

Women of both the tribal communities have the least of decision making role in familial affairs. Both the communities follow patriarchal form of social system and hence women are traditionally not allowed to participate in the local traditional village administration. So only in the matters of social and cultural offences, they are allowed to be present before the traditional body headed by the headman of the village as witness or to explain their position before a verdict (Oraon 2015). Woman is not allowed to become headman under any circumstance. Even woman is not allowed to officiate as priest of any traditional worship in Karbi tribe. Only at the ceremony of burial and at the last rites of a dead in Karbi tribe, a socially recognized aged women, preferably widow (Rexarpi) has the role of priest. Lack of education and political awareness, both, go hand-in-hand among the women of the two communities. This chapter traces the decision making powers and the political status of women in the Karbi and Kuki communities of the Cachar district in Assam. Political status of the women here includes the rights of women for participation in decision making on various activities at the family, community and societal levels. This is being taken up for discussion hereunder.

PARTICIPATION IN GAON SABHA MEETINGS

Gaon Sabha is the general body of all adults of a particular Gaon Panchayet (G.P). Every adult person (who has attained 18 years) in a village is considered a member of the Gaon Sabha. In its meeting, various welfare schemes, progress of developmental works, and selection of beneficiaries for various schemes are decided in the presence of all the elected members of the particular Gaon Panchayat and Government officials. Gaon Sabha approves proposals of development schemes which are submitted onward to the state Government. Participation in these meetings is very important for an adult villager. Sometimes

one person or two participate in the meeting from a small village. The tribal women's participation in Gaon Sabhas of their respective Gaon Panchayatis is very less. The following table shows the mode of participation of the respondents in Gaon Sabha meetings:

Table 6.1
Participation of the Respondents in Gram Sabha Meetings
(Percentage in Parentheses)

Mode of Participation	Karbi Respondents	Kuki Respondents	Total Respondents
Always	7 (2.70)	3 (1.49)	10 (2.17)
Occasionally	36 (13.90)	22 (10.89)	58 (12.58)
Never	216 (83.40)	177 (87.62)	393 (85.25)
Total	259 (100)	202 (100)	461 (100)

Source: Field Survey Conducted during June 2014 - December 2015.

The above table reveals that the importance of Gaon Sabha is realized very less in the poor tribal society, particularly in its women folk. In spite of the involvement of women in almost all economic and non-economic activities, it is observed that over three fourths (85.25%) of the respondents have never attended any meeting of Gram Sabha. On the other hand, over one tenth (12.58%) of them have occasionally attended such meeting. Of them only 2.17% have attended the meeting regularly. The patterns are similar among the respondents of two communities.

However, Kuki society is found more orthodox in allowing their womenfolk to attend such meetings than the Karbi society. Hence Kuki women always maintain more distance from decision-making discussions in any form and anywhere compared with the Karbi women. Location and communication facility of Karbi habitations are comparatively better than those of Kuki habitations. The Kukis have better education of family members but the family head is generally found inclined to certain political party and he decides anything.

Thus, despite the women's active role in family economy, due to lack of awareness and motivation they always remain away from decisions for various welfare programmes of government. However, due to less family impositions, Karbi women are comparatively more aware about the Government programmes than their Kuki counterparts.

AWARENESS ABOUT DEVELOPMENT SCHEMES UNDER GAON PANCHAYAT

Awareness about various schemes under Gaon Panchayat reflects political attitude of the people and the level of their participation in decision-making. The distribution of the respondents' awareness about Gaon Panchayat's schemes is given in the following table:

Table 6.2
Distribution of respondents on the basis of Awareness about Panchayat Schemes
(Percentage in Parentheses)

Name of Development Scheme	Karbi Respondents N=284(100)	Kuki Respondents N=218 (100)	Total Respondents 502 (100)
BRGF(Backward Region Grant Fund)	04 (1.41)	02 (0.92)	06 (1.20)
District Development Programme	23 (8.01)	17 (7.80)	40 (7.97)
Handicapped pension	53 (18.66)	30 (13.76)	83 (16.53)
IAY (Indira Awas Yojna)	284 (100)	218 (100)	502 (100)
Income Generating Scheme	48 (16.90)	27 (12.39)	75 (14.94)
Kalpataru	63 (22.18)	39 (17.89)	102 (20.32)
MGNREGS (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme)	163 (57.39)	127 (58.26)	290 (57.77)
NFBS (National Family Benefit Scheme)	53 (18.66)	30 (13.76)	83 (16.53)
Widow pension/ Old age pension	219 (77.11)	186 (85.32)	405 (80.68)

Source: Field Survey Conducted during June 2014 - December 2015.

The above table indicates the level of the respondents' awareness about various government sponsored schemes initiated at the Gaon Panchayat level. It is observed that all the respondents of both the communities' are aware about the Indira Awas Yojana (IAY), followed by the most (80.68%) of the respondents who have adequate knowledge regarding widow pension and old age pension.

MGNREGS (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) is also a popular scheme and about three fourths (57.77%) of the respondents have also the full information about it.

