

Chapter - VI

Political participation of Women: Comparison between Manipur and Meghalaya

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter highlighted the different indicators through tabulation of responses from the respondents on all important aspects such as social, economic and political in both the selected states. The tabulations on various aspects on women's activeness adequately indicate the social and economic as well as political standing of women in the two states differently. Continuing in the same course, in this chapter the researcher will discuss socio-economic and political participation of women in the comparative perspective of Manipur and Meghalaya through the prism of the tabulations provided in the previous chapter. It is to be noted that participation has different dimensions therefore researcher have only explored some of the cases. Socio-economic factors directly or indirectly influences politics. Thus questions on education, attitudes towards the sex of child, income, inheritances of ancestral property, exercising of voting power, freedom of movement without anyone's consent etc. comes to the purview of this chapter.

At the outset it should be mentioned that the study of political participation of any society or section of people needs to take into account whether or not it is associated with democratic values. However, the levels and extent of political participation of people may be restricted by the very existence of both natural and man-made inequalities. While it is impossible to overcome natural factors of inequalities, it is possible to overcome man-made inequalities simply by adopting the democratic principles and values. The pillars of democracy like liberty, equality, fraternity, justice etc. are strong enough to support and protect the people from challenges posed by

man-made inequalities. And also, the socio-economic environment will have a direct impact upon political participation.

Thus, the study of the nature and level of political participation and its resultant empowerment can be evaluated only on the basis of the availability of democratic values. The presence of the umbrella of democracy is a pre-requisite for the attainment of maximum extent of participation and empowerment. Empowerment is not characterized as achieving power to dominate others, but rather power to act with others to effect change. It is indeed an integral part of democratic political system to insure greater participation and empowerment of the people in the political process and in political institutions which will in turn reflect the good health of the system. Maximum participation through empowerment means more legitimacy to the activities of the government and political stabilities.

But the problem is that gender disparities still exist in many democratic countries including India. In the North-East too, women are under-represented in local and national decision making bodies. They earn less than men and participate comparatively less in wage employment and also remain mostly in low grade jobs.¹ One reason is, for instance, in the poor areas even the rate of schooling of girl child is still very low and dropout rate is very high as compared to men although one of the UN Millennium Development Goals is universalization of primary education by 2015 (HDR, 2003). When one looks at the gap in drop-out, income, work participation, social and political participation, one can assert that there is a long way to go in order to remove the gender inequality in education, economy and social status.

The current chapter will discuss briefly and concisely on the Political participation of women in Manipur and Meghalaya in a comparative perspective. These two states are located in the so called

¹ Burman, J.J.Roy. 2012. 'Status of Tribal Women in India'. *Mainstream Weekly* (12) 10th March. <http://www.mainstreamweekly.net/article3314.html> retrieved on 10th January 2013.

'North East India' belonged to same racial stock. Manipur and Meghalaya perfectly exemplify patrilineal and matrilineal society respectively. As a patriarchal society, in Manipur the father is the head of the household and the lineage is traced through the father. On the other hand, in Meghalaya as it is a matriarchal society the lineage is drawn through the mother. Subsequently, the relative positions of husbands and the wives in the two states are quite different.

The type of society or family can have a significant bearing on the status or position of women in society. In a matriarchal society, a woman is the head of the household, and when property is inherited through females, women are likely to have a higher social status, autonomy, and control over the family resources than males. However, in patriarchal societies, especially in North-East India, men are at the top in the social hierarchy as compared to women. Cain (1993) defines the patriarchal structure as "the sum of institutional mechanisms that serve to limit women's autonomy relative to men's". In a patriarchal system, various political and legal institutions also perpetuate inequalities between men and women. The practices of purdah and certain marriage rituals often relegate women to a subordinate position.

Analysis above suggests that social systems have significant influence on individual's participatory intentions. The type of social system may have about the participation intentions sometimes through providing certain norms and behavior. In other cases, it may influence participation intentions by imposing restrictions on the individuals e.g. by denying them access to resources, access to information, freedom to make decisions, etc. In a matriarchal society women are more likely to have higher access to resources, more freedom of movement and higher decision making freedom or authority as compared to women living in a patriarchal system. This

difference in the access to resources and in decision-making power may lead to differing participation behavior.

