“Experience has taught us that democratic ideals of inclusiveness, accountability, and transparency cannot be achieved without laws, policies, measures, and practices that address inequalities. Moreover, we must go beyond thinking about these issues mostly at the time of elections. Rather we must weave these ideals into the social, political, and economic fabric of a society, so that girls and women can reach their potential on an equal basis with men, whatever they choose to do.”

7.1 VOTING BEHAVIOUR AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AMONGST WOMEN IN CHAR AREAS (DHUBRI ASSEMBLY CONSTITUENCY:

The success of every general election in any country is very much related with the levels of political participation which in turn is linked with issues of economy, rights and gender justice. Democratic governments can only be successful if the voices of the marginalised sections are taken into account. But this critical aspect of ‘voices of the marginalised peoples’ being heard is closely related with people’s awareness about their rights and their knowledge about the working of the government
institutions and policies. Choosing of elected representatives by the masses is a simple yet complex task, especially if literacy levels are abysmally low and political ignorance is high and levels of deprivation and discrimination are structurally ingrained. The quality of elected representatives is directly linked with the levels of good governance. Therefore, factors affecting peoples political participation, voter apathy and their knowledge about electoral practices, political processes and government programmes and policies needs to be critically examined and reforms have to be initiated earnestly on a priority basis.

The issue of free and transparent elections is at the heart of any democratic process and the role of the voter is crucial for the success of this process. The process of electing representatives through secret ballot, the act though it might seem simple, but the motives behind choosing such a representative while negating other choices is depending upon a myriad of factors. It is more so a complex process especially when we try to analyse the society and politics in the peripheral areas of India and more so the char regions of Assam. The char areas along the Brahmaputra river, which happens to be inhabited by the Muslim community, who incidentally happen to be the poorest as well as the most illiterate community amongst all, the women there perhaps face discriminations at different levels and remain socially backward, economically poor and politically ignorant.

The strength of any democratic country lies in its ability to inculcate a spirit of people’s participation in politics and it is for this purpose ‘voter education’ becomes important. The issue is not simply the act of voting, but rather ‘why’ voting is
important and ‘what’ are the issues that need to be taken into consideration while voting. There is never any doubt that the voter must have full faith in the electoral process and the institutions and mechanisms that make rules for elections. The integrity of the electoral process and people’s faith in democratic institutions will largely determine the nature of political participation.

The success of the electoral process is largely dependent upon voters and their ability to understand their rights and responsibilities. Political participation has to be meaningful and this can only happen if ‘voter education’ as well as ‘civic education’ go hand in hand in a symbiotic manner. Voters must be well aware of the voting process and the process through which ballots are cast, and must be knowledgeable enough to judge which policies are imperative and beneficial in the long run. Elections can truly become more inclusive if all segments of the society are given adequate scope of participation and issues of gender sensitivity, voter apathy and needs of marginalised segments are addressed.

The debate between deepening and widening of democracy critically reflects the prevailing political culture, nature of participatory politics and state of quality of governance. The issue of voting behaviour and political participation gets a whole new dimension especially when seen through a ‘gender lens’. The Human Development Report (2002) point out, ‘in the 1980s and 1990s the world made dramatic progress in opening up political systems and expanding political freedoms. Some 81 countries took significant steps towards democracy, and today 140 of the world’s nearly 200 countries hold multiparty elections—more than ever before. But
the euphoria of the cold war’s end has given way to the somber realities of 21st century politics.\(^2\)

Globally, even though strengthening of ‘democracy’ as a goal for most nation states has become a norm, there are now questions about the quality of democracy, the nature of political involvement of citizens and the role of state institutions. Democratic deficits in mature democracies in the North, ‘diminished democracy’ in the United States and ‘downsizing of democracy’ has only limited the role of ordinary citizens and their motivation and the means of participation in politics.\(^3\)

In India, procedural norms as envisaged in the Constitution of India has led to a ‘democratic upsurge’, where in religious communities, ethnic and caste groups have come to play an important role in determining and shaping state policies. The char Areas is the Assam’s periphery in a geographical sense. But poverty and illiteracy has ensured that this region continues to remain politically ‘peripheral’, because it is only during election campaign season that political parties and leaders visit this vulnerable region. More importantly, voters of this region continue to be treated as ‘vote banks’ by political parties, where ‘en bloc’ voting has come to be accepted as a political reality by all. The complex problem is about analyzing the role of women and electoral politics in peripheral areas like that of those dwelling in char regions of Assam.