But the impact of education is clearly visible in case of the old age pension/widow pension scheme. Due to more education in Kuki tribe including its womenfolk, the awareness about beneficiaries of the scheme are relatively more among Kuki respondents than Karbi respondents. About four fifths (77.11%) of the Karbi respondents and over four fifths (85.32%) of the Kuki respondents are aware about the scheme. But advantage of the location of the villages with better communication has direct impact on the implementation of some schemes such as IAY, MGNREGS etc and due to the location of Karbi villages, implementation of the schemes is more visible in their villages than the Kuki villages as about three fifths (57.39%) of the Karbi respondents and over two fifths (41.75%) of the Kuki respondents are aware about MGNREGS.

Thus, because of the advantageous location of the villages, Karbi respondents have better knowledge about most of the infrastructure-related schemes like MNREGS. More than half of the Kuki villages are located far away from the Gaon Panchayat Office and due to lack of communication, Kuki people get less benefits. But due to better education, Kuki respondents have more knowledge about pension-related schemes like old age pension and widow pension. Awareness about development schemes implemented by a panchayat relates to the level of awareness about the role of Gaon Panchayat is being taken up here.

AWARENESS ABOUT THE ROLE OF GAON PANCHAYAT

Gaon Panchayat functions for the development and governance of villages. It supports the villages and villagers. But due to various factors like lack of communication, lack of awareness regarding various schemes, corruption in implementation of sanctioned schemes remained in almost all the Karbi and Kuki villages in a very miserable condition. Hence, it is necessary to know the

awareness about and satisfaction level over the role of the Gaon Panchayat for all-round development of the poor people of the respective villages. But in these villages, over half (50.80%) of the respondents were found unaware about the functions of Gaon Panchayat and hence they remained silent about the role of the panchayat in the villages. On the other hand, Kuki (53.67%) respondents are found more unaware than Karbi (48.59%) respondents. The following table indicates the respondents' satisfaction about the functions of the Gaon Panchayat for welfare of the villages:

Table 6.3
Respondents' Satisfaction about the Role of Gaon Panchayat in Village Welfare
(Percentage in Parentheses)

Level of Satisfaction	Karbi Respondents	Kuki Respondents	Total Respondents
Satisfied	23 (15.75)	12 (11.88)	35 (14.17)
Partially satisfied	52 (35.62)	31(30.69)	83(33.60)
Dissatisfied	71 (48.63)	58 (57.42)	129 (52.23)
Total	146 (100)	101 (100)	247 (100)

Source: Field Survey Conducted during June 2014 - December 2015.

The above table reveals that satisfaction level of the respondents over the activities of Gaon Panchayat is very less. Over half (52.23%) of the respondents who are aware regarding the functions of Gaon Panchayat expressed their dissatisfaction over the activities of Gaon Panchayat for ignoring their village in various welfare schemes whereas over one third (33.60%) of the respondents were partially satisfied and only over one tenth (14.17%) of them were satisfied.

Here, also, location keeps most of the Kuki respondents relatively deprived from various welfare schemes under a Gaon Panchayat and, therefore, about three fifths (57.42%) of the Kuki respondents are dissatisfied as compared to about half (48.63%) of the Karbi respondents. Then, more Karbi respondents (35.62%) than the Kuki respondents (30.69%) are partially satisfied. In the case of their full satisfaction, about one sixth (15.75%) of the Karbi respondents, over one tenth (11.88%) of the Kuki respondents are satisfied over the activities of Gaon Panchayat.

Thus, due to remote location of the villages and lack of education, most of the Karbi and Kuki villages are generally deprived from getting the benefits of

various Government schemes. Comparatively, due to better location of Karbi villages, Karbi respondents are more aware about the various functions of Gaon Panchayat and a little more of them are satisfied with the panchayat's role. In most of the villages, particularly in remote villages, headman or his nominee generally takes part in such programmes.

LEVEL OF SATISFACTION OVER THE HEADMAN'S ROLE

Headman of a village is the administrative head of a tribal village that has to take several decisions for development of the village and to maintain peace and harmony. Headman is the most important character in a tribal village and has the power to solve any dispute of the village with other responsible persons of the village. But, on the other side, every family member will not be happy on the every decision of headman. However, out of 17 Kuki villages, 5 under Borjalenga Development Block; viz., Nagathal, Taranathpur Pt-V, Luipui, Naxatilla and Old Bagbahar have no headman or Gaon Burah and 41 respondents' families have no attachment with the most important traditional character of tribal habitation. But all Karbi villages have headman. Hence, only 217 respondents made any comment on the issue of headman and one fourth (25.60%) of the total respondents remained silent- on the issue of headman: over one fifth (21.83%) of the Karbi respondents and about one third (31.64) of the Kuki respondents made no comment on the issue.

So, to assess the acceptance of his decisions among the people, the following table speaks the level of satisfaction over headman's role among the respondents who made any comment without any hesitation:

Table 6.4
Level of Satisfaction among the Respondents over the headman's Role
(Percentage in Parentheses)

Level of Satisfaction	Karbi Respondents	Kuki Respondents	Total Respondents
Fully satisfied	77 (34.68)	59 (36.65)	136 (35.51)
Partially satisfied	145 (65.32)	102 (63.35)	247 (64.49)
Total	222 (100)	161(100)	383 (100)

Source: Field Survey Conducted during June 2014 - December 2015.

