CHAPTER - X

CONCLUSION

There were enough studies marked by critical problems faced by women in their service to the State and administration. Gender deprivation is the common phenomenon faced by the women at the global level. Women are the occupant of the 50% of the electorates but still their positions in the decision-making bodies is marginal. The present study is a focus on the role of woman legislators in the Assam Legislative Assembly and in the Parliament, their socio political background and in relation to it the social status of women, Constitutional provisions and other relevant elements were studied.

Patriarchy is the root cause of all social evils, for which the women are the worst victims. The male dominated society does not want to keep any space neither socially nor politically for women. Feminist movement started all over the world to uproot this system of the society. It is a struggle against the male domination of the society. Feminists agree on the point that empowerment of women is the only solution to end gender disparity from the society. But inspite of the Feminist movement throughout the world the condition of women has not been improved up to the mark.

The demographic profile of the Indian women reveals that the number of female is always less than the male and it is decreasing day by day. It is due to malnutrition, lack of food and proper care. The growth rate of female babies is decreasing due to the prevalence of foeticide. Assam is also not free from this kind of criminal act. The age-old tradition of ill treatment towards female child has not been changed in our State too. The sex ratio in Assam is always below the National level of sex ratio.

Status is a position occupied by a person in the society. So far as the status of women is concerned, they enjoy a low status in relation to men. A society cannot progress without women. It is called advanced when women are in good position. Indian women played a gallant role in the history of freedom movement but inspite of that they have not been given their due position in the society. She is a second-class citizen in every respect. Women of Assam is not exception to that and enjoy a
secondary status in the family and society. Silently she tolerates the tortures of her husband and in-laws. She has to struggle and strongly pose herself in the society and through a good number of entry tests. In the traditional society of Assam, women were not allowed to take part in the administration and thought to be best suited at home. So, they are to meet serious challenges of the society and the family to establish themselves.

The Legislature is the law making authority through which the grievances of the people can be redressed. It is the democratic institution through which public will can be focused. The success of democracy depends upon the successful working of the Legislature and where both the sexes equally share powers and discharge their duties and responsibilities.

The Legislature in Assam is called the Assam Legislative Assembly, which is a Unicameral one. It was constituted under the Government of India Act of 1935. It is consisted of 126 members and they are democratically elected by the people of Assam. Very few women were elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly from 1952 to 2001.

So far as status of women in the Lok Sabha is concerned, a limited number of women were elected to the highest legislative body not only from Assam but from other States too. Woman members though marginal in number had a tradition of being good administrator. Inspite of their outstanding role performances, the attitude towards women have not changed. The number of woman members in the Assam Legislative Assembly from 1952 is too marginal. Political participation is the process through which a person displays a role in the political life of the society. It does not mean the exercise of power but all other relevant activities that are necessary to capture power. It covers all the forms of actions by which the citizen take part in the operation of State machinery. Political participation of women in our country is not encouraging. It is low profiled because there is excess of money and muscle power that the women are lacking. They are not fit to challenge themselves in the pollution of politics. There is excessive manipulation and criminalisation of politics.

Political parties don't consider women as winning candidates for election. They are reluctant to select women as contesting candidates. All the political parties
more or less have the same attitude towards women except the Congress party that
has projected more women to the electoral politics. They are selected as workers to
carry out campaigning and for substitute works in the elections. All the political
parties carry out propaganda to project more women in the elections but in practice
they do nothing. Political parties underestimate women about their potentialities and
capabilities. Only a few women backed by political Godfather get chance to contest
in the elections. A woman in order to get party tickets has to overcome many hurdles.
She cannot reach the top level without backing.

    Indian women's entry into politics started with their participation in the
Freedom struggle against the British colonial rule. Women of Assam also dedicated
their lives for the sake of Nation.

