CHAPTER - VII

The concept of women's identity in Kamrup and Assam

"...the habit of looking upon marriage as a profession almost and as the sole economic refuge for women will have to go before woman can have any freedom. Freedom depends on economic conditions even more than political and if a woman is not economically free and self earning she will have to depend on her husband or someone else, and dependants are never free. The association of man and woman should be perfect freedom and perfect comradeship with no dependence of one on the other."

—Jawaharlal Nehru

Indian women, almost five decades after independence, have not changed their nature and the changes have only been skin deep. In the urban areas educated women are aware of their rights, health and fitness and above all of beauty and decoration. Women today are dressing better, buying better, working better and enjoying themselves as feminine person. They want romance in their marriage and well educated children. They want a balanced family life to and wish to be valued as a member and individual in the family. Even the mother in laws and the husbands seem to be more supportive to the housewives in this aspect.

After having discussed the major issues touching the educated housewives in Assam and Kamrup in particular, a study on a new dimension, has been very crucial to the study on the changing profile of educated housewives in Assam, certain factors have been looked into in order to see their contributions in determining their individuality.

Before analysing the factors which are responsible for the development of personality of the housewives as well as the related case studies, it is neces-
sary to mention the significance and the meaning of the term 'personality' in social science.

'Sigmond Beaker'* in his book Personality and women" describes, personality as the "sum total of attitude and behaviour a human being carries, which determine his role in the society". The personality of a person be it women or man reflects the following–

![Diagram]

In Assam, Kamrup has been the mecca of fashion, attitude, breeding ground of modernity and nerve centre and model district. Assamese women of all ages, status, classes, married and unmarried have been influenced by the changes that have taken place in Kamrup. Since time immemorial Kamrup had been the centre of education, fashion, political and social activities and it com-

* Beaker Sigmond personality and women p. 25, 1970.
prised all classes of people, elite, middle class and lower middle class. Our study about the history of education, educated housewives and a micro study, extensive survey and observations on the attitude of the educated housewives reflected few major changes in the area of personality development of the housewives in the areas of Kamrup, which is played a significant role in changing the status of the housewives all over Assam.

Educated housewives of Assam have asserted their self identity either within the forewalls of households or in the work place or in both areas. Our keen observation on the changing mode of happenings in the social sphere, and the role and reactions of housewives to the changes, their views and outlook of the other family members to the changes could be broadly discussed in the following segments.

Of late almost all the changes found in the society have been the effects of the following concepts—

- Modernisation
- Westernisation
- Industrialisation
- Sanskritisation

The personality of the housewives in the contemporary time in Kamrup has been shaped by the above mentioned factors. The area of reflected changes could be divided as follows:
### CHART - 1

**1. Modernisation**

(a) Attitude towards marriage and family.
(b) Dress code and fashion.
(c) Tradition.
(d) Thinking & participation.
(e) Information and education.

### CHART - 2

**2. Westernization**

(a) Mannerism
(b) Beauty concept
(c) Role in Mass media.

### CHART - 3

**3. Industrialisation**

(a) Awareness for employment and job
(b) Views on materialism and part time job.
(c) Attitude towards status, income, class concept and domestic changes.

### CHART - 4

**4. Sanskritisation**

(a) Cultural assimilation.
(b) Intercaste– interstate, marriages.
(c) Attitude towards change and life.
In the light of the above, we have observed the changes among women and the housewives in the development of their personality.

**History of changes in the personality of Assamese housewives:**

In earlier times women were mostly relegated to the background. The colloquial language, in phrases and idioms certain terms were used to denote women's subordinate and abominable position.

- Some of them were as such Mothers' concern is for her 'son's welfare, but wife is concerned with the material gain from her husband
- Wives, debt and casinos, are the three, that endanger life
- If not horizontal what is the use of land, If the quality of the wife can not be determined what is the use of her?
- Wives long for rich husbands. As fisherman long for rivers filled with fishes
The world is a better place if you think positive, your son in law will be alright if your daughter is good
Your are the soul of home, mother to my children, if I do not ask you whom should ask?
Never go astray from the right path, Never marry a widow, better wed a spoilt-spinster

Source*

**The Concept of Modernisation and the personality of educated housewives**

According to Durkheim** modernisation involves a transformation of social, political and economic organizations. In the words of Weiner—"Each social

* Baishya Dharanidhar, Asomiyar Phakarajoyjana, pp 13, 14, 15, 1985
** Western radical thinker.
science discipline in concerned with a particular aspect of the modernization process. Modernization is essentially based on a rationalist and positive spirit. Important aspects of the process of modernization include. Economic development, provision of educational facilities, provision for adequate health and building up of an open society, in which individuals of talent, enterprise and training can find a place in the society appropriate to their achievement.

The structure of marriage and family in the advent of modernisation has changed. As a result housewives have refused to accept their traditional role in the marriage and family.

The New Oxford dictionary defines marriage as "an act or a ceremony to establish union between a man and a woman who are legally united for the purpose of living together. It is said to be the most trying of all kinds of relationships."

What is marriage today? A survey was conducted and interviews were taken in certain areas of Guwahati, Hajo, Rangia, Chaygoan, Palashbari, Bijoy Nagar, Rani, Azara, Domdona, Panitema, Pothimari, Sirakhundi, Chamaria, Suntoli, Nagarbera in Boko and Mathurapur, in the district of Kamrup. The factors that were observed had been follows.

