok Sabha from the Guwahati constituency, as B.J.P. nominee. She became the State Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation in the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Ministry in 1999. She was the second woman Union Minister from Assam. As Minister, she expressed her views on the Godavari Action Plan, modernization of irrigation projects along with their latest cost and expenditure, reappearance of river Saraswati, Jowat irrigation project, water management, flood control system in the country, Bergi Dam project, National Water Policy, foreign assistance to irrigation project Bansagar inter-State irrigation project and pending irrigation projects.

During her term, she dealt with many other problems relating to rain-water harvesting, utilization of funds allocated by the Central Government to the States Government for installation of tube wells, utilization of Godavari water, water management, Master Plan for flood management in the major flood-prone regions lying in the basins of Ganga and Brahmaputra, availability of water, water supply projects in Assam, level of underground water, and Pagladia dam etc. As Minister she tackled many other problems like water scarcity for drinking and irrigation.

6. Materials collected from interview with Bijoya Chakraborty.
purposes, devastation caused by the floods in Assam, allocation of funds for irrigation schemes in Assam.  

On the floor of the Lok Sabha, she faced several questions relating to purchase of Hindi typewriters in Ministries and Departments of Water Resources, loss due to Sardar Sarovar project, flood control schemes in Manipur, resettlement of the displaced persons etc.

**Woman as Minister in the State Council of Ministers**

The Constitution of India has provided for the same pattern of administration both at the Centre and at the State level. According to Article 163 of the Indian Constitution, the Governor is a Constitutional head of the State and has, therefore (subject to his discretionary functions), to act on the advice of the Council of Ministers. The provisions of Council of Ministers of the Governor are therefore similar to that of the Council of Ministers of the President. As the head of the State Council of Ministers is the Chief Minister and the Governor appoints him while the other Ministers are appointed by the Governor on the advice of the Chief Minister of the State.

After independence, the First General elections to the State Legislative Assemblies were held in 1952. The Congress party ruled Assam since independence continuously up to 1978. The Congress party under the leadership of Bishnu Ram Medhi came to power and there was no woman Minister in his Cabinet. In the Assembly election of 1957, the same party under the leadership of same leader formed the Ministry on April 1957. Usha Barthakur was appointed as the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Welfare. She was the first lady Minister appointed to the Assam Legislative Assembly. She was one of the pioneers of female education in Assam and one of the founders of Assam Mahila Samiti. She was in office for a short period from April 1957 to December 1957. As Minister, she contributed to the discussion relating to education. She has struggled for the improvement of women education in Assam.

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The Third Assembly election was held in 1962 and the Congress party secured the absolute majority and B.P. Chaliha became the leader of the House. B.P. Chaliha appointed Kamal Kumari Barua as the Deputy Minister for Education, Social Welfare, Finance, Information and Publicity, G.A.D. and S.A.D.\textsuperscript{11}

As Minister of Education and Social Welfare, she handled the problems relating to education, number of venture L.P. schools functioning in Guwahati Subdivision, teachers test examination, number of male, female chowkidars employed in the L.P. schools in the State, travelling allowances are provided to the teachers attending seminars\textsuperscript{12}.

She was member of the A.P.C.C, All India Congress Committee, and Vice President of the Pradesh Congress Committee. She was also a member of the Assam Jail Commission. She was the Chairman of Assam State Social Welfare Advisory Board from 1969 to 1975. After the split in the Congress party in 1969, she resigned from the party. At present, she is the social worker and President of the Assam Pradesh Mahila Samiti.

Padma Kumari Gohain- In the Assembly election of 1957, Congress party secured the absolute majority and the leader of the Congress party B.P. Chaliha formed the Ministry. He appointed Padma Kumari Gohain as Minister of State for Social Welfare, Relief and Rehabilitation\textsuperscript{13}. She became an active member of the Indian National Congress in 1930 and held that office for 12 years. She was an elected member of the Dibrugarh Municipal Board. She was the member of the A.P.C.C. from 1952-1960. She was the Chairman of Dibrugarh School Board, Chairman of Dibrugarh Mahakuma Parishad in 1964 and Chairman of Dibrugarh Central Bank, Bharat Sevak Samaj and Land Mortgage Bank.

B.P. Chaliha resigned on November 6\textsuperscript{th}, 1970 due to ill health. After Chaliha, Mohendra Mohan Choudhury was selected as leader of the House and became the Chief Minister of Assam. He appointed Padma Kumari Gohain as Cabinet Minister for Social Welfare, Sericulture and Weaving. After independence she was first woman Cabinet Minister in the history of Assam.\textsuperscript{14} As Minister of State and Social Welfare

\textsuperscript{11} Materials collected from interview with Kamal Kumari Barua.
\textsuperscript{12} Debates in the Assam Legislative Assembly, 18 the March—1st April, 1963.
\textsuperscript{13} Election Report, Assam Legislative Assembly, 1967
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 6\textsuperscript{th} October—10\textsuperscript{th} November, 1967.
in 1967, she took active part in the discussion on the refugee problems, about total number of adults both male and female and also about minors.