The gender-wise patterns of vote in the 2014 elections reflect a ‘significant increase in the overall voter turnout (from 58 to 66 percent) at the all India level, there is a
remarkable closing of the gender gap between men and women voters (men at 67 and women at 66 per cent at the all India level). The relationship between gender dimension and ‘democratic upsurge’ needs to be properly analysed because such an upsurge has not necessarily strengthened the rights or addressed issues of structural inequalities of women. Issues of gender equality and empowerment of women remains a challenge for state authorities and its institutions. The women of char Areas have exercised their voting rights unequivocally, but over the years, seldom has it led to transformation of their quality of lives. Indeed electoral empowerment for women of char Areas has not led to major qualitative change in their lifestyles and they continue to be treated a ‘vote banks’. ‘Feminising’ grassroots representative bodies may be a small step forward, but it does not necessary help in radically transforming and empowering the women of char Areas in Dhubri LAC.

7.2 DOES RELIGION OF THE CANDIDATE MATTER FOR WOMEN ELECTORATES IN THE CHAR AREAS?

It definitely matters. In a study conducted by Humayun Bokth on the social lives on char areas in Nalbari District of Assam, it was found that Villagers also show great respect for the religious leaders of Jamiat-ul-Ulema who are mostly teachers of traditional religious educational institutions known as madrasa. Some pirs even try to dictate the voting behaviour of their followers. In this research work too, in the chars of Dhubri LAC similar trends have been found.

While studying the voting behaviour of the Muslim community in the Malwa region, Sanjay Kumar (1996) finds that ‘it clear that like all other voters the concern of the Muslims is their general well-being and, given recurring communal tension, their
social and physical security.’ Muslims are probably one of the most disadvantage groups in Indian society. According to the Sacchar Committee, there is a ‘development deficit’ and ‘the perception among Muslims that they are discriminated against and excluded is widespread, which exacerbates the problem.’ As a result, the only way that Muslims can gain political representation then is by gaining leverage within existing political parties from within. Nothing seems to have changed even after more than two decades. This research work too finds that the main factor that influences voting behaviour of women in char areas is the issue of security and the fear of being identified as ‘outsider’. This is what makes women vote in large numbers in Dhubri LAC and the AIUDF is seen as best representing the interest of the community.

The chars in Dhubri Assembly Constituency is completely inhabited by Muslim community. Therefore, there are certain issues which plague the women voters of char Areas. Firstly, the fear of being treated as ‘outsiders’ or ‘Bangladeshis’ by the mainstream has ensured that they vote in large numbers as voting in elections strengthen their claim of being an Indian. An average of 70% of the respondents have claimed that it is the foremost reason why they vote in elections. Saleha Khatun, a first time voter of Bhasani char says, “My father told me to vote because if we fail to vote we will be thrown out of the country.” Secondly, most political parties only give party tickets to Muslim candidates to contest state assembly elections. Therefore, the voters have limited choice in choosing a candidate. Thirdly, field study reveals that non-Muslim candidates are not trusted by women electorates in char areas. Fourthly, issues of religious identity override all other electoral issues such as development, floods, employment etc. Sarina, a 43 year old resident of Majir
char argues “It is religion which binds our community together and we must safeguard it from being assaulted upon by others.” *Fifthly*, the *Gaon Sarpanch* as well as the *religious leaders* openly preach about the need to vote for Muslim candidates and issues affecting their community. And *finally*, even the electoral campaigns get a religious fervor during elections as political parties and leaders openly ask for votes in the name of religion and community. It must be mentioned that it is not only Muslim leaders of AIUDF who made communal speeches, but also the RSS led Hindu leaders too. In fact, during the 2014 General Elections, ‘the Election Commission issued a strict warning to AIUDF candidate and perfume baron Badaruddin Ajmal and state food and civil supplies minister Nazrul Islam for making election speeches laced with religious sentiment.’\(^{11}\) The explosive speeches given by leaders of the majoritarian as well as minority communities has only led to polarisation of society. According to Professor Monirul Hussain of Gauhati University, “Ajmal and BJP-RSS complimented each other in enhancing the fear of illegal immigrants. Politics in the state certainly took a communal turn during the elections because of these parties and organisations.”\(^{12}\)