    The second Chapter studies the status of women in the society. Legally there
is no difference between men and women. The status of women is mostly same
throughout the world. She enjoys a secondary status at home and also in the society.
Customs and traditions play a dominant role in determining the status of women.
Though the evil customs of early marriage, enforced widowhood, sati system, female
infanticide etc. are abolished through legislative Acts but still the society is not devoid
of these customs. Women of the present day becoming victims of bride-burning,
bride tortures, dowry deaths, rape and molestation. Though widow re-marriage has
legal sanction but still there are rare cases of widow re-marriage. The custom of
dowry still exists in the society. Inspite of the legislative steps by the Government the
evil customs still exist in the society. Due to the prevalence of these customs and
traditions in the society, women are homebound and cannot participate in the decision
making process of the country. There is the need to change the traditional ideas and
ethos otherwise 50% of the population will remain completely ignorant about the
administrative job of the Nation.

    Women have same secondary status in the family too. Inspite of the
technological advancements and scientific inventions, the position of women in the
family is deteriorating slowly. Despite her great sacrifice from morning to late night
she gets nothing except physical tortures and mental harassment. The traditional society
of Assam does not consider women as fit for political job. She has to carry out her
duties silently. In the family her position has been upgraded up to the mark. To establish
equality between men and women in every respect, there is the need that they should be respected in the family.

Gradually there is a slow change in the thoughts of women towards family and society. Girls in the Assamese society are no longer depended on traditions and customs. She wants to establish herself in the family and society. Even in the rural areas there is a trend among women of earning through self-help groups, which are run by women. There are women related legislations but law is on women’s side, i.e., legal safeguards, but prejudices, hostile attitudes, resistance and social taboos still hold them. There is the need of effective machinery for the implementation and enforcement of laws by the Government.

Women’s progress is possible only through education. It is the media through which women can identify and establish her and ultimately can interfere in the Nation-building process of the country. Education of women means education of the family. It will enable women to challenge all the superstitions and bindings that are imposed on her. It will make them aware of their duties and responsibilities towards the State and share in the administration as a whole. Development and progress of the country depends on the education of the masses. Everything needs change and it is the most pervasive aspect of life. Changes take place due to the changes in the society and these are affected by the technological advancement and modernization. Inspite of the changes, the position and status of women did not change much. Sill they are on the verge of age-old traditions and customs and becoming victims of domestic violence and crimes.

The third Chapter deals with the Constitutional provisions relating to women. Despite women’s heroic activities in the Freedom struggle, they were not equally represented to the Constituent Assembly from all areas of the country. Women were deprived of the membership of the important Committees of the Constitution. They gave preference on the Minorities, Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and Other Backward Classes. They did not consult about the women matters at all. The position of women during that period was much worse but gender issues did not figure the list of agenda of discussion.

The Constitution has guaranteed certain basic rights, which the State must
follow to establish justice in the society in the form of Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles of State Policy. The Fundamental Rights are implemented for the greater interest of the people irrespective of sex, caste and religion. These rights are not sufficient enough and Directive Principles of State Policies are enlisted which are the directions to the State Government for the protection and welfare of women. There are Fundamental Duties, women related Acts, Schemes and Projects, but all these provisions could do a very little in establishing equality between men and women in the society because the entire system is based on gender deprivation and gender discrimination. Only laws and provisions are not sufficient enough, the age old thoughts and beliefs about women are to be changed and only in that case justice to women will be possible.

The social background of the woman legislators reveals that most of the women in the Parliament and Assemblies come from economically well off families or from royal background and are high Caste Hindus. Women from the rich families with political connections can survive. Women who are careful and find patrons or powerful lobbies to support them only then their parties are willing to risk their candidature for election. Most of them had either in-laws or other kin in politics. They belonged to educated, urban, middle class families with a good exposure to politics from childhood. Education appears to be an important tool for encouraging political participation by women. Women who have aspired for Prime Ministership/Chief Ministership or high profiled office are the daughters/wives or relatives of political leaders. Infact the family plays the role of the political patron in making women's political careers. Poor, rural and semi-literate women cannot imagine of powers and their careers lose out even before they can begin. Most of the women who have been interviewed 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 husband paved their way to politics. Most of the woman leaders are middle-aged i.e., between 30-55 years of age. Middle-aged women entered in the politics of Assam because they are free from their familial burden and they can face the challenges of their male opponents better than the younger ones. 50% of the woman legislators are from the high profiled job. Majority of them are highly educated with Master degree and Ph.D degrees.