From the survey of Sualkuchi, Jalukbari, Chaygoan, Kamlpur, Boko, Palashbari, West Dispur, East Dispur and Guwahati it was observed that--

- The number of illiterate women were less in rural areas and lesser in urban Guwahati. In areas like Boko, Kamlpur every household had at least one illiterate woman between age group of 45 to 60. On the other hand, wives in the age group of 20 to 45 were almost literate and educated up to matriculation level.

2. Kappuswamy B, social change in India, 1989, p. 61
A section of housewives from the above mentioned areas believed in 'egalitarian marriage', which was a compromise between love and arranged marriage.

Most of the housewives favoured nuclear family and considered it essential for the development of personality and self identity.

Desire for romance, meaningful relations, vacation, sex, respect from children and husband were the things that women crave in the marriage. It was a departure from the stereotype role, earlier played by the housewives when there desires and aims ended up in procreating babies. Now, women were found demanding their due place in the family.

Bai or Jaruwali-maid, came from the lowerclass women hailing from cross the society. They also expressed their views on their due place in their respective families. The Assamese women no longer believed in sacrificing the self for the family.

A section of educated housewives in Kamrup believed that, marriage could no longer keep a couple together till death put them apart. Working wives were reestablishing their equation. However, some women from upper caste families belonging to the age group of 45 to 60 still observe fasting or brat for their husbands. Pati-Parameswar syndrome is fast disappearing from the family scene, it was observed.

Self identity had been strong among the highly educated women. In our interviews and conservation with various highly women it was observed that a tendency not to forsake their parental surname and adding the surname of their husbands had been quite populas.

* Fasting, North Indian housewives keep annually for the welfare of their husbands.
This had been one of the most striking tendencies and growing awareness for one's own identity among modern woman.

In most of the middle class families, housewives have started discussing openly about their satisfaction and dissatisfaction and other matters relating to desire. The concept of new-sexuality has started gaining ground gradually.

Dress code and fashion craze:

Constant media blitz following the global recognition and popularity of Miss universe and Miss world, have developed the sense of beauty consciousness in Assam, specially in Kamrup. Even an ordinary working class woman today visits the beauty parlours to have done their threading, perming, facial, manicure, pedicure, cutting of hair, message and the like. We talked a beautician and president of the beauty parlour association* who revealed that in the past four years, educated housewives were pouring in to her training centre. Even from the rural areas of Kamrup, after a stint of marriage and motherhood and getting bored with the stereotyped role, came to her beauty parlour to keep themselves busy. Another beautician of repute**, expressed her pleasure over the changes. She observed that in the last five years in Kamrup women became conscious in matters of health and beauty more and more from 1985 to 2001 more than three hundred beauty parlour were flourishing in Guwahati, while in 1982 there were only three beauty parlour in Guwahati. Now a days in every nook and corner of Guwahati there are at least five to seven beauty parlours. The total number of beauty parlours that were registered in the last five years had been 50% more than that of the previous years. These have been paving a new means of livelihood for the unemployed woman.

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* Madhumita Patowary  
** Runu Hazarika
'The Beauty Parlours are now as iniquitous as the local paanwala, in India. The same applies to Kamrup too where in almost all areas, including Sualkachi, Hajo and interior of Mirza have more than one beauty parlours, for women and housewives. Thus beauty has become guilt free and aspirational concept. In our visit to various beauty parlours and during conservations few housewives it was observed that most of the housewives, without any prior experience of working made attempts to become economically self sufficient by even opening up a one-room parlour in their own residence, although they were financially well off and their husbands earned enough money to support them. This was a significant development in the area of self-identity which was noticed in Kamrup. The housewives, after getting educational degree did not like the idea of sitting and tried to do something with their educational experience and qualification.

Several boutiques sprung up all over the middle and upper-middle class colonies in Guwahati and in small towns of Kamrup like- Baihatchariali, Sualkuchi, Mirza, Bijoy Nagar, Chaygoan and Sonapur. These have been the symbol of women's urge for a new definition of there approach to life and beauty. Women from all areas of Kamrup visit their boutiques. All of them are of the view that in the last few years more and more women, especially housewives have been changing their dress code. This reflected their increasing self confidence in the sphere of personal choices and freedom.

Till a few years ago majority of women were compelled to wear Mekhela Xador, after marriage. Leave alone other modern dresses, wives were not even

5. "India Today" reveals, according to the survey Mumbai has–one for every 10 buildings. Jamubus–one for 100, Surat–500, Chandigarh–200, Chenai–200 and In Delhi, a new one would have opened by the time one finish reading the review. Source: Indian Today–Nov 15. 1995– p. 45, 47.

* According to Dipankar Kashyap, Barasa Bora, Megna Rita Raimedhi, Gautom Baruah, who have excelled in fashion designing.

** Traditional Assamese costume of married women.
allowed to come outside without taking veil or urani. Traditional sayings have lots of references regarding restrictions on the costumes of women after marriage. An ancient saying quoted as follows:

"Donot were Mugar Mekhela xador / even,
donot oil your hair with scented oil, Man will follow you."