7.3 ARE WOMEN MORE LIKELY TO SUPPORT WOMEN CANDIDATES?

There are two alternative perspectives. Gender affinity perspective argues: Women voters can be a particular base of support for women candidates. This can include women who switch parties to vote for women (e.g., Brians 2005; Cook 1994; Fox 1997; Plutzer and Zipp 1996). In other words, the gender affinity effect is sometimes so influential that women voters cast ballots for women candidates waving a rival party’s banner.\(^{13}\) It is linked with the idea that ‘women candidates are seen as more
likely to “act for” or substantively represent women."^14 Studies in UK have reveal that ‘women voters do not gravitate to women candidates simply because they are women. Some mechanism is required to link voter and candidate gender.’ Voters might discriminate against women or might rationally not vote for them if they think that other voters will not vote for women.^15

Again, numerous studies have been done to co-relate women voting for women candidates^16; studies conducted in the US reveal that “female Republican voters may be more likely to cross party lines to cast ballots for Democratic women candidates.”^17 So there is an affinity of women to vote for women representatives.

In India, according to M. InduMenon-

> after studying the data on all state assembly elections held from 1962 till 2012, for 16 large states sought to explore the role of women voters. Our results strongly suggest that an increase in the female voters turnout negatively effected the probability of re-election for a political party in a given constituency. And in contrast, the results also show that male voters increased the probability of re-election of political parties, in a given constituency. While women voted for change, the men voted for status quo.”^18

In context of char Areas in Assam (Dhubri LAC), the field study has revealed that this issue does not matter for numerous reasons: Firstly, 69% of the respondents have put forward the view that it is religion of the candidate which is the ‘principal’ determinant rather than gender which shapes voters choice for a particular candidate. Bobijaan Nesa, a 40 year old women of Bhasani char says, “We are instructed by others to vote for our community members only.” ^19During the conversation with Bobijaan, it was clear that religion will inevitably play a vital role in determining their vote. The elders in her vicinity, family members and friends too support members of
their own community; and this ‘peer pressure’ clearly shapes voting behaviour of women of Bhasani char like Bobijaan and Safia Khatun.\textsuperscript{20} It is also clear that political parties also distribute party tickets taking into consideration the demographic profile of the assembly constituency. According to the 2001 census, Muslims constitute 79% of the population in Dhubri district. Again Dhubri LAC has witnessed 14 assembly elections, and only once in 1991 has the BJP been successful in winning this seat. Thirteen of them have been won by Muslim candidates. \textit{Secondly}, in reference to the 2004 Lok Sabha elections, Rajeshwari Deshpande, argues ‘in spite of the celebrations of women’s empowerment and the reservation policy, it appears that the structuring of political parties remains the main obstacle in women's political recruitment.’\textsuperscript{21} Same trend continues and women electorate have no choice. Parties give tickets to only Muslim men in the char areas. Women are not given party tickets to contest in General or Assembly elections for the Dhubri Assembly Constituency. As a result, the ‘visibility’ of women as representatives of people, has not yet gathered any momentum in the char Areas. In the last 14 assembly elections in Dhubri LAC, women have never been elected nor been runners-up in assembly elections. \textit{Thirdly}, even the role of women grass root leaders in the Panchayats in the char Areas, does not give any confidence to the women voters. Nazira Bibi, (41 years, Bhasani char) sarcastically says, “Only their husbands’ work, not them. The women representatives don’t know anything.”\textsuperscript{22} Likewise, Jameela Khatun (46 years Bhasani char) of the same locality says, “Women members are never taken seriously, and are more interested in making \textit{lal-sah} (red tea) for others”.\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Fourthly}, even women respondents believe that such jobs are best dealt by men rather than women because if the nature of the job, which essentially demands mobility and accessibility. Momotaz Begum, a member of the Gaon Panchayat in Dhubri, honestly remarks, “I try to work,
but sometimes I do not get adequate rest from agricultural and household works. I cannot walk too far because of medical problems.” Such experiences are not just limited to her alone. Women respondents also do not have access to women representative of the Gaon Panchayat easily because they cannot go alone to put forward their problems. Essentially it also reveals that women have very little faith in women representatives, even at the grass root levels. Field study reveals that 73% of the respondents feel that politics is for men. Furthermore, field study shows that 42% (2014 General Elections) and 34% (2016 Assembly Elections) of the respondents are influenced by their ‘husbands’ in exercising their franchise and 36% (2014 General Elections) and 38% (2016 Assembly Elections) of the respondents are influenced by religious community leaders. The absence of women candidates and lack of women role models for women electorates in char Areas have ensured that women candidates will face a ‘credibility crisis’ while facing women electorates of char areas.

