PART III

SYNTHESIS
CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

SUMMARY

The present research work as outlined in the preceding chapters gives a clear picture of electoral politics, voting behaviour of the people of Assam, activities and performance of the political parties of the state with special reference to their involvement in some of the basic problems of the area. The main aspects investigated in this thesis are the spatial patterns of demographic, socio-political and economic characteristics of population of the study area, historical perspective of poll verdicts, distributional patterns of political parties, voting pattern, voting behaviour, politics of influx and an analysis of the disparities in voting behaviour of electorates in its various parts (State, District and Legislative Assembly Constituency level). The present study clearly depicts Assam as miniature India with all the diversity of language, religion, ethnicity, culture and tradition with wide variation in her geographical features and above all, with a host of problems which are characteristics of some of the chronic problems of the country as a whole. Assam is only a state in the country which has been a mercilessly dissected in the name of preservation of identity and safeguarding of the interests of ethnic groups and yet the people here have accepted it with magnanimity and a rare sense of mutual understanding and cooperation.

The first chapter gives an introduction of the problem in respect of its statement, the study area, focus and objectives of the study, hypothesis, data base and methodology including significance of the study and organisation of the work. A brief review of some relevant works is also incorporated in this introductory chapter. A review of existing, relevant works have been done in a comprehensive manner. The scope of study is limited by non-availability of required maps and data on the one hand and the lack of source materials on the other. It may, however, be mentioned here that the analysis of the problem is sometimes constrained due to the non-availability of adequate data at Legislative Assembly constituency level.
A study of the physical, socio-economic background, geopolitical setting and electoral landscape of Assam is made in the second chapter. The physical background encompasses the physiography, climate, soil, natural vegetation and on the other hand, the socio-economic background encompasses social and economic structure of the people of Assam. It is found that the entire state is highly varied and complex in physical and socio-cultural characteristics. Physically, the state exhibits an uneven topography ranging from high hilly areas to low-lying valleys or plains. Socially, the state contains almost all the ethnic and socio-religious groups including a significant proportion of scheduled tribes and Muslim population. Geographically, the state of Assam consists of hills and plains with different levels of economy. Most of the people living in hill areas practice jhum cultivation. In addition, the traditionally prevalent socio-economic and socio-cultural practices in the state are undergoing gradual transformation due to the growing impact of urbanization and modernization. The geopolitics of Assam can be understood on the basis of the dialectical relationship between geography, society, and politics. The inadequate and unsatisfactory communication system between north-east India and the mainland is also a relevant feature in the geo-political life of the state. The partition of the country in 1947 left this part high and dry. For the purpose of Assembly elections, the state of Assam are divided into some Legislative Assembly constituencies. But the total number of Legislative Assembly constituencies varies from time to time. In 1952, the state of Assam was divided into 94 Assembly constituencies. The Delimitation of Assembly constituencies order in 1976 provided 126 seats for the state. There was no change in the number of constituencies since 1978 Assembly elections.

The third chapter deals with the demographic attributes of population in the state. It has been found from the study that the rate of population growth in Assam which had been much higher than the relevant national rate of growth was one particular demographic feature which figured in the different Assembly elections specially after 1978 election. At the beginning of 20th century, Assam’s population was 3.29 million. It increased to 8.03 million in 1951 and 26.64 million in 2001. It is significant to note that growth rate of population varies spatially within the state depending upon the nature and extent of migration and number of socio-cultural factors influencing the natural growth. Satisfactorily, the population growth rate in the state has been checked significantly during the last three
decades (1971-2001) It may be mentioned here that partition of the country came as a great relief to the ruling class of Assam which suddenly found itself in a dominant political position. The influx of Hindu and Muslim immigrants from East Pakistan (present Bangladesh) into Assam made the Assamese ruling class apprehensive of the new entrance into the state as they might be one day outbalance the Assamese people again and of eventual loss of their acquired political status. Although Assam is a Hindu dominated state, people of all the major religious groups live here in varied proportions. It is seen that the proportion of Muslim population in Assam is significantly higher than that of the country as a whole. Caste system exists among the Hindus. However, the majority of the political parties have projected religion and caste as an important factors in the state’s political process. The linguistic classification of the people of the state shows that the Assamese speaking people constituted the dominant linguistic group, followed by the Bengalis who were predominant in Barak Plain only. Language issue in Assam was another notable social phenomenon which surely had some impact on the General elections in the state. The literacy rate varies widely across the state. The variation in literacy is even found to be more significant in respect of rural-urban, male-female and different social components in the state. According to 2001 census, the literacy rate in Assam is found to be 64.17 per cent as against country’s 65.38 per cent. Rural-urban dichotomy was another demographic feature which deserves a special mention here. The society in Assam was predominantly rural in character, 23.25 million of its people lived rural areas whereas only 3.39 million lived in 125 urban centers. Guwahati was only city having a population over 5 lakh. This indicates that size of the urban middle class which provided political leadership in the state was relatively small.

