

KHASI WOMEN AND ELECTORAL POLITICS

A Study of the Greater Shillong Area

KEZHALENO KHATSO

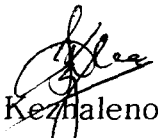
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I, Kezhaleno Khatso, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University/Institute.

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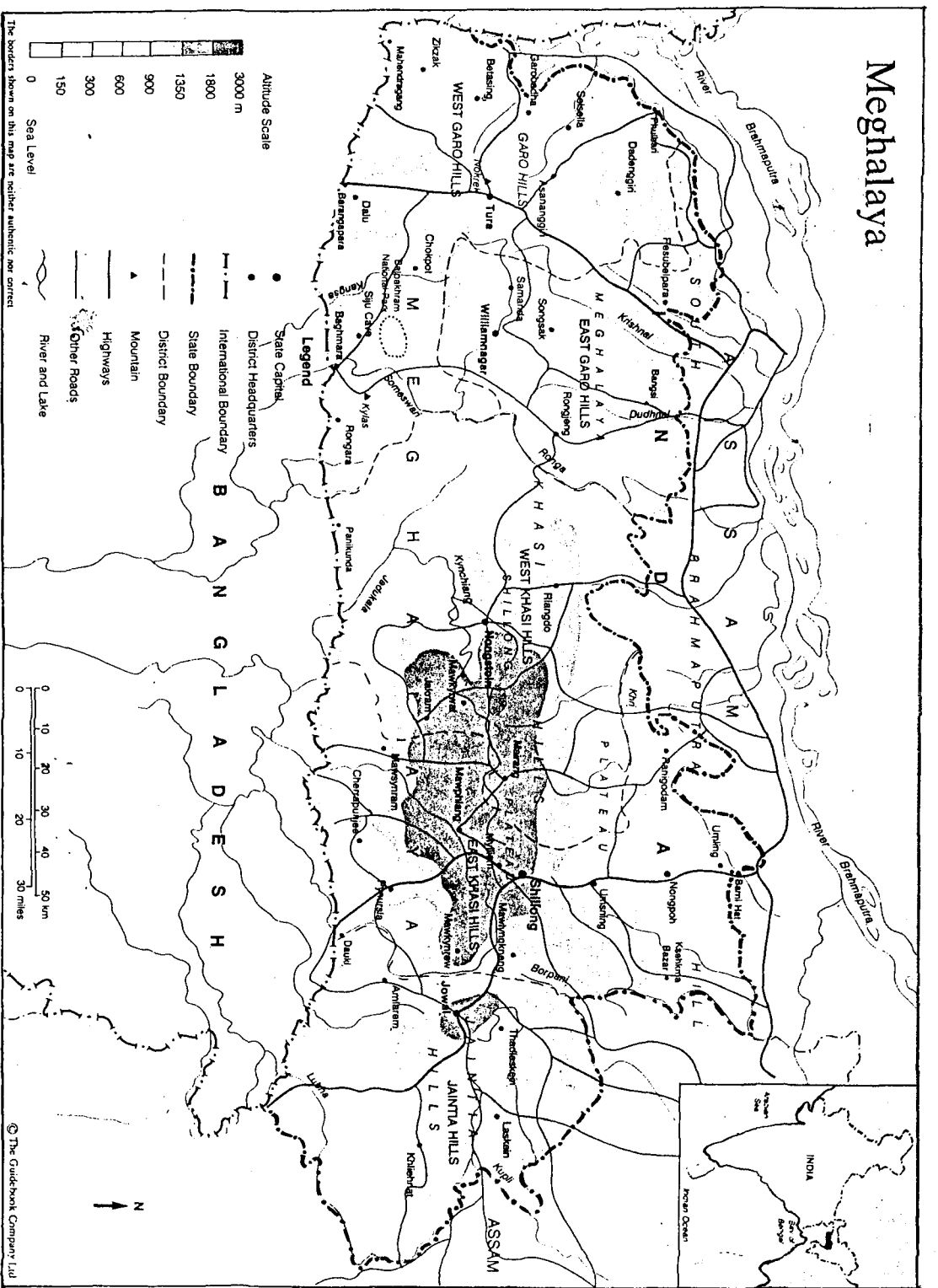
Words fail me as I express my heartfelt love and gratitude to my husband, Ben, who has been of immense help through out the study. I am deeply grateful for the constant support, encouragement and inspiration he gave me. Special thanks and love to my darling daughter, Rachel, for patiently bearing the long hours spent away from her. I am also deeply grateful to all my family members and friends who have stood by me, encouraging me in my work and always extending their help in what ever way they could.

