"Political empowerment of women is the only decisive catalyst which will bring about a perceptible change in the lot of women"

— V. Mohini giri
Chairperson of (NCW)

Access to education has been a major policy goal in most of the developing countries for the last three decades. This reflects a broad recognition that "education is essential to economic, social and political development. Education is the key to equal opportunity and the ladder to advancement, and without it and its concomitant benefits, men and women of certain classes and social groups have, over the years, been condemned to inferior lives. Women especially in their personal development, their choice of work and as citizens in their power to influence government, leadership and decisions have been empowered by education. Education has made women realize the necessity of empowerment in order to change government. It is only education that enable housewives to develop their capacity of self identity and meet the urge to actively participate in the functioning of the government.

Despite strong resistance from the family, housewives are entering into politics, more and more educated housewives in India, and different states of India including Assam have demonstrated a growing tendency of wider participation in the socio-political activities.

The term political participation, reflect in some diversified meaning. Therefore while making and assessment of the political participation and political awareness of the housewives, following points should be taken into notice.

Participation in the political process as a political leader.

Participation in the political process as a member of parliament or State legislative assembly.

Participation in the process of democratisation of politics as a voter to determine the fate of the executive.

Participation in local gaon panchayat or various socio-political group and organisation to contribute to the development of society.

Functioning as a politically aware housewife, who is neither ignorant nor disinterested in the process of political development.

As a voter, as a representative, as a political leader, and as a politically aware citizen of India, educated housewives of Kamrup districts are slowly but steadily assessing this. Their presence is being felt in the political process of India.

While performing the manifold responsibilities and duties as politically aware citizens, educated housewives are still in the crossroad to prove their mettle.

The history of political participation of women in the third world countries, is also the history of the transformation of housewife to the apex of political machinery².

Before analysing in details about women in Assam and Kamrup a reference to India and other countries is worthwhile.

Women and political Participation:

Political participation of women and their percentage is as follows:

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Chart - 1

Woman's political participation in politics (2001-2002)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percentage of woman representative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>America (USA)</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangla Desh</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapur</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source *

Amongst all the countries, Sweden has set a record by incorporating 154 out of total 349, representatives in the Parliament, even in South Africa 110 are female representatives out of 450 representatives in the parliament.

The history of voting right to women goes back to 1893 when in Newzealand women were conferred the right to vote followed by Australia in 1899 and Switzerland in 1917, 1920 was the important year for Canadian and American women because that year they were offered the voting right. 1928 was the year, women of England got the voting right and in 1944, women of France got the voting right. Women of Quait and Bahrain were not conferred the right to vote. The

* Report, women and child welfare development Govt. of India, 2001-2002.
most striking fact of the third world countries is that in many of them women especially, housewives are at the apex of the countries administrative machinery. In Sri Lanka it was "Siri Mavu Bandarnayake" later her daughter "Chandrika Kumartung", the president of Sri Lanka, after the death of her slain husband. She joined politics against the challenges and death threats from the LTTE*. In Bangladesh it is either Sheikh Hasina or the present prime minister Begum Khaleda Zia who became the prime minister alternatively for the last couple of years. In Indonesia it is Megawati Sukarna Putri who became the leader of largest Muslim dominated country and with largest numbers of housewives. Despite crisis, she is still singlehandedly executing the political affair of the "Penisila democracy". In Pakistan—Till Musharraf came into power, it was Benazir Bhutto, daughter of Juflikar Ali Bhutto, who was slain in a political conspiracy was reigning as the 1st women prime minister after installation of democracy in Pakistan, now is the leader of opposition of the biggest party in Pakistan. Neighbour Burma, is all for restoration of democracy under the leadership of Nobel peace prize winner, an icon, "Aung-Chu-Chi", who was has been fighting tirelessly last few years against the military junta of Barma.

A brief understanding on the meaning of democracy help us to know our political system and the expected role to be played by its citizens including the housewives. The term democracy is derived from the terms 'demos and cratia' which respectively mean people and power, thus democracy means "power in the hands of people." According to Abraham Lincoln—Democracy is a government for the people, of the people and by the people. Dicey defined it as 'a form of government in which the governing body is comparatively a large fraction of the entire nation. Sieely defines it "government in which everybody has a share. "As a whole democracy is particular kind of civilization that hail man."
Due to the universal appeal to human freedom, democracy today is the most popular form of government and more than half of the globe is having democratic form of government when in India public comprises of both men and women has a major sharer in the political process "The constitution of India" in the preamble*, express the nature of its democracy in the following words.⁵

"We, The people of India, having resolved to constitute India into a sovereign Democratic Republic and to secure to all is citizens:

Justice, social, economic and political;
Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;
Equality of status and opportunity; and promote among them all;
Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity of the Nations;

In Our constituent Assembly this twenty-sixth day of November, 1949, do Hereby Adopt, Enact and give ourselves this constitution."⁶

Every democracy must needs have an aristocracy of talent, of knowledge and of character and Political life of a democratic man or women canot be understood or assessed if separated and removed from his social life,⁷ the social conduct of a man or women contribute to the enlargement and reduction of political problems. Thus the study of housewives in relating to politics and affair in political, the mode of their voting behaviour, the line of difference between educated and non educated housewives, in our micro study etablish that society and politics are interelated. The more educated the housewives, the more participation in the political process either as voter or as a active participetor is seen, All political scientist belive that "Human beings are apolitical creature"⁸

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6. ibid pg. 30.
7. Palkhiwala : we the people" p. 60, 1984 
In this connection a glimpse at the participation of women and the wives in the freedom struggle of India help us to understand the comparative role played by the Assamese housewives in this regard.

Participation of women in the politics in the pre-independent era of India in the history of the trend of participation of housewives who are educated in the political arena, a lot of elite upper class, like Sarojini Naidu, Aruna Asaf Ali, Dr. Durgabari Deshmukh, Suchetra Kripalini, Vijoyalashmi Pandit participated in the national movement to free India from the British.

