Part III

Chapter VI

Representational Role of the Legislators

We have discussed in our earlier chapters the demographic sketch of the legislative elites and their role orientation and attitudes throwing sufficient light on the role of the opposition. In this chapter, an attempt has been made to analyse the legislative elites at work inside the legislature. This chapter has been devoted to the content analysis of the 8th Assam Legislative Assembly Proceedings with a view to determine the nature and extent of participation of the legislative elites in the proceedings of the legislature. It helps us an understanding the representational role of the legislators from broader perspectives.

The legislators as the representatives of various constituencies are supposed to solve the problems of their respective constituencies. People complain about the problems of their constituencies and at the same time they have personal complaints also. They expect that an MLA
being an influential person would do towards the redressal of their grievances.

Representation being one of the most pervasive and important processes of political life, it was found virtually in all the political structures. However, the elected legislators had been the focus of the most normative and empirical enquiries of representation. The special fiduciary relationship of the legislators with the sovereign electorate had formed the basis of classical doctrine of legislative functioning.

Representation had been, by far, more easily discussed than defined. Many theorists had viewed representation as status, the concordance of two separate and definable qualities, the will of the represented and the behaviour of the representatives, while another approach regard representation as a system of actions which serve to

1 Jha Dayadhar, State Legislature in India, Abhinav Publication, New Delhi, 1977, pp 311.
3 Heinz Euler, Micro-Macro Political Analysis (Chicago, Aldine, 1969) Chapter 4
“facilitate interchange between the authority and the spontaneous groupings of the society”\textsuperscript{5}. From this perspective, representation had been a type of interaction between the social groupings and the political decision makers\textsuperscript{6}. In this context the concept of representation had largely pervaded the study of the Assam Legislative Assembly.

The representational role of the Legislative Elite embraces a number of aspects both within and outside the Assembly, which may even sometimes contradict and come into clash with each other. As such every legislator has to project a role or set of roles perceived by them which might vary from one legislator to another. For obvious reasons, a legislator belonging to the ruling party might perceive his/her role in one way and a member belonging to the Opposition parties may view them differently. Yet the two might have lot of common ground to cover particularly in


\textsuperscript{6} Davidson, Roger H. "Representational Roles of Congressmen" (paper read at the 64th annual meetings of the American Political Science Association, Washington DC), Sept 1968, mimeographed, p 1.
terms of constituency linkage, which they embody in their political personality and which as such leaves an imprint on their performance and behaviour.

The representational role of the legislators had been fundamental in truly measuring their legislative roles. The legislators as representatives performs a number of roles in various capacities in the Assembly. Most of their roles outside the Assembly could not be subjected to empirical study due to the lack of authentic data on such issues. As such the representational role of the legislators inside the legislature had received serious attention, since such study could go a long way to enable us to throw sufficient light on the legislative behaviour and role, particularly their representational roles.

The representational roles of the legislative elites cover a wide variety of aspects that they perform as the representatives of the constituencies. Besides, the legislative functions and roles, there are certain roles which the legislators are seen to perform. As such without focussing
adequate light on such roles, the understanding of the representational role will be rather simplistic.

It had been found during our survey on the legislative role of the legislators, that the members used various constitutional methods to represent the demands and issues of the people of their respective constituencies. It had been observed that while a few members were active in Question Hour, others were active in redressing the grievances of the people through the methods like – Calling Attention Notice, demand for half an Hour discussion, Zero Hour discussion and the like. Members utilised such methods to draw the attention of the Government to certain serious matters of urgent public importance. Hence, for the purpose of our convenience, we have proposed to focus on the representational role of the legislators from that perception.

**Calling Attention Notice:**

The provision for the Calling Attention Notices was first made in the year 1954. Prior to this, the need for a precise procedure to raise an important and urgent issue was
being felt considerably. The procedure of bringing an adjournment motion which was in the nature of a censure motion against the Government was restricted in its scope in the existing constitutional set-up. It was, therefore, considered that some procedure might be devised whereby members might have an opportunity of bringing urgent matters to the attention of the Government.  