The fourth chapter deals with the historical perspective of poll verdicts, districtwise profile of the electoral performance of the contesting political parties, an overview of party position in different Assembly elections and electoral hold of the political parties in space and time. The Indian National Congress had monopoly over the Assembly seats in all the earlier Assembly elections (from 1952 – 1972) in the state of Assam. In the first five General elections to the Assembly—the Indian National Congress used to win at least two-thirds of the total seats in the state while the rest fall into the hands of opposition parties and Independents. The Indian National Congress’s hold over the electorates of the state
had been considerably reduced in the 1978 Assembly election. The party secured more than 53 per cent of the valid votes polled in the Fifth General Election but its electoral hold had been reduced to 23.7 per cent in the 1978 Legislative Assembly election. The party was worst affected in Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, and Tinsukia districts. The Janata party emerged as the single largest party in the election but it secured only 27.5 per cent of the valid votes polled. The party faced best in the hill districts followed by Darrang, Sonitpur, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Lakhimpur, and Nagaon districts. In contrast, the election schedules of the subsequent three General elections (held in 1978, 1983, and 1985) were greatly disturbed. The Seventh General election held in 1983, was marked by increasing violence and an extraordinary situation of boycott call given by AASU and AAGSP, the Indian National Congress again emerged with a clear majority. In the Eighth General election (in 1985) a regional party, namely the “Asom Gana Parishad” (AGP) won with an overwhelming majority. During the 1991 General election to the Assam Legislative Assembly, the regional party “Asom Gana Parishad” were split into two major fractions. In such situation the Indian National Congress (I) took the golden chance and captured the most of the Assembly seats. In 1996, General election to the Assam Legislative Assembly, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) came to power and the Indian National Congress (I) had to sit it in the opposition bench for the third time since the Independence. The Indian National Congress (I) has swept the state Assembly polls in 2001, while the Asom Gana Parishad suffered a serious setback. The Sixth General election to the State Assembly held in 1978 heralded the beginnings of an end to the dominant position of Indian National Congress (INC) in Assam. The INC which dominated electoral politics in the state during the first three decades since Independence (1952–1977) was in a process of disintegration. Its hold over the “vote bank” in the Muslim and the Tea garden areas started waning rapidly. A major section of the Muslim population of the state appeared to have stood behind the Janata party in the 1978 election, United Minority Front in the 1985 election and Asom Gana Parishad in the 1996 election.

In the first Assembly election held in 1952, though the Congress party gained 44 per cent of the total valid votes polled it secured 79.56 per cent of total Assembly seats. The socialist party and the Kisan Majdoor Praja Party (KMPP) gained only 19 per cent of the total valid votes polled and captured only five Assembly seats. A significant number of Assembly seats were secured by the Independent candidates. In 1957 Assembly election, the Congress party gained 52.35 per cent of the votes polled and it secured 77.42 per cent of the Assembly seats. The Praja Socialist Party (PSP) were the strongest opposition parties but secured only 13.78 per cent of total votes polled. The Second General election was again an easy win for the Congress because the Congress party had acceded to the widespread demand for re-organization of the states of India on linguistic basis. The election of 1962 was contested by seven political parties besides a number of Independent candidates. In the third Assembly election held in 1962, the Congress secured 48.25 per cent of the total votes polled and the party gained 83.87 per cent of the total Assembly seats. In the election of 1962, two-member constituencies were abolished and the marking system of voting was introduced. The Assembly, however, looked poorer without the two veteran leaders of the opposition, Hareswar Goswami (PSP) and Gauri Sankar Bhattcharyya (CPI). The question of a separate Hill State, immigration, language and economic issues were some of the major issues of this election. The position of the regional language was another important issue of that time. The Assam official language Act, 1960, was vehemently opposed by the Hill leaders in the House. The problem of immigration of people to Assam from East Pakistan (present Bangladesh) was an election issue of the opposition parties as well as the Independents. Among the opposition parties that fielded candidates in a big way in the election was the Praja Socialist Party. This party put up 56 candidates and out of them six members won the election.