The history of political participation of women and housewives goes back to the Gandhian period

**Gandhian Period and political participation of housewives:**

In India during the pre-Gandian era, few elite women being encouraged by the presence of the Annie Besani, had attended political meetings since the time coinciding the first world was. The most outstanding of the women were Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant and Bi Amma, the mother of Muhammad Ali.9

The reformers of the 19th century were concerned with the prevailing law status of women and their efforts were directed towards improving women's position within the family. Its main purpose was to strengthen the family as the basic unit of social organisation. The reformers concentrated their attention on three important aspects of a woman's life like the age of marriage, the life of widows and their right to remarry and education.10 The elitist approach was the characteristic of this movement. The issues were relevant for a limited section of women of the upper and the middle classes. They were not concerned with the problems of the common women. In the 19th century the impact of the ideas of the reformers changed the status of women to a considerable extent. This led to

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10. ibid p-60
the emergence of women organisations through which women could enter public life in large numbers. During that period, the formation of women's organisations, namely, the women's Indian Association (this was later merged in the All India Women's Conference) opened a new chapter in the women's movement for equality. Mahatma Gandhi was one of the pioneers of Indian renaissance which included the cause of women also. He held that women as the companion of men were gifted with equal mental capacities. They had the right to participate in the minutest details of the activities of men and thus were entitled to the same right of freedom and liberty as men. By sheer force of a custom, even the most ignorant and worthless men could enjoy superiority over women which they did not deserve said Gandhiji's: "Satyagraha meant resistance offered through self-suffering, for it was a weapon pre-eminently for women and by wielding it properly she could become the leader in every in every aspect of life. satyagraha required a stout heart that come from suffering and faith."12

The Assamese women also joined the mainstream during the freedom movement answering to Gandhiji's call. They had been remarkably free in regard to joining the movement as well as the outdoor activities. In this regard a clear difference could be seen between the women of Assam and those of other parts of India. The concept of freedom of the Assamese women was epitomised in the absence of the system. It was found in the early history of Assam that the practice of confinement of women within the four walls and under vail had never existed in Assam. In a note written by shahabuddin, a travellor and a companion of Mir Junlah, in his Assam expenditure in 1662, it was observed that the wives of the Rajas and the peasants alike never vailed their faces before anybody excepting their elder and respected ones. They moved about in the market places with bare head. The clear persistence of essentially tribal values and ideology among the Assamese peasantry explained the freedom enjoyed by the women.13

11. Gandhi Mahatma, young India, 26-2-1881
12. ibid p. 13.
13. Baruah, Dr. Mrs. SL. "A comprehensive History of Assam p-257, 1985
The significant role played by women and the housewives in the freedom struggle in India greatly contributed to the political awareness of wives in the later periods.

**Freedom Movement and the Role of the Assamese Women**

During the period of since 1838 to 1857, the Assamese people took all possible measures to regain their lost freedom. However, by the time the Indian people in different parts of the country rose in revolt against the British, the people of Assam and their neighbours had fought a series of battles since 1826, waged in different times against the alien powers. Although the people of Assam failed to organise an open revolt in 1858, their spirit of freedom found glowing expression through the martyrdom of their various compatriots which inspired them to carry on the struggle for decades to come. All the struggles were organised as protests against the enhanced rates of local land revenue and imposition of new taxes. The medium through which the people expressed their resentment, was the raij-mel* or people's assembly. The discontent against the foreign rule which was earlier confined to the members of the royalty and the aristocratic few, touched every member of the society and popular movements grew up during this period and both the Hindus and the Muslims took part in those movements being united under the Gosains* Dalois** or Gaon-Burhas*** of their respective areas with a view to protest against the arbitrary and unjust collection of revenue from the local people by the British Government.14

Even after the transfer of power from the East India company of the Crown, the exploitation of the resources of the country, reducing the people to object poverty went unabated with a view to meet the huge deficit caused by the

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* Peoples assembly  
** A saint, spiritual guide : Hemkosh pg. 311  
*** Chief of a party : Hemkosh pg. 494  
*** Village elder : Hemkosh pg. 288  
14. ibid p. 499
revolt of 1857 an excise duty was levied in some districts and several other measures were taken up by the Government with a view to raise revenue. The Assembly of people protested against the taxes and the revenues imposed by the alien rulers and revolted against the taxes and the revenues imposed by the Government with a view to raise revenue. The uprising of phloguri in 1861 and the rebellion of pathorighat (Mangaldai) could be referred to as the ideals set up by the martyrs including Maniram Dewan. At that time, specially amongst the educated people and the young students of Assam, a new consciousness grew up in respect of education and language and an association named "Asamiya Bhasa Unnati Sadhini Sabha" was formed at calcutta in 1888.\textsuperscript{15} The first college of Assam—The cotton college was established in 1900 at Guwahati. Almost at the same time Berry white medical school was also established at Dibrugarh and in 1912, the Arle Law College also come into being at Guwahati. with the guidance of Manik Ch. Barua, Ghanashyam Borua, Phaisnur Ali and Jagannath Borua, the "Assam Association" was formed in 1903.\textsuperscript{16} The agitation launched against the partition of Bengal took the turn towards independence movement of India and it also helped to create a sense of nationalism in the minds of women in Assam. The spread of English education, improvement of communications and bringing the entire India under one administrative control, helped the growth of nationalism in the minds of the people of India. Due to this sense of nationalism, the India National congress came into being in 1885 and this was followed by a new era in Assam.\textsuperscript{17}

Several social organisation were formed in different places of Assam and through these organisations the attention of the Government was drawn to the grievances of the people of Assam in order to get the benefits of administrative reforms along with the rest of India.

\textsuperscript{15} Kalita Ramesh : Study of the role of Assamese student in the struggle for freedom movement of India, 1986 p. 13
\textsuperscript{16} Dr. Barua Indrani : Bharatar Sadhinata Andulan Aru Assam, 1989, p. 151
\textsuperscript{17} Sarma, Debendra Nath : Bhartar Swadhinata Sangramar Itihas p. 288, 1986
In a session of this association, that followed the session of Indian National Congress held in September 1920 the non-violent movement for attainment of Indian independence was supported. Consequently Assam also decided to boycott the legislative councils. On the whole, due to the leading role of the Assam Association, the non-cooperation movement spread throughout Assam and it also created an unprecedented sensation amongst the people of Assam. Till March 1920, there was no separate organisation like the Indian National Congress in Assam and the Assam Association worked like a political organisation in Assam. In 1920 the non-cooperation movement was launched in various parts of India under the guidance and direction of Mahatma Gandhi and simultaneously a congress committee was formed in Assam.¹⁸

In 1921 Mahatma Gandhi for the first time visited Assam and after his visit the non-cooperation movement gained momentum in Assam.³¹ The 30th November 1921 was a memorable day in the political history of Assam and on this day Deshabhakta Tarun Ram Phukan, Karmabir Nabin Chandra Bordoloi and Bishnuram Medhi were arrested by the Government. This was followed by the arrest of several other people including women throughout Assam and as a result of which there was reaction in the minds of general people of Assam. The women of Assam also responded to Gandhiji's call for non-cooperation. They participated in the movement by way of joining in the procession, spinning and weaving and attending the public meetings. Their participation took place through several women's organisations as well as through the Congress Committee. They were engaged in the propaganda work for the use of Khadi and Charkha, boycotting of foreign goods and leaving schools and colleges by the female students. Some of the important organisers of the non-cooperation movement at the national level were Kasturba Gandhi (Gujarat), Basanti Devi (Bengal), Urmila Devi (Bengal), Parbati Devi (Agra), Bai Amman (Lahore), Sarojini Naidu (Bombay), Uma Nehra (U.P.), Sarola Devi (Punjab), Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya (Ben-

Kasturba Gandhi undertook extensive tours for propagating Khadi amongst the women in different parts of India who had lesson in Satyagraha in South Africa with her husband Mahatma Gandhi. Parbhati Devi was arrested and imprisoned for two years for her inflammatory speeches at meerut. Sarojini Naidu worked primarily for Hindu-Muslim unity during 1921-22. In 1922 when Gandhiji was arrested he entrusted Sarojini Naidu with the responsibility of carrying on the programmes.