A particular piece of clothing, women within a single right by women for their warrior husband was considered as protective shield on talishman. Again in rural areas girls and women who did not know weaving was called Thupori. Women after marriage in rural areas of upper Assam had to sleep in Chorcung. They were forbidden to cheer loudly, or go out veil. They were not allowed to wear footwear even in winter season. Women could not openly participate in festivals. Marriage to them was a life of confinement and liabilities. Their husbands and in-laws used to dictate their style of living, mode of dress code, hair style, behaviour and other aspects of life. Astonishingly no such restriction on dresscode and behaviour was meant for the male members. They were the freebirds and independent people in the society.

In the 21st century the Assamese women, have been found wearing dresses which please them the men. A visit to the rural areas if Kamrup and interviews conducted in both rural and urban Kamrup, showed that there were lots of women who took to wearing dresses according to their conveniences. Urban Kamrup has a completely changed picture since the last few years as almost all of the women switched over to modern and sophisticated dresscode. Dresses today they consider, should reflect style and choice. However the Assamese women are used to wear traditional dresses in festivals and events like Bia puja.

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* "Mugab mekhela lottaai nishiga chatai khanoti lagge,
gohitell bai bangale noallara, aaiitii koneba gharaki lagge
** Useless women.
*** A secluded place near kitchen where the newly married couple used to sleep.
and the like. A number of housewives were of the opinion that putting of vermillion or sindur* on the forehead of the marriage should not be compulsory. A large section of married women between the age group 20 to 35 said that putting of vermillion on the forehead was only an ornamental custom. A recent debate over this issue** attracted widespread attention in Assam. However a few years ago woman without this symbol was considered to be deviant. In Assamese society widows were not allowed to wear colourful customs and red coloured tilkka on her forehead. Over the years. This sort of puritanic customs have been withering away. In rural Kamrup widows have to wear white clothings and shun all types of cosmetics. Several case studies of the working women relating to their personal choice reveal that a few working women from each locality from Guwahati agree with that they believe that women are not the

A large number of women, we interviewed, expressed that they were not in favour of any submissiveness in the family and any confinement as the earlier times.6

Now a days women prefer to wear anything that blend modernity and traditional flavour of dressing style, as stated by most of the fashion designer in Kamrup. Thus modernism has in its fold covered up the areas of hi-tech information and the importance of education too. Most of the women in Kamrup expressed their urge to educate their children. A few women, married at a tender age, started to study afresh in colleges with the moral support from in-laws and husband, few who have obtained higher degree have joined in highly paid prestigious jobs, give an example of positive contribution of family members in the sphere of attainment of self identity by housewives in our society.

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* Red coloured powder, which married women put on the forehead.
** Sadin, an Assemese weekly, continuously published controversial views on the comments of the editor who in a public meeting held in 2002 commented that putting sindur should not be a compulsion for the married women.

6. “মাতৃ পেলিম পকিত্তাল্য মেধুনম মই মোদীরু”
   “দ্বারকদাসপ্রসন্ন্যাবিং, বশি ৪ এসময়েতে,
   তাবদু মেধুনম তাম্মাং কসাং সহরেত্রত”

Westernization and housewives:

The term, Westernization is used to characterise the changes brought about in Indian society and culture as a result of over 200 years of British rule. The term denotes changes that have been occurring at different levels—technology, institution, ideology and values. Abolition of Sati (1829) female infanticide, human sacrifice, and slavery, (1833) were some of the positive effects of westernization. While an analysis of social and cultural changes in India, signifies that the British model of westernization was obviously the most important one, since 1947 the American and Russian models also became equally popular in our country.

According to a section of highly educated housewives in Kamrup, they were not the rubber stamps in the hands of their family. The concept of "cultural-schizophrenia" is absent in Assamese culture. People in general and women in particular know the adverse effect of westernization like, communalism, linguistic fanaticism in an regionalism. They have realised that tolerance in marriage and family circle is essential. A few of them concede the positive impact of westernization in the development of self identity. Although the domestic and social life of the Assamese women have been highly traditional, yet, people living in towns are more exposed to western influence than the rural folk.

Our survey indicated the areas which were effected and influenced by westernization. Western education had exerted great impact on the style of living. Use of English language as a "lingua franca" has promoted a new style in the households. In this connection mention may be made of a reputed sociologist M. N. Srinivas who developed the concept of westernisation, and modified the concept and included knowledge, beliefs and values in it. In the rural Kamrup, having food while sitting on a chair and to know how a cake is baked or pudding, are the impact

7. See foot note No. 2 in this chapter
10. Ref. foot note 8 in this chapter, page 47.
of western behaviour. Earlier, people used to have food sitting on a low wooden platform known as 'pira' that stood on the floor of the kitchen. Now women are showing more interest in the decoration of the house which was quite alien to them a few years ago. The traditional means of household appliances have been replaced by electric gadgets like mixy, grinder and micro oven. Food can be stored in freezer and gas has taken the place of firewood in cooking, which according to the housewives are saving their time.

**Transportation and housewives**

In our survey and study on the changes of attitude and personality of the housewives, a new area relating to this had come to the fore. It had been noticed that in the several years, registration by women for driving licence had increased. A lots of women especially from the upper-middle class families applied for driving licence to drive their own vehicles. There had been a rapid growth in the percentage of women, seeking driving licence. In 1995, there were only 10 women who got driving licence and now in 2002 every week, a woman mostly housewife is seeking driving licence for light motor vehicles like car and scooter.