7.4 IN THE CHAR AREAS, WHAT ARE THE DOMINANT MODES OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION FOR WOMEN IN ELECTIONS?

Brady defines political participation as “action by ordinary citizens directed toward influencing some political outcomes.” Essentially, political participation is linked with the ability of ordinary citizens to determine and shape public policies. But there is considerable amount of scope of interpretation of this term. In Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality by Norman H. Nie and Sidney Verba, they have argued about four dimensions of political participation:

“voting; campaign activity (including membership in or work for political parties and organisations as well as donating money to such parties or groups); contacting public officials; and cooperative or communal activities (basically understood by Verba and associates as all forms..."
of engagement that focused on issues in the local community) (Verba, Nie 1972, 56–63).\(^\text{26}\)

Again, for Teorell, Torcal, and Montero (2007) participation may entail voting, donating money to a party, doing voluntary work for a party, taking part in demonstrations or contacting civil servants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of Activity</th>
<th>Type of participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electoral participation</td>
<td>Voting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer participation</td>
<td>covers donating money to charity, boycotting and political consumption, as well as signing petitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party activity</td>
<td>to be a member of, active within, do voluntary work for or donate money to a political party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protest activity</td>
<td>such acts as taking part in demonstrations, strikes and other protest activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact activity</td>
<td>Contacting organisations, politicians or civil servants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


But not all types of political activity are given equal weightage and some are considered to be more ‘gladiatorial’ in character when compared to the rest. Milbraith’s framework of political participation, clearly identifies three levels of participation – gladiator, transition and spectator activities. Invariably, ‘spectator mentality’ pervades amongst the women in char Areas. The dominant mode of participation is ‘voting’ and they come out in large numbers to vote in the Lok Sabha as well as State Assembly Elections. In 2014 General Elections, the maximum voter turnout in India was in Dhubri PC (88.22%), Assam.\(^\text{27}\)The constituency had 1 women candidates out of the total 15 Candidates.
TABLE 7.1 VOTER TURNOUT AND POLL PERCENTAGE OF DHUBRI ASSEMBLY ELECTION 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assembly Constituency</th>
<th>Total Voters in the Assembly Constituency</th>
<th>Voter Turnout</th>
<th>Percentage of Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AC No. 23, Dhubri</td>
<td>Male 89545, Female 83018, Total 172563</td>
<td>Male 79800, Female 72127, Total 151927</td>
<td>Male 89.12%, Female 86.88%, Total 88.04%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Election Commission, Govt of Assam