The above is only a few example of women's participation in the freedom movements of 1921-22 in different parts of India. There were many of then who could not participate in the organizational works due to social restrictions. Even then they stood behind the mass movement and encouraged their male counterparts to carry on the movement. In the case of the women of Assam organizational activities began long before the commencement of the non-cooperation programmes. It would not be wrong to summarise that due to the absence of rigid restrictions the housewives in Assam could not participate in the freedom movements of India. However, prevalence of conservatism put obstacles on their way of large scale participation, mostly in the rural areas. Even then womenfolk of Assam came out of their home to take active part in the non-cooperation movement. The policy adopted by the Government to suppress the popular movement for attainment of freedom rather strengthened the political consciousness of the people of Assam including the women and housewives.

On 19th December 1921 about 60 women, in a meeting held in the residence of Deshabhakta T. R. Phukan at Guwahati took oath to participate in the struggle for independence by joining the non-cooperation movement. The leading women leaders of this period were the wife of T. R. Phukan, the wife of Nabin Chandra Bordoloi, Mrs. Girija Devi, Dharmada Sundari Devi, Mrs. Kamala Kanta Bhattacharjee, Snehalata Bhattacharjee and the and the mother-in-law of

19. ibid p. 152.
20. Das Amiya Kumar Barua, Liladhar: Asomot Mahatma pg. 54-55, 1975
late Rohini Kumar Choudhury. Those women organised meetings throughout Assam with a view to spread the message of the non-cooperation movement. In 1919 an women's organisation was formed at Tezpur under the leadership of Chandra Prava Saikiani, one of the active participants of Chatra Sanmilan. This organization held meetings to educate the people, Particularly the rural women, about the non-cooperation movement and the importance of spinning and weaving, boycotting of foreign goods and abstinence from opium eating and smoking as a part of the programme. Between 1904 and 1918, the Indian women's movements took a serious turn. In this period, the awakening of Indian women crystallised into a women's movement. The process of emancipation of women through participation in the socio-political life also began forthwith.

For the advancement of Indian women organisations in the all India level with definite programmes were organised during this period. In 1904 the first women's organisation by the name of Bharat Mahila Parishad was formed. Thereafter Bharat Shri Mahamandal was established in 1910 after about 6 years of formation of Bharat Mahila Parishad at the initiative of sarala Devi Choudhuri. However, the major step towards the women's movements was the formation of women's Indian Association in 1917 at the initiative or Dr. Annie Besant, Margaret Causins and Dorothy Jinardasa (an european lady). Madras was the headquarter of this association having 43 branches in different parts of India.21 This association till that period had no connection with the women of Assam. The women of Assam themselves felt the necessity of a women's association to gear up the conditions of socio-cultural life, education of women and child welfare. Housewives, educated are first to gear up with the idea of imparting education to women at large for their empowerment the year 1915, the first women's organisation was formed in Dibrugarh as Dibrugarh Mahila Samiti. This organisation was formed at the initiative of smt. Hemprava Das few other women of Dibrugarh town. In 1917 another organisation was formed at Nowgaon. Similar Mahila

Samitis were formed in different parts of Assam. These samitis were mainly involved in the removal of the socio-cultural taboos of women of Assam. The constraints which made women's participation in political field limited, were identified as being the socio-religious cultural and economic conditions of the society. The pattern of political behaviour of women, their economic position, customs and traditions of the male-dominated social milieu which glorify women's servility in the name of tradition, shaped the political behaviour of women in Assam. These organisations also played a very important role in women's education, child welfare, raising the age of marriage of girls and the like. These organisations used the platforms of the Assam Chatra Sarmilan (Assam Students' Association) and the Assam Sahitya Sabha (Assam Literary Society) for improving the status of Assam.

The 1918 Session at Tezpur of the Asom Chatra Sanmilan was attended by several women leaders including Laxmi Prova Chaliha, Chandrakanti Das and Chandra Prava Saikiani as students. Subsequently, through the all Assam organisations and the local Mahila Samitis, the women leaders of Assam participated in the socio-political activities till 1926 when the all Assam Mahila Samiti was formed.22

The women organisations formed during this period were small in size and the members mainly came from the elite families of the urban areas. As such few rural women participated in the movements and mass mobilisation of women then remained out of question. However, meetings were held to discuss the Raulat Act and the disaster of Jaliwanalabagh. The Indian National Congress also tried to improve the conditions of women. The British people found the Indian women tradition bound, religious-minded as well as superstitious. They also found the environment of the Indian women to be oppressive and harsh. For the backwardness of women and that of the society, the overall British opinion was negative to granting of political freedom of India. Interested British Scholars,

missionaries and bureaucrats had applied European standards and values in judging the position of women of India, they described the Hindu women as being tradition bound, religious, subservient, who functioned in an environment, which was limited an oppressive.23 The upliftment of women became more important from the political standpoint than from the socio-economic and cultural point of view. For that purpose the Britishers adopted the principles of including women in every programme they made. They held the view that gender should not be the obstacle on the path of women in enjoying political rights.24 For this approach of the Government more and more women from all sections of the Indian Society joined the congress. Gandhiji's call to the women gave them a new hope, inspiration and strengh to fight equally with men for the freedom movement of India. For the illiterate and innocent rural Assamese women he was God's incarnation on earth, and they treated him as God. This was the result of sacrifice of women throughout India in different phases of the freedom movements from 1921 onwards and it was the spirit of liberation from age old conservatism to get courage to fight for the mother land.

In the 19th Century certain changes were brought to the society by granting the women the right to property, right to remarriage after widowhood and by abolishing child marriage. These reforms however had little effect on the elevation of the political status of women. It is on record that the demand for women's sufferage was initiated in 1917 when Srimati Sarojini Naidu led a women's deputation to the British Parliament demanding enfranchisement of women on the basis of equality with men. The colonial rulers did not accept the demand since in Britain itself women came to enjoy full and equal political right only in 1928. The Government of India Act, 1919, based on the Montague-Chelmsford Reform left the question of enfranchisement of women to the discretion of the elected legislature of the provinces. The colonial rulers could not conceive of the possibility of

the women acting as a separate political force. A recognition to the status of women's power was given for the first time by the Indian National Congress at its Karachi session in 1931. The India National Congress pledged itself to granting or political equality of women irrespective of their social status or educational qualification.