In this connection it is worth mentioning that in the 18th century housewives were illiterate and they were seldom permitted to go outside without escort. It was Chandra Prabha Saikiani an epitome of women's liberation in Assam who riding on a bicycle in her village, went from place to place, despite lewd remarks from the people all around. Slowly with the increasing number of educational institutions and growing awareness of education for the girl child, girls in village areas have started to cross miles after miles riding on bicycle. Even today, girls and women from Chaygoan, Singimari, Sualkuchi, Sonapur, Puthimari, Palashbari, Dharapur and such other rural areas of Kamrup, have been riding on bicycle to attend distant colleges and schools. Housewives from affluent families ride on scooter or in car in urban areas. From our interview with a few rural women it was observed that riding on a bicycle had become a regular feature for those who
work and study. They simply could not depend on the condition of road transportation in the village areas of Kamrup.

Health club and housewives:

Another area that focuses the changing attitude of the housewives, is the growing health consciousness as well as the narcissistic fetish which expanded through various health clubs in urban Kamrup. Over the years, a large number of health clubs came to be flourishing in the urban areas of Kamrup. To name a few famous health centres*. There are more than fifty health clubs in Guwahati with modern equipment to cater to the need and fancy of urban women. Slimming down machines and women instructors to guide aerobic exercises, have increased**, Women from all classes specially the rich and middle class working women have joined the health clubs. Even women in rural areas also have started joining in sports and games breaking the conservative norms following few assemese role model sports personalities***. Some of them have won laurels in various interstate games and meet. 50 women in the age group of 20-45 in 2002-2001 joined the swimming training. Women were not encouraged earlier to join games and sports. But now such participation have been a regular feature. Prior to 1985, there were no registered health clubs for women in Assam, as we observed.

Industrialization:

Industrialization implies that an animated sources of energy like steam and electricity are utilised for the production of goods and for transportation and communication"""

* Bodyline, Zimkhana, Figura, Signature, and like.
** Expressed, Mala Hazarika, the first women health instructor in Kamrup.
*** P.T. Usha, Shine Abrahim and Taiburnissa, Monalisa Hazarika
Industrialization has been playing a key role in the domestic sector. The rate of participation in the area of employment, has indicated the mental faculty of the housewives. It has been evident from the increasing number of participation of the women in the organised sector. Participation in organised sector has been a clear indication of the growing development of the individuality and personality of the women. In this connection mention may be made of the share of Assamese women in the organised sector as follows:

**Share of Women in the organised Sector, 1999-2000**

**Five States on the Top**

Kerala (38.6%), Assam (29.8%), Karnataka (29.5%),

Tamil Nadu (29.1%), Mizoram (26.5%).

**Five States at the Bottom**

Bihar (6.7%), Uttar Pradesh (9.2%), West Bengal (10.3%),

Jammu & Kashmir (10.8%), Orissa (11.6%)

The increasing number of working women in both the public and private sectors clearly indicate the tremendous growth of the feelings for self identity. This is possible because industrialization has opened up avenues for self employment, which is a necessary factor relating to the personality development. The number of women workers in Kamrup district and the male-female ratio in the year 1991-1995 are as follows:

The number of workers in Kamrup and other districts and the male-female ratio are in are as follows.

### TABLE - I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non worker</td>
<td>210131</td>
<td>313935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal worker</td>
<td>2445</td>
<td>36690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other worker</td>
<td>59070</td>
<td>6454</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source*

From the survey, it was observed that most of the working women in the sectors like mills and factories, comprised the pseudo populace coming from Bengal, Nepal, Bihar, Rajathan, Orissa and Punjab. They helped in our culture. Kamrup has less tea gardens while the districts of upper Assam like, Dibrugarh, Duliajan, Jorhat, Margerita, Bokathat, Golaghat and Digboi are full of tea gardens. The tea garden workers with their distinct language and culture have contributed a lot to enriching the composite culture of Assam.

**Housewives in other sectors**

Our survey on the paces of changes in the Assamese society reflect in several global network business.* The women since last couple of years started joining such concern in order to enhance their self identity and to utilise their educational experience for the maximum benefit of their family.

*Dev Bora, a business man, who's introduced Herbelife in the year 1999 to Assam, a member of the world team, Bora have expressed his satisfaction over his business boom on Harbelife, According to him during the year 1990 to 2001 65% of educated housewives were taking up personal franchise of Harble life from him covering the areas in Kamrup. According to Deepa Talukadar, a housewife and distributor of Revlon– she has joined the company in year 1999 and apart from the material benefite, feels more confident about herself and her abilities.
Another group of women from the locality of greater Dispur of Guwahati, Kamrup expressed that from quiet housewives they transformed themselves into successful business women. It was also observed that the life style of hundreds of middle class women. Educated housewives and even the minimum literate housewives made brave attempts of building fortunes themselves, with no prior working experience. This was an indication of self worth. Moreover, direct selling, transformed women into savvy entrepreneurs. One of the article have examined varied working sector present day housewives in Assam are engaged in. Following are the types of work and job for housewives mentioned in the magazine survey only on the housewives of Assam.

Thus a significant change was noticed in the area of housewives’ participation in the part-time and non governmental jobs. A few years earlier only a
limited number of professionals like teaching, nursing and the like were considered suitable for women.

The women who paved the way for a new beginning in Assam and established a milestone in the area of self identity could be found in the following fields.