The Assembly election held in 1967 was contested by eight political parties, besides a number of Independent candidates. In the fourth Assembly election, the pattern of distribution among the political parties of the Assembly seats largely changed. The Congress captured 72 seats in a House of 126. The opposition captured 52 seats; its strength was only 26 in the Assembly of 1962. For the first time in the history of electoral politics, a large number of Independents were elected. Communal consideration played a great role in the election of 1967. The Bharatiya Jana Sangha (BJS) was
completely rejected in the election of 1967. This can be important feature of the electoral politics of Assam. One new political party under the name and style of the ‘People’s Democratic Party’ was formed in 1969 under the leadership of Gauri Sankar Bhattacharyya. Land reforms, nationalization of bank and industries, tribal problems, unemployment and education was major election issues of this election.

In the election of 1972 nine political parties took part besides a large number of Independent candidates. As the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganization) Act 1971 came into force two separate states of Meghalaya and the Union Territory of Mizoram were created and as a result, the strength of the Assam Assembly was reduced to 114. In the reorganized Assam, the Indian National Congress secured an over-whelming popular mandate with 95 seats in a House of 114 seats. The ‘Indira wave’ after the Bangladesh war exerted tremendous influence on the parliamentary election of 1971 and Assembly elections of 1972. The Congress emphasized issues like the all round development of the youth, improvement of communications, industrial development, improvement of employment position, enforcement of land reform measures, radical change in education system and development of integration among different religious groups, language groups and communities.

The General election to the Assam Legislative Assembly of 1978 was contested by eleven political parties, besides a number of Independents. The Sixth Assembly election (1978) in Assam differed in many respects from all the earlier General elections held in the state. As compared with the past elections, the number of contestants was abnormally high. A record number of candidates, 938 in all, were in the fray for 126 seats as against 438, 312, 409, 487 and 476 candidates respectively in the first five General elections. The Indian National Congress, the Indian National Congress (I) and the Janata party were the major contenders for power in the election held in 1978. Neither the left parties nor the regional parties could project themselves before the electorates as another viable alternative to the Congress party. The Indian National Congress which had 95 members in the dissolved Assembly could win only 26 seats in the election. The Janata party which emerged as the single largest party in the election won 53 seats. However, in the 1978 election a record number of voters 66.8 per cent of the electorates participated and the Indian National Congress ousted from power for the first time in Assam. Though the verdicts mentioned above are contradictory, still it would be unjust to reject the assumption
that correlation exists between higher voter turn-out and the election verdicts. On the other hand, the opposition parties for the first time were fighting the election not merely on the theme of 'anti-congressism' but mainly on the theme 'Democracy vs. Dictatorship'.

The General election to the Assam Legislative Assembly of 1983 contested only by four political parties. Janata party and most of the Regional parties was boycotted the election process but the Indian National Congress (I), Indian National Congress (S) and Communist parties were taking part in it. The percentage of votes cast was only 32.74 compared to 66.85 in 1978 Assembly election. The election for sixteen Assembly constituencies were postponed indefinitely because of unmanageable situations. The All Assam Student's Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) which were leading the agitation against the foreigners and decided to boycott all elections in the state until their demands were not fulfilled. Thus the 1983 Assembly election became the major issue itself. The issue of foreign nationals on the basis of which AASU organized the poll boycott did not have any impact among the electorate in the districts of Barak Plain and in areas where the minority groups (Muslim community) were predominant. In 1983 Assembly election, Indian National Congress (I) emerged as the single largest party and captured 91 seats out of 110, where Assembly election was held.