The present research also aims at understanding these co-relationships between social system and political participation. The present analysis will be strictly on the basis of data presented in the previous chapter. Thus, the chapter will be divided into four (4) sections highlighting four indicators on social immunity, economic independence, political participation and co-relationship between socio-economic status and the level of political participation. The researcher, thus, will analyze the indicators which highlight the social status of women in both the states in its relationship with the level of political participation.

a) Social immunity

Under this section the researcher will focus on some important indicators. The main indicators to be analyzed here are education, marital status, attitude towards the sex of child, timing of food intake, membership of club, community center, social organization, participation of social meeting, function, fete etc., visit to nearest town, thinking about dependency of women on men, idea about remarriage after husband's death. Through these indicators which were presented earlier in tabulated form the researcher tries to know the level of social immunity or freedom the women of Manipur and Meghalaya have.

In terms of literacy women in Manipur are highly literate as shown in the table 3.2 of the chapter number three (i.e. 71 percent of the women are literate as given in the table. This even corresponds to the data given by the census 2011).² Most even if the presented data in the previous chapter did not show details of the qualification of the literate respondents, most of them are above graduate. Only some of them are illiterate. This suggests that they are highly educated. In the

² Field Survey.

same way women in Meghalaya are also highly literate as shown in the table 3.21 of the chapter number three (i.e. 69 percent).³ Thus in both the states, the literacy of women is high. It suggests that in terms of education (which is an important social indicator) women in both the states are very active.

In terms of marital status of women in Manipur, due to their activeness in the social and economic fields, they are more independent and can sustain even after separation from their husbands as shown in the table 3.3 of the chapter number three (i.e. 47.04 percent of the total percentage). In the same way women in Meghalaya are also highly independent due to their dominance in the social and economic fields (i.e. 52 percent of the total percentage). They can also sustain themselves even after separation from their husbands. The most important suggestion provided by this indicator is that women are not fettered by a close social outlook. Instead they are quite immune to social to restrictions provided by traditions and practices.

This is interesting in the sense that the average Indian women are quite succumbed to various kinds of social prejudices and thus restricted their activity to domestic affairs whereby the freedom of women is restricted substantially. Even in terms of attitude towards the sex of child, most of the women express their independent ideas towards the sex of the child as shown in the table 3.4 (i.e. the numbers of illiterate female respondents who prefer equally both are 24 which come to 6.55 percent. In the same category of the literate female respondents who prefer equally both are 182 which come to 49.72 percent. Thus altogether the number women preferring both the sex are 206 which come to 56.28 percent). The data suggests that means maximum people in Manipur treat both the sexes with equal value. It further means social acceptability of women in all aspects. In the same way in Meghalaya, most of the women express their

³ Census Report 2011.

independent attitude towards the sex of the child as shown in the table 3.23 of the chapter number three (3) (i.e. the numbers of illiterate female respondents who prefer equally both are 30 which come to 8.19 percent. In the same category of the literate female respondents who prefer equally both are 96 which come to 26.22 percent. Thus altogether preferring of equally both the sexes are 126 which come to 34.5 percent). This percentage is big considering the fact that the percentage of women preferring (only) female child is 20.7. Again the numbers of respondents who say 'cannot say' are 102 which come to 27.86 percentages of the total respondents, only 12 percent of respondents prefer (only) male child. This suggests that in both the states women are accepted and there is no such prejudicial preference to male child happened elsewhere in India. If one reads this with earlier indicator it is clearly understood that respect of women right from their birth is being hailed in these two states. This becomes a huge impetus towards their freedom in the society.