The above table reveals that near about two thirds (64.49%) of the respondents are partially satisfied with the performance of headman and over one

third (35.51%) of them are fully satisfied. So, majority of the respondents are partially satisfied. The same pattern is observed across the respondents of the two communities. However, it was observed in the field that satisfaction over his performance is higher in the small villages than the medium or large villages. Few issues like restriction on the rearing of number of livestock which is not favoured for certain cultivation and settlement of a dispute which make a few families become unhappy with the headman. It is also seen that due to religious difference among people in Boalchera Karbi village, most of the people who have converted into Christianity do not support the animistic Hindu headmen on all occasions. So, satisfaction over headman's work is more in Karbi villages than Kuki villages.

Hence, Kuki respondents are more conscious and headman in their villages is more cooperative to their families than the one in the Karbi villages. In all, major portion of the respondents is not fully satisfied with the headman's activities. Urbanization impact and adoption of Christianity by a part of Karbis have divided them into two groups: Hindus and Christians. This has caused more disputes in Karbis as compared with Kukis. Hence, less number of Karbi respondents are fully satisfied with headman's working.

PARTICIPATION IN VILLAGE ADMINISTRATION

Tribal village administration is a traditional body formed and headed by the headman of the respective tribal village or Punjee. In this body, the family heads, senior and respective person of the village and the headman become the members. It is a male-based very important institution in tribal villages. The Karbi body of tribal village administration is termed *Kachingdai* whereas in Kuki villages this administrative body is known as *Deban*. However, in Borjalenga Development Block there is no headman in any Kuki village. Here, a temporary *Deban* is constituted as and when necessity arises. A senior, reputed and undisputed male person from the village resolves issues. The main function of the institution is to solve any dispute that arises between the members of the village.

Also, on some occasions decisions are taken for betterment of the village. All the families in the village should obey the restriction or verdict from the traditional forum. But generally the headman tries to solve disputes and if the situation demands, then he calls a meeting of the traditional body. Their decisions sometimes make some families resentful. During the survey, over two thirds (69.52%) of the total respondents remained silent on the role of the traditional village administration. The following table reflects the level of satisfaction among those respondents who are aware about the village administration:

Table 6.5
Respondents' Awareness and Satisfaction about the Traditional Village Administration (Percentage in Parentheses)

Satisfaction Level	Karbi Respondents	Kuki Respondents	Total Respondents
Satisfied	47 (53.41)	41 (63.08)	88 (57.52)
Dissatisfied	41 (46.59)	24 (36.92)	65 (42.48)
Total	88(100)	65(100)	153 (100)

Source: Field Survey Conducted during June 2014 -December 2015.

The above table reflects the activities of traditional village administration in various areas of the Karbi and Kuki habitations. About three fifths (57.52%) of these respondents are satisfied with the administration and the rest (42.48%) are not. More of the Kuki respondents (63.08%) are satisfied than those of the Karbi respondents (53.52%).

Due to the cultural homogeneity, strong monitoring by Church and effect of education, Kuki respondents have comparatively greater satisfaction with their traditional administration than the Karbi respondents as they have comparatively less number of disputes.

AWARENESS ABOUT NGOs

Tribal people live in remote and isolated habitations with very poor communication. Hence, they remain deprived of various Government welfare facilities. As a result, some Non Government Organisations (NGOs) have come forward to play role for the welfare of the people. Though, there exists the Government aided welfare organization Tribal Sangha, in Barak Valley, it is known by the people of only a few villages. Besides, Hill Tribes Development

Council has the least of presence in Cachar district; several NGOs are active even in the remote tribal villages. Ram Krishna Mission, Vanavashi Kalyan Ashram, Young Mizo Association (YMA) and various Churches are doing tremendous work in the field of education, health and welfare of the people. Ram Krishna Mission, Vanavashi Kalyan Ashram etc are active in most of the Karbi villages, while various missionary trusts are active in the Kuki villages. In the Kuki villages, YMA is actively providing support to the tribal people especially in the villages located in Assam-Mizoram boarder area. But in few remote tribal villages, particularly Kuki villages, there is found no such welfare activities. Let us see the respondents' awareness about the Tribal Welfare Organisation.

Welfare organizations working in tribal areas have a role in political awareness of people for development. The people's awareness about these organizations reveals activeness of the respondents. The following table shows the awareness of the respondents about tribal welfare organizations:

Table 6.6
Respondent's Awareness about Tribal Welfare Organization
(Percentage in Parentheses)

Level of Awareness	Karbi Respondents	Kuki Respondents	Total Respondents
Know very well	161 (56.69)	133 (61.01)	294 (58.56)
Know Something	88 (30.99)	64 (29.36)	152 (30.28)
Know Nothing	35 (12.32)	21 (9.63)	56 (11.16)
Total	284 (100)	218 (100)	502 (100)

Source: Field Survey Conducted during June 2014 - December 2015.