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Shillong  
The 16<sup>th</sup> Nov, 2004.

  
Kezhaleno Khatso

# Meghalaya

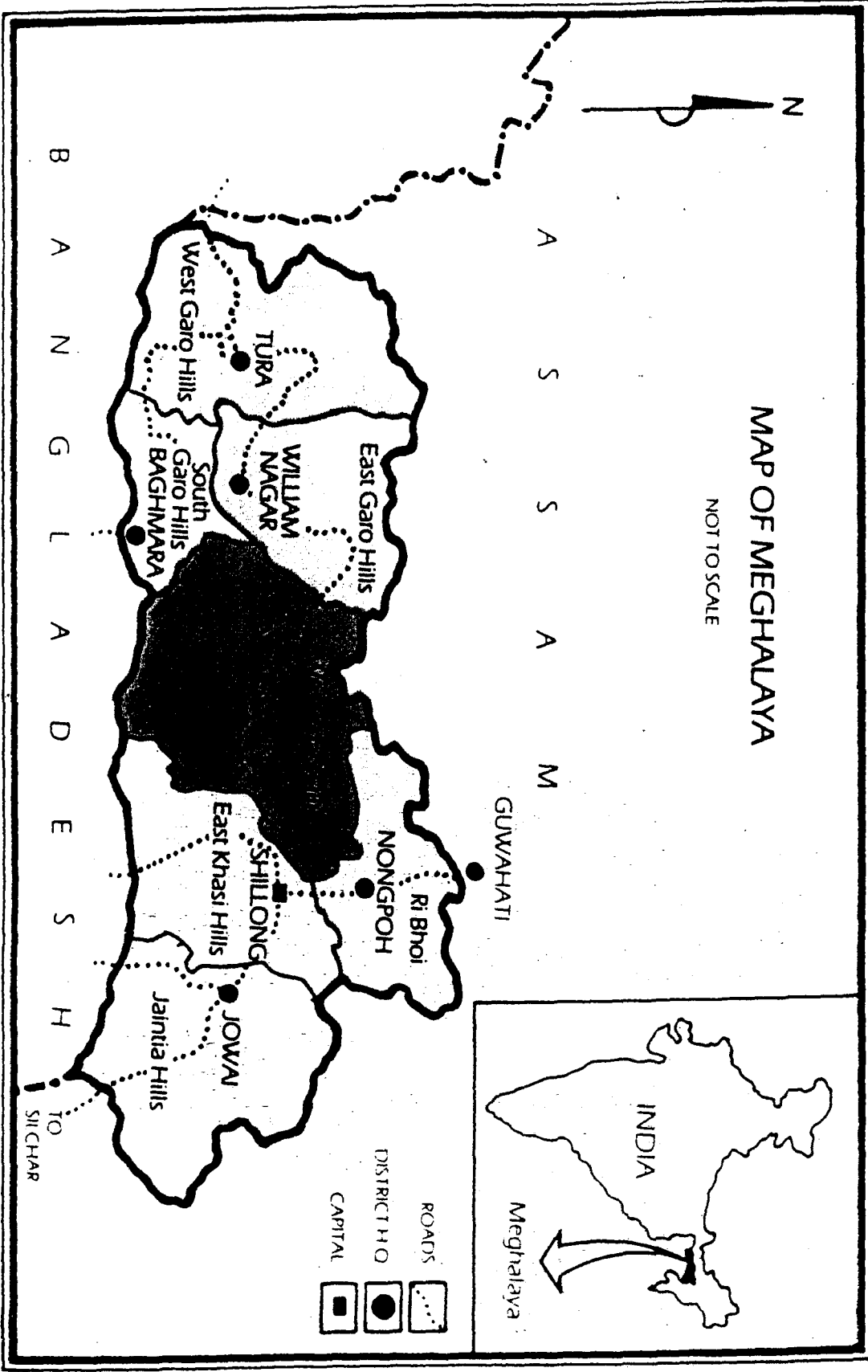


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