After six-years “the Assam Movement“ against foreigners in Assam (1979-85) leading to widespread violence and considerable loss of life and property, ended when “the Assam Accord”, was signed on the 15th August 1985 between the central government and the student leaders of Assam. The Eighth General election to the Assam Legislative Assembly held in December 1985. In the election of 1985, nine political parties took part besides a large number of Independent candidates. Unlike the previous elections, the 1985 General elections to the Assam Legislative Assembly, which was held after the “Assam Accord”, witnessed an unprecedented voter's turn out (more than 75 per cent) It was a record poll and therefore a clear manifestation of the democratic will of the people. The emergence of a regional party, named the “Asom Gana Parishad (AGP)” in 1985 election was a significant political development in the North-East in particular and in the country in general. By securing 63 seats in the 126 member Assembly seats, the Asom Gana Parishad grabbed political power in Assam defeating the Indian National Congress (I), which
could secure only 25 seats. The United Minority Front (UMF), another regional grouping secured 17 seats with 10.85 per cent total votes polled. The AGP which was formed with blessing of the pro-movement organizations was full of promise and it presented a picture of purity, honesty and commitment to the ideal of preserving and promoting Assamese nationality, language, and culture without endangering national unity and other natural goals. All other political parties paled into insignificance before the AGP. The electorates therefore, gave a massive mandate to the AGP in the entire Brahmaputra valley.

In the 1991, the State Assembly election were also held simultaneously with the Lok Sabha election In the election of 1991, thirty-eight political parties took part besides a large number of Independents. The regional party, Asom Gana Parishad split into two fractions - the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and the Natun Asom Gana Parishad (NAGP) and both the parties contesting the 1991 Assembly election independently. In that situation, it would be sheer naivety to argue that the vote banks of the AGP were going to be distributed among the local or regional parties. In such a situation the Indian National Congress (I) secured an overwhelming majority with 67 seats in a House of 126 seats. The Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and the Natun Asom Gana Parishad (NAGP) captured 19 and 5 seats respectively. For the first time in the history of the Assam Assembly a large number (10) of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidates was elected. The Indian National Congress (I) emphasized issues like restoration of peace in the state, job opportunity to unemployed educated youths and finding out solution of the demand for the 'Bodoland' and Autonomy for Karbi - Anglong and N.C Hills district. The Asom Gana Parishad laid emphasis on the greater autonomy and right of self determination for the state and fulfillment of the party promises and the total implementation of "Assam Accord"

The Assembly election of 1996 was contested by eight National parties, two Regional parties, five state parties of other states, besides a large number of Independent candidates. The NAGP did not put up any candidate to contest the Assembly election 1996 because this party merged with the AGP before 1996 election. The Asom Gana Parishad swept the poll, pushing the ruling Indian National Congress (I) to the opposition camp. The success was slightly unexpected for the Asom Gana Parishad which fielded only 96 candidates
and won 59 seats comprehensively. The Indian National Congress (I) was wiped out from five districts of the state. The people of Assam had given clear mandate to AGP and its alliance partners - the CPI, CPI (M), ASDC and UPPA to form a popular Government in the state. The alleged corruption and the misrule of the Congress (I) Government were the main issues raised by the Asom Gana Parishad. The AGP’s party manifesto avoided any direct reference to the issue of Bangladeshi migrants and only promised all necessary steps to implement the ‘Assam Accord’. The Congress (I) in its manifesto said that the party would see that the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal) Act of 1983, which provides for deportation of foreigners, was not misused. In real sense, the Assembly election of 1996 was “issueless” and “waveless”.

The General election of 2001 was contested by twenty-eight political parties including regional or local parties. The Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) suffered a serious setback winning only 20 seats while the Indian National Congress (I) under the leadership of Tarun Gogoi had swept the state Assembly polls, 2001, winning 72 Assembly seats out of the 126 seats. The AGP’s alliance partner the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) also suffered as the party managed only eight seats. All Bodo Students’ Union (ABSU) had fielded Independent candidates in 15 constituencies and managed to win 10 seats. The result shown by the candidates fielded by ABSU proved that the people of the Bodoland area had faith on the ABSU and its allied organizations and that the People’s Democratic Front (PDF) had no mass base in Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) areas. The ABSU and their allied organization in their election manifestoes emphasized on issues like formation of Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) and solution of Bodo problem. The election had proved that though the BJP had made the ‘maximum sacrifice’ in the seat sharing arrangement, yet the alliance with the AGP did not yield the expected results. Many stalwarts in the regional Assam Gana Parishad including its president Prafulla Kumar Mahanta was humiliated in the prestigious Dispur Assembly constituency. The election to the Eleventh Assam Assembly had indicated that the Left parties (Communist parties) in the state were heading for a natural death as the voters had totally rejected them in all the Assembly constituencies. The ASDC (U) headed by Holiram Terang managed to win in Howraghat and Bokajan constituency while the ASDC(P) led by Chandra Kanta Terang drew blank in all the five Legislative Assembly constituencies under Diphu Parliamentary
constituency The electorates of Assam had given a decisive verdict for a change. The return of Congress (I) to power with massive support from all different sections of people can not explained only by attributing it to anti-incumbency factor even though it possibly played the most significant role The Eleventh Assembly election in Assam was apparently an issue oriented one Secret killings during the AGP’s regime, Bodo problems, IM(DT) Act, ULFA problem and removal of corruption were the major issues in the 2001 Assembly election.