Padma Kumari Gohain brought to light valuable information regarding the number of tube wells sunk at Derapathar area, starvation death cases in the Derapathar rehabilitation site, about the number of knitting industries and knitting training centres in Assam.15

Padma Kumari Gohain as State Minister remained in office from 1967 to November 1970 and as Cabinet Minister, she was in office from November 1970 to January 1972 in the Mohendra Mohan Choudhury Ministry. Mohendra Mohan Choudhury resigned on January 1972 and Sarat Chandra Sinha became the Chief Minister of Assam. There was no woman Minister in the Sarat Sinha Ministry.

However, it may be noticed that she did not play active role both as legislator and as Minister on the floor of the Assembly.

In the Assembly election of 1972, Congress party again came to power and on March 17th, 1972, Sarat Sinha became the Chief Minister of Assam and on March 21, a thirteen member Ministry was formed. He appointed Swarna Prova Mahanta as Minister of State for Social Welfare, Sericulture and Weaving. She was the Zonal Organizing Secretary of Assam Pradesh Mahila Samiti. She was the Convenor of Women Department of Bharat Sevak Samaj, Tezpur and was executive member of Assam Chah Karmachari Sangha, Na-Duar Circle. She was elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly in 1972 from the Sootea constituency as Congress nominee.16 As Minister; she has taken various steps related to Social Welfare Board, about the Yarn Mill, the Youth Welfare Organization, and welfare of the young girls in Assam. As Minister of State she was in office from March 1972 to 1974. In 1974, she resigned when Sarat Sinha expanded his Ministry.

In October 1974, Anowara Taimur became the Minister of State for Education in the Sarat Sinha Ministry. She remained as Minister from October 1974 to December 1977 and resigned because she joined in the Congress (I) party. She was Convenor, Women's Front Assam Pradesh Congress Committee. She was General Secretary of Assam Pradesh Mahila Samiti. She was member of Central Women’s Advisory Council, All India Congress Committee.17

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17. Who's who Assam Legislative Assembly, 1972, Assembly Secretariat, Dispur
Anowara Taimur was first elected in 1972 to the Assam Legislative Assembly from the Mangaldoi constituency as Congress candidate. She was appointed as Minister of State for Education from October 1974 to December 1977 in the Sarat Sinha 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 became the Minister of State for Agriculture. From 1972 to 1991 she was elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly for four times and elected to the Rajya Sabha in 2004.

As Minister of State for Education, she made efforts to reform higher education, tried for the permission for opening Honours courses in colleges. During her term, a State level Education Advisory Board has been constituted to look into the matter of educational problems. She solved the problems of non-formation of education centres, payment of salaries to the teachers of these institutions, grant for the border area school, transfer of teachers from one school to another school etc.

Anowara Taimur as Minister of Education had to face the controversy on the matter of appointment for the SC/ST and admission into the Government Schools and colleges. In the Cotton College in 1950, reservation was made for 11 Hill Tribes and Plain Tribes. But Diphu and Haflong Colleges are located in Hill areas and most of the students are getting admission, there are also Government Schools in all the Sub-divisional Headquarters including areas mostly inhabited by Hill Tribes and Plain Tribes. She therefore said that it was not necessary to make reservation for them in these areas. She also became the Agricultural Minister in 1991. She dealt with the issues relating to the creation of Subdivision, World Bank assistance to various project in the field of agriculture, fisheries, veterinary, irrigation and P.W.D and that projects called Assam Rural Infrastructure and Services project. She tried to supply hybrid variety of goods to inspire the peasants and steps were taken to compensate the peasants for loss of harvest in the flood in Palashbari area, protection of seeds etc. She encouraged the peasants to represent in the International Agricultural Fair.

The Sixth General election to the Assam Legislative Assembly was held in March 1978. During that period, Congress party was defeated in the Centre in 1977 and Janata party with the assimilation of four parties came to power. At the State level election, Janata party with the support of some other parties formed the Ministry
because no single party could secure absolute majority in the election. 18 Golap Barbora, the leader of the House became the Chief Minister of Assam on 12th March 1978. After 6 months, Janata party lost its support and Golap Barbora resigned. There was the absence of woman legislators in the Janata party and Anowara Taimur was the only lady legislator from the Congress party in the Assembly. Jogendra Nath Hazarika became the Chief Minister of Assam but he also lost support of the Coalition partners in the House and resigned. Due to the Constitutional failure of the State administration, President rule was imposed in Assam on December 1979. Assam was under President rule for one year. When the President’s rule was over, Congress party was informed to form its Ministry to tackle the situation. So, in December 1980, Congress (I) formed the Ministry under the leadership of Anowara Taimur. She was the first woman Chief Minister of Assam. Her Ministry continued up to June 29th, 1981. So, as Chief Minister, she was in office for 6 months.