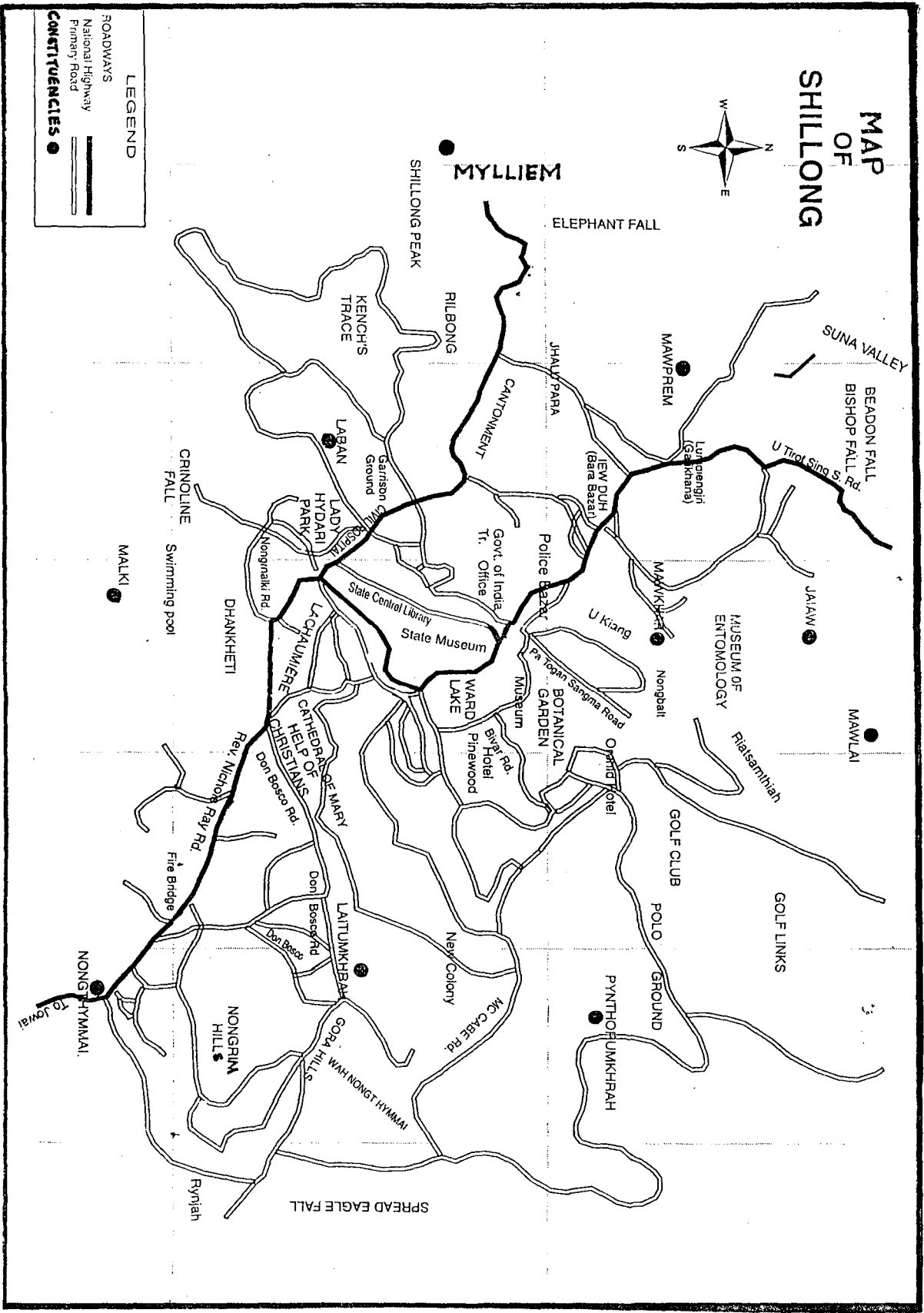
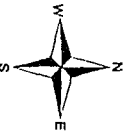
Legend  
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▲ Mountain  
— Highways  
— Other Roads  
— River and Lake