Chapter Six is devoted to the analysis of the voting behaviour of the electorates and influencing factors behind the trends and patterns of voting behaviour in the different Assembly elections. The research works on electoral study have dealt with a variety of factors which influence the voter’s mind in the exercise of their right to vote. Besides the standard SES factors, ideas and aspirations of the voter, the values he or she cherishes and the political considerations he or she make find expression in his or her decision to cast vote for a particular candidate. Voting behaviour in Assam’s elections is not altogether different from what has been in the rest of the country. The reason is simple. The average voter of Assam is more or less like his counterpart in any other part of the country. Here exhibits more or less the same degree of illiteracy, ignorance, apathy, prejudices of caste, community, language etc. as any other voter in the country.

The eleven General elections to the Assam Assembly (from 1952 - 2001) covered by this study should thus be expected to bring out trends of voting behaviour in Assam that would not be materially different from the rest of the country. Thus one would come across lack of party orientation, even issue orientation and a predominance of non-political factors influencing the voting behaviour in Assam or elsewhere in the country. Yet the elections in reference exhibit certain unique features in electoral politics of Assam. Some of issues generated by these elections were typical of the situation in Assam. Hence, the response to these issues in the form of voting behaviour should also be unique or typical of Assam. In Assam, voter participation comparatively is more than the all India averages of voter participation, since the 1952 Legislative Assembly elections in spite of widespread illiteracy and ignorance. Both “constant” or “long term influence” and “situational influences” have been affecting the voter’s participation in Assam since 1952 elections.
The voting behaviour up to the 1978 Assembly elections exhibited trends common to the rest of the country. In the 1978 election, the anti-Congress wave which was blowing in the country also reflected in the electoral scenario of Assam. The Janata party which had benefited from the anti-Congress wave at the Lok Sabha poll was again the most popular party in Assam. The emergency excesses and the authoritarian trends of Indira regime were much detested in Assam as in the rest of the country. Even the minorities which supported the Congress all along had deserted the Congress camp and joined the Janata bandwagon.

From 1979 onwards the situation in Assam had changed dramatically. The socio-economic, socio-cultural and political problem which was simmering for a long time had burst out into a major crisis. The bulk of the Assamese people felt that it was a life and death struggle for them. The All Assam Student's Union began to highlight the magnitude of the immigration problem carrying on the publicity campaign giving figures of immigrations from the beginning of the 20th century. A fear psychosis had thus developed in the minds of the Assamese people that they might one day be submerged in their own land and thus lose their languages, cultures and identity. Many regional groups and political parties had joined hands with the AASU to demand a total revision of electoral rolls in all the constituencies so as to delete the name of all non-citizens and there after take effective steps to detect them and deport them.

The ruling Congress Party was alleged to be soft pedalling the issue for fear of offending the minorities. Local political parties and the students' organizations blamed the congress squarely for encouraging the immigrant settlers and getting their names enlisted in the electoral rolls, thus ensuring for itself a solid vote bank to support them. Consequently a long drawn out conflict and confrontation ensured between the AASU and some regional groupings on the one hand and Indian National Congress (I) on the other hand, which is known generally as the "Assam agitation", the movement against foreign nationals. Against this background, the 1983 election was virtually forced on the people. Fear and intimidation apart, the bulk of the people boycotted the poll out of conviction in the cause of the Assam agitation. There was a clear polarization, the bulk of the electorates opposed the poll and sections of the minorities (both Hindu Bengalis and Bengali Muslims) were in favour. There was a striking reflection of this trend in the
voting behaviour. At the 1985 Assembly election, two new regional parties called "Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and the United Minority Front (UMF) were formed, representing the majority Assamese community generally and the latter Muslims and other minorities. People in mostly those belonging to the Assamese speaking Hindus voted in en bloc to the AGP in 1985 Assembly election. This kind of situational influence was clearly conspicuous on the voters' mind in the 1985, 1991, 1996 and 2001 Legislative Assembly elections in Assam.