Elections are seen as a political festival in Dhubri. People, who are working in far off places, return in large numbers to Dhubri to vote. In an interview with Lotiful Bibi and her sister Falan Bibi of Kuntir char, who are working as housemaids in Bilasipara, Lotiful recalls, “Both me and my sister vote in every election. For us it is question of our identity. It is a fear that if we don’t vote, we will be thrown out of the country. But it also provides us a welcome break to meet our family members. We both can’t come often. We both earn two thousand rupees per month only, which is barely enough.” In another interview with Lal Banu, a 45 year old casual worker from Kuntir char, says, “Elections are important for us because we get to choose our own sarkar. He belongs to our community and in the past too, we have got benefits from him.” When asked about ‘Modisarkar’, Lal Banu says, “Modi is the Prime Minister of this country, but I did not vote for him, so I don’t know how he became the Prime Minister.” The conversation of this researcher with Lal Banu clearly revealed few things- Firstly, she was only choosing an elected representative belonging to a particular party. She was completely unaware of the fact that the process of formation of a government at the centre or state level is very different from
choosing an elected representative. Secondly, she had no political knowledge of role of opposition party or what constitutes coalition government. Thirdly, she could not differentiate between what constitutes Union and State Government. For her, there is only government which is the state government who is responsible for bringing changes in her life. Fourthly, while 38% and 44% of the women of the char Areas took part in some political procession or rally during Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections respectively, they did not have any knowledge about what was being discussed or who their leaders were. Only 12% (Lok Sabha) and 15% (State Assembly elections) of the respondents could understand what was being said in the political rallies. Finally, women of char areas seldom have taken part in any form of non-voting political activity. While some of them have taken part in procession and electoral rallies, in the fieldwork it was found that no women is interested in meeting civil servants, attending protest marches or have contributed funds to any political party and only 3% of them have enrolled themselves as a party worker for a political party. Thus, political participation in the form of voting in elections (National/State and Panchayat) for women in char areas continues to be high, the problem is of ‘informed participation’ and ‘empowerment’ in the long run. The role of some women panchayat members have not been found satisfactory to the women of char areas. As a result, there is little trust between women representative and women voters in this area. And experiences from the panchayats reveal that women representatives have not been able to inspire much confidence about their need or work amongst the women of the char. Nazira Bibi, a 41 year old from Bhasani char says, “The women leaders hardly say any word in the Panchayat meetings. I have attended a few meeting, but they are absolutely ignorant on many things”. 30
Voting percentages in Lok Sabha as well as Assembly election are very high. In northeast India, states of Nagaland too has high voter turnout. Study of women and electoral participation in Nagaland reveals that there is very little political awareness amongst women, but this has not stopped women from voting in large numbers. Political awareness does not seem to be an important criterion for those women who participate in electoral activities, rather political environment, socio-cultural values and practices matters more than political awareness in political participation.\textsuperscript{31} This research work finds that similar situation exists in the chars of Dhubri LAC. Dhubri witnessed the highest voter turnout in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, but field study reveals that there is very little political awareness amongst the women of chars in Dhubri LAC. Voter apathy is very much prevalent in the chars in Dhubri LAC. Sominur Bibi (58 years) of Bhasai char says, “I hardly have any expectation from any government, and our family has struggled all these years. We vote because all vote.”\textsuperscript{32} There is definitely a feeling of alienation towards the political system amongst a section of women in the chars.

\textbf{7.5 DOES VOTING IN ELECTIONS (LOK SABHA OR STATE ASSEMBLY) LEAD TO EMPOWERMENT FOR WOMEN IN CHAR AREAS?}

There is never any doubt that voting is considered to be a ‘duty’ for all in Char Areas and women participate in large numbers. But field study reveals that 32\% of the respondents feel ‘good’ being part of a democratic voice, but an overwhelming 61\% of the respondents feel that the fear of not taking part in elections will create problems for their citizenship, since they are treated as illegal migrants. Therefore, for dwellers in char Areas, voting is an act not for choosing elected representatives, but more
linked with the fear of being ‘disenfranchised’. Under such a scenario, the issue of empowerment for women based on ideas of participatory democracy, gender equity and gender mainstreaming seems a non-starter.

The state machinery and its institutions have ensured that women do come out to vote in large numbers. The field study reveals that women vote free without any fear from any source. ‘Procedural equality’ has been ensured and voting statistics of Dhubri LAC shows that women and men participate in healthy numbers in National and Assembly elections. But a deeper scrutiny reveals that women of char Areas seldom have any choice or knowledge about elections, electoral choices or civic knowledge. An average of 67% of the respondents could not correctly named the name of candidates standing for elections in National Elections. 79% of the respondents did not trust the EVM. The absence of any paper trail does make the women respondents feel slightly worried. In an interview with Haleka Bibi, a 45 year old resident of Bhasani char says, “I voted for Ajmal, and I heard he won elections. Why didn’t he become the Chief Minister? Is there something wrong in the EVM?” Essentially, women had very little awareness about elections, candidates and their policies. In the focus group interview too it was clear that the respondents do not trust the way EVM functions. The following tables reveals the problem of lack of civic knowledge and lack of information on election and electoral candidates, which is a major hindrance to ‘substantive participation’ for women of char Areas.
TABLE 7.2 ELECTORAL INFORMATION AND CIVIC KNOWLEDGE OF RESPONDENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Electoral information and Civic knowledge</th>
<th>Post poll elections studies: Lok Sabha Elections (2014) (% of respondents who could identify)</th>
<th>Post poll election studies: Assam Assembly Election (2016) (% of respondents who could identify)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of candidates standing for elections</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational qualification of candidates</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assets and income of candidates</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal records of candidates</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in EVM</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field study

Therefore, the key problem for women in char Areas is ‘information vacuum’ about electoral processes, government policies and programmes. While women have heard about programmes such as MNREGA, NRHM and other flagship programmes of the Government of India, they have no knowledge about the ‘fine print’ in such programmes. As such, they continue to remain deprived and discriminated in delivery of public services by state institutions.