A slight improvement was evident under the Government of India Act, 1935. This Act increased the number of women voters to more than six million which was only 3,15,000 under the Act of 1919. Moreover the Government of India Act, 1935 Provided for reservation obseats for woman in Assam Legislative assembly.

The woman of Assam got the right to vote in or about 1924. The president of International women suffrage Alliancs (I.W.S.A.) congratualted the women of Assam for this achevement. Catherine Rampus, the Secretary of the association in a latter dated 29th November 1924 to Mrs. M.E. Causins stated that the president of the I.W.S.A. Corbet Asbee was very anzious to congratulate the women of Assam for their achievment The All India Women's Organisation like the Indian Women's Association and all India Women's Conference had no information about the women's organisations in Assam.

Thus the contribution made by the people of Assam including the women during the non-violent, non-cooperation movement at the call of Mahatma Gandhi would remain ever green in the his tory of India. The participation of the Assamese people both male and female in the struggle for independence reached its climax during the Quit India Movement of 1942. On 8th August 1942, it was resolved in the session of the INC committee held in Bombay that India would not accept anything other than independence. On the morning of the 9th August 1942, all the members of the Indian National congress Committee including Mahatma Gandhi were arrested and on the same day, the political leaders of

25. Ibid (23) p. 28
Assam were also arrested. With the arrest of the leaders, the movement of 1942 took a serious turn. At that time Assam became virtually a war field where from one end to the other there were only military personnels and war materials. Assam felt the brunt of the World War II. During that time several revolutionary leaders like shri sankar Borua, Sri Bimala Prasad Chaliha, Sri Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, Sri Braja Nath Sarma, Sri Mahendra Mohan Choudhury and Sri Mahendra Hazarika and others who went underground, took charge of the movement. The movement took a serious turn in Assam under the guidance of Sri Jaiprakash Narayan, Smti. Aruna Ashaf Ali and Sri Hem Borua. The "Quit India" resolution of the AICC created great excitement throughout the country. The civil disobedience programme called out by Mahatma Gandhi included strikes, hortals, picketing, hunger strikes, general definace of law and establishment of parallel governments. The call of Mahatma Gandhi to the countrymen was to "do or die". Before the AICC could start the programme, the Government struck the first crushing blow by arresting Gandhiji, the members of the congress Working committee and a large number of congressmen were arrested on that day. As elsewhere in India, the people of Assam also both male and female took active part in that movement by following peaceful ways. However, at Barpeta the agitating crowd destroyed the residence of the Mauzadars and the mandals who collaborated with the Government. At Sarbhog the aerodrome under construction was raided and the military storee houses along with the M.E.S. offices were destroyed. Hundreds of people of Assam lost their lives while carrying on such activities. At Barhampur in the district of Nowgong, while celebrating the occasion of re-capturing the "Santisena" camp on 18th September 1942, by holding a public meeting and community feast, the police took action causing death to Sri Lakshikanta Hazarika, Sri Thagiram Sut, Sri Boloram Sut and Smti. Bhogeswari Phukanani an aged lady, who died due to police atrocities. Darrang), on 20th

27. Ibid p. 226. Also BSS Etihas, p. 212.
September 1942 about 5000 people led by Shri Kumala Kanta Das proceeded to hoist the national flag in the police station. The police then resorted to firing and as a result 8 persons including three women were killed on the spot. A similar incident took place at Gohpur (in the then district of Darrang) Where Kanaklata Borua, a girl of 18 years leading 5000 people from chariduar proceeded to hoist the flag in front of the local police station, was shot dead. Mukunda Kakati and Hemkanta Borua sustained serious injuries immediately there after.\(^{30}\)

**Case study on Assamese women and housewives, in political participation throughout the ages**

Many Assamese housewives and women laid their lives for the freedom movement of India.

On 20th September 1942, when the police opened fire on a peaceful procession consisting of both male and female which was led to Dhekiajuli police station with the intention for hoisting a national flag, 17 women including Kumali Devi, an old woman aged 63 years, Khahuli, a pregnant lady and a teenaged girl had to lay down their lives. Four other women, namely, Padumi, Gulapi, Thunki and Ken Chuliani died as a result of lathi charge by police at that occasion and several other women were injured and crippled for life. It could not, however, be ascertained the actual numbers of victims of the said police atrocities. There were cases of sabotage on the railways at several places, namely, Sahajibazar in Habibganj near Panikhaiti, Rangia (in the district of Kamrup Puranigudam in Nowgong, Safrai in Sibsagar, Kachamari and Sarupathar in Golaghat. Kushal Konwar who was the Secretary of the Congress Committee of Sarupathar was executed on 15th June 1943 for his alleged involvement in the Sarupathar train derailment case. His three other Co-accused were given two years of imprisonment each. Indiscriminate lathi-charges was resorted to in the towns of North Lakhimpur, Dhalpur, Bihpuia, Dikhowghat, Tezpur, Dhekiajuli, Bihali, Barpeta,

Sibsagar, Nitaipukhuri, Teok, Dergaon, Golaghat, Nowgong and in many other places of Assam. Women took the lead in several places as a result of which either they sustained serious injuries or lost their lives. Government establishments were also established at Jamuguri, Sootea, Bajali and Kenduguri. "No tax campaign" was carried on and the underground workers encouraged the people to resort to arms against the British. The movement however came to a halt in the face of repression by the Government. The leaders went underground immediately after the arrest of Mahendra Nath Hazarika.

Srimati Puspalata Das, one of the leading figures took an active part in carrying out the mass movement of 1942. It was under her leadership that the volunteers force organized in May 1942 palyed an important part in the mass movement 1942. on her return from Gohpur after entrusting the responsibility to Kanaklata to lead a procession to Gohpur thana, Smti. Puspalata Das was arrested under the defence of India Act and lodged at Tezpur jail. Thereafter she was transferred to Jorhat jail where she became ill. She refused to be released on parole and although at last she was released unconditionally, She was arrested at Guwahati again. She however defied that order and proceeded to Calcutta. Some Congress leaders of Assam were however not satisfied when Smti. Puspalata Das defied and violated the interim order but Gandhiji approved of her action. Srimati Teleswari Mahanta defied the police order and boldly hoisted the national flag at Behali police station.

Under the leadership of srimati swarnalata Mahanta, a volunteer force known as the "Mahila Mritu Bahini", consisting of more than 350 ladies was formed at Sootea. The women led a procession to the Sootea police Station to hoist the national flag on 20th September 1942. Several women of Sootea played active role in publishing and circulation the propaganda against the Government. They also explained the responsibility of the people with regard to the

32. ibid p. 31.
mass movement. Srimati Golapi Bhuyan a volunteer was imprisoned for two months.