In the present study before examining the SES factors as determinants of voting behaviour, one needs to examine if political factors like candidate orientation, issue orientation and party identification of the voters had influenced their voting preferences in 2001 Assembly election in Assam. In this chapter, we have also discussed the voting behaviour of the sample respondents in four representative Assembly constituencies, namely the Assamese speaking Hindu voter dominated constituency of Patacharkuchi, the religious minority (Muslim) dominated constituency of Jonia, tea community voters-dominated constituency of Doom Dooma and the mixed voters (Hindu, Muslim and Bodo voters) make-up constituency of Bhabanipur. Researcher tried to evaluate the political and electoral awareness of the sample voters as well as their perceptions of the vital election issues which were expected to have a significant bearing on the voting behaviour of the electorates. Efforts have also been made to analyse the voting behaviour in the context of issues, candidates and party orientation of the voters and their exposure to election campaign and mass media. The correspondence between the SES factors of the voters and their voting behaviour is also examined here.

The Seventh chapter deals with the politics of influx, vote bank politics and role of religious minority (Muslim population) in electoral politics in Assam. It has been found from the study that "infiltration" or "influx problem" is the major problem of Assam. Immigration has contributed to the big spurt in population growth in two ways - through direct addition to the population and by raising the natural rate of increase of population of the state through higher fertility rate. The Influx problem was consequence of the so-called minority politics that started in the early fifties of the 20th century with Saadullah and his followers joining the Congress. Saadullah and his followers brought to the Assam Congress the germs of Muslim politics designed to play a role similar to that of the
Muslim League in the pre-independence Assam in so far as the interest of the Muslims were concerned. On the part of the Congress Government in the state it became difficult to take firm measures to expel the illegal immigrants because of internal pressure. The Muslim politics given birth to by Saadullah continued even after Saadullah’s death. Whenever the Government tried to solve the immigration problems with a firm hand, Muslim politics stood in the way, giving a communal colour to the issue or raising allegations like harassing the Indian Muslims, depriving the minorities of their rights and so on.

In the sixties of 20th century, following the pattern of Muslim politics the non-Muslim Bengalis of Cachar Plain gave birth to another type of politics, which might perhaps be called “Cachar politics”. There is, however, little hope of ‘Unity’ between Muslim politics and Cachar politics, for they are basically different in the sense that the former is based on religion while the latter on language. The political parties of Assam fell victims on several occasions to both these types of politics.

The Muslims have had a great role in the electoral politics of Assam as well as National Politics especially after Independence and at present they act as determining factor in the state politics. However, various isms are found among the different fabrics of the Miah Muslims and hence a comparative study of the different political parties and the Muslim majority Assembly constituencies are analyzed.

CONCLUSION

The present study which goes along the course of eleven General elections to Assam Legislative Assembly is a humble attempt to analyse and highlight various issues, both theoretical and practical, posed by democratic elections and to draw meaningful conclusions from the experiences gained so far. The role of elections in the democratic polity need hardly be over-emphasized. Periodical elections provide an opportunity for the exercise of the most fundamental citizenship right, namely the right to franchise. This is be fundamental because it enables the citizens, both individually and collectively.
to elect a Government of their choice, conversely to bring down a government which has fallen from grace

The findings of the study and the conclusions there of are presented as follows .

1. Compared with the first five General elections to the Assam Legislative Assembly held between 1952 and 1972, the subsequent six General elections present a striking contrast. The first five General elections were held at regular intervals at five years. There never was an occasion for premature dissolution of the state Assembly nor Presidents' rule. The result of first five General elections to the Assam Legislative Assembly were politically conclusive in that, a single political party, the Indian National Congress (INC) was voted to power with for more than an absolute majority of seats. In that period the Indian electoral politics revolved around the dominant political party - the Indian National Congress and several smaller opposition political parties.