Hindu women because of their greater degree of economic and social
emancipation seem to be somewhat more politicized than the Muslim or Tribal women. Again upper class women are more active in politics. They are generally better educated and come from more liberal high caste families. The study also reveals that urban women are more politically conscious.

The representation of women in the highest legislative body of the Union and the State Legislative Assemblies depicts a dismal picture. Women constitute 45 to 50 percent of the country’s total electorate but their representation in the Legislatures is totally disproportionate to their strength in the country’s population. Despite their awareness about their rights and duties their participation and strength in the various elective bodies has not increased more than 10 percent of the total members both in the Union and in the States. The election results of the Assam Legislative Assembly reveals that the number of woman participants is increasing day by day. Women being deprived by the political parties contest elections as Independent candidates and there is the less chance of winning. Most of the woman contestants are sufferers but it proves that women are slowly becoming interested in politics. The largest numbers of woman contestants are Independents because they are interested to contest in the election but are rare selected by the political parties. Most of the aspirant women fight election as Independents. In the history of election in Assam the Congress party has projected more women in relation to other parties. In terms of success, in both absolute numbers and percentage of women contestants, the Congress achieved the best results.

Majority of the women were conscious of women issues. They were strongly convinced of women’s potentialities and the need for women entering into politics. They preferred woman candidates to men, because they are convinced that women would be more sensitive to women issues and problems and would be sincere and committed to remedy them. Women were also held to have leadership qualities and ability to cleanse politics, which will ultimately bring about Nation’s progress. Most of the woman members viewed that the issue of women’s welfare as such does not figure significantly during the Assembly and Parliamentary session and there is the tendency of overlooking the matter. Though women are conscious of the women issues but they are not getting importance due to the lack of women’s initiative. The study reveals that woman legislators though participated in the debates and discussions
but seldom focused on special problems related to women. The male members handled most of the times women matters. The proceedings of the Assam Legislative Assembly depicts that the woman legislators who are senior in age were more active and they dealt with most of the women issues.

One finds sorry state of women’s incumbent to Ministerial portfolios at the Centre. No woman from Assam was assigned to the Minister of Cabinet rank and 2 women were appointed as State and Deputy Minister. Stigmatic status of weaker sex is also reflected in the portfolios assigned to women. Women could take the burden of heavier Ministries, but generally they were given portfolios of not demanding special verbe vigour. They never showed any act of inefficiency in their activities. Woman as Cabinet Minister generally were allotted the portfolios of Health, Information and Broadcasting, Urban Development, Health and Social Welfare and Education. They never were allotted the independent charge of more challenging departments like-Finance, Railway, Defence, Foreign Affairs and Home etc. In the State politics of Assam, women were always given the charge of Handloom and Textile, Weaving and Sericulture, Culture and Revenue, Education and Social Welfare and that is also the State or Deputy Ministry. In fact women were always appointed to the women specific departments. Very few women were appointed as Cabinet Minister. The woman Ministers have also functioned as the representatives of both men and women. This proves that women as a class do not have their specific politics, in other words politics has no sex dimension.

Committees are the integral part of administration. Regarding the Committee assignments of the woman legislators of Assam, they were never assigned to important Committees, which were the domain of the male section of the society. Women are rarely appointed as Chairperson except the Empowerment of Women Committee. Generally women became the member of the Library Committee, Committee on Welfare of Backward Classes and More Backward Classes, House Committee, DRSC on Development and DRSC on Education etc.