This freedom of women can also be looked from the perspective of another indicator viz. timing of food intake. In a normal closed patriarchal society, it is the male who take food first and only after him women should take their food. In terms of timing of food intake, as per the table, majority of women in Manipur seem to have no independent food intake time as shown in the table 3.5 (i.e. 76 percent of the female respondents take food after male. 12 percent of the female respondents take food whenever needed.). On the other hand women in Meghalaya take food whenever they think it is necessary as shown in the table 3.24 (i.e. the number of female respondents who took food together is 30 which come to 8.2 percent. The number of female respondents who took after male is 0 which come to percent. The number of female respondents who took food whenever needed or convenience is 336 which come to 91.80 percent. The number of female respondent who took food any other is 0 which come to 0 percent.) And in this sense they are more independent. This indicator on the timing of food intake is important because it has the

potentiality of highlighting the relative freedoms of women in day to day life. In most of the Indian societies women generally take food after husband which in most cases shows the relative limitation on the freedom of women. By looking at the timing of food intake, the researcher aims at understanding the relative independence or otherwise of women in Manipur and Meghalaya. Accordingly it is found that women in both the states do not take food similarly. In this regard women in Meghalaya are relatively more independent.

However, in terms of membership of club, community center, social organization, women in Manipur are very active and participative in social activities such as membership of club, community center, social organization or NGO of Manipur as shown in the table 3.6 (i.e. 82 percent of the female respondents are member of the club, community-centre, and social organisation. Only 18 percent of the female respondents are member of the club, community centre, social organisation). Whereas the women in Meghalaya, are less active in social activities such as membership of club, community centre, social organization or NGO as shown in the 3.25 (i.e. 21 percent of female are member and around 79 percentage are female are non-members) . This indicator is important because of many reasons. First it shows the activeness of women in Manipur in social sectors. Second, it also shows through some aspects of patriarchy still exist (i.e. food intake timing) women in Manipur are not restricted by prejudices of patriarchy social characters or traditions where women are to confine in domestic affairs only. This indicates that they are highly active in social life.

Similarly, in terms of participation in social meeting/function/fete etc. maximum number of women in Manipur took part in social gathering either on their own initiative as shown in the table 3.7. Considering the fact that most of the women in Manipur are part of the local association 'Meira-Paibi', it is not surprising that maximum women in Manipur take part in such gatherings Meira-

Paibis meet at least once a day (mostly after dinner in night). In the same way women in Meghalaya took active part in social gathering and maximum of them on their own initiative as shown in the table 3.26 (i.e. women who took own initiative in participation in social meeting/function/fete etc. outside the village are 306 which come to 83.6 percent and the number women who took with men or women of the same or other family participation in social meeting/function/fete etc. outside the village are 48 which come to 13.11 percent and the number of women who took participation in social meeting/function/fete etc. outside the village on the initiative of NGOs is 12 which come to 3.27 percent).

Likewise in the case of Manipur, where most of the women involve in 'Meira-Paibi' as shown in the table 3.7 (i.e. women who took own initiative in participation in social meeting/function/fete etc. outside the village are 34 which come to 9.28 percent and the number of women who took part at the initiative of men or women of the same or other family are 92 to 25.13 percent and the number of women who took participation in social meeting/function/fete etc. outside the village on the initiative of NGOs is 240 which come to 65.57 percent). Women in Meghalaya attend church service regularly at least once a week. Thus, the percentage of women's participation in social gathering in both the states is very high. This again helps them in maintaining their social activeness.

In terms of visit to nearest town women in Manipur most of them can move alone freely and join any social activity including joining political party, the party, function or ceremony without the permission of senior or male members as shown in the table 3.8 (i.e. the total number of female respondents who say 'yes' to visit nearest town with/without the permission of men in Manipur are 320 which come to 87.43 percent of the total respondent i.e., 366). In the same way women in Meghalaya can move alone freely and join any function or ceremony without the permission of senior or male members as

shown in the 3.27 (i.e. the number of female respondents who say 'yes' to visit nearest town with/without the permission of men are 324 which come to 88.52 percent of the total respondent i.e., 366).