**First Assamese women in various sector**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First girls school</td>
<td>Dibrugarh M.E. School.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FA</td>
<td>Hemopropha Das</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.Sc.</td>
<td>Amalprabha Das</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHD</td>
<td>Dr. Kamala Raj and Tilottama Gogoi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elected Women Commissioner GMC</td>
<td>Somiron Das</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honours Graduate in Chemistry</td>
<td>Arunmoni Choudhury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geo Scientist</td>
<td>Sapna Devi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Engineer</td>
<td>Chitralekha Borkakati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemical Engineer</td>
<td>Depti Deka Raichoudhury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate from Mumbai J. J. Arts</td>
<td>Gayotree Dutta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electric Engineer</td>
<td>Rita Rajkhowa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanical Engineering Graduate</td>
<td>Bondita Phukan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemical Engineer</td>
<td>Suraja Begum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic Engineer</td>
<td>Gitima Das, Krishna Jinnat Sebrin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxford Ph.D holder</td>
<td>Dr. Minaxi Bhatacharjee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Doctor</td>
<td>Kashinath Barman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LMP Diploma</td>
<td>Susila Thomas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBBS</td>
<td>Dr. Rajani prabha Das</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree from foreign University Psychiatrist</td>
<td>Dr. Nirmal Prabha Chaliha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st women principal of medical college</td>
<td>Dr. Dipali Dutta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st women Jailor</td>
<td>Illu devi Baruah.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Food habits and women:

Industrialization has brought about radical changes in the matter of self identity of the housewives as new ranges of power kitchen materials like, dishwashers, washing machine, electric stove, microwave, freezer, natural gas burner, mixy grinder and various other range of commodities have helped in household activities. For entertainment television, computer and mobile telephone have been ... for housewives, leaving enough room for them to get engaged in entertainment and creative works. Food habits of educated women have changed drastically with the increase in the rate of educated women. While in earlier Assam, the brahmin widows had to abstain from eating non-vegetarian food. Simultaneously they were forced to turn into strict vegetarians. Eating out centres, clubs and fast food restaurants also have changed the food habit of both rural and urban Assam. In our survey, more than five hotels and restaurants were found in each locality of Guwahati. Ten to twelve hotels were there in the small towns in Kamrup. According to a number of housewives brahmin and upper castes, now a days family members do not impose any restrictions on taking non-vegetarian food. In the weekends, they prefer to eat out in fast food centres or in dhabas. With the changing concept of entertainment, even the middle class women admit their habit of drinking and smoking in family gatherings. However, due to duality in social setup, unlike in other metropolises women of Assam seem to be a little bit hesitant in public smoking and drinking.

The tribal populace in Kamrup constitutes 9.43% in Guwahati, 15.78% in Rangia and 7.21% in Hajo. In each tribal household, making and consuming of country liquor*, is a must and no restriction and duality prevail among women and men regarding consumption of liquor. Village women have started taking cooking lessons as well as for baking cake and biscuits. Even in local festivals like bihu**, they prefer to offer food with urban touch instead of Pithas and Larus.*** Several

* Laupani, Hazpani
** Colourful spring festival of Assam.
*** Local traditional food items made of rice during festivals of Assam.
women confided in an interview that gas, heater, stove, replaced firewood, and clay stove. Even the matriculate housewives in rural Boko, Palashbari, Kamalpur, Mirza and Dharapur have started to utilise their leisure time in creative pursuits. The broad perspectives of industrialization and its far-reaching impacts have influenced the habit and behaviours of the educated women to a great extent.

Sanskritization:

Sanskritization is a process by which a 'low' Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high and frequency of a " Twice born" caste. Mobility associated with Sanskritization results only in positional changes in the system and does not lead to any structural change. The areas influenced by sanskritization in Assam and Kamrup are as follows:

Cultural assimilation:

"Assimilation is a form of social adjustment, where individuals and groups begin to absorb slowly and gradually, somewhat unconsciously in the new circumstances in which they fit in. It results in the modification of social attitudes." For example in Assam cultural assimilation has been process of interpretation and fusion of memories, sentiments and attitudes of persons or groups by sharing each others' experience and glory.

"Ajan Pir", a social and religious reformer of Assam composed Jikir and Jari with that end in view.

To quote a few of them are as follows:

15. Ibid p. 37
17. Jikir and Jari are the devotional songs of Assam composed by Azanpir, in the 15th century. Jikir and jari were the reflection of the feelings of brotherhood between the Hindus and the Muslims of Assam.
* I do not discriminate Allah,
    Everybody is equal to me,
    be it Hindu or be it Muslim.
    All are, creatures of the same Allah or God.

** Abdul Malik, a famous literature and popular novelist penned down the immortal lines:
The Moghul came and became Assamese.
Who can distinguish who's who, who's Muslim
and who's Vaishavite?

***Religious tolerance was expressed through various devotional songs***
The four Vedas speak of knowledge. The Koran, and Puranas say the same, oh, knowledgable!