2. In contrast, the elections schedule of the subsequent three General elections (held in 1978, 1983 and 1985) were greatly disturbed. The Sixth General election was held after a gap of six years from the Fifth, the Seventh General election took place in 1983 after a series of exercises in Presidents' rule. The Eighth General election took place in about two years from the Seventh. Secondly, the first five General elections was conducted in a smooth and orderly manner. There was no report of any major clash, disturbances or violence leading to the suspension of the poll or it adjournment at any time. In contrast, the subsequent General elections particularly the Seventh General election held in 1983, was marked by increasing violence and an extraordinary situation of boycott of poll. Thirdly, in all the first five General elections, a single party namely the Indian National Congress emerged with a clear majority. It was blessed with a high popular vote and a overwhelming majority of seats in all the Assembly elections. In contrast, the Sixth General election marked end of the Congress monopoly and Janata party came to power. In the Eighth General election, a regional party, namely, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), formed weeks before the election, won with a overwhelming majority.

3. Elections ensure the highest degree of political participation and interaction among voters, candidates, political parties, groups and organizations. Elections are a trial and strength for the government as well as the opposition.
4. Elections are a feedback mechanism in the political system. They reflect almost like a mirror both the strength and weakness of the political system. Election made it possible for political parties as well as candidates to face their moments of truth and meet their destiny.

5. Elections popularly known as the battle of the ballot may not be the best device of representation but they are the best guarantee of direct popular control over the government.

6. Nature of formation of the leading national political parties has revealed some interesting facts. These parties belong basically to three distinct streams or groups - Congress, Socialist and Communist, each group having a number of offshoots not very different ideologically from the original. The analysis of the elections results presents a clear picture of the people's allegiance to different political parties. The analysis was based on the results of the Legislative Assembly elections held between 1952 and 2001 in the area comprising present day Assam only. Although a few Independent sponsored by some local parties were able to make their way to the Legislative Assembly, they failed to project impressively by ideologies of their respective parties to win the support of the people. The analysis leads to believe that local politics can thrive only on "local demands" and "local aspirations", and success of a local party depends on how effectively the party can exploit these demands and aspirations in winning the support of the people. During the periods analysis, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) was found to be the only regional political party of Assam with a certain amount of stability and continuity. It may be noted that the AGP thrives on the hopes and aspirations of a particular ethnic group of people in the state. But from the analysis of election results it is clear that, the AGP also does not seem to have a bright future.

7. Among the national parties, the Congress, the Socialist and the Communist parties along with their offshoots dominated the elections scene. However, the communists lagged behind the other two groups in terms of electoral popularity. Just after independence the Socialists emerged as a strong force in the opposition, but they failed to maintain their internal squabbles in the party hierarchy. The election results to Eleventh Assembly
election in Assam has indicated that the Communist in the state are heading for a natural
death as the electorates of Assam totally rejected the party in all the constituencies. The
Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won 10 Assembly seats in 1991 Assembly election. The
increased strength of the BJP was not noteworthy event of the Assembly election 1991. For
the first time in the history of the Assam Assembly a large number of BJP candidates
were elected.

8. In Assam, like many other parts of the country, the people and the political parties
seem to be less concerned about the problem of acute economical backwardness of the
state than about problems arising out of religious, ethnic, linguistic or similar other
considerations. The problems that consumed much time and energy for their solution and
evoked much bitterness among different sections of the people of the state. No doubt,
there are similar problems in other parts of the country. But there is a basic differences
between the problems of Assam and those of other parts of the country. In Assam,
excepting the problem of reorganization, in all issues the majority group; i.e. the
Assamese speaking people had to fight for preservation of their identity as a distinct
cultural and linguistic group. One can not be sure that India as a whole will not face a
similar problem in the future.

9. It has been found that the level of political and electoral awareness was
reasonably high in the case of Muslim voters since the First Assembly elections. But in
case of Assamese speaking Hindu voters and Tribal voters both political and electoral
awareness was moderate but it was not so in case of the tea garden Mazdoor voters.
In fact, the tea Mazdoor voters were found to be politically least aware. More or less a
similar observation can be made with regard to the voters’ perception of the political and
economic issues raised in the different Legislative Assembly elections.