Tribal welfare organizations in most of the Karbi villages are running various welfare programmes. However, due to a strong network of Churches in most of the Kuki habitations, maximum Kuki people are associated with various welfare organizations. Hence, more Kuki respondents have knowledge about the tribal welfare organizations and their activities. The table speaks that about three fifths (58.56%) of the total respondents has adequate knowledge about the active welfare organization of their areas and communities. However, tribal welfare organizations are more active in Kuki areas. Over three fifths (61.01%) of the Kuki respondents are well aware about the functions of various Missionary trusts

in providing low cost medical treatment and education. About three fifths (56.69%) of the Karbi respondents also know the activities of Vanabashi Kalyan Ashram, Ramkrishna Mission etc very well. However, about one third (30.28%) of respondents have also some knowledge about the activities of tribal welfare organizations in their areas: about one third (30.99%) of the Karbi respondents and over one fourth (29.36%) of the Kuki respondents. The respondents in the remotest villages where these organization are either not active or not well aware about these organizations. Rather, some people of these villages gather information from other villages. But over one tenth (11.16%) of the total respondents has no idea about these welfare organizations and their activities: 12.32% of the Karbi and 9.63% of the Kuki respondents. Here, particularly womenfolk remain untouched with the organizations. But in most of the Kuki villages and a few of the Karbi villages, Church plays a vital role for the welfare of the people.

Thus, tribal welfare organizations are active in most of the tribal villages. But due to involvement of Church, these organizations are more active in Kuki villages than Karbi villages.

Though tribal women are also found active in those areas, where they are free to move, it is often noticed that some sort of restriction is imposed on the tribal women as found in some non-tribal communities. Political participation of women in the Karbi and Kuki communities of Cachar district is also not encouraging.

FAMILY ATTITUDE TOWARDS WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Political participation of women is not generally encouraged by their families; rather, they are expected to devote life for the sake of family. The following table shows the attitude of family towards the respondents' political participation:

Table 6.7
Attitude of Respondents' Family towards Women's Political Participation
(Percentage in Parentheses)

Family Attitude	Karbi Respondents	Kuki Respondents	Total Respondents
Encourages women fully	17 (5.99)	10 (4.59)	27 (5.38)
Encourage women to some extent	36 (12.68)	22 (10.09)	58 (11.55)
Encourage women not at all	231 (81.33)	186 (85.32)	417 (83.06)
Total	284 (100)	218 (100)	502 (100)

Source: Field Survey Conducted during June 2014 - December 2015.

The above table reveals that most of the families (83.06%) of the respondents do not encourage women's participation in political activities like political meetings or any discussion, campaign in favour of a candidate or political party, casting vote according to one's own choice etc. and the rest (16.93%) are allowed to participate. Moreover, only 5.38% of the respondents are fully encouraged and over one tenth (11.58%) are encouraged to some extent to participate in political activities. The patterns are similar among the respondents of the two communities.

The Karbi families are found more liberal towards women's participation in political activities than the Kuki families as 85.32% of the Kuki respondents as compared with 81.33% of the Karbi respondents who said that women are not at all encouraged to participate. It is reported that the families which have educated members or inclined towards any political party generally encourage their womenfolk for political participation. So, due to the better location of habitation and urban impact, Karbi families are comparatively liberal to allow their women to participate in political activities.

Thus, the families generally do not allow the womenfolk to participate in political activities in the two communities. Kuki families are more rigid in this respect. Pattern of restriction varies and is not the same on all occasions. Particularly, in voting participation women are even encouraged to cast votes. Let the family's role in exercise voting right be analysed.

Role of Family in Exercising of Voting Right

Voting is an important right and duty of every citizen in a democracy, as the citizen exercises the right to elect a candidate of his/her choice. The following table shows the role of family in influencing the women's exercise of vote:

Table 6.8
Role of Family among Respondents in Exercising Their Voting Right
(Percentage in Parentheses)

How Allowed to Cast vote?	Karbi Respondents	Kuki Respondents	Total Respondents
Allowed full freedom to decide her choice of vote	27 (9.51)	19 (8.72)	46 (9.16)
To some extent allowed to decide her choice of vote	52 (21.83)	36 (21.10)	108 (21.51)
No freedom to decide her choice of vote	195 (61.66)	153 (70.18)	348 (69.32)
Total	284 (100)	218 (100)	502 (100)

Source: Field Survey Conducted during June 2014 - December 2015.

The above table reveals that for casting of vote, over two thirds (69.32%) of the respondents (61.66% of the Karbi and 70.18% of the Kuki respondents) have no freedom to cast their vote according to their own choice as it is decided by families specially male members; over one fifth (21.51%) of the respondents (Karbi 21.83% and Kuki 21.10%) are allowed to some extent to cast vote of their choice and about one tenth (9.16%) of them have full freedom to cast vote of their choice. The same trend is observed among the respondents of the two communities. However, in the category of 'No freedom' the figure for the Kuki respondents (70.18%) is much more than that for the Karbi respondents (61.66%) and it indicated that Kuki families never allow their women to have a choice in vote casting.

Thus, majority of the respondents have no freedom to decide a choice for vote casting. Comparatively the Karbi respondents have more control of family over their vote casting than the Kuki respondents. Here, the better literacy level of the Kuki respondents remains ineffective while the exposure of the Karbi

respondents to urban and other outside impact, due to habitational location, is found effective.

In a democracy, deciding a choice for vote casting is part of political culture. Political discussions take place at various forms, but the one that takes place among family members is very important from the viewpoint of women in family. Let the women's participation in discussions in family be examined here.