In the modern parliamentary procedure, the idea of introducing Calling Attention Notices in the rules of procedure had been purely an Indian innovation. It combined the asking of a question for answer with supplementaries and short comment in which all points of views were expressed concisely and precisely and the Government got adequate opportunity to state its case. Sometimes, it gave the opportunity to the members to criticise the Government, directly or indirectly and to bring to the surface the failure or inadequate action of government in an important matter.

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7 Puri, Shashilata, Legislative Elites in an Indian State, Abhinav Publication, New Delhi, p 240.
The chief source of the legislators for tabling the Calling Attention Notice had been the daily newspapers. Sometimes they were to be based on private information of a member or on correspondence between him and his constituents.

1. A member could with the previous permission of the Speaker, call the attention of a minister to any matter of urgent public importance and of recent occurrence and the minister could make a brief statement or ask for time to make a statement.\(^8\)

2. There could be no debate on such statement at the time it was made.\(^9\)

3. Not more than one such matter could be raised at the same sitting.\(^10\)

4. In the event of more than one matter being presented for the same day, priority could be given to the matter

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\(^8\) Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Assam Legislative Assembly, 1997, pp 34.
\(^9\) ibid pp 34.
\(^10\) ibid pp 34.
which was, in the opinion of the Speaker, more urgent and important\textsuperscript{11}.

5. The proposed matter could be raised after the questions and before the list of business was entered upon and at no other time during the sitting of the House\textsuperscript{12}.

Calling Attention Notice had been an instrument of Parliamentary Democracy and became popular and viable by the beginning of 60's in the Loksabha of India. Since then calling attention notice relating to matter of urgent public importance had received great importance. The Speaker of the Loksabha realised that adjournment motions had no real procedural opportunity to raise a matter of urgent public importance. As such Calling Attention Notices could be the best way to focus on these issues. As a consequence, there was a tremendous fall in the number of notices for

\textsuperscript{11} ibid pp 34.
\textsuperscript{12} ibid pp 34.
adjournment motion and considerable increase in the numbers of Calling Attention Notices in the Loksabha\textsuperscript{13}.

In the 8\textsuperscript{th} Assam Legislative Assembly, this procedure was used to a great extent and the figures available in the Assembly showed that members made considerable use of this rule and tried to ventilate the grievances of their constituents through this procedure. Table 6.1 shows the numbers of Calling Attention Notices tabled and number of notices admitted.

Table: 6.1

**Calling Attention Notice (CAN) tabled and admitted in the 8th Assam Legislative Assembly (1986-1990)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CAN*/Year-session</th>
<th>No. of Calling Attention Notice tabled</th>
<th>No. of Calling Attention Notice admitted</th>
<th>PC of admitted CAN</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>33.33</td>
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<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27.27</td>
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<tr>
<td>1988</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>53.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>54.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>53.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Prepared on the basis of data available in the proceedings of 8th Assam Legislative Assembly.

CAN* - Calling Attention Notice
Table: 6.2

Subject matter of Calling Attention Notice tabled during the Different Sessions of 8th Assam Legislative Assembly (1986-90)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session/Subject matter</th>
<th>Law&amp; Order</th>
<th>Allegation against officer</th>
<th>Strike</th>
<th>Social Problems</th>
<th>Corruption/ Malpractice</th>
<th>Border dispute</th>
<th>Insurgency</th>
<th>Govt. Policy</th>
<th>Forest/ Wildlife/ Eviction</th>
<th>Eviction</th>
<th>Natural Calamities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>01</td>
<td></td>
<td>02</td>
<td></td>
<td>01</td>
<td>01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>03</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>04</td>
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<tr>
<td>1989</td>
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<td>01</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>01</td>
<td></td>
<td>02</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>01</td>
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<td>01</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>01</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Prepared on the basis of data available in the proceedings of 8th Assam Legislative Assembly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session/Subject</th>
<th>Infiltration</th>
<th>Deforestation</th>
<th>Appointment matter</th>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Adulterated drugs</th>
<th>Human security</th>
<th>Health services</th>
<th>Deportation</th>
<th>Animal husbandry</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>01</td>
<td></td>
<td>01</td>
<td>02</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>1987</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>03</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>01</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>1988</td>
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<td>01</td>
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<tr>
<td>1989</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
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<td></td>
<td>01</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>02</td>
<td></td>
<td>01</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Prepared on the basis of data available in the proceedings of 8th Assam Legislative Assembly.
The above tables indicate that the members in the 8th Assam Legislative Assembly made extensive use of this parliamentary device for ventilating the grievances of the people. Most of the issues raised in the Assembly were matter of state importance. More notices could not be admitted either because of short duration of the session or disinterest of the House to take up such matter for discussion.