These indicators on social mobility can be read together with another indicator that highlights women's awareness on various issues concerning society and politics. This can be understood by looking at the data on reading and watching newspaper or television. Thus, when it comes to mass media such as newspapers, the radio and the television, women in both the states read newspapers, listen to the radio, and watch television. More than half of the women in Manipur read newspapers as shown in the table 3.11 (i.e. 56 percent of female respondents read newspaper daily or occasionally and 44 percent female respondents did not read newspaper because they are illiterate.) in chapter 3. Almost similarly in Meghalaya too, more than half of the women read newspapers as shown in the table 3.30 in chapter 3 (i.e. 56 per cent of female respondents read newspaper daily or occasionally). Meager number of women of Manipur listens to the radio as shown in the table 3.12 (i.e. 28 percent of female respondent's listened radio either every day or occasionally in Manipur. And around 72 percent of the female respondent never listened radio). It has been a common trend that that nowadays one finds radio as the least popular mass media. It has been increasingly replaced by other media such as Newspapers, Magazines and Television (TV). In the same way, very less number of women of Meghalaya listens to the radio as shown in the table 3.31 (i.e. 46 percent of female respondents listened to radio programmes everyday (daily) or occasionally and 52 percent of the female never listened radio Table 3.13 in chapter 3 showed that women in Manipur are very active in watching television (i.e. 92 percent of the women respondents watch TV either regularly or occasionally). Similarly, the women's television viewership in Meghalaya too is huge which had been shown in the table 3.32 (i.e. 76.49 percent of the women respondents watch TV either regularly or occasionally).

In terms of remarriage after husband's deaths, in Manipur, majority of the women do not want to remarry after death of their husbands as shown in the table 3.10 (i.e. 3 percent of the female respondents say 'agree' that they should remarry after husbands' death. Around 82 percent of the female respondents say 'do not agree' that they should remarry. Around 15 percent of the female respondents say 'not sure' that they should marry after husband. The percentage of the 'do not agree' is more than the 'agree'). Remarriage is not popular in Manipur. It happens only in some rare cases. However, when the respondents are asked they claimed that it is not related with their being unfired to remarry, rather it is about the future of their children.

Whereas the women in Meghalaya do not want to live without male counterparts, thus they want to remarry after death of their husband as shown in the table 3.29 (i.e. 34 percent of the female say 'agree' to remarriage after husband death. 25 percent of the female respondents say 'do not agree'. 32 percent of the female respondents say 'not sure'. Around 8 percent of the female respondents say 'no comment'). The percentage of remarriage is high in the case of Meghalaya and the reverse is true in case of Manipur.

It is very interesting and also significant to know the status of women particularly their activeness in social affairs. From the above data it may be said that even if in some aspects of social life women in both the states are similar and independent in almost all the aspects. It is only the timing of food intake and the indicators of remarriage that show different status of these two states. Otherwise be it, child sex preference, social meeting and gathering, visiting nearby towns, thinking of dependency that women in both the states show that independent status as also their acceptance in society. Thus, it may be said that socially women in both the states, Manipur and Meghalaya are active.

(b) Economic Independence

Under this section the researcher will focus on some important economic indicators. The main indicators to be analyzed here are earning status, inheritance of ancestral property, occupational pattern. From these indicators the researcher tries to understand the economic status of the women in Manipur and Meghalaya.

In terms of speaking about dependency of women on men, women in Manipur are independent. This shows the permissibility or acceptance of women's mobility in society without too much restriction on them as shown in the table 3.9. In the same way women in Meghalaya, they are independent of men economically. Perception of male and female about whether the female would remain economically dependent on men provides another indicator of status of the women in the Khasi society as shown in the table 3.28.

Earning status of women is very important indicator to understand their relative independence from men. If a woman earns at least to sustain herself and her family she is economically independent in the sense that she does not need to depend on her husband income for maintaining herself and her family. Women contribution to the economic life of the family as well as that of the society at large has been aptly described in a popular saying in Manipur. It says: "They enjoy a certain degree of the economic independence which enable them to involve in every activities directly or indirectly connected with the social and economic problems of the state. This high status accorded to the womenfolk was regarded as one of the greatest prides of Manipur."⁷ In terms of earning status women in Manipur are economic independence. Women play a vital role in the economic life of the society as shown in the table 3.14 (i.e. 52 per cent of the female respondents are dependent and around 48 per cent are earner. In the table the overall percentage of the dependent of the female is more than the male and also in case of the earner). Though the females earn less but they are active in most of

the socio-economic activities in Manipur. On the other hand women in Meghalaya earns more and economically independent as shown in the table 3.33 (i.e. 78.68 percent to be exactly).