A Government official who misbehaved with the women prisoners on 9th September at Mangaldai was dragged out of his office by two teenaged girls, namely, Jöona and Urmila with a view to teach him a lesson. Smti. Jagoda Keutoni who used to supply food to the underground Congress workers in the movement had to suffer tortures in the hands of the police. The women of Nowgong who set an example by taking active part in the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930 could maintain their status in the similar way in the movement of 1942. The agitation in Nowgong continued both in non-violent and violent forms for which the police atrocities perpetrated on the agitators were more inhumane.33 The condolence meeting organised at Bajali and other places of Assam to pay homage to those who laid down their lives and become martyrs were attended by the women activists along with their male counterparts. Srimati Chandra Prava Saikiani was in the forefront in the matter of organization in the Barpeta Sub-Division on 20th January 1930 an unforgettable incident took place at pathsala when a police officer wanted to arrest and drag Srimati Chandra Prava Saikiani who was about to address a meeting of the Mahila Samiti. At this womenfolk got agitated and started beating the police personnel. However, the police managed to arrest Srimati Chandra Prava Saikiani along with others. Chandra Prava Saikiani could inspire the women to come out of their home and work for the society. The people of Pathsala also took an active part to obstruct the movement of food supply and on 7th October 1942, they seized 12 truck-loads of food at Pathsala. The Government believed that the movement for obstruction of food supply had been under the direction of Srimati Puspalata Das.

It is noteworthy that majority of women who took active part in the Quit India Movement hailed from the rural areas of Assam were not educated. Their example of courage, Patience, sacrifice and patriotism had rate comparison.

33. Political history of Assam pp. 174-603 (1826-199), ed. Govt. of Assam.
Even common housewives contributed their service to the freedom movement.

One Srimati Ratanpriya who earned her livelihood by selling vegetables, came forward and challenged the British officers to shoot her when they threatened to open fire on the agitationists in front of Nalbari Police station in August 1942. Thus she demonstrated the courage of the Assamese women. Similar countless instances of courage of the women and mostly housewives might have gone into oblivion for want of proper maintenance of records.

Another noteworthy work of the common women of Assam was to give shelter to the underground Congress workers which was rather a tough job on the face of strict vigilance of the authority. The wives of a few Government service holders also gave shelter to the underground congress workers. Sometime they had to remain in disguise while rendering help to the underground workers. Mention may be made of one such woman, named Dineswari Hazarika of Jorhat who pretended herself to be anti-Congress but collected informations during day time and passed the same to the Congress workers at night. However, she was detected once and imprisoned for 3 months.34 Although the Quit India Movement was mainly a non-violent movement, a section of the freedom fighters under the extremist national leaders as Jay Prakash Narayan, Aruna Asraf Ali and others engaged themselves in sabotage activities. In Assam also such events took place and the women who lost faith in non-violence were attracted by the means adopted by the extremists. Examples may be cited of Srimati Gunabati Devi and Rakshada Devi who not only rendered monetary help to the movement but also destroyed the military camps on the Bank of Beki river on 26th August 1942 under the direction of Braja Nath Sarma, Joymati Saikia, Enamai Bora, Damayanti Bora, Daibaki Das, Padmabati Saikia and Bakulee Bora of Nowgong were very much connected with the sabotage activities during that time. Srimati Ratnabala Phukan took active part in the collection of guns under the direction of

34. ibid p. 12-13
the extremist Mahendra Hazarika of Raha, Nowgong. It is said that one Nepali Women rendered all possible help in the derailment of a train carrying Military personnel at Panikhaiti of Kamrup District on 24th November 1942.

One Kachari of Hatichung of Nowgong District, who was charged for sabotage of the movement had to lay down his life, but some of his relative women supplied information to public. One Srimati Baddheswari Hazarika openly asked the people to resort to violence and she also took part in the sinking of Cargo boat in Brahmaputra river near north Lakhimpur.

In this way the women of Assam in the last phase of the Quit India Movement took the plunge and in that process adopted both the violent and the non-violent ways. It can be deduced that the women of Assam by and large, were politically conscious. Although a very large number of women of Assam were involved in the freedom movement of India, they were not given proper representation in the administrative and political organisation after the freedom of India. Besides both rural and urban housewives had actively participated in the most movement and amazing was the fact that except the urban housewives rural women were uneducated and merely literate.

**Political Participation of Women after Independence in Assam and Kamrup.**

The number of women who contested the general election held in 1946, was five. They were Bonniely khongmen, Movis Dunn, T.W. Shadap, Berline Diengdoh and Padmakumari Gohain. Bonniely Khongmen was nominated by the Congress and the rest were Independents. Padmakumari Gohain was the first Assamese leader to contest a general seat in the plains of Assam.35

In 1952 the first General Election under the constitution of India took place wherein as many as six women candidates filed nominations. Raka Bala Das was the second woman to be nominated by the Congress to contest the Guwahati Constituency. But she polled only 5292 votes and was defeated.

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35. Dainik Assam, Saturday, August 15, 1992
Jyotsna Chanda was the third woman to contest the General Election of 1952 and she was elected.

Usha Borthakur was the fourth woman to contest the first General Election as a Congress candidate and she was elected. There were two women candidates, namely, Monorama Mehta and Movis Dunn but both of them were defeated.

In 1957, Eleven women candidates filed nominations. Three of them withdraw their names and five were elected. The defeated candidates were Bonniely Khongmen, Sojani Rajiong and Chandra Prava Saikiani.

In the third General Election held in 1962, the percentage of women candidates was less by 59% than that of 1957.

In that election Begum Afia Ahmed was elected by a minority vote.

Srimati Kamal Kumari Borua and Smti. Padmakumari Gohain were also elected by minority vote. Another elected woman leader was Srimati Lily Sen Gupta. of the four elected women candidates of 1962, three were sitting members and only one was a newcomer.

In the General Election of 1967, as many as nine women candidates contested. Seven of them were from the Congress and two were Independents. Rani Manjula Devi was elected by a minority vote.

Srimati Pranita Talukdar as a Congress candidate, polled an absolute majority of 17,237 votes, out of 32,061 votes.

Srimati Puspalata Das as a Congress nominee polled an absolute majority of 17,405 votes polled.

Begum Afia Ahmed and Kamal kumari Borua were defeated in that election.
Srimati Pandmakumari Gohain was elected with 9,037 votes out of 17,730 polled. Smti Malati Basumatari was an Independent candidate, but she could not get elected. Smti. Surya Prava Chetia polled 2000 votes out of 20,838 votes and lost her security deposit. Smti. Lily Sen Gupta was elected but she polled only 6,986 votes out of the total of 19,343 votes polled.