Even Mahapurush Sankardev, who linked Assam with the rest of India, explained similar messages in the "Kirtonghosa"

His chief disciple, Madhavdev also expressed the same sentiment of cultural assimilation and unity in the Namghosa

*“মেহ মন্ত তীন পব নাই, অ আল্লা
মেহ মন্ত তীন পব নাই,
হিন্দু কি মুসলীম এক আধার ফরমান
মেহ মন্ত একটিভাব”

**”বুব মোগল আহি হাল অসমীয়া
কাব বঙ্গ দেও
গীয়ানে মহাগীর্যা”

***”চাবিরেধ গিয়ানকে কয় এই আল্লাক, কোন পুবানে একোকে কেইছে
বৃত্তিবা মহন্ত লোক।”

18. Like Bharta no places are there in the world and Ramanama is the best solution all the problems, therefore worship him.
Thus Assamese housewives have never experienced any sort of religious fanatism and communalism which reflect in the increasing rate of various inter caste marriages, inter state marriages and therefore we have witnessed the distinct characteristics of Indianization in the assamese culture. The increasing importance of education have made the reflection of cultural assimilation more prolific.

**The Y2K family & Kamrup, Development & changes, A case study**

Attitude towards changes and life, has drastically but positively changed in Assam, our survey carried out in the village areas, indicate that a handful of housewives in Kamrup are able to understand Hindi or English. In our survey conducted, there are 50 family in 8 blocks had inter cast marriage and In our correspondence with Assamese American society in USA and Assamese society in London*, we have come to know Assamese housewives in America are still maintaining their traditional identity and are personally strong and independent. Two hundred of assamese housewives are from the district of Kamrup, he stated but this in not official.

The new characteristics seen in the millennium, observed in the family, relating to the matter of changing self expression, habit and behaviour of the housewives are accordingly.

- Live-in-relationship is, no longer a taboo, the modern women today donot hesitate to start any relation other than marriage.

- In this connection mention should be made of the American social setup were in the year between 1970 and 1987, the number of single parent families of all races were doubled. By 1990, one out of every families in American was headed by a single parent. In India we have observed the

* Ritu Lahkar, a top class business executive in Chicago expressed that
same. While in Assam and Kamrup single parent families have hot been unknown as fathers could die, or run away or discard a wife or mothers could die when extended family of the single parents, usually cocooned the broken house, but with the disappearance of joint family, single mother and fathers are to take the responsibility of household. In our survey we have observed five single parent in each two hundred households.

- Widows and divorcees face no restriction in remarry which was a taboo few years back. In our interview with hundreds of divorces and widows in the areas of Guwahati we could arrive at a conclusion that small percentage of such women get a chance to remarry and social perception on widow remarriage and the remarriage of divorcee is sceptical. In rural areas widow marriages are hardly seen. The changes, we have seen in the attitude of the public on widow remarriage and divorcees been possible due to the effect of education which has made the people more considerate and progressive than before. Because in recent past widows and divorcees had hardly any due place in society.

- Mention should be made of few cases with an exception. Concept of love child, and such extra ordinary attitude on family setup was not unknown to Assam. Prior to independence" Chandra Prabha Saikiani, a forerunner of women liberation had gathered the courage to raise her love child with dignity is a case lying in the pages of assamese history. To add the SOS* villages has raised many a destitute babies have found in many parts of Kamrup and near by districts depicts the story of duality in unwed mothers, a reverse development in the matter of attitude transparency in the society. Moreover concepts and relations like lesbianism, homosexuality are coming to the surface too. In this matter as case study we have talked to ten gay members and lesbians who confided that they are aware of Ashok Rai

* A world wide welfare organazation to sheltar homeless child.
** A gay activitist.
Ravi** and the legal sanction given to the gays to get marry, in other countries of the world. In rural areas women are less vocal about this, Similarly cases of extra marital and premarital relation are very common in all classes of society here, we observe, but none have been willing to acknowledge publicly for the fear of criticism.

**Children and Mother**

Across the world, most single parent home today are run by women, who have been divorced, widowed or abandoned. Women who's husband are working in another city or area or women who have adopted child despite being single for mental reasons, are also increasing. In India although single mother are viewed with a compassionate eye, yet single mother successful and courageous Mention should be made of few single mothers* who have attained stardom in their respective field by dint of their own effort in a period when there were a very few educated housewives in the society and no such facilities for education were evident. Our interview with the children of a few single mother we found at children are more sincere and independent, more under standing in this setup and in this regard mention should be made of various creches in Kamrup, because of its significant role in the matter of granting qualities time to the housewives.

"In 1840, Creches were established in France. 'In 1860' in Britain and in almost all European countries**. By 1900 Indian Metropolies are having creches. In Guwahati 1st ever creches were founded by Dr. Usha Rani Choudhury, the owner of 'Modern Crutch' when a previous survey released in 1995 that there were more then 10 creches in Guwahati**. In the other block of Kamrup Sonapur has

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* Nirmal Prabha Bardoloi, Chandra Prabha Saikiani, Justice Mira Sarma


** P.P. Kids tance, Sisters, Merry Gold, Rose Broke, My Child, Ulubari, Rupnagar, Rose buds
one, Borjar has one Puthimari has two and other district of Assam, Guwahati, Nowgoan, golaghat, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, N.C. Hills, Digboi, and almost all toward has creches, established. With new avenues for regurgitation activities, the burden of educated and working single mothers could be lessened by creches, which takecare of the babies professionally. Women's hospitals, baby clinics, children park, baby sitters, public aid, Kinder garden schools has already mushrooming and there by left enough scope for the housewives to review their role as supermom who perform the duty of child rearing and their career with elan. According to a few housewives—they believe in giving quality time to their children and modern way of living has made this possible moreover the attitude of the husbands has been very positive. Therefore there is a need to analyse the changing attitude of the husbands toward their wives.