Participation in Political Discussions in Family

Family discussion on political affairs is instrumental to understand democratic rights and duties of a citizen and to participate in decision-making. Women's participation in such discussions varies across communities. Political discussion relates to the developmental schemes, corruption at various stages of implementation of these schemes, influence of political party about the respective tribal community etc. The following table displays the level of political discussions and participation of women in those respondents' families where it is allowed:

Table 6.9
Women's Participation in Political Discussions in their Families
(Percentage in Parentheses)

Level of Political Discussion	Karbi Respondents	Kuki Respondents	Total Respondents
Regular discussion	37 (27.21)	22 (22.68)	59 (25.32)
Occasional discussion	99(72.79)	75 (77.32)	174 (74.68)
Total	136(100)	97 (100)	233(100)

Source: Field Survey Conducted during June 2014 - December 2015.

The above table reveals that a discussion by women on various political matters, even in the few families where it is allowed, is largely occasional as about three fourths (74.68%) of the respondents' families allow their women folk in such discussion occasionally and over one fourth (25.32%) of the respondents' families have women's participation in political discussion regularly. In the two communities women folk generally do not take part in political discussions regularly as women remain engaged with the work in family all the time. But on

some occasions, like organizing any conference for development of the community, womenfolk participate in the discussions. However, regular participation of women in discussions on political matters is found more in the Karbi respondents' families (27.21%) than the Kuki respondents' families (22.68%) whereas in occasional discussions, more Kuki respondents' families (77.32) allow their women folk than Karbi respondents' families (72.79%). It is also observed that in order to manage household activities, the families generally never feel it necessary to encourage their womenfolk in such discussions as these are considered useless for women.

Majority of the respondents' families, women don't participate in the political discussion as they remain absorbed with household works and have no interest as well as awareness about political matters. So, generally males participate in the matters. However, relatively better exposure to outer world due to locational advantage and urban impacts, more Karbi women participate in political discussions regularly as compared with their counterparts in the Kuki families.

Besides the family level political participation, one finds membership of political parties as more visible political activity. Let us examine the respondents' membership in political parties.

MEMBERSHIP OF POLITICAL PARTIES

In the tribal communities, male members often take membership of political parties, but women rarely take such membership. No major influence of any regional or national party is found in the villages of the two tribal communities. Of the total respondents, only 29 respondents (5.78%) are members of Indian National Congress and Bharatiya Janata Party: 17 (5.99%) and 12 (5.50%) of the Karbi and Kuki respondents respectively. The following table displays the political party membership among the respondents from the two communities:

Table 6.10
Political Party Membership among the Respondents
(Percentage in Parentheses)

Membership of Political Party	Karbi Respondents	Kuki Respondents	Total Respondents
Indian National Congress (INC)	06 (35.29)	09 (75.00%)	15 (51.72%)
Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)	11 (64.71)	03 (25.00%)	14(48.28%)
Total	17 (100)	12 (100)	29(100)

Source: Field Survey Conducted during June 2014 - December 2015.

The above table reveals that very few respondents (only 29) have membership in only two political parties and of these, over half (51.72%) are members of Indian National Congress (INC) and 48.28% are members of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). More of the Karbi respondents (64.71%) and their families have membership of BJP whereas more of the Kuki families (75%) have membership of Indian National Congress. Due to influence of political winds from the neighbouring state of Mizoram with Christian majority as well as its religious minority status, Kuki prefer the Congress under the influence of their religious leaders. However, due to their traditional culture and the influence of Sangha Parivar, Karbi people generally prefer BJP.

The inclination for a particular political party is not a recent development; in some cases the new generation continues to support those political parties which were preferred by their forefathers.

Vote Casting

Exercising voting right is the most fundamental right of citizens in a democratic society. But in the tribal communities, fundamental rights of women are not generally exercised due to various factors which influence their voting rights. There are 41 (8%) respondents [Karbi-25 (8.80%) and Kuki-16 (7.34%)] who are non-voters, as their names are not found on electoral rolls, due to underage and other reasons. Most of them cast vote in panchayat, state and national elections.

Generally the women of both communities are passive voters as cast their vote according to the wish of the head of the family. A few factors which influence the families for casting votes in a massive way are: (i) ideology, (ii) national interest, (iii) community/village interest, (iv) self/ Family interest and (v) one's own right. Ideology is meant for their inclination towards a political party. National interest is evolved from an effect of mass media wherein a small section of people in both the communities vote for the sake of nation. Community/village interest motivates them to cast their votes for the development of their village and it is the most influential factor in vote casting. Self/family interest is also a major factor in exercising of voting right in the tribal communities. Some political party or candidate provides some instant benefits to some families or commits to do some favour in future and it motivates the tribal families to cast votes on a large scales. Finally, in both the tribal communities a section of voters is always supposed to protect their citizenship (land) right by casting vote in every election.

The following table presents the factors that influence women's vote casting in both the tribal communities.