After the resignation of Anowara Taimur from the office of the Chief Minister, Keshab Gogoi became the Chief Minister of Assam. There was no woman Minister in his Ministry. In 1983 Assembly election, Congress party again came to power and formed the Ministry under the leadership of Hiteswar Saikia. Anowara Taimur was elected in 1983. Hiteswar Saikia appointed Anowara Taimur as Cabinet Minister for Public Works Department. She was again elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly in 1991 became the Agricultural Minister under the Hiteswar Saikia Ministry.

In the Assembly election of 1985, there was a revolutionary change to the electoral politics of Assam. During that period, for the first time Asom Gana Parishad (A.G.P), a regional political party came to power. Rekha Rani Das Boro was elected in 1985 from the Barama constituency as A.G.P nominee.19 Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, the leader of the Asom Gana Parishad formed the Ministry and he became the Chief Minister of Assam. He appointed Rekha Rani Das Boro as the Minister of State for Women and Social Welfare, Sericulture and Weaving. In January 1990, she was appointed as Cabinet Minister. Rekha Rani Das Boro was the executive member of the A.G.P and then became the Vice President of the Central Body. She was the President of the Asom Mahila Parishad. She also became the Minister of Women and

19. Materials collected from interview with Rekha Rani Das Boro.
Social Welfare department in the Prafulla Kumar Mahanta Ministry in 1996. She dealt with the problems relating to Mahila Samiti and youth organization.

On the floor of the Assembly she highlighted about the steps taken for the development of women, establishment of children bhawan, the number of I.C.D.S projects, old age pension, the special assistance sanctioned to the W.P.T and B.C Department. During her term 3% reservation sanctioned for the disabled persons. She also faced the question regarding the false certificates in getting admission to the M.B.B.S course in the name of Tea Tribe community. Rekha Rani Das Boro, under her initiative passed the Lalung (Tiwa) Autonomous Council Bill, Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Bill 2001. She had to participate in the discussion on the staff position of the Social Welfare Directorate Office, grants for the P.W.D works in the B.A.C area, total amount of Central assistance for the development of Plains Tribal people of Assam, I.C.D.S.programme, basis of selection of I.C.D.S. projects, number of educated handicapped unemployed youths etc. She also took initiative for the widows and helpless women to be employed in the Anganabadi. Rekha Rani Das Boro remained as Minister for two terms.

In the Assembly election of 1991, again Congress party came to power and Ministry was formed under the leadership of Hiteswar Saikia. He appointed Amiya Gogoi as Handloom and Textile Minister and Anowara Taimur as Agricultural Minister. Amiya Gogoi was appointed as Minister of State for Handloom and Textile on 23rd April 1993. As Minister, she has taken various steps about the developmental schemes for weavers, Handloom Package Scheme, and protection of the silk insects.

Hiteswar Saikia as Chief Minister remained in office from February 27th 1983 to December 1985 and from June 30th to April 21st 1996. He could not complete his full term and he died and after his death Dr. Bhumidhar Barman became the Chief Minister of Assam on April 22nd, 1996 to May 14th, 1996.

In the Assembly election of 1996, A.G.P. came to power and Prafulla Kumar Mahanta became the Chief Minister of Assam. He remained as Chief Minister of Assam from 24th December, 1985 to 27th November 1990, 15th May 1996 to 17th May 2001. He appointed Rekha Rani Das Boro as the Social Welfare Minister.

In the Twelfth Assembly election of 2001, Indian National Congress secured 71 seats, A.G.P. 20 seats, B.J.P, 8 seats, N.C.P, 3 seats, Autonomous State Demand Committee 2 seats, All India Trinamul Congress 2 seats, Samata party 1, Samajbadi party 1 and Independent 18 seats. So Congress party under the leadership of Tarun Gogoi formed the Ministry on 18th May, 2001. He appointed Dr. Hemoprava Saikia as Cabinet Minister of Textile and Handloom, Rupam Kurmi as State Minister of Handloom and Textile, Pranati Phukan as Cultural Minister, Sarifa Begum as Minister of State for Transport, and Ajanta Neog as State Minister of P.W.D

Hemoprava Saikia was the wife of Chief Minister late Hiteswar Saikia. She is closely associated with social activities. In 1976 she was associated with the Mahila Inndad Committee formed by Begum Abida Ahmed, wife of late Fakaruddin Ali Ahmed.