Changing Role of husbands in modern Assam

As New Delhi based psychologist Sujata Sharma observes that "men are becoming more understanding and intelligent and have started respecting their educated and career oriented housewives as equal partners in Family and life", We have also observed the changes of the attitude of the husband toward their female counter part. Interview with twenty housewives, each from every locality in Kamrup we have observed that.

> Few husbands from upper and lower middle-class want their wives to work outside, and are willing to look after their households. Education is now regarded as an eligibility criterion in the "marriage market". Boys from any race or class hardly are willing to marry an uneducated girl.

> A hand full of husbands help their wives in urban Guwahati in households like cooking, looking after children, help in studies, taking them to park and family holidays.

> Only few male from kamrup think that helping their wives will be a shame on their personality and they would be branded as "Tiruta Serua" or "Sub-

22. Indian Today, Feb 28, 1997, Pg. 100, and 101
missive to wives". If they do so.

> With the advent of SAHD. Stay-at-home Dad in Japan, where they are called Zijai Assam also has the tradition of keeping Ghar Juwai* or Son in law who stays at 'mother in laws' Even now a days many husbands easily accommodate in the Urban Guwahati with their in laws place to save money and due to lack of proper residence in main areas, we observed.

> Male chauvinism is a total no for the parents, who want to marry off their daughter, to educated and liberal because educated girls are no longer regarded a burden. But one cannot deny the growing greed for materialistic attainment in marriage and family.

> Long distance marriage, are not uncommon in Kamrup, Few male workers work outside the city and adaptable in household works. Even in village areas husband stays in urban Guwahati, while wives work in villages are common in almost four in each villages in Kamrup.

—In major issues like purchasing household goods, procreation of children, education of children, the opinion of both male and female are considered important as we have observed, but years back it was the husbands who dictated the family.

Among the higher class, comprised of families working in tea garden owner of real estate, and like, social participation is limited to joining different clubs**, Rural areas also have established clubs. In Sualkuchi as we observed, there are three women clubs, similarly in the areas of Boko, Palashbari, Kamalpur, Dharapur, Mirza each block has at least one club where the participation of wives are satisfactory. Clubs and organization in both rural and urban Kamrup for sure have been providing the basic platform for social participation and enhanchement of individuality of both educated and noneducated housewives.

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* Son-in-law in assamese family who stay in father-in-laws place.
** Few of such clubs in Guwahati are Guwahati clubs, R.N.B. club, Lions club, Rotary club, India club.
Mother in laws and housewives

Interview with mother in laws in many urban and rural Kamrup, it is evident that, daughter-in-law should be observed, after abetted by in laws* such medieval outlook are no longer present in our society. Mother in laws are nowadays more tolerant, and co-operative with their daughter in laws and their changing mode of lifestyle. Educated housewives are asserting their freedom of expression, evident in many forms in the households. Few cases we have studied on dowry, there were two in Jorhat, 5 in Dibrugarh 3 in Rongia and 10 in Guwahati during 2000 to 2001. Where in all cases mother in laws were found guilty. In this matter as we observed, that this hostality in behaviour against daughter in laws were never a part of Assamese culture, It is only because of various inter state marriages, Assamese girls are married to boys from various communities where dowry related customs are present. Cultural assimilation of various community like, Bengali, North Indian, where dowry related customs were present, normally Assamese families are great example of peaceful co-existence between daughter in laws and mother-in-laws.

Muslim housewives in Assam

The religious population in Assam are varied and diverse. Kamrup is no exception to this the religious setup in Kamrup are asfollowes:

Table - 2

|                | PC          |  |
|----------------|-------------|
| Hindus         | 148,6526    | 74.32% |
| Muslims        | 46,7544     | 23.38% |
| Christians     | 31,820      | 1.59%  |
| Sikhs          | 33,31       | 0.17%  |
| Buddhists      | 1,077       | 0.05%  |
| Jains          | 5,622       | 0.28%  |
| Others         | 14.36       | 0.07%  |
| Not Stated     | 2,715       | 0.14%  |

Source**

* Sahuee Goroka Bwari Baba

** Table 1.14 of Statistical Hand Book Assam 2001, p. 34

There are no example of communal violence and religious clashes in Assam. The Muslim comprised of 23.38%, have been contributing to the overall changes taking place in Assam. Muslim housewives in Assam and Kamrup district are in a privileged position then those residing in any part of the country and abroad. Interview with a few active Muslim educated housewives and few uneducated housewife in mostly rural Kamrup justify that a few educated housewives started questioning the justification of Talaq. Guwahati Hight Court has on the Application of a housewife "Zinnat, Fatima Rasid Vs Md. Iqbal Anawar" gave the historic verdict in 1993 that "Muslim man on the precause of own wishes cannot divorce their wives by simply pronouncing. "Talaq Talaq and Talaq" In that case a wife can ask for judicial help Zinnat after a course of physical harassment applied for justice and was asking for maintenance in 29/8/90. The court directed that "talaq" should be on the assistance of a third party who first should try reconciliation and only after that divorce should be granted. Majority of women in the Muslim dominated areas of Dharapur, Hajo, Baihatachariali and Hatigoan, Hedayatpur, Karbarstan, Garigaon, Machkhuwa, Aathgaon, Amingaon in city Guwahati, we have observed are aware of their rights. Majority of women in those areas are ignorant of Landmark cases of Shahbno case24. There is no "Burque" clad women in Assam and Kamrup except few in the District of Goalpara, although girls and women are not allowed to enter in to the Mosque. Majority of educated housewives in kamrup in the areas mentioned, are well aware of the 'Holy Quran' and well versed in various form of religious instructions prescribed by the religion in the matter of four types of talaq*. We have talked to a few Muslim housewives and hundreds of educated housewives from the minority areas of Kamrup in a random basis and observed that educated housewives have been inspired by radical Muslim thinker. Ismat Sugtai**. Media like : TV, News-