Table 6.11
Purpose of Exercising Voting Right among the Respondents
(Percentage in Parentheses)

Purpose of Vote Casting	Karbi Respondents	Kuki Respondents	Total Respondents
Ideology	13 (5.02)	18 (8.91)	31 (6.72)
National Interest	52 (20.08)	23 (11.39)	75 (16.27)
Community/ Village Interest	94 (36.29)	76 (37.62)	170 (36.87)
Self/ Family Interest	51 (19.69)	48 (23.76)	99 (21.48)
Securing citizen	49(18.92)	37 (18.32)	86 (18.66)
Total	259 (100)	202 (100)	461 (100)

Source: Field Survey Conducted during June 2014 - December 2015.

The above table reveals that in vote casting, interest of the community or village plays a vital role. Here, over two fifths (36.87%) of the respondents exercise their voting right only for fulfilling their village's or community's interest: Over one third (36.29%) of the Karbi respondents and about two fifths

(37.62) of the Kuki respondents cast their vote only for their community's or village's interest. Self or family's interest also has a great role in exercising voting right in both the communities as the second most important factor among over one fifth (21.48%) of the respondents. Here, self or community-centric voting is more distinctly visible among the Kuki respondents (23.76) than the Karbi (19.69) respondents. There is also a common belief in a section of the tribal people that through voting their citizenship (land ownership) is renewed or protected. About one fifth (18.66%) of the respondents, thus, cast their vote to protect or renew citizenship: 18.92% of the Karbi and 18.32% of the Kuki respondents. National interest is also a motivating factor in voting for parliamentary elections and 16.27% of the respondents vote for this purpose. Here, the Karbi respondents (20.08%) are more than the Kuki (11.39%) respondents while the rest of the patterns are similar across the categories of purpose of vote casting.

Thus, largely it is communities or village's interest, followed by self or family's interest, which motivates the respondents to cast vote. The respondents of both the communities have strong community and family feelings. However, more Karbi respondents than the Kuki respondents have national interest as an influencing factor in their vote casting. It is due to relatively more exposure of Karbis to outer world and impact of urban contacts, due to their location.

In most of the cases, women of the two communities have no knowledge, awareness and self-motivation for exercising voting right. They go and vote in almost all elections as per their family head's wish. Hence, on this front, the political status of women is poor; their consciousness is always over shadowed by community and family feelings. Political exercise of voting among the respondents of the two communities is influenced by various factors. Women voters generally cast their votes in large numbers in every occasion. But in most of the cases they cast their vote according to a decision taken by others. So, various factors generally influence them in casting of their votes. The following table speaks of the factors influencing vote casting among the respondents:

Table 6.12
Factors Influencing Vote Casting among the Respondents
(Percentage in Parentheses)

Type of Influence	Karbi Respondents N=284 (100)	Kuki Respondents N=218 (100)	Total Respondents N=502 (100)
Political Campaign	52 (18.31)	33 (15.14)	85 (16.93)
Role of head man/ senior person of the village	188 (66.20)	124 (56.88)	314 (62.55)
Role of media	17 (5.99)	21 (9.63)	38 (7.57)
Books and magazines	13 (4.58)	16 (7.34)	29 (5.78)
Relatives and family members	248 (87.32)	196 (89.91)	444 (88.45)
Friends	139 (48.24)	83 (38.07)	222 (44.22)
Discussions in public place	42 (14.79)	37 (16.97)	79 (15.74)

Source: Field Survey Conducted during June 2014 - December 2015.

The above table reveals that the female voters (88.45%) are particularly influenced by male guardian at home much more: 88.32% of the Karbi and 89.91% of the Kuki respondents. Headman of a tribal village also creates a positive atmosphere for vote casting in favour of a particular person or party after getting some benefit (personal, community/village or of both types). 66.18% of the Karbi and 56.88% of the Kuki respondents believed that headman or senior respectable male person of these tribal villages influenced their vote casting. Influence of friends is also large among the respondents (44.22%): 48.24% of the Karbi and 38.07% of the Kuki respondents. Other influencing factors like political campaign and effect of mass media or books and magazines leave no significant influence on vote casting among the respondents. Ultimately the community (family or village headman or friends) plays the major role in this respect.

There are different levels of political participation through vote casting like local, state and national elections which also indicate their political space.

There are 92 Karbi and 32 Kuki (total 124) respondents with no voting right, due to under age. The rest have the right to vote and they voted at various levels.

The following table depicts the level of vote casting among the respondents in the elections held in the recent past:

Table 6.13
Level of Vote Casting among the Respondents
(Percentage in Parentheses)

Level of Vote Casting	Karbi Respondents N=192 (100)	Kuki Respondents N=186(100)	Total Respondents 378 (100)
Parliamentary Elections	175 (91.15)	167 (89.79)	342 (90.48)
Assembly Elections	172 (89.58)	171 (91.94)	343 (90.74)
Gaon Panchayat Elections	178 (92.70)	174 (93.55)	352 (93.12)

Source: Field Survey Conducted during June 2014 - December 2015.

The above table reveals that the vote casting among the respondents of the two communities is almost similar at the three levels of elections. This means that women are influenced and guided in their vote casting by their male family head, village headman or friends in the elections, also, the community feeling is strong among them and thus, women are less aware in the matter of political participation. Hence, most of the respondents have to cast their votes according to their male guardians' will.