After the death of late Hiteswar Saikia, in 1996, Chief Minister of Assam, she contested for Nazira bye-election as Congress nominee and was elected. She was again re-elected for the second term in 2001 from her old constituency and was elected. She became the Cabinet Minister of Handloom and Textile, Sericulture and Cultural Affairs and Fisheries in the Tarun Gogoi Ministry with effect from 7th June 2002. As Minister she dealt with many welfare projects for the women of Assam. During her term many women related projects like Bayan Jyoti Achoni, Dindayal Achoni etc. were taken by the Government of Assam.

Rupam Kurmi was an active social worker. She was elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly for three consecutive terms in 1991, 1996 and in 2001. She was appointed by the Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi as State Minister of Handloom and Textiles and also appointed as Cabinet Minister. She remained as Minister from 18.05.2001 to 04.02.2004. She was the first Cabinet Minister from the Tea Tribe community. She was also allotted the charge of Labour Department. She as Labour and Employment Minister handled the problem relating to the number of employed youth enlisted to the employment exchanges, the number of employed engineers and other technical experts in Assam. During her term steps were taken regarding the educated unemployed youths in Assam.

22. Materials collected from interview with Dr. Memo Prova Saikia.
Pranati Phukan was elected in 1996 and in 2001 to the Assam Legislative Assembly. She was appointed as Minister of State for Revenue and Culture on 7th June 2002 in the Tarun Gogoi Ministry. But later on she lost her Ministership. As State Minister for Revenue and Culture, she dealt with the problems of scientific prevention in the State Museum and other Satras, Kokrajhar Arts and Music College, change of rules and regulations of cinema, various projects of cultural development of Assam, provided facilities to develop the culture of Tea Garden community, grant to the Sankardev Kalakhsetra etc.

Sarifa Begum was elected to the Assembly in 2001 from the Rupahee constituency as Congress nominee and was appointed as the Minister of State for Social Welfare and Transport on 7th June 2002 in the Tarun Gogoi Ministry. She remained as Minister for a short period.

Ajanta Neog was elected to the Assembly in 2001 from the Golaghat constituency as Congress candidate. She became the State Minister of Food and Civil Supplies and Tourism with effect from 7th June 2002. Then she became the Minister of State for P.W.D.

As Minister of State for Tourism she dealt with the problems about tourism, -two types of projects have been taken for tourism, one is by Central assistance and the second is the State-wise project, to prepare Guwahati as one of the most important tourist centres, details of the projects have been submitted to the Central Government. She was also appointed as P.W.D. Minister. During her term as Minister, steps were taken for the improvement of roads in Assam, the Central assistance were granted to the P.W.D department, repairment of roads done, steps were taken for the butification of Guwahati etc.

There are various reasons of less activeness of women in politics in comparison to men. In spite of the equal facilities to both men and women, women’s response to politics is very poor. The reason for increased events of leaving active politics by women coming from families having long political traditions is their huge expenditure of elections, threat of violence and character assassination have prevented many women from fighting elections. The women of rich families having long political

24. Materials collected from interview with Pranati Phukan.
25. Materials collected from interview with Sarifa Begum.
traditions can stay in politics for a long time. But for the women of young, educated and ordinary families entrance and stability in politics becomes difficult and impossible. These young women are totally inexperienced and they are to depend upon the senior politicians for their existence and sometimes they cheat them. The Muslims, Tribal and rural women are not interested in politics. The Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe women also sometimes though interested but can not bear the heavy expenditure of electoral politics. The educated upper class women are also apathetic towards politics. The middle class women are not totally free from their household responsibilities. So, as a whole, as the number of woman legislators are in minority, the number of Ministers automatically cannot increase.

After consulting the Ministerial profile of the woman legislators both at the Union and in the States, it is noticed that from the First election, women have shouldered the responsibility of Ministership in both the Central Cabinet as well as in the Provincial Cabinets, along with men. They never showed any act of inefficiency in their activities. The Prime Ministership of the country (the greater responsibility) was in the hand of a woman i.e. late Indira Gandhi for 14 years from 24th January 1966 to 24th March 1977, 14th January, 1980 to 31st October, 1984. Besides, Prime Ministership, there has been a dismal state of women incumbent to Ministerial portfolios at the Centre. There has been fourteen Ministries formed, but women have been included as Cabinet Minister only in five Ministries. Here, also the number of Cabinet Minister is only 8%. No woman from Assam has become Union Cabinet Minister up to now. Similarly one finds a sorry state of women incumbent as Minister of State and Deputy Ministers too. Only two women from Assam have been appointed as State Union Ministers. So, considering the percentage of women population and the number of women voters, the number of woman Ministers are very low. The only satisfaction is that their number is increasing slowly.