The woman legislators have been all- encompassing and general in nature. They were not elected on gender basis. So as leaders they are to represent their areas from where she was elected and solve the problem. They are elected on party lines and are to follow party guidelines and can raise issues, which are closely connected
with their party. Mostly they raises issues which are related to the day to day affairs of the people. The woman legislators of Assam raised most of the issues, which were related to the general developmental works, and they rarely raised women issues. The statements of the woman MPs have been by and large ordinary in content and style. But this perhaps is also true for most of the male MPs. The problem is that only party leaders owing to their position and personality make the maximum use of Parliamentary forums. The rest follow their leaders and thus are more often than not, relegated into the background.

**Findings**

Despite the socio cultural diversities in the country out of these studies some common features emerge regarding women's participation in politics and this is the stereotyped role of men and women and that politics is the realm of men. Evidently there are career politicians and ordinary citizens who take part in political game. Career politicians tend to come from a liberal family who are supportive of women's political participation while domestic chores may be an obstacle to their service and they can easily overcome with a helpful family. Most of the woman politicians of Assam tend to come at an age of 35 to 44 years because women at this age are matured and experienced. It is also found that more and more women are from the urban areas due to political awareness. From another standpoint, it is found that more women are from high Caste Hindus join politics in Assam. There is the dominance of General Caste, 2 women are from the SC category and 6 were from the ST. The higher Caste specially Brahmins and Kayasthas comparatively enjoy better status in the society.

It is seen that in the State politics of Assam, representations of Hindu women were more active in politics. Only 6 women were from the Muslim community and 2 were from the Christian community since 1952 to 2001.

The woman legislators of Assam are mostly educated people, with their involvement in extra curricular activities, ranging from student activities to social welfare work and more explicit political work, as a lead-up to their political career. It is found from the study that majority of the women were highly educated.

The marital status of the woman legislators of Assam reveals that majority of
them were married and only 2 women were unmarried at the time of their entry into politics. Most of the woman legislators of Assam entered into politics through widow succession i.e., they were widows of some renowned politicians of Assam. Though most of them were Assamese speaking but they did not face any language problem in exchanging their ideas with the people of different communities. The elite and middle-income groups, especially from urban areas, have relatively easy access to information and mass media, which can shape their political opinions. Women from the low-income groups are not visible. So far as the size of the family is concerned most of the women are having middle size family i.e., up to 3 children. As majority of women are from the Hindu community so they celebrated all the Hindu festivals. 6 women are from the Muslim community and 2 were Christian community and they celebrated their respective festivals.

Most of the women started their political career after their marriages. Woman legislators of Assam held the post of members both in the Parliament and in the State Legislative Assembly. A few women were appointed as Ministers of women related departments. It is observed that 50% of the woman legislators were student activists and 3 women participated in the student movement against foreign nationals.

Most of the woman leaders were members of the woman organizations either directly or indirectly. 3 women became the Chairperson of the State women Commission. A few women honoured the Chair of the President of Assam Pradesh Mahila Samiti.

No woman from Assam became the Minister of Cabinet rank and only 2 women were appointed as State or Deputy Minister in the Union Council of Ministers. In the Assam Legislative Assembly only 5 women became the Cabinet Ministers of less influential departments and most of the women were honoured with the charge of either State or Deputy Ministry. Regarding their achievements women are satisfied about their role as Minister or as members. None of them became the Speaker of either Lok Sabha or State Assembly. Only one woman honoured the Chair of Deputy Speaker in the Assam Legislative Assembly.

It is also found that most of the woman legislators of Assam were elected more than one term both in the Lok Sabha and in the State Assembly. There is always participation of experienced Women in the State politics of Assam.
It is observed that woman legislators of Assam are usually excluded from the important Committees. Women are rarely appointed as Chairperson of any Committee except the Empowerment on women Committee.