10. It has been found that the majority of the electorates, excepting the tea garden
Mazdoors, were aware of the identities of the candidates contesting the election in their
respective constituencies. But the vast majority of the tea garden Mazdoor voters did not
know even the names of the candidates in their constituency. It should be mentioned that
the percentage of voters who voted for the “candidate” rather than party varied between
27 to 35 in all the areas excepting the tea gardens where only 8 per cent of the electorates voted for the candidate. It therefore appears that the candidate orientation of voters operating as an independent variable had influenced the voters’ choice only in a marginal way.

11. The 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th and 11th Assembly elections in Assam was apparently an issue-oriented one. Survey reveals that the voters had strong opinions on a number of political, socio-cultural and economic issues. It was found that the voters in general disapproved of the secret killings, insurgency, AGP-BJP alliance, etc. in the 2001 Assembly election. They were also very vocal against corruption. Majority of the voters perceived industrialization, employment, transport and communication development as solution of some of the pressing economic problems confronting the country. The study shows that although a firm correlation between voters’ issue orientation and voting behaviour was not noticed yet it may be safely stated that deteriorated law and order situation and few economic issues had influenced their choice to a certain extent.

12. It is evident from the study that the party orientation of the voters was an important determinant of voting behaviour. Although majority of the respondents in the sample constituencies had not apparently felt closer to any of the political parties contesting the election yet they cared a good deal as to which party should win the election. On the other hand, it was noticed that majority of the tea Mazdoor and religious minority respondents felt identified with one or the other political party. It appears that party orientation of voters had influenced their voting preference to a considerable extent. In fact, the percentage of voters who voted for the ‘party’ was much higher than that of the voters who voted for the ‘candidate’.

13. Among the socio-economic status factors, income and literacy appears to have a significant correlation with voting preference of the sample electorates. In the urban areas, voters belonging to the lower income groups voted overwhelmingly for the Indian National Congress (I) party. On the other hand, a reverse trend was noticed in some specific rural areas dominated Assembly constituencies. In the Muslim dominated areas, voters in all categories of income groups voted mostly for the Indian National Congress (I) but in the
case of Assamese speaking Hindu dominated constituencies there seemed to be no direct relationship between income and voting preferences. Even in tea garden areas, financial position of the Mazdoor voters appeared to have influenced their voting preference to some extent. With regard to literacy and voting preference, it was noticed that the Indian National Congress (I) derived support mostly from voters who had attained the minimum standard of literacy. The illiterate tea Mazdoor voters exercised their franchise in bulk for the INC (I). In the Tribal dominated areas the illiterate Bodo voters exercised their franchise totally in favour of the All Bodo Student’s Unions’ candidates. In the religious minority dominated areas most of the literate and illiterate voters, voted for the Indian National Congress (I). In the Hindu dominated constituencies specially in the Brahmaputra valley, the bulk of voters, irrespective of their levels of literacy, voted for the AGP – BJP alliance.

Caste and religion, the two most important determinants of voting behaviour in the Indian setting, did not seem to be decisive factors in the case of voters in the 2001 Assembly election in Assam. Survey shows that there was no bloc voting on the part of the Assamese Hindu community in the 2001 election like the 1985 Legislative Assembly election. In case of Muslim community, most of the voters exercised their franchise in bulk for the INC (I) while majority of the Muslim voters in the Brahmaputra valley (excluding the district of Goalpara) voted for the Indian National Congress (I) but the majority of them in the Goalpara district and Barak Plain voted for the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), Samata party and Samajwadi party. It should be noted, however, that the context of 2001 Assembly election in Assam, was quite different from those of the earlier elections and therefore it would highly premature to predict the continuation of the trend that was noticed in the case of voters belonging to the minority communities in the Eleventh Legislative Assembly election in Assam.

Tribal factor is also very important in the state Assembly elections. In the district of Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Darrang, Karbi-Anglong, N C. Hills have large Scheduled Tribes population. The tribal people voted for the Congress Party in the most of the Assembly elections till 1972 but later the Tribal orientated political parties increased their influence over tribal population. Now, a large number of these areas are controlled by opposition parties.
The present research work has explained a number of vital issues concerning the electoral politics and voting behaviour of electorates in the state of Assam in spatial and socio-political terms. It may, however, be mentioned here that, in view of vastness of the study area and the theme, the treatment of the problem leaves further scope in a number of directions. In any case, the present work as a pioneering one in the state, will have immense academic value and practical significance. This work is expected to provide a right direction to the future researchers in this less explored field of study not only in the state of Assam but also in other parts of the country.