After independence, some experienced women of National movement, some women of rural houses came forward for fighting elections. Later on, Sucheta Kripalani, Nandini Satpathy and Shashikala Kakodkar held the position of Chief Ministers. In recent time, some women became Chief Ministers of the State, e.g. Uma Bharati in Madhya Pradesh, Sheela Dikshit in Delhi, Mayabati in Uttar Pradesh, Bashundhara Raje Sindhia in Rajasthan, Jaylalitha in Tamil Nadu, Rabri Devi in
Bihar etc. This proves that women also hold positions of greater responsibilities but still they are very rarely given the position of Ministers at Cabinet level that is a frustrating situation. Due to this factor also many ambitious and capable women are reluctant to politics. Considering the percentage of women population and the total number of woman voters, the number of woman Ministers are very low.

Most of the female members of Parliament and State Legislatures do not get their significant position as Ministers related to some important departments. Women as Cabinet Ministers have hitherto been assigned portfolios of Health, Information and Broadcasting, Social Welfare and Urban Department. Women never have been assigned to independent charge of more challenging and important portfolios like Finance, Defence, Home and Foreign etc. Although some women have become Deputy or State Ministers but their contributions is also not taken into consideration. In the State politics of Assam, woman Ministers were always assigned with Handloom and Textile, Education, Weaving, Sericulture, Culture and Revenue Department. They were always provided with women specific departments like Health Welfare, Consumers affairs etc. They are seldom appointed to Ministries that are normally considered as high powered or influential, as a result they have little influence in decision-making.26

So, it is not sufficient enough for women to be only members of the legislative bodies. They have to occupy positions or important portfolios where they are viable and where they can bring their powers and knowledge to bear on changing directions of society. So, there is the need of active woman leaders as Ministers where they can handle the women’s interests and issues.27

An analysis of the elected woman Ministers reveals that at the Union level, very few women became the Cabinet Ministers and they were always allotted to State or Deputy Ministry of less important departments. At the State level study, woman Ministers of Assam were elected from General seats except Rekha Rani Das Boro who was elected from Barama (ST) constituency and Rupam Kurmi who was from the SC community. Except Rekha Rani Das Boro and Bijoya Chakraborty (Union Minister), from the B.J.P. party respectively, all other regional Ministers were from

27. Ibid

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the Congress party. From 1952 to up to the present period only 6 women became the Minister of Cabinet rank and the rest have been allotted either State or Deputy Ministry. So the same system of male domination in politics is prevailing both at the Centre and at the State level.

Women as Members of the Committees

Parliamentary system of Government cannot be effective without the Committees. Committees are the integral part of administration. A Legislature has to dispose of several matters and the available time being limited, the Committee system has acquired importance. A Committee is a small body, where it is possible to hold elaborate discussion. The Legislature has the scarcity of time in discussing the various matters and it vests these responsibilities to the Committees. So, Committees deal with the various problems, hold discussions elaborately and suggest solutions. For every meaningful legislative action the relevance of the Committee system cannot be neglected. Committees are formed to focus on specific policy areas. The various types of Committees are—Public Accounts, Estimates, Education, Welfare, Community Development, Taxes, Petitions and Legislation Committees.

Woman M.Ps of our country not only worked on various Parliamentary Committees but they also participated in the discussion and debates. In the question hour, they participated in the debates on equal footing with the male partners. An analysis of the Parliamentary Committees reveals the low visibility of women in Parliamentary Committees. It is popularly believed that women are on insignificant Committee assignments. Generally, the male leaders of the political party and Legislature discriminate against women in finalizing Committees and Sub-committee assignments. Women are excluded from important Committees in spite of their interests and preferences assigned to relatively less influential Committees except for the Committee on the Empowerment of women, which has almost all the woman members, all the rest have zero to one woman member, and no Committee has a woman Chairperson except Nazma Heptullah who was the ex-officio Chairperson of some Committees in the Rajya Sabha. The Empowerment of Women Committee has woman Chairpersons. The Committee on Education, Public Health and Social Welfare are as a rule invariably allotted to women. The male leaders who are the
fountains of power assigned to Rules Committee, the Legislative Cabinet, Executive Committee of the party caucus, the Speaker’s Cabinet and they resist the inclusion of women.

The woman legislators of Assam have served in the different Committees. At present, there are 23 Committees in the State Legislature of Assam. The various Committees are—Business Advisory Committee, Rules Committee, General Purposes Committee, Committee on Subordinate Legislation, Committee on Privileges, Committee on Public Accounts, Committee on Estimates, Committee on Public Undertakings, Committee on Welfare of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Committee on Welfare of Backward Classes, Employment Review Committee, House Committee, Committee on Petitions, Committee on Government Assurances, Library Committee, Act Implementation Committee, Committee on Welfare of Women and Children, Committee on Ethics, Budget Committee, Departmentally Related Standing Committee on Development Department(A), Departmentally Related Standing Committee on Development Department (B) Departmentally Related Committee on Education, Departmentally Related Standing Committee on Works Department.