Members sometimes raised certain issues which could have been raised as Calling Attention Notice. According to Rule 3, of the Rules of Procedure and conduct of Business in the Assam Legislative Assembly, not more than one such matter could be raised at the same sitting\textsuperscript{14}. But members sometimes raised several issues as Calling Attention Notice, in the same sitting for which only one of such matters could be discussed taking into consideration the importance of the issues raised. For example, Abdul Jabbar (UMF) raised a Calling Attention Notice regarding the strike of teacher’s on various demands\textsuperscript{15} to draw the attention of the government. Silvius Condpan INC(I)

\textsuperscript{14} Rule of Procedure and Conduct of Business in ALA, 1997, pp 34
\textsuperscript{15} Assam Legislative Assembly Debate, dt. 15\textsuperscript{th} Oct 1987, pp 82-83.
raised another Calling Attention Notice in the same sitting on the matter of health\textsuperscript{16}. Golok Rajbongshi INC (I) raised a Calling Attention Notice to draw the attention of the Government regarding the irregularities and misappropriation in the purchase of X-ray unit in Guwahati Medical College Hospital\textsuperscript{17}. In the same sitting another Calling Attention Notice was raised by Shahidul Islam (UMF) regarding the irregularities and apathy of the state zoo authorities. It appeared that members were unfamiliar with the procedural knowledge of Calling Attention Notice to focus light on the issues raised. Even sometimes the members demanded discussion on the reported scandal of the ruling party in a Newspaper published on 16\textsuperscript{th} Feb, 1990 which was then a sub-judicial matter. The matter was raised by Hemen Das(UMF)\textsuperscript{18}. Member Joinath Sarma (AGP) pointed out that since the matter was sub-judice, there could not be any discussion in the House\textsuperscript{19}. Golok Rajbongshi INC (I) argued that except for the sub-judicial point, the rest of the matter could

\textsuperscript{16} Assam Legislative Assembly Debate, dt. 4\textsuperscript{th} April 1989, pp 76.
\textsuperscript{17} ibid pp 79.
\textsuperscript{18} Assam Legislative Assembly Debate, dt. 28\textsuperscript{th} Feb 1990, pp 7.
\textsuperscript{19} ibid
be discussed in the House\textsuperscript{20}. The Speaker pointed out that the matter was sub-judicial under the rule and therefore there could not be any discussion on the matter\textsuperscript{21}.

Table 6.3 shows that a declining trend of admittance of the Calling Attention Notice raised in the Assembly. In 1986, the highest number of Calling Attention Notice was tabled, out of which only six were admitted. Similar was the fate of the Calling Attention Notice raised in the subsequent years: - 3 out of 11 in 1987, 7 out of 13 in 1988, 6 out of 11 in 1989 and 7 out of 13 in 1990 respectively were admitted. In spite of non-admittance of the Calling Attention Notice, the members belonging to both the treasury and the Opposition benches were successful in drawing the attention of the Government to the basic problems of the state.