24. Case, on 23th 1985, gave the historic verdict that husband in bound to give proper maintance to her divorced wife.

* Talaq–UL–Sunnat, Alaq–UL–Biddat, Ela, Ziher

** A Gyanpith awardee and revolutionary radical thinker.
paper, Radio have exposed themselves to the various fatwa lavied on Taslima Nasrin*. And Salman Rushide**. There is a of differences in the thought and belief between the uneducated and educated muslim housewives. As we have observeverd, uneducated and illiterate housewives in few rural areas of Kamrup have dubious citizenship25 is also a matter of concern to Muslim housewives also marching towards self identity and marriages between muslim girls and Hindu or boy from Other religion have been a very common affair.

Other religion like Christian, Buddhist, Jain and follower of Satya Sai Baba, Anukul Thakur, Pras japati Brahmakumari, Vedic society of Vivekanand Kendra, Krishna Guru has a handful of housewives who has started believing in their self-identity and considered religion moral booster to their faith on god and themselves. Assamese educated wives are religious but the number of women who visit Namghar*** are decreasing in urban areas last few years as we observed. To visit the Namgarh still a must activity for the rural housewives. There are rare incidents regarding religious restriction on women except the Barpeta Namghar, where women are not allowed to enter the premises. Even few Xatras$ do not allow women to centre into the Namghar on holy occasions. Few Assamese housewives worship Jai Santoshima, and Devi Kamakhya as many as god and goddesses. To majority of assemese housewives religion is a strong and positive force which have been from time to time inspiring women towards spiritual attainment.

* writter and poet of repute in Bangladesh, became controversial after commenting on Islamic law in her novel Lajja. Fanatic muslim leaders lavied Fatwa on her. She is in exile now.

** A writer, for his novel Satanic-Verses, Fatwa was declared on him.

25. A report on the muslim women in Assam, A judicial review published in The Sentinal, a local daily, April, 2000, pg. 5

*** Place of worship for the follower of Ek Saran Namdharma.

$ Religious campus mainly established by Shree Manta Shankar Deva and are situated in the river island Mazuli.
Media and housewives

The healthy trend of increasing number of housewives, joining in the field of acting in television, movies and theatres is a departure from the age-old customs, which prohibited women from taking part in acting. It is the reflection of the growing sense of self-identity of the housewives in Assam. Mention should be made of Aidew Handique the first Assamese Heroine of 'Joymoti' who had to remain unmarried for her participation in acting. A survey on the media participation and an interview with the president, assamese film technician association*, we have found that between the year 1995 to 2003 more than 50 educated new married corner have been joining the film industry of Assam. According to a host of reputed film directors, we interviewed, the participation of educated housewives in the media as actress, director, make-up artist, scriptures, editor are the sign of positive trend of women social and cultural participation. Guwahati Dooradarshan has a number of registered women directors**.

Few none governmental organizations*** and more then hundreds of NGO are immensely helping housewives from all sectors to stand on their own feet and to realise their worth in the process of change and development in the society. Mention should be made of the first group of women cultivators in Assam comprised of mostly housewives. In our visit to Biswanath Chariali in the Sunitpur district, Assam, we have talked to twenty of women cultivator trainee. In our personal chat with Rumi Das, Leeli Kuch, Bimala Mahanta, Manjo Barthakur,

* Sibanan Baruah.
** Geeti Baruah, Pratima Baruah, Jinti Borthakur, Leena Rahman, Mridula Baruah, Tribeni Bora and few others total of 25
Boro women justice forum,
Mitalee Sangha establised in 1969
Asom Pradesika Mahila Somity.
NEN (North-East-Net work)
Moonprobha Das we were overwhelmed, after hearing their exemplary story of motivation and full support from their husband to join in a field where no housewives did dare to enter. We have talked to the director of DRDA Shri Madhavananda Rajkhowa under who’s supervision and guidance all the members of the self help group, 'Lakhimi Mahila Krishak Sanstha' have joined in the training for cultivator.

Changes never take place overnight. It is a silent revolution. Change is a complex concept. Indian mode of changes are peculiar by nature, because few changes we observe, are superficial and few are latent by nature. Indian society is a blend of modernism-conservatism. The nature of opinion, reaction, views, values, principles are different to each families of India. Education and a few allied factors are immensely contributing to the personality growth of women, evident in their style of dresses, mode and behaviour, a close departure from the age old traditions that dictated a wife's worth only inside the household. But today women are seeking their own identity and seem not at all satisfied with the role they used to play as daughter, wife and mother to someone.