Another important indicator of economic independence is the ancestral property inherited by women from their parents. It is important because when the amount of property inherited is substantial, women can sustain themselves even if they do not earn through any other profession. If the women earn as well as inherit property their source is huge thus making them economically highly independent. In Manipur property and ancestral assets are traditionally inherited by the sons in the family with few exceptions as shown in the table 3.15 (i.e. 22 percent of the female respondents received their ancestral property. The maximum of these women do not have any male sibling. But some of them share the parental property with male siblings. 78 percent of the female respondents do not receive their ancestral property due to the presence of a male member in the family). In the absence of a male in a family, privilege are given to the female for inheriting property and ancestral assets in Manipur. It shows that property and ancestral assets based on traditional customs is previously inherited by the sons in the family. Whereas in Meghalaya the females have more chance to inherit property. This indicates that in Meghalaya the women have upper hand in terms of property which may lead to economic independence as shown in the table 3.34 (i.e. 51 per cent of the female heads inherited property from their parents). Women inherit the parents' property acquired and ancestral. Women get the better share as the custodian of the property and the keeper of the home and hearth. Since women inherit property and have control of economic activity. Women are economically independent of the society are emphasized. Thus the inheritance of the property implies a host of responsibilities and strict adherence to norms laid down under the system among the women in Meghalaya.

In terms of occupation the number women in Manipur government and private services is relatively less compare to male. However, a very interesting fact shown by this table 3.16 is that more than 60 percent of women are engaged either in government service or business. This means that the majority of women are economically independent and active. Even amongst those who remain unengaged in any earning occupation, maximum of them are literates. In the same way women in Meghalaya comparatively less in government service and more in house maker category. However, very interestingly, nearly half of the female respondents are active earners be it in cultivator sector or, government service or business as shown in the table 3.35 (i.e. 14.7 percent of women in cultivator category and 13.6 percent of women in government service category and 21.8 percent women in business category and 36.6 percent of women in House maker category. 13.1 percent of women in old age category). Reading this economic indicator along with pattern of property inheritance, women in Meghalaya can be said to be more or less economically sound or self- sufficient. These three economic indicators namely, earning status, inheritance of ancestral property and occupation, indicate high percentage of women as economically independent in both the states. Women in Meghalaya are traditionally inheritors of ancestral property. This coupled with their working for earning makes them economically more or less independent. In Manipur too women are involved in economic activities especially in terms of earning livelihood. This gives them economically independence too. Women's activeness in economic activity in Manipur is exemplified by the fact that there is a special market in the heart of the Imphal city where only women conduct business activity. Located at the most important area in the city, 'Ima Market' is the unique market. In Manipur, in almost there is at least one such market where women sells various goods.

(c) Political Participation

This section on political participation will analyze indicators that show level of political participation of women in the two states. It will analyze this level on the basis of tables provide in the previous chapter. Here the indicators are of two categories. The first category will look at the level of awareness on political issues such as reservation of seats for women in local government institutions. The second category directly link to political participation indicators such as exercising voting right, participation of women in political demonstration / rallies / public meeting /contesting election / membership of political parties etc. By analyzing these two categories one can understand the women's political activeness in these two states. The indicator on the opinion about reservation of seats is important as it is one of the ways to understand the awareness of the respondents on political issues in the state. In terms of opinion about reservation of seats for members in the local bodies, majority of the women in Manipur support reservation. Interestingly, whether supporting or not maximum number of respondents have information on political issues as shown in the table 3.17 (i.e. 81 percent of the female respondents say 'Good'). In the same way in Meghalaya most of the women wants reservation of seats for members in the local bodies and also maximum numbers of respondents have opinion about the political issues of the state as shown in the table 3.37 (i.e. 3 percent of the female say 'bad' and 82 percent of the female says 'good' and 15 percent of the female say 'no idea'). From the above analysis it can be said that most of the female wants reservation of seats for members in the local bodies. Here the most important indication is that maximum numbers of respondents have opinion about the political issues of the state. Only 15 percent of women say 'No idea' which means they do not form any opinion about this issue.