Out of the nine women candidates six were elected and all of then belonged to the congress.

In the General Election of 1972, the position of women slightly improved. In that election to the Assam Legislative Assembly, as many as 12 women candidates contested. In that election smti. Anandi Bala Rave, Smti. Pranita Talukdar, Smti. Rebati Das, Smti. Renuka Devi Barkataki, Smti. Satyabati Goswami, Smti. Tarulata Bora were elected. The defeated women candidates were Smti. Sabita Rani Pradhan, Smti. Makani Patar, Smti. Kamala Mazumdar and smti. Arati Saikia. Thus in 1972, out of 12 women eight were successful.

Assamese women as M.P.

Before 1952, no woman from the North-East India was elected to the central legislature. Two Bonniely Khongmen and Rani Manjula Devi contested for a seat in the Lok Sabha. Khongmen polled 59,326 votes out of 1,09,663 votes polled. And she was elected in the year 1952.

The second was Rani Manjula Devi, an Independent candidate from Goalpara-Garo Hills who had to fight against five rivals and was defeated by Amjad Ali in the year 1952.

In 1957, again two women candidates contested for the Lok Sabha–Rani Manjula Devi and Begun Mofida Ahmed. Although two communists and two PSP candidates also contested from the same constituency, Mrs. Devi was elected by a minority vote.

36. Ibid, p. 3
The second candidate was Mofida Ahmed. Her one rival was from CPI, another from PSP and the third was from sarbadal. However, she was elected by a minority vote.

One important feature of the General Election of 1957 to the Lok Sabha was that two women were elected to the Lok Sabha, representing the Brahmaputra valley.

In the General Election to the Lok Sabha of 1962, three women candidates contested. Among them Mofida Ahmed who contested from Jorhat was defeated by Rajendra Nath Borua.

Smti. Jyotsna Chanda, who represented the Silchar Constituency from 1950 to 1962 in the Assam Legislative Assembly was elected as a member of the parliament in the General Election of 1962. Smti. Renuka Devi Barkataki contested against a PSP candidate—Shri Biswas Goswami and she was elected.

In 1967, only two women were nominated by the Congress party. They were Smti. Jyotsna Chanda and Smti. Renuka Devi Barkataki. The latter was shifted from Mangaldai to Guwahati, but she was defeated. Smti. Jyotsna Chanda has to fight against three independent candidates but she was elected. The mid-term elections of 1971 were contested by three women candidates, namely, Smti. Jyotsna Chanda, Begum Mofida Ahmed and Smti. Lucy Gogoi. Jyotsna Chanda contested for a third term. She was elected by polling 50-54% of the votes cast. It was her last term since she died halfway through that term.

Begum Mofida Ahmed, a Congress candidate was defeated in that election. Smti. Lucy Gogoi, a candidate from Dibrugarh was defeated by Rabindra Kakaty. It shows that in 1971, as in 1967, only one woman was elected to the Lok Sabha.
In 1977, three women candidates contested in the General Election to the Lok Sabha. They were Rashida Haque Choudhury, Renuka Devi Barkataki and Lucy Gogoi.

Rashida Haque Choudhury, a Congress nominee had to fight against Nurul Huda, CPI (M). Rashida Haque was elected and thus she became the second Muslim woman to be elected to the Lok Sabha from Assam.

Renuka Devi Barkataki as a candidate of the Janta party was also elected to the Lok Sabha in that election.

Smti. Lucy Gogoi, an Independent candidate was however defeated.

In the case of the Rajya Sabha only three women were elected during the period of 1952-80, out of the total 47 candidates elected from Assam. They were Smti. Puspa Lata Das belonging to the Congress Party for two complete terms of twelve years.

Smti. Bedavati Buragohain and Smti Usha Barthakur were nominees of the congress party for ten years and six years respectively. After the election of 1985, when the Assam Gana Parishad came into power in Assam, Smti Bijoya Chakravarty was elected to Rajya Sabha.

During the period of our survey no woman was elected to the office of the speaker of the Legislature. Smti. Bonniely Khongmen was elected as a Deputy Speaker only in 1952. After her, no other woman was elected to that high office.

After the introduction of provincial Autonomy in 1937 when the legislature came to be a bi-eameral one, Smti.

Jubeda Ataur Rahman, a nominated member of the Legislative Council was elected as Deputy President without contest. She was the first Assamese woman to become presiding officer of the Legislative Council.
No of women minister in Assam now under Tarun Gogoi lead government is four with one cabinet and three minister of state.

After the death of Mona Mohan Lahiri, the president of the Legislative Council in 1938, Smti. Jubeda Ataur Rahman, the Deputy President was elected as President of the Legislative Council. She was elected unanimously, although there were two more candidates for the post, namely, sri Heramba Prasad Borua and sri suresh Chandra Das.

During the period of 1921-39 no woman was included in the Cabinet of Assam. Muhammad Saadulla included smti. Movis Dunn in the Ministry on 5th December 1939 when he formed the ministry. She continued up to the 4th term but was subsequently dropped during the formation of the fifth ministry.

There was no woman minister from 23rd March 1945 to 22nd April 1957. Smti. Usha Barthakur was appointed as Deputy Minister in the Cabinet formed by Shri Bishnu Ram Medhi. Form 28th December 1957 till 23rd April 1966, no women was included in the Minister in the cabinet formed by Shri Bishnu Ram Medhi. From 28th December 1957 till 23rd April 1966, no woman was included in the ministry of Assam. However, on 23rd April 1966, Smti. Kamal Kumari Borua was appointed a minister of state. She was the third woman to occupy a berth in the ministry of Assam.

During the time of the Chaliha Ministry, no woman was included in the ministry at the beginning, but subsequently smti. Padmakumari Gohain was appointed as Minister.

Sbri Mahendra Mohan Choudhury during his tenure as the Chief Minister of Assam, Appointed smti. Padma Kumari Gohain as the cabinet minister. Smti. Mavis Dunn (first lady to become a cabinet minister) resigned on 24th March 1945. After that there was no lady member in the cabinet of Assam for five years.
Sri Mahendra Mohan Choudhury resigned on 5th November 1970. His successor Shri Sarat Chandra Sinhe did not include any woman in the cabinet. However, after the General Election of 1972 Smti. Swarna Prava Mahanta was appointed a Minister of state. She resigned in 1974. Smti. Anward Taimur was included in the Sinha Ministry in October 1974. She also resigned in December 1977.

In December 1980 Smti. Anawara Taimur became the Chief Minister of Assam37.