After this analysis, main findings of the chapter may be summarized. These are as follows:

1. In spite of the involvement of women in almost all economic and non-economic activities, over three fourths (85.25%) of the respondents never attended any meeting of Gram Sabha. On the other hand, over one tenth (12.58%) of them have occasionally attended the meetings. Of them only 2.17% have attended the meeting regularly. The patterns are similar among the respondents of two communities. However, Kuki community is more orthodox in allowing their womenfolk to attend such meeting than the Karbi community. Hence, Kuki

women always maintain more distance from decision-making discussions in any form and anywhere as compared with the Karbi women. Location and communication facility of Karbi habitations are comparatively better than those of Kuki habitations. The Kukis have better education of family members but the family head is generally found inclined to certain individual or political party and he decides anything.

2. About the awareness of various government sponsored schemes initiated at the Gaon Panchayat level, it is found that all the respondents of both the communities are aware about the Indira Awas Yojana (IAY), followed by the most (80.68%) of the respondents who have adequate knowledge about widows' pension and old age pension. MGNREGS (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) is also a popular scheme and about three fourths (57.77%) of the respondent have also full information about this scheme. Due to more education in the Kuki tribe including its womenfolk, the awareness about beneficiaries of this scheme is relatively more in the Kuki respondents than the Karbi respondents. About four fifths (77.11%) of the Karbi respondents and over four fifths (85.32%) of the Kuki respondents are aware about the scheme. But advantage of location of the villages with better communication has direct impact on the implementation of some schemes such as IAY, MGNREGS etc and due to the location of Karbi villages, implementation of the schemes is more visible in their villages than the Kuki villages as about three fifths (57.39%) of the Karbi respondents and over two fifths (41.75%) of the Kuki respondents are aware about MGNREGS.

3. Satisfaction level of the respondents about the activities of Gaon Panchayat is very less. Over half (52.23%) of the respondents who are aware regarding the functions of Gaon Panchayat expressed their dissatisfaction over the activities of Gaon Panchayat for ignoring their village in various welfare schemes whereas over one third (33.60%) of the respondents were partially satisfied and only over one tenth (14.17%) of them were satisfied. Here, also, location keeps most of the Kuki respondents relatively deprived from various

welfare schemes under Gaon Panchayat and therefore, about three fifths (57.42%) of the Kuki respondents are dissatisfied as compared to about half (48.63%) of the Karbi respondents. Then, more Karbi respondents (35.62%) over the Kuki respondents (30.69%) are partially satisfied. In the case of their full satisfaction, about one sixth (15.75%) of the Karbi respondents over one tenth (11.88%) of the Kuki respondents remain satisfied over the activities of Gaon Panchayat.

4. Headman is the administrative head of a tribal village and near about two thirds (64.49%) of the respondents are partially satisfied with the performance of headman and over one third (35.51%) of them fully satisfied. So, majority of the respondents are partially satisfied. The same pattern is observed across the respondents of the two communities. Few issues like restriction on the rearing of number of livestock which is not favoured for certain cultivation and settlement of a dispute which makes a few families unhappy with the headman. It is also seen that due to religious differences among people of several villages where co-habitation of both Christian and animistic Hindu Karbi people takes place like Boalchera Karbi village, most of the people who have converted into Christianity, do not support the animistic Hindu headmen on all occasions. So, satisfaction over headman's work is more in the Kuki villages than in Kuki villages.

5. The traditional tribal village administration is very strong in every tribal village. In Karbi villages such body is termed *Kachingdai* whereas in Kuki this administrative body is known as *Deban*. About three fifths (57.52%) of these respondents are satisfied with the administration and the rest (42.48%) are not. More of the Kuki respondents (63.08%) are satisfied than those of the Karbi respondents (53.52%). Due to the cultural homogeneity, strong monitoring by Church and effect of education, Kuki respondents have comparatively greater satisfaction than the Karbi respondents as they have also comparatively less number of disputes.

6. About the function of welfare organizations, about three fifths (58.56%) of the total respondents have adequate knowledge about the welfare organizations

of their area and communities. However, tribal welfare organizations are more active in Kuki areas. Over three fifths (61.01%) of the Kuki respondents are well aware about the functions of various Missionary trusts which provide low cost medical treatment and education. About three fifths (56.69%) of the Karbi respondents also know the activities of Vanabashi Kalyan Ashram, Ram krishna Mission etc very well. However, about one third (30.28%) of the total respondents have also some knowledge about the activities of tribal welfare organizations in their areas: about one third (30.99%) of the Karbi respondents and over one fourth (29.36%) of the Kuki respondents. But over one tenth (11.16%) of the total respondents has no idea about these welfare organizations and their activities: 12.32% of the Karbi and 9.63% of the Kuki respondents. Here, particularly womenfolk remain untouched with the organizations. But in most of the Kuki villages and a few of the Karbi villages, Churches always play a vital role for the welfare of the community while tribal welfare organizations in most of the Karbi villages are running various welfare programmes. However, due to a strong network of Churches in most of the Kuki habitations, maximum Kuki people are associated with various welfare organizations.