In terms of exercising of voting rights in Manipur maximum number of female respondents exercises their voting rights. Of course,

most of the female exercises their voting rights and it increase with the increase of the level of education as shown in the table 3.18 (i.e. 12 percent of the male say 'No' about the exercising of voting right. Again 81 percent of the female say 'Yes' about the exercising of voting right and 18 percent of the female say 'No' about the exercising of voting right). It means that maximum number of female respondents want to exercise their voting rights. Of course, most of the female exercises their voting rights. Though, they like to exercise their voting right, they did not like to active involve in politics. But some women involve actively in exercising of voting right and take their advantages for their own benefit. It is also believed that women were less politically aware due to the burden and influence of domestic work which limits female exposure to political experience and information. There is a gap or contradiction between the ground of political reality and the mode of exercising the political rights by the women voters of Manipur. This may be said that women voters never considered the gender factor while exercising their franchise. On the other hand women in Meghalaya do not bother even about whether their names are in the electoral role or not.⁴ Of course most of the female exercise their franchise in the election as is observed from the table 3.37 (i.e. 12 percent says 'no' about the exercising of voting right. Again 86 percent of the female respondent says 'yes' and 13 percent says 'no' about the exercising of voting right).

In terms of active participation of women in politics in Manipur, it may be easily seen that women are not active in politics,⁵ though majority are active in social and economic fields. Most of the women do not want to involve in politics due to their household chores and

⁴ Field Reports.

⁵ Active participation means involvement of citizens in such political activities, which directly or indirectly influence the behavior and actions of decision-makers. It may be viewed as any voluntary action, successful or unsuccessful, organized or unorganized, episodic or continuous, employing legitimate or illegitimate methods, intended to influence the choice of public policies, the administration of public affairs, or the choices of political leaders at any level of government, local or national.

other related factors. It is said that if they take part in politics, they do not gain much but the losses are more. Some women think politics is money power, prestige and honor and does not want to get them involved into it. Because of the financial clout, from rising criminalization of politics to threat of character assassination, etc. which are making it increasingly difficult for women to join active politics. What is even more important is the mutual support and co-operation among themselves. Until and unless, the women themselves come out in support of their own kinswomen contesting in the election reservation of seats for women in politics could not ensure more representation and participation. And therefore it would be meaningless as shown in table in table 3.19 (i.e. 12.29 percent of women are members of Political Parties and just 22.13 percent of women took part at the political demonstration/rallies/public meeting etc. and only 4.09 percent of women contest elections. And 61.47 percent of women remain outside political activities).

In the same way in Meghalaya, women are not active in politics in terms of active participation of women in politics as shown in the table 3.38 (i.e. 13.66 percent of women are members of Political Parties and just 15.02 percent of women took part at the political demonstration/rallies/public meeting etc. and only 6.83 percent of women contest elections. And 64.48 percent of women remain outside political activities). But majority of women in Meghalaya are aware about their rights and position in the society. In electoral political realm hardly any women actively participate as candidates. Though the women outnumbered men voters, even the society does not allow women to participate in political decision making. Till now woman Headman of a Dorbar is hardly found. Also they do not participate much in political discourses. Only recently women are allowed on a very limited scale to participate in Dorbar meeting. Though women in Khasi society are relatively free, still there are discriminations (social and psychological) as explained above. Thus, women are not much interested in politics. Actually most of the women in Meghalaya think

even reservation of seat for the females in the local bodies or Dorbar is not beneficial to them. The opinion of both male and female respondents in this regard is presented in table 3.38.

By analyzing different indicators on political participation, it is known that women in both the states are not active in political participation. The present research clearly reveals that the activeness of women in politics is low. The general belief that the activeness in social-economic will improve the political activeness is disproved here. The indicators of political participation is shown in the table 3.19 and 3.38 of the chapter three which clearly showed that women in Manipur and Meghalaya hardly make any difference in terms of political participation even if they are socially and economically independent.