**Woman as Members in the Committees of Lok Sabha**

*Bonily Khongmen* was first elected to the Assam Assembly before independence and served as Deputy Speaker. She became the Member of the Lok Sabha and her involvement with the Lok Sabha Committees is not available. She was twice elected to the Gauhati University Court.

*Rasida Haque Choudhury* was elected to the Lok Sabha in 1977. She was the member of the Bharatiya Gramin Mahila Samiti. She did not speak on the floor of the Lok Sabha. After studying the Parliamentary proceedings, it is found that she remained silent in the Lok Sabha. Her involvement in the Committees of the Lok Sabha is not available.

*Mofida Ahmed* was the Convenor of the women department of the Congress at Golaghat since its inception in 1953 to the end of 1957. In the Lok Sabha election of 1957, she was elected to the Lok Sabha. She was the member of the Estimates Committee in the Lok Sabha.

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Rani Manjula Devi was the pioneer of women movement in Goalpara district. She was elected to the Lok Sabha in 1957 from the Goalpara constituency as Congress nominee. She was the most active lady and fought for the women's cause. She was also elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly in 1967. She was the Panel of Chairman in the Assembly. She was the member of the Estimates Committee in the Lok Sabha. She was the member of the Committee on Government Assurances in the Assam Legislative Assembly.

Jyotsna Chanda was first elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly in 1957 and elected to the Lok Sabha in 1962, 1967 and in 1971. She was member of the Committee on Petitions. She was the Panel of Chairman in the Assam Legislative Assembly. She was the member of the Assam Text Book Committee, N.F. railway Zonal Users Consultative Committee, Assam State Planning Advisory Committee etc.

Renuka Devi Borkataky was the Secretary of Women’s department, Assam Pradesh Congress, 1955 and worked as in-charge of Women and Children Wing, Constructive Working Committee, Labour Cell. She was elected to the Lok Sabha in 1962 and in 1977. In 1972, she was elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly as Independent candidate information regarding her involvement with the Committees are not available.

Bijoya Chakraborty was elected to the Rajya Sabha in 1986 from a regional political party. In the Thirteenth Lok Sabha election of 1999, she was elected from the Guwahati constituency as B.J.P nominee. She was the member of some Committees including Subordinate Legislative and House Committee in the Rajya Sabha. She was the member of the Committee of the Welfare of SC/ST. She was member of the Indian Nursing Council.

Ranee Narah was elected to the Lok Sabha in 1998 and in 1999. The information about her participation in the Committees is not available.

**Woman as Members of the Committees in the Rajya Sabha**

Committee systems are also active in the Rajya Sabha. Rajya Sabha has also to dispose of various matters and its time being short due to the limited period of
sessions, the Committee system acquired importance. So, Committees are the essential part of administration. Like the Lok Sabha, the role of women from Assam in the Rajya Sabha Committees is not dominant.

_Usha Barthakur_ was elected to the Assembly for two terms from the Samaguri constituency as Congress candidate. In 1966, she became the member of Rajya Sabha. She was the Panel of Chairman.

_Puspalata Das_ was elected to the Rajya Sabha in 1952 and in 1958. In 1967, she was elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly from the Dhekiajuli constituency as a Congress candidate. She continued her social service till the last part of her life. She was the Panel of Chairman in the Assam Legislative Assembly.

_Bedavati Buragohain_ Detail information regarding her biodata and role performances is not available. She was not an active member of the Rajya Sabha. She was the member of the General Purposes Committee.

_Basanti Sarma_ became the Member of the Rajya Sabha as a Congress nominee. She also remained as Chairperson of the State Women Commission. She was the member of the Committee on Rules, Committee on Government Assurances, Petroleum Committee, Empowerment Committee, Forest and Aviation Committee, Defence and Civil Aviation Committee.

_Jaysree Goswami Mahanta_ became the member of the Committees of the Rajya Sabha, e.g. Petroleum and National Gas Standing Committee, House Committee, External Affairs Advisory Committee, Railway Advisory Committee (N.E).

_Anowara Taimur_ was elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly for four terms and member of the Rajya Sabha in 2004 as Congress candidate. She was Panel of Chairman in the Assembly. She was member of the Business Advisory Committee. She was also member of the House Committee.

**Woman as Members of the Committees in the Assam Legislative Assembly**

Woman legislators of the Assam Legislative Assembly participated in the different Committees of the Legislature. They were always assigned to less important Committees. Their participation in the various Committees are:

_Padma Kumari Gohain_ was first elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly
in 1957, 1962 and in 1967 respectively. She was appointed as Minister of State for Social Welfare, Relief and Rehabilitation in the B.P. Chaliha Ministry from 1970 to January 1972. She also became Cabinet Minister. She was the member of the House Committee.