7. Women's participation in political activities is very poor. Most of the families (83.06%) of the respondents do not encourage the activities like political meetings or any discussions, campaigning in favour of a candidate or political party, casting vote according to the one's own choice etc and the rest (16.93%) are allowed to participate. Moreover, only 5.38% of the respondents are fully encouraged and over one tenth (11.58%) are encouraged to some extent to participate in political activities. The patterns are similar among the respondents of the two communities. The Karbi families are found more liberal towards women's participation in political activities than the Kuki families as 85.32% of the Kuki respondents as compared with 81.33% of the Karbi respondents who said that women are not at all encouraged to participate. It is reported that the families which have educated members or inclined towards any political party generally encourage their womenfolk for political participation. Urban impact is also creates positive impact to some extent in this regard. So, due to the better

location of habitation with urban impact, Karbi families are comparatively liberal to allow women to participate in political activities.

8. For casting of vote, over two thirds (69.32%) of the respondents (61.66% of the Karbi and 70.18% of the Kuki respondents) have no freedom to cast their vote according to their own choice as it is decided by families, specially male members; over one fifth (21.51%) of the respondents (Karbi-21.83% and Kuki-21.10%) are allowed to some extent to cast vote of their choice and about one tenth (9.16%) of them have full freedom to cast vote of their choice. The same trend is observed among the respondents of the two communities. However, in the category of 'No freedom' the figure for the Kuki respondents (70.18%) is much more than that for the Karbi respondents (61.66%).

9. Regarding the discussion by women on various political matter, the family of the respondents allow these largely occasional as about three fourths (74.68%) of the respondents' families allow their womenfolk in such discussions occasionally and over one fourth (25.32%) of the respondents' families have women's participation in political discussion regularly. In the two communities womenfolk generally do not take part in the political discussions regularly as women remain engaged with the work in family all the time. But on some occasions like organizing any conference for development of the community, they participate with no hesitation. However, regular participation of women in discussions on political matters is found more in the Karbi respondents' families (27.21%) than the Kuki respondents' families (22.68%) whereas in occasional discussions, more Kuki respondents' families (77.32) allow their women folk than Karbi respondent's families (72.79%). It is also observed that, in order to manage household activities, the families generally never feel it necessary to encourage their womenfolk in such discussions as these are considered useless for women.

10. For having membership in political parties, very few respondents (only 29) have membership in only two political parties and of these over half

(51.72%) are members of Indian National Congress (INC) and 48.28% are members of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). More of the Karbi respondents (64.71%) and their families have membership of BJP whereas more of the Kuki families (75.00%) have membership of Indian National Congress. Due to influence of political winds from the neighbouring state of Mizoram with Christian majority as well as its religious minority status, Kukis prefer the Congress under the influence of their religious leaders. However, due to their traditional culture and the influence of Sangha Parivar, Karbi people generally prefer BJP.

11. In vote casting, community's or village's interest plays a vital role. Here, over two fifths (36.87%) of the respondents exercise their voting right only for fulfilling their village's or community's interest: Over one third (36.29%) of the Karbi respondents and about two fifths (37.62) of the Kuki respondents. Self or family's interest also has a great role in exercising voting right in both the communities as the second most important factor among over one fifth (21.48%) of the respondents. Here, self or community-centric voting is more distinctly visible among the Kuki respondents (23.76) than the Karbi (19.69) respondents. There is also a common belief in a section of the tribal people that through voting their citizenship (land ownership) is renewed or protected. About one fifth (18.66%) of the respondents, thus, cast their vote to protect or renew citizenship: 18.92% of the Karbi and 18.32% of the Kuki respondents. National interest is also a motivating factor in voting for parliamentary elections and 16.27% of the respondents vote for this purpose. Here, the Karbi respondents (20.08%) are more than the Kuki (11.39%) respondents while the rest of the patterns are similar across the categories of purpose for vote casting. However, the female voters (88.45%) are particularly influenced by male guardian at home much more: 88.32% of the Karbi and 89.91% of the Kuki respondents. Headman of tribal village also creates a positive atmosphere of vote casting for a particular person or party after getting some benefit (personal, for community/village or of both types). 66.18% of the Karbi and 56.88% of the Kuki respondents believed that headman or senior respectable male person of their village influenced them in

vote casting. Influence of friends is also large among the respondents (44.22%): 48.24% - Karbi and 38.07% -Kuki. Other factors like political campaign and effect of mass media/books and magazines leave no significant influence on vote casting among the respondents. Vote casting among the respondents of the communities is almost similar at the three levels of elections (above 90%). This means that women are influenced and guided for vote casting by male family head and village headman or friends in the elections or the community feeling is strong among them and women are less aware in the matter of political participation.

Briefly Karbi and Kuki women in the Cachar district are not politically empowered. However, due to the effect of urbanization, Karbi women are marginally advanced in enjoying political right than the Kuki women. In both the communities, very few women participate in Gaon Sabha but they are aware about the schemes like Indira Awas Yojona (IAY), Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) etc. But women in both the communities are fully aware about the powers and functions of the most powerful tribal village administration. However, due to the belonging to the same cultural belief, Kuki women are more satisfied about the administration than the Karbi women. In exercising voting right, a very few families allow their women folk (voters) to cast vote according to their own choice. Family head, headman and senior members of the village generally play vital role in mobilizing the voters in favour of a particular person or party. Regarding the political orientation, Karbi community is found more inclined towards the ideology of Indian National Congress whereas animistic Karbi society prefers Bharatiya Janata Party.