A noticeable aspect in the legislative process of the 8\textsuperscript{th} Assam Legislative Assembly is that the members were found to be interested in involving themselves in debate on a Calling Attention Notice matter which was not permissible under the

\textsuperscript{20} ibid
\textsuperscript{21} ibid, pp 8.
Rules of Procedure and conduct of business in the Assam Legislative Assembly. Responding to the statement made by the minister of industry and commerce on a Calling Attention Notice raised by Bharat Narah (AGP) on a scam in the Assam Industrial Development Corporation (AIDC), Joinath Sarma (AGP) put a supplementary to the minister. The Speaker pointed out that there could not be debate on the matter. Similarly, the House witnessed uproar over the statement of the Health Minister regarding a Calling Attention Notice raised by Jagat Hazarika (AGP) on the death of a large number of people of encephalitis in Lakhimpur and Dhemaji due to alleged insufficient medical care. Members both from the ruling and the Opposition benches criticised the health minister for apathy and negligence in taking up the issue seriously. Dr. A K Dey (UMF) pointed out that mere spray of DDT would not serve the purpose. There were some sort of vaccines which needed to be imported from Japan for prevention and treatment of encephalitis.

22 Rule of Procedure and Conduct of Business of ALA, 1997, pp 34.
23 Assam Legislative Assembly Debate, dt. 23rd March 1988, pp 74-80.
encephalitis\textsuperscript{25}. The health ministers assured the House to consider the import of vaccine and said ironically that if health minister’s visit to Lakhimpur could cure the patients, he was ready to go\textsuperscript{26}. The members expressed dissatisfaction over remarks of the ministers\textsuperscript{27}.

Table 6.3

Calling Attention Notices raised by the members

party-wise

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year/ CAN*</th>
<th>No. of Calling Attention Notice tabled</th>
<th>No. of CAN Raised by Ruling Party</th>
<th>No. of CAN raised by Opposition</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>1988</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source – Assam Legislative Assembly Debates,

CAN*- Calling Attention Notices (1985-1990)

\textsuperscript{25} ibid, pp 68.
\textsuperscript{26} ibid, pp 69.
\textsuperscript{27} ibid, pp 69.
The table indicates that the Opposition members tabled as many as 36 Calling Attention Notice to draw the attention of the Government towards the matters of urgent importance. One noticeable aspect had been that the members belonging to the ruling party also raised Calling Attention Notice to criticise the Government\textsuperscript{28}. Even sometimes it was found that the members of the ruling party tabled Calling Attention Notice accusing the Government of corruption and mal-administration. It is thus clear that members of both the ruling and the Opposition benches actively participated in the functioning of legislature.

It clearly indicated that the largest number of Calling Attention Notices was tabled on charges of corruption and malpractices in various sectors of the Government. The allegations were of various kinds. Dilip Kumar Saikia (AGP) tabled a Calling Attention Notice to draw the attention of the Government regarding the misappropriation of Rs. 51 Lac in the department of Education. The minister, however, denied the charge of misappropriation and made the Government stand

\textsuperscript{28} Assam Legislative Assembly Debate, dt. 7\textsuperscript{th} April 1986, pp 345.
clear on that matter. Similarly, Dr. A K Dey (UMF) tabled a Calling Attention Notice with serious charges of corruption and irregularities in the department of Education\textsuperscript{29}. Bharat Ch. Narah (AGP) raised a matter to draw the attention of the Government to big scam in the AIDC\textsuperscript{30}. Abdul Muktadir Choudhury INC(I) tabled a Calling Attention Notice in order to draw the attention of the Government regarding the alleged corruption and misappropriation of funds in the Assam Agricultural University\textsuperscript{31}.