(d) Correlation

Finally this section, “co-relation” will analyze the co-relationship between the social and economic status of women with the level of political participation and it will be analyzed in terms of popular understanding that political participation is contingent upon the socio-economic status.

From the earlier analysis on social, economic status as well as levels of political participation, it is known that women in both the states are very active in social and economic affairs but it hardly matters when it comes to political participation. For instance it is well known that Manipuri women have always played an important role in the social life. There are lots of evidences where the women played a vital role in the growth and evolution of the society. Women used to attend social gatherings, religious ceremonies and festivals throughout the year. In addition to their household responsibilities and upbringing of children, it has become compulsory for every Manipuri women to participate in the social functions and festivals of their locality. It has been in these social gatherings and festivals that women exchanged their ideas relating to social, political and economic

matters of the society. From this very fact, it can be said that womenfolk of Manipur enjoyed a high status and have been playing a very important role in the society example First Nupi-Lan and Second Nupi-lan.⁶ But women of Manipur are not active in politics, women traditionally been enjoying a respectable status in the society. Women enjoyed high degree of freedom in public life and in the family domain.

In the same way women of Meghalaya too, always have an instilled special position and they play important roles in different

⁶ When we look back to history Manipuri women had always played a significant role in any movement that occurred in Manipur, whether be it in the valley or the Hill. Since the first women's agitation in 1904, the Nupi-lan in 1939-40, to the present situation, the freedom movement of Rani Gaidinliu.

When the British troop occupies Manipur they also enforced disarmament of the local people and adopted a new policy of free trade. Under this policy rice was exported to Kohima without any restraint and the people began to face acute shortage of rice. So in retaliation to this some unidentified persons burnt the Khawairamband bazaar, some government building was also burnt down.

In the meantime Maxwell the then Chief commissioner of Assam issued an order that the town people of Imphal should contribute towards the rebuilding of a bungalow, when the local revolted against this order, the local officials began to use force. Later demoralized by the repressive action of the British the male folk of Imphal began to contribute building materials to rebuild the bungalows destroyed by fire.

It was at this critical juncture that the women folk of Imphal came to the rescue of their male folk. Right from the historical period the Manipuri women always played a very important role in Manipur society. Unlike in other contemporary Hindu society, the Manipuri woman held a key position in social and economic activities of the state. One advantage which the women had was that they met every day at market place and always discussed the day to day happenings of the town and other current issues of the state. The women folk protested in front of the British residency, the market were close, the situation became so serious that the day to day life was severely affected and the government was compelled import army from outside Manipur. However the situation didn't get better it got worse, finally the government decided to withdraw the order for the reconstruction of the bungalows. The women folk thus achieved what their male folk could not do.

An epoch-making event popularly known as the Nupi-Lan broke out on 12 December 1939. The main cause of the agitation was the rise in the price of rice. Owing to the poor harvest in the previous year and unrestricted export of rice to outside Manipur, there was acute shortage of rice in Imphal bazaar. To worsen the situation the mail owners bought all available paddies and continued to export it nonstop. On 12 December 1939, the womenfolk came out in hundreds and began to organize demonstrations in the streets demanding the cessation of export of rice and closure of all rice mills immediately. With the participation of the male folk, particularly of members of the newly formed Praja Sanmelini under the leadership of Neta Hijam Irabot, the agitation began to assume a political color. The predominantly peasant and popular character of Nupi-lan was simply anathema to the petty bourgeois sensibilities of the urban based mahasabha leadership. The Nupi-Lan paved the way for the emergence of the powerful freedom movement in the state and on many occasions the Manipuri women had always demonstrated a rare example of conduct and sacrifice before their male folk.

spheres with great responsibility. Meghalaya is such a society, commonly known as matrilineal where authority, title, inheritance, residence are entitled to women after marriage and succession of properties are traced through the female line. So, it is presumed that they do not require any special effort to make them aware of social, economic, political or psychological understanding and knowledge and to establish their rights along with men in their society as they are automatically placed on an esteemed level. They are presumed to have free access to education, ownership of property, authority in their family and society; they are entitled to be the heads of their families and have the power to take decision regarding what to be done or what not etc.