Indian women are the beneficiaries of the rights recognised by the Constitution in the same manner as men. But the surprising thing in that despite the recognition of political equality Indian women mostly the Assamese women continue to suffer a number of inequalities and indignities. They have some sorts of a minority status within the present political process, though, they enjoy equal rights with men in the matter of election (Articles 325 and 326 of the Constitution). In practice only a few women are elected to the parliament and the legislative Assembly. The following Table No. 1, Table No. 2 show it.

37. Ibid p. 7
### Table No. 1

**Growth of Women Electors in Assam**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Revision</th>
<th>No. of women electors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>17,79,831 .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>22,21,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>29,02,369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>36,69,027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>40,59,560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>45,83,689</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>55,20,922</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>59,58,938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>68,99,164</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source*  
Reports on General Election 1952–91, 1996 to 2001
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Election</th>
<th>No. of women Candidates</th>
<th>No. of elected candidates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source* 

* Reports on General Election, 1996 to 2001
There are 9 women member in the Assam legislative Assembly with one seat vacant after the death of Rupam Kurmi in 2004.

In the recently held election for Municipal Corporation in the year 2004 in Guwahati out of 60 councilors 19 are women*.

In the Anti-Foreigners Movement (1979-85) the women of Assam showed tremendous enthusiasm but as soon as the movement was over, they were side tracked by the leaders. For it, the rate of participation of women in the ministry was insignificant. Only two women Smti. Rekha Rani Das Boro and Smti. Jyotsna Sonowal were elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly in the election of 1985.38 Smti. Bijoya Chakraborty was elected to the Rajya Sabha. While the above three belonged to the Assam Gana parishad, a regional party formed after the anti-foreigners Movement Srimati Omen Deuri represented the Congress (I) Party. Ranee Narah and Bijaya Chakraborty are the two sitting MP from Assam the year upto the recent election.

The rate of political participation of women is not satisfactory in India. Assam is no exception to this. Following are the rate women representation in the Lok Shabha.

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* Report by municipal corporation, Guwahati, 2004
Women Last Five year and Women in legislation women Representation in Lok Sabha.

Representation of women in the Lok Sabha

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Male %</th>
<th>Female %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>4.40%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>5.40%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>6.70%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>5.90%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>4.20%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>3.40%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>5.10%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>8.10%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>5.29%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>7.07%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>7.07%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>7.09%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source *

The percentage of male and female contestants and winners in the last election in India gives a picture on the wide gulf between male and female.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Election</th>
<th>Male Contestants</th>
<th>Female Contestants</th>
<th>% Male Winners</th>
<th>% Female Winners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sixth</td>
<td>2369</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>27.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventh</td>
<td>4478</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eighth</td>
<td>5406</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ninth</td>
<td>5962</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenth</td>
<td>8374</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleventh</td>
<td>13353</td>
<td>599</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twelfth</td>
<td>4476</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thirteenth</td>
<td>4364</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source**

* Election Commission of India, 2001
** Election Commission of India, 2001
Number of women in Assam legislative Assemble shows an upward trend in the women participation here as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No of woman</th>
<th>elected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Number of Women member in the legislative assambly 2001 names are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constituency</th>
<th>Name of Elected Member</th>
<th>Party offer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mankachar</td>
<td>Smt. Hosenana Islam</td>
<td>NCP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kokrajhar East (ST)</td>
<td>Smt Pramila Rani Brahma</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panery</td>
<td>Smt. Kamali Basumatari</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marigaon</td>
<td>Smt. Jonjonali Baruah</td>
<td>INC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rupahihart</td>
<td>Smt. Sarifa Begum</td>
<td>INC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golaghat</td>
<td>Smt. Ajanta Neog</td>
<td>INC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamlpur</td>
<td>Smt. Uttara Kalita</td>
<td>INC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mariani</td>
<td>Smt. Rupam Kurmi</td>
<td>INC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nazira</td>
<td>Dr. (Smt.) Hema Priva Saikia</td>
<td>INC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naharkatia</td>
<td>Smt. Pranati Phukan</td>
<td>INC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source *

Source *  Hand book of Assam, Department of public Relation, Govt. of Assam 2001-2002
A total of 10 women legislative in 126 member in the Assam legislative assembly, out of 10. Constituency in Kamrup District only one women Smt. Uttara Kalita from Kamalpur District is elected to the legislative assembly.

**Housewives and political Participation, case studies—**

In the political affair, participation of the housewives are like the icing on the cake only. Colourful faces that sparsely dot the parliamentary landscape despite repeated assurance of almost all political parties, that they would allot women, larger number of seats, women still remain a minority in the parliament.

Mention should be made of few housewives in India who have inspired the Assamese housewives to actively join in the political affairs of the state*.

Name of few assamese housewives who have joined in politics are as follows:

Few number of state legislative were the widow of political leader to name 1991 to 1996 Renupama Rajkhowa, the widow of late cherismatic AGP Minister Lalit Rajkhowa,

---

* > Indira Gandhi: She was made the only women prime minister of India. From a demure housewife, she transformed herself into an active politician after the demise of her husband. She imposed Emergency, in India her tenure was marked by some gargantuan mistakes, but she became a potent symbol of Indian womanhood, an icon and a role model in direct opposition to all those mythic figures of suffering and sacrifice.

> Sonia Gandhi: From her self-imposed isolation, after the death of her husband "Ex prime minister Rajiv Gandhi who has emerged as the cynosure of all eyes, leader of the opposition sonia's tranformation from a simple housewives to a political leader, follows the trend of the "importance of Gandhi Nehru Family in the Congress Party"— Few other women around India who are educatational housewives and at the helm of political affair are:

  Najma Heptulla, Sushma Swaraj, Shella Dixit, Margarat Ulva, Shabana Ajmi, Uma Bharti

  In the state scene they are:

  (Puratchi Thalaivi) Jayalalita, Bengal Tigress Mamata Benarjee, Mayavati, Rabri Devi, Basundhara Raje
–It was Alaka Sharma, wife of Minister Nagen Sharma, prior to 2001 state election after her husband’s death at the lands of terrorits in a bomb blast. Riding the sympathy wave was elected as member to the state legislative.

–Present minister for Dr. Hemoprabha Saikia, is the widow of Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia.

–Another leader and ex. Rajya Sabha member was Joyashree Mahanta joined her husband ex cheif minister “Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, to her journey from a educated housewives to active political leader, caused much speculation and debate in Assam from 1996 till date

–Another active student leader and only number in the AGP lead government last year was Rekha Rani Das Boro.

–Basanti Sarma, who was the member of the Rajya Sabha is the widow of the slain congress leader Manabendra Sarma.

–Besides, it was Annowara Timur, the only living lady chief minister from Assam, Renuka Devi Borkotoky, MP in Janta Minister during mororaji Desai’s, regime. Rani Narah was a MP from Assam in the RS.