*Kamal Kumari Barua* was elected to the Assembly for two consecutive terms and became the Minister of State for Education and Social Welfare etc. She was the member of the Public Accounts Committee, Committee on Petitions, House Committee and Library Committee.

*Lily Sen Gupta* was elected to the Assembly for three consecutive terms. She was the Panel of Chairman. She was the member of the House Committee, Committee on Estimates and member of the Advisory Board of Co-operative Development.

*Pranita Talukdar* was elected to the Assembly in 1967 and in 1972. She was the member of the Library Committee, House Committee and the Committee on Government Assurances.

*Anandi Bala Rava* was elected to the Assembly in 1972 and the information regarding her involvement in any Committee is not available.

*Satyabati Goswami* was elected to the Assembly in 1972 and she was the member of the House Committee.

*Begum Afia Ahmed* was elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly in 1962 and she was the Panel of Chairman.

*Swarna Prava Mahanta* was elected to the Assembly in 1972 and became the Minister of State for Social Welfare, Sericulture and Weaving in the Sarat Sinha Ministry. So, her role in the Committees is not available.

*Rebati Das* was elected to the Assembly in 1972 from the Jalukbari constituency as Congress nominee. She was member of the House Committee.

*Tarulata Bora* was elected from the Saikhowa constituency as Congress candidate. She was member of the House Committee.

*Mridula Saharia* was elected from the Panery constituency as Congress candidate in 1983. She was the member of the House Committee and Library Committee.
Jyotsna Sonowal was elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly in 1985 from the Sadiya constituency as A.G.P nominee. She was the member of the Library Committee and the Committee on Petitions.

Amiya Gogoi was elected in 1985 and in 1991 to the Assam Legislative Assembly and became the Minister of State for Handloom and Textiles in the Hiteswar Saikia Ministry. She was the member of the Library Committee, House Committee, Committee on Estimates, Committee on Public Undertakings, Committee on Works Department, Committee on Government Assurances, Empowerment Committee and Committee on Privileges.

Kumari Rabidas was elected to the Assembly in 1985 from the Karimganj constituency as Congress nominee. She was the member of the Advisory Committee.

Pramila Brahma was elected to the Assembly in 1991 for three consecutive terms. She was the member of the Business Advisory Committee, General Purposes Committee, Committee on Welfare on Women and Children, Committee on Ethics, Budget Committee, Departmentally Related Standing Committee on Education, Select Committee, Committee on Welfare of SC/ST, Advisory Committee, House Committee, Library Committee, Committee on Empowerment of women, DRSC on Development Department. She was also the Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee on 23rd December 2003. 29 She was the member of the Committee on Government Assurances and Rules Committee. She was the member of the Select Committee in 2001.

Rupam Kurmi was elected to the Assembly in 1991 for three consecutive terms and was appointed as State Minister of Labour and Empowerment in the Tarun Gogoi Ministry. She also became the Cabinet Minister. She was the member of the Committee on Government Assurances, Committee on Estimates, DRSC on Development Department, Committee on Petitions. She was the Chairperson of the Empowerment on Women Committee. She was member of the Advisory Committee.30

Renupama Rajkhowa was elected to the Assembly in 1991 and in 1996. She was the Chairperson of the State Women Commission. She was the member of the Committee on Privileges, and Committee Subordinate Legislation. She was the

29. The Journal of the Assam Legislative Assembly, April7, 2005, p-68-81
30. Ibid, April 7,2000, p-73.
Chairperson of the Committee on Privileges, Committee on Subordinate Legislation and the Budget Committee. She was the member of the House Committee, Empowerment Committee on Women, and DRSC on Development Departments.\(^{31}\)

*Sushila Hazarika* was elected to the Assembly in 1996 and was the member of the Committee on Government Assurances, Library Committee, Committee on the Welfare of SC/ST, Committee on Empowerment of Women, House Committee and Committee on Development Departments.

*Alaka Desai Sarma* was elected in the bye-election of 2000 from the Nalbari constituency as an A.G.P nominee. She was the member of the Empowerment Committee. She remained as member of the Assembly for nine months and did not get chance to serve the various Committees of the Legislature.

*Komoli Basumatary* was elected to the Assembly in 2001. She was the member of the Committee on Welfare of SC/ST, Committee on Empowerment of Women, DRSC on Development Department.

*Jibontara Ghatoar* was elected to the Assembly in the last part of 2004. Her involvement in the Committees of the Legislature is not available.