Hemen Das CPI (M) tabled a Calling Attention Notice to draw the attention of the Government towards misappropriation and malpractices in the Rural Development as reported in a newspaper\textsuperscript{32}. Thus the main grievance was against corruption, malpractice and irregularities in various department of the Government. Most often the ministers made evasive reply and did not furnish full facts. Such statement of the minister did not convince the members. However, there was no denying the fact that the attention of the Government and the public was drawn

\textsuperscript{29} Assam Legislative Assembly Debate, dt. 6\textsuperscript{th} April 1987, pp 60.  
\textsuperscript{30} Assam Legislative Assembly Debate, dt. 23\textsuperscript{rd} March 1988, pp 74-80.  
\textsuperscript{31} Assam Legislative Assembly Debate, dt. 6\textsuperscript{th} May 1988, pp 88.  
\textsuperscript{32} Assam Legislative Assembly Debate, dt. 9\textsuperscript{th} March 1990, pp 18-19.
towards the grievances of the people. This was a clear instance of the representational functions of the legislators.

A number of Calling Attention Notice was tabled by the legislators on the matter of Government policy. Some of the major instances could be illustrated here. Sheikh Abdul Hamid (UMF) tabled a Calling Attention Notice to draw the attention of the Government regarding its apathy and negligence of the Government leading to crisis of STATFED. Kusumbar Gogoi (AGP) tabled a Calling Attention Notice to draw the attention of the Government regarding the decision of the Government to close down the Namrup Fertiliser factory. Members cutting across party lines strongly objected the decision of the Government to close down the factory. Sheikh Abdul Hamid (UMF) raised a matter regarding the Government policy for providing text books to the students free of cost, as a result of which important text books were not available in the market. The Government admitted the problems faced by the students.

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33 Assam Legislative Assembly Debate, dt 16th December 1986, p 27.
34 Assam Legislative Assembly Debate, dt. 16th Dec 1986, pp 27-29.
and assured the member to provide the books soon\textsuperscript{35}. Similarly, Sheikh Abdul Hamid (UMF) tabled a Calling Attention Notice regarding the eviction of about 150 encroachers’ families from Kirakara, Dhalpur, Fafuratli and Joychar in Mangaldoi subdivision\textsuperscript{36}. The minister assured the member to take all necessary steps for allotment/settlement of suitable land to the eligible persons including the evicted families\textsuperscript{37}. Chandra Mohan Patowary (AGP) tabled a Calling Attention Notice to draw the attention of the House regarding the industrial policy of the Government which posed a threat to the future of the industries in Assam\textsuperscript{38}. It appeared that the members of the ruling party were found to be critical regarding the policies of the Government.

Similarly, a large number of Calling Attention Notice was tabled, particularly by the members of the Opposition charging the Government for its failure to maintain law and order. For example, Silvius Condpan INC(I) tabled such a motion of

\textsuperscript{35} Assam Legislative Assembly Debate, dt. 1\textsuperscript{st} April 1987, pp 76.
\textsuperscript{36} Assam Legislative Assembly Debate, dt. 11\textsuperscript{th} Aug 1989, pp 101.
\textsuperscript{37} ibid, pp 102.
\textsuperscript{38} Assam Legislative Assembly Debate, dt. 10\textsuperscript{th} Oct 1990, pp 55-59.
accusing the ruling AGP Government of all round failure to provide for human security. The Home Minister assured the member to take all the necessary steps. Ardhendu Kr. Dey (UMF) tabled a Calling Attention Notice demanding the resignation of Home Minister for deteriorating law and order situation. The excerpt was as follows: "Sir, we have noticed the deterioration of the law and order situation within the state and it was presumed previously that only the Opposition parties were demanding the resignation of the Home Minister and not the others, but it had been a matter of great regret that the All Assam Student Union which gave birth to the AGP also demanded the same. Sir, there had been a news that appeared in the "Sadinia Prahari", and Assamese news paper dated 13th Nov, 1986, with the caption "Why resignation of the Home minister is demanded?" Naren Tanti (AGP) tabled a Calling Attention Notice to draw the attention of the House to a news item published in a local newspaper regarding the death of a

39 Assam Legislative Assembly Debate, dt. 31st March, 1986, pp 56.
40 ibid, pp 57.
41 Assam Legislative Assembly Debate, dt. 12th Dec 1986, pp 32.
42 ibid
person in police custody\textsuperscript{43}. Similarly, Rashidul Haque (UMF) tabled a Calling Attention Notice charging the Government with failure to provide security to minority community in in the Bandardubi massacre\textsuperscript{44}. Debeswar Bora (AGP) put a Calling Attention Notice to draw the attention of the Government to a news item that was published in the 'Dristikon' on 1\textsuperscript{st} Jan 1987, regarding the mysterious death of two ladies in Farkating. The member expressed concern at the slow process of inquiry and pointed out that there had been a failure of law and order to provide security to people. The minister assured the member to provide for impartial enquiry into the matter\textsuperscript{45}.