Most of them identified male domination as the root cause of less number of women in politics. Woman legislators expressed their view relating to reform of the system that there is the need of reservation of seats and are in favour of 33% women Reservation Bill.

Regarding their attendance in the sessions of the Legislature it is found that only a few members were very active and they always remained present and raised questions relating to various problems. Some members though they were present but remained silent most of the time. The issue raised by women, either during electoral contests or in Parliament/Assembly has seldom focused on special problems related to women. It is found that majority of them were busy about the general developmental problems of their constituencies and had no scope for dealing with the women problems.

Most of them expressed their view that women alone cannot solve women problems and there is the need of cooperation of both the sections of the society as well.

It is very difficult to draw conclusion on the basis of limited election statistics, yet some general impressions can be drawn. The very few women who have been able to gain prominence in politics are economically well-off and belong to the upper strata of the society. They entered politics through backing and stayed through the force of money and status. The Congress party having the largest women in politics, having the largest experience of struggle projected more women in politics. There is the manipulation of politics. There is nothing wrong if women choose to involve themselves in domestic affairs than anything else, as most of the women do. It is definitely wrong if a society restricts women from participating actively in various fields including politics. Women are as good or as bad politicians as men. They should not be discriminated as being women. There is the need to adopt a sympathetic attitude towards women.
To facilitate women's entry into politics following measures may be suggested:

1. Education plays the key role in the entry of women into politics. Mass literacy programmes are to be adopted for the eradication of illiteracy. If more and more women are educated and it will enable to bring more women in the mainstream politics.

2. An awareness campaign about women's political and legal rights should be organized twice or once in a month mainly in the rural areas.

3. Woman leaders should inspire women to participate in the political rallies, election campaigning, meetings etc. and this will increase women's interest in politics.

4. Political training should be imparted to both man and woman legislators. There is an urgent need to create a political will to change the attitude of the people as 'Politics is social work'.

5. Women should be encouraged to participate in the grass-root administration and through participation they will be trained and experienced. These women must be given a chance in the decision-making process.

6. Criminalisation of politics and character assassination are the greater hindrances to women's entry and it was felt that the increase in the number of women in the decision-making bodies will help in countering these problems.

7. Women should take active role in the political parties. Their leadership capabilities will force the political parties to project more women as candidates for election.

8. Women should join in the trade unions, pressure groups, and other woman organizations and service to these organizations will impart leadership ability among them.

9. To gain access to high-level political decision-making, one needs to have an extraordinary strength of will and determination. It may mean sacrificing personal pleasure and happiness. Woman politicians have to work hard, twice as hard as their male counterparts in order to be recognized and to make their presence felt.

10. After entering in the administrative bodies, women should not limit themselves with in the party politics. They must engage themselves to the various
Committees and prove their proficiencies.

11. Agencies for better political communication should be established from where accurate political, economic and educational information can be given.

12. Male section of the society should be interested in the women's political participation because it leads to the greater progress of the society.

13. There should be understanding between men and women regarding contesting in the elections. Men should not feel that politics is their domain and should not suffer from any kind of frustration or deprivation. Co-operation of the male section is necessary.

14. To become real representative of the majority of the women, they are required to be sensitive to the problems of the silent majority, who are not usually articulated and who are not politically beneficial to many politicians.

15. Political parties should be liberal towards women. They must consider women as fittest candidates. Depriving by the political parties women are bound to contest election as Independent candidates where there is less chance of winning.

16. Strengthening the linkages between women politicians and women's organizations is also needed.

17. Majority of the woman legislators have suggested for the 33% reservation of seats in the Parliament and in the State Assembly. This will not only increase their numbers in the decision-making bodies but also give the opportunity to women to fight against discrimination.

18. The Government and all political parties should take initiative to pass the Women Reservation Bill in the Parliament to make 33% reservation into practice. Only then we can hope for a handful number of women into politics.