A major challenge seems to be the ‘knowledge hole’ in civic education. The women of char Areas in Dhubri have no knowledge regarding what constitutes Union government, Union –State relations, electoral and coalition politics, role of Election Commission and State administration. Illiteracy coupled with ignorance has not helped the cause of women empowerment in such vulnerable areas. The inability of women of char areas to identity or name their elected representative, head of state or head of government or the capital of their own state shows the depth of the ‘knowledge hole’.34
According to Zoya Hasan, ‘Indian democracy is deepening, and politics and elections are providing space for contestation and avenues for expression of rights and claims. While the persistence of a democratic-federal-secular polity is a major political and human achievement, formidable challenges remain in the realisation of substantive democracy.’\(^3^5\) Internalisation of social norms and acceptance of ‘status quo’ seems to have further hampered the issue of empowerment of women in char areas. For most women, polygamy is a social norm which is acceptable and having 5-6 children is absolutely normal. Contraception is not encouraged and neither is any form of family planning. Most of the financial issues and property related issues are determined by men and women see no reason as to why it should be challenged. Internalisation of social norms has been largely possible because of their poverty and their lack of control over economic resources. The quality of governance is linked with people’s participation in politics. But participation is ‘multilayered’ and forms of participation are varied. Field study in char areas reveals that passive participation has been a norm amongst the women of these regions. Therefore, it is imperative that there is a need for proactive participation of women if qualitative political change is the goal.

This enhancement of political participation is depended upon ‘institutional measures’ as well as ‘structural reforms’ in the society. The issue of empowerment women cannot be judged through the acting of voting alone for it ‘cannot be disassociated from the question of relations of power within different socio-political systems.’\(^3^6\) The issues of development and better governance have been a casualty in this electoral battle. Monirul Hussain argues that ‘economic problems of the people are yet to surface at the centre- stage of electoral processes and that ‘we failed to move towards a substantive democracy.’\(^3^7\) Perhaps, the chars continue to remain a symbol of failure
of state institutions and state policies, and the voters caught in a vortex of identity politics and poverty. Patriarchal laws and lack of support by state institutions have hampered the empowerment of women in the chars. Social structures continue to be robust and seldom women get adequate support from the elders of their community. There is never any doubt that ‘increased political participation by women in all spheres of political life and electoral competition in particular will not only ensure political parity and equality with men, but would also serve the larger issues concerning women, *i.e.*, upliftment and empowerment of Indian women’, the task is far from easy.
ENDNOTES:


16 “Eric Smith and Richard Fox used pooled U.S. data from 1988 to 1992 and found that well-educated women were more inclined to support women candidates in House but not Senate races (Smith and Fox 2001), and others have found that women are more likely to vote for women candidates only when they are perceived as being pro-feminist (Plutzer and Zipp 1996). By contrast Fulton (2014) found that women are not more likely to vote for women candidates in the United States, but that male Independents are somewhat less likely to vote for them. Others have found little evidence whatsoever of an association between candidate gender and vote choice (McElroy and Marsh 2010).” In Campbell R. & Heath, O. (2017) . Do Women Vote for Women Candidates? Attitudes toward Descriptive Representation and Voting Behavior in the 2010 British Election. Politics and Gender 13(02),p .209-10.


N. Bibi, personal communication, May 19, 2017.


M. Begum, personal communication, May 9, 2017.


The Dhubri Parliamentary Constituency was made up of 11 Assembly segments, namely, Goalpara West, Dhubri, Gauripur, Goalpara East.


N. Bibi, personal communication, May 19, 2017.


33 H. Bibi, personal communication, May 19, 2017.

34 Only 34% and 23% of the respondents could identify the date of Independence Day and Republic Day of India respectively.