Against the poor and unsatisfactory representation of women as political leader and member of state legislative assembly, to evaluate the trend of political awareness, we have set few questions regarding political vis a vis social participation in Random Samble in total of 10 communitices and 7 blockes in the Kamrup District and the result we got are as follows.

Our second resort to get the pulse of women in Kamrup district was a one to one chatting session during the period 1995 and 2000 about elections. The diverse structure of Kamrup district helps us to get a true picture of political awareness of educated housewives. While Guwahati-East and West Dispur are comprised of urban women, Boko, Chaygaon, Rongia has a mixer of populace Kamalpur, Palasbari and Jalukbari Comprises of minority section. most, and all
the constituency comprised of tribal and women from various religious group make our study more extensive.

Question set and asked touches the Concepts like—

–Political Culture.

–Political information.

–Public Opinion.

–Rule of Pressure Group.

–Political Socialisation.

–Political Consciousness.

–Political behaviour.

–Voting behaviour of women, education and uneducated.

In main areas interview was conducted with certain questions* like:

Our survey and interview, conducted, reveals some significant facts like:

* List of questions

1. What is the most important issue which concern you today?

2. Which factor is decisive for you in voting for a candidate?

3. Have you heard of the recent Rajjor Padulit Rajjor Sarkar slogan?

4. Have you heard of the 33% reservations demand for women controversy.

5. Has politician are able to improve the standard living last fore years.

6. How would you rate the present PM and chief minister's performance.

7. Why are you not joining in politics?

8. Do you believe that education will help women in political participation.

9. Do you abstain from voting and why?
political culture that includes the basic attitude and skills that determine how politics is conducted of Assamese women is not satisfactory, in the district of Kamrup although there is an increase in education housewives but povertes unemployment improper legislation, criminalisation of politics, discouraging women from active participation in politics.

A case study on two gaon Panchayat women member, victimised in improper conduct controversy* in an interview expresses that even rural women are aware of the Naina Chahni** Tandur Murder*** and still believe that politics is the game for tougher man.

Recent survey on the nature and mood of housewives disclosed a growing interest among women in politics that is altering the picture of acquienteces and passivity in older research. Political view of the husbands and family is still dominant factor in the voting behaviours of housewives, Moreover it is a difficult task to judge the political behaviour of women from their voting spirit the illiterate women and housewives seem regard the voting days as festival, besides, motherhood and domestic responsibilities stood as an obstacle on their way.

The reason behind the slow rate of participation of women in political affair is the less apathy from political parties too, Regional parties like AGP$ had never had any high women officer and leaders despite there contribution to their party upcharge even national parties like BJP and INC are not attracting housewives into politics in Assam like that of the other state.

Many educated housewife in Kamrup District were unable to answer few latest political development beacuse they feel political awareness is not as beneficial as any economic milage Assam, after Independces has not yet produced a single fireband women political leader is a matter of concern in this aspect. The new generation of young educated housewives are even failed to recognise the

40. J Prasad, Political Analysis, p. 24
* Thakuria Naba, Savvy 2000, issue February
** A Congress leader burnt to death in tandur in Delhi by her husband in 1999
*** Pratidin : pg. 7, 2002 march
$ Asom Gana Parishad, a regional party of Assam.
contribution of women starlet like Chandraprava Saikiani, Puspolata Das, and like. Few educated wives are purposely abstaining from voting showing their displeasure and protest in the present political system.

The middle class women are more politically aware then the upper and elit class and between agegroup 40 to 50 housewives are more intesated in voting, to note that pure electoral arithmatic about voters even who are infiltraters discourage few who question their existence.

A spate of violent killing spree against political leaders by few insurgent from 1990 till 2001 and 2002, where leaders like Manabendra Sharma, Nogen Sarma and like was gundowned in our interview with varius officers incharge of election, showing their displeasure with less turnoul women voters in Kamrup. undoubtly the initiation of 30% reservation at panchayat leavel are encouraging a few women to joint politics.

In this connection mention should be made of the recent controversy and debate on 33% reservation for women in the Parliament.

Debate on 33% reservation

Women's Reservation Bill and Differences still persist over the demand for 33% resarvation for women in the parliament. In the context of political power and reservation of seats in the legislative bodies has been a much debated topic over the last couple of years prior to independence it was "Anniebesant" who supports the need for political empowerment of India and educational excelliency. Mahatma Gandhi has alwags been supporter of political participation of women, provisions of the bill are :

- 33 per cent seats to be reserved for women in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies.
- One-third of these to be reserved for SC/ST women.
Applicable after the dissolution of the House or assembly existent at the time that it is passed.

The 181 Lok Sabha seats to be rotated by a draw of lots.

Bill not to apply to states/Union territories where seats reserved for SC/STS is less than three. So will not apply in 10 states/UTS.

Due to the clashes of opinion, the bill still pending in the floor of parliament. Few who support the bill argue as follows:

> Then chief Election Commissioner T.N. Seshan Expresses that—"We need more women in politics, because, women are less excitable and more objective, They will make politics more sober",

> Uma Bharati, Girija Byas, Pramila Dahavate are all for women bill while according to ICSSR-CDS. India today Nation wide survey of 10,000 respondents published, 73% of men and women believed that women should be more active in politics and 80% of them supported reservations.

> In urban kamrup few women favour this bill but few believe that compulsion will make women more miserable in the face of competition.

**Women's Participation in Gaon Panchayat**

The most important changes relating to political experiment of women, which is reaching the nook and corner of all states including Assam is the passing of 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment bill of 33% reservation for women in Panchayats and Municipalities, or more then 10,00000 women been elected as representatives all over countries has uplifted the mood of women resides in villages, and signifies a major leap in the sphere of political empowerment since independence at the grassroot level. Panchayat is now the breeding ground to political education and training ground for women to entre in to the state and national level politics.

Women's Representation in Panchayati Raj Institutions gives a picture of womens political participation all over the states of India and it indicate the less participation of assamese women in this regard the following table indicate that:
Women's Participation in Gaon Panchayat

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Gram Panchayat</th>
<th>Panchayat Samiti</th>
<th>Zilla Parishad</th>
<th>All Three tiers of Panchayats</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women %</td>
<td>Women %</td>
<td>Women %</td>
<td>Women %</td>
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Source *  
Department of women and child welfare, Govt. of India., 2000-2001.
As Nani Palkhivala pointed out—"A bad government is the inevitable consequence of an indifferent electorate, politics will never be cleaner and our economic future will never be brighter unless and until our citizen both male and female are willing to sacrifice for their land besides, the active comprehensive educational program in the mode with Plato's philosopher king, less of criminalisation, communisation and corruptions in polities will definitely attract more housewives in to politics. A total transparency in legislation and compulsive reservation for women will defiantly encourage more women into politics."