However in political sphere, hardly anybody is there who is female and even in the Dorbar (similar to that of village panchayat of plain areas) females are not allowed to take part in the meeting or decision making. Though active in socio-economic activities, they are still assumed to be physically weak. Also, even though some families are headed by males it may be noted that they are just to carry out activities with the guidance of their female counterparts who has better control over assets and therefore no fear of losing anything even if they are deserted by their husbands.

Therefore, it can be said that women of Manipur and Meghalaya have traditionally been enjoying a respectable status in the society. Women enjoyed high degree of freedom in public life and in the family domain. They are also observed to enjoy liberty in choosing profession or occupation.

Manipuri women can be also accredited to the contribution they are making to end alcoholism and drugs abuse in the state. In Manipur, two (2) Women's Movements which can be quoted namely, Nisha-Bandh and Meira Paibi are examples of women acute participation in curbing social evils in our society. Researcher sees that the contribution of women in the economic aspect is also large.

Whether in the organized or unorganized sector they have been making their presence felt everywhere.

Same goes to the women of Meghalaya, their women take care of nursing and rearing of their children, supervision of domestic activities, attending to the sick aged parents and other relatives in distress. This is the duty of the youngest daughter in both Khasi and Jaintia families. The Women folk are very sociable. This is reflected in the structural pattern of their socio-political system, which by itself formed a social organization from the family unit to the Hima or state. There is no caste or class system and women are free to participate in any social activities.

With the spread of education, women have taken jobs in govt. offices, many working as engineers, as doctors, as teachers in colleges and Universities and are known for their sincerity and proficiency. One unique feature of this society is that the man has a dual crown, being an uncle in his sister's house and a father to his children. The fact that the ancestral property is vested with the mother could be a mistake to suppose that the father is nobody in the Khasi-Jaintia society. The father has a strong position in his wife's house as well as at his mother's house.

However, the present research clearly reveals that when it comes to political participation the activeness of women in social and economic sphere does not help their participation in politics. The general belief that the activeness in social affairs and economic independence will improve the political participation is disproved here. The indicators of political participation in table 3.19 and table 3.38 clearly shows that women in Manipur and Meghalaya hardly make any difference in terms of political participation even if they are socially active and economically independent.

6.5 Concluding Remarks

Political participation of women is imperatively pivotal for this present age where the concept of women empowerment is immensely crucial however cumbersome in progress it may be. Low political participation of women is allegedly can be attributed to numerous socio-economic and political factors such as traditionalism, illiteracy, gender prejudices, economic dependency, male dominance in the political setup and so forth.

However, by analysing above indicators, it can be concluded that in both the states researcher find gap between social and economic indicator on one hand and political indicators on the other.

Let us first discuss the aspects of gender disparity. In both the states, the proportions of higher income women have been found to be less as compared to that of their men counterparts. In Manipur this feature is more prominent. But, there is not much difference regarding such proportion when it comes to poor families. Women in most cases or in other places are found to be deprived of becoming members of clubs, communities and other social organizations. However, this is not conspicuous in Manipur. This feature is likewise for literacy status of female respondents.

The status of political participation can also be seen through freedom of movement of female members going outside their homes. In Meghalaya, there is virtually no restriction on women's movement. In Manipur, the situation is same, families allowed their female members going outside the house. Regarding going to schools, temples, market etc. by the female members, most mothers preferred to keep silent.

Another way of looking into the participation of women is through the opinion of the respondents of women about equality of men and women, equal rights to inherit properties, etc. While in Manipur, most of the female members of families agree that there

should be equal pay of men and women whereas it is just the opposite in Meghalaya.

As mentioned above, it also need to analyze the aspects of the decision making bodies; if it is male dominated, all major decisions are in the hands of men. Thus, the real power will be in the hands of men. Therefore, real improvement can only happen when the patriarchal mindset of these bodies is reversed. It is only through the inclusion of women in decision making process that will enable a change in attitudes in a far more effective manner than any legislation and amendments. The society will move forward if there is an equal partnership between men and women in decision making aspects.