Certain serious matters like infiltration, deportation of foreigners, ecological issues like deforestation, insurgency and natural calamities remained unaddressed in the Assembly. The legislators had more often than not drawn the attention of the Government towards corruption, malpractices in various departments law and order, health, security of the people, and irregularities in health department. Thereby they had been able

\textsuperscript{43} Assam Legislative Assembly Debate, dt. 25\textsuperscript{th} March 1988, p 48.
\textsuperscript{44} Assam Legislative Assembly Debate, dt. 4\textsuperscript{th} April 1990, p 72.
\textsuperscript{45} Assam Legislative Assembly Debate, dt. 12\textsuperscript{th} March 1987, pp 56-58.
to persuade the Government to focus its policy towards the problems. Sometimes certain actions had also been taken by the Government. The members of the Assembly utilised their time to raise certain basic problems effecting the people as a whole and thereby exhorted the Government to take steps for the redress of their grievances.

The procedure for Calling Attention Notice had enabled the legislature to keep the Government on its toes, by way of giving explanation immediately on a vital matter of general public importance. The procedure had enabled the Government to state facts or its decisions to deal effectively with the matter with the knowledge and the feeling that it has the support of the House. It is a short and swift method of raising, dealing with and bringing to conclusion an important matter in which members, who had given notices, were entitled to take equal part without any party whip and without coming to painful determination by dividing on a formal or specific motion. No specific conclusions were generally recorded. Only the atmosphere could be surcharged with feeling on all sides of the
House and each member was free to interpret the short discussion in his/her own light and to come to his/her own conclusion.

**Zero Hour Discussion:**

The legislature has not been a merely law making body. It has become more and more a multi-functional institution performing a variety of roles – many of which being inter-related and often meshing with one another. Any attempt at a comprehensive identification of the roles and analysis of the functions of modern legislature may be quite misleading and may even amount to pettifogging i.e. – it may befog more and enlighten less.

A part from representational, grievance-ventilation had been one of the cardinal roles and functions of a legislature. In fact, the primary functions of a legislature in a modern democracy had been to represent the people. In recent decades, emphasis has shifted more and more to the representational and grievance ventilation role of the legislature, both at the state as well as national levels. Because, legislature is a people's
institution par excellence. It is the apex law making body at the state level through which people seek to realise their aspirations, urges and expectations, ventilate their grievances and difficulties and even articulate their passions, anxieties and frustrations. Legislature represents the changing moods and needs of the people. It had been not only a microcosm and mirror of the people, but also a barometer of their mood and pulse rate\textsuperscript{46}.

The time immediately following the Question Hour had come to be popularly known as the ‘Zero Hour’. It had been a zero hour in more than one sense. Since it had been a non-existent hour. It starts at 12 O’ clock which is zero hour of the day. It came to call an ‘Hour’ also because very often it continues for one full hour, until the House rose for launch at 1 O’ clock. Nobody knows what matter might crop-up during this period or what kind of attack may be launched against the Government.

\textsuperscript{46} Kashyap, Subhash, Our Parliament, NBT, 1989, pp 44.
In the Rules, there is no mention of any zero hour at all. It is the Press that gave the name ‘Zero Hour’ sometimes in early sixties when a practice of raising matter of urgent public importance without any prior notice developed. As soon as the question hour is over, several members are on their feet to raise matter which they feel cannot brook any delay even if there are no rules permitting them. The underlying consideration seems to be that Rules which come in the way of the members raising at once the issues of national importance or serious grievances of the people on the floor of the House, are irrelevant and should yield to the basic concerns and rights of the people’s representatives. After all, the legislature is a political institution consisting of the representatives of the people and any attempt to run the House, strictly by the rules of book, is likely to be futile. Rules are for general regulation and guidance and could never visualise all eventualities that may arise from time to time.