*Jonjonali Barua* was elected to the Assembly in 2001 from the Marigaon constituency as Congress nominee. She was the member of the Departmentally Related Standing Committee on Development Department, Committee on Empowerment on Women, Act Implementation Committee, Committee on Public Undertakings, House Committee, Committee on Welfare of Women and Children. She was the Chairperson of the Committee on Welfare of Women and Children.

*Hosenara Islam* was elected in the Assam Legislative Assembly in 2001 from the Mankachar constituency as N.C.P nominee. She was the member of the Committee on SC/ST, House Committee, Committee on Welfare of Women and Children, Committee on DRSC on Education, Committee on Empowerment of Women.

*Sarifa Begum* was elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly in 2001 from the Rupahee constituency as Congress nominee. She was the member of the Committee of Other Backward Classes and More Other Backward Classes, House Committee, Committee on Empowerment of Women, Committee on Departmentally Related Standing Committee on Development Department. \(^{32}\)


\(^{32}\) Ibid, April 7, 2002.
Uttara Kalita was elected in 2001 from the Kamalpur constituency as Congress nominee. She was the member of the Library Committee, Committee on Public Undertakings, Committee on Welfare of Women, Committee on DRSC on Education, Committee on Empowerment of Women.

Dr. Hemoprava Saikia was first elected in 1996 in the Assembly bye-election of Nazira constituency as Congress nominee. She was re-elected for the second term in the Assembly election of 2001. She became the Minister of Handloom and Textiles. She was the member of the Committee on Empowerment of Women, Committee on Education, and Committee on Subordinate Legislation.

Pranati Phukan was first elected in 1996 and in 2001 from the Naharkatia constituency as Congress nominee. She was appointed as Minister of State for Revenue and Culture. She was the member of the Committee on O.B.C/M.O.B.C, Committee on Empowerment of Women, D.R.S.C. on Education, Committee on Welfare of Women, and D.R.S.C on Works Department, Committee on Estimates, House Committee, DRSC on Development Departments, Committee on Backward Classes, Committee on Education etc. She was the Chairman of the Committee on Empowerment of Women.

Ajanta Neog was first elected in 2001 from the Golaghat constituency as Congress nominee. She became the Minister of State for Food and Civil Supplies and Tourism. She was the member of the Committee on Privileges, Committee of O.B.C/M.O.B.C, Act Implementation Committee, Committee on Empowerment of Women. She was the member of the Select Committee. She was the Panel of Chairman.

An analysis of the women’s role and participation in the various Committees of the Parliament and in the State Legislature particularly of Assam reveals the low visibility of women. The male leaders dominate more influential Committees. Public Accounts, Finance Committee, Rules Committee, and Executive Committees were never assigned to women. Women get scope to become member of the Empowerment Committee. They are never given the chance of Chairperson except the Empowerment of women which has mostly woman Chairperson. Women, like men have the criteria to exert influence in the Committees. Such criterion includes particularly, regular attendances, flexibility, willingness to hear all sides of a question and a mastery of...
the subject matter. But the aspirant women are to work harder to overcome the doubts of her colleagues and win their approval. Women’s popularity is not easily gained. They are to work sincerely to overcome the hurdles of male-dominated society.

The political scenario of Assam is not exception to the rest of India i.e. same behaviour is treated to the woman Legislators of Assam. In the Assam Legislative Assembly there are 23 Committees to handle the administrative job. Woman Legislators of Assam always became the members of the Committee on Welfare of Backward Classes and More Backward Classes, Committee on Welfare SC/ST, House Committee, Library Committee, Committee on DRSC on Development, Committee on DRSC on Education etc. They were rarely allotted the membership to the Rules Committee, Employment Review Committee, Committee on Public Accounts, Committee on Estimates, Committee on Petitions, and Budget Committee, Act Implementation Committee, Committee on Government Assurances. Only two women were assigned the post of Chairperson of a few Committees and they were –Pramila Brahma and Renupama Rajkhowa. Pramila Brahma has become the Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee and she successfully carried out her responsibilities. Renupama Rajkhowa has become the Chairperson of 3 Committees, as she was the Deputy Speaker of the Assam Legislative Assembly.

**Woman as Speaker and Deputy Speaker**

In the history of Indian political system, women were never assigned to the post of Speaker either in the Parliament or in the Assam Legislative Assembly. Women were also deprived of the post of Deputy Speaker of Lok Sabha. As regards the Deputy Speaker of Assam Legislative Assembly, Mrs. Bonily Khongmen became the Deputy Speaker in the Assam Assembly before independence on 14th March 1946. In the post independence era, after a long gap, Renupama Rajkhowa honoured the Chair of Deputy Speaker on 14th May 1999 and she discharged her duties successfully. She was the only woman who became the Deputy Chairperson of Assam Legislative Assembly after independence.