According to the Rules the so-called ‘Zero Hour’ is an irregular affair. Since the matters are raised without any
permission or prior notice, it results in loss of precious time of
the House and encroaches on the legislative, financial and other
regular business of the House. With several agitating members
speaking at the same time, the task of the presiding officer
becomes very difficult. Although the Speaker and the House did
not encourage such interruption of the regular business of the
House, in the 8th Assam Legislative Assembly the 'Zero Hour'
appeared to be significant from many perspectives. Most of the
matters raised during the period were by and large basic
problems of the people. Even the back benches who often
remained indifferent in the Question Hour and other regular
business of the House, showed keen interest in the raising
matters of urgent public importance. This was empirically true
in the case of the legislative elites of both the treasury and the
Opposition benches as evidenced in the following Table.
Table 6.4
Zero Hour issues raised by the members party-wise

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zero Hour/Year</th>
<th>No. of Zero Hour Issues tabled</th>
<th>No. of Zero Hour Issues raised by the members of ruling party</th>
<th>No. of Zero Hour Issues raised by the members of the opposition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source – Assam Legislative Assembly Debates,

The above table shows increasing interest of the members both in the case of Opposition and the treasury benches to highlight certain matters of urgent public importance while drawing attention of the House. Even the members belonging to the ruling party raised important matters to draw the attention of the Government.

The Opposition raised certain matters during the Zero Hour to highlight the inefficiency or failure of the Government to solve those. For example Joinath Sarma (AGP) raised the
issue of infiltration demanding a statement for the government⁴⁷.

The Zero Hour discussion in the 8th Assam Legislative Assembly covered variety of subjects ranging from social evils like ragging in the educational institutions to the law and order problems of the state. The following table presents a picture regarding which issues mostly dominated the Zero Hour discussions.

⁴⁷ Assam Legislative Assembly Debate, dt. 12th Dec 1986, pp 29.
Table: 6.5

Subject matter of zero hour discussions during different sessions of the 8th Assam Legislative Assembly (1986-90)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session/Subject matter</th>
<th>Border dispute</th>
<th>Eviction</th>
<th>Rehabilitation</th>
<th>Finance</th>
<th>Unemployment</th>
<th>Appointment</th>
<th>Transport</th>
<th>Pollution</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Assam Legislative Assembly Debates) (1985-1990)
The table shows that a variety of subject matters were taken up in the zero hour for discussion. Even members, who were found to be disinterested in the question hour, appeared to be vocal in raising some serious matters in the Assembly. For example, Nilomani Das (AGP) raised a matter regarding a news item published in the ‘Agradoot’ dated 27th March 1988, captioned as ‘Flood at the direction of minister’ to draw the attention of the House regarding flood havoc in Assam48. Harendra Bora (AGP) raised a matter regarding the law and order to draw the attention of the Government during the survey it was found that as many as 12 issues of corruption and malpractice was tabled, followed by 12 issues of strike and 10 issues concerning law and order respectively49.

The Zero Hour discussion in the 8th Assam Legislative Assembly may be called by and large a routine exercise. Despite it, had some effect on the functioning of the Government The members, cutting across the party lines, raised important matters to keep the Government on the right tract.

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48 Assam Legislative Assembly Debate, dt. 6th May 1988, pp 78.
Issues like law and order, unemployment, corruption and social evils raised by the members had impact on framing the rules of the Government. In spite of being unscheduled business, such representational role made it possible for the Government to come to know about the grievances, problems and expectations of people who provided the basis for discussion on urgent matters. The people could be informed about the programs, policies and stands of the Government on various issues. Moreover, the House could come to know about the manner in which the administration was carried on by the Government.