0 10 20 30 40 50 km  
0 10 20 30 40 50 miles

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Statement of the Problem

In anthropology, the study of politics is devoted to understanding how and why power and authority operate in human societies. It studies the politically thinking and acting human being in his community (Claessen, 1979). In anthropology it was with the publication of *African Political Systems* by Fortes and Evans Pritchard in 1940 that more specialized attention was given to political activities in order to understand the politics and law of colonized people. During the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, anthropologists developed a terminology appropriate to the wide variety of political systems with which they dealt. They clarified the characteristics that distinguished different systems and used these as the bases of typologies useful in comparative work. They dealt with descriptions of political groups and political roles as they ideally functioned which drew attention to mechanisms for social control rather than to the competitive aspects of politics.

The period from 1940 to 1960 was dominated by synchronic study of political structures in a state of assumed equilibrium and creation of

typologies, while in the period after 1960, an increased interest was shown in the development of a theory that could deal with change, faction, party and political maneuver. This move to study competition for political power has made it important to distinguish the implementation of political decisions and the carrying out of administrative routine from the struggle for control of decision-making positions.

Though politics has always been regarded as a male prerogative, it was formerly believed that political control by women or matriarchy occurred as a regular stage in the evolution of social organization. This was the view held firmly by most evolutionists. According to them, matriliney, where descent is traced through the mother, was a very primitive form of organization. Matriliney, according to them, would lead to matriarchy or concentration of economic, political and ritual power in the hands of women. In their unilineal view of human history, matriliney would, everywhere, ultimately be succeeded by patriliney, supposedly a higher form of family organization in which women hold a less exalted position (Gibbs, 1977). Today, virtually all anthropologists doubt the existence of matriarchies at any phase of cultural evolution.

To the question as to why men have, at least so far, almost always dominated the political sphere of life, some have suggested that men's role in warfare gives them the edge in all kinds of political leadership, particularly because they control weapons. Warfare is seen to be related to political power as it clearly affects survival, occurs at a regular basis, and that decision about war may be among the most important kind of politics in most societies (Ember & Ember, 1995,). The predominance of men in politics has been attributed to the reason that men move around more than women in the outside world, their activities taking them far away from home while women tended the home, and that they know more about the world and as such are chosen as leaders (ibid). According to Fried (1977), even in known societies with matriliney and matrilocality, men have dominated political sectors of the culture. What he observes is that the problem is knottier than such simple statements suggest. His reasoning is that if sex is operated as a ubiquitous factor leading to at least temporary inequality, it was not due to difference in size, strength or endurance, but rather had to do with the total social patterning of early human society and its subsequent historical development. Culture is seen to affect participation through sex-role expectations, behavioural codes and beliefs, as well as individual

motivations. In most societies there are widely held beliefs that women lack intelligence, are psychologically weak, emotionally unbalanced, illogical and unreliable. Besides cultural prejudices, there are also structural impediments to women's active role in politics. Such structural factors are also seen to occupy a position of priority in determining access to participation (Sertel, 1979). Women's lack of education and lack of time for politics after responsibilities as house-wives and wage-earners...etc., exemplify these impediments (Kamalawathie, 1990).

Besides the question as to why men generally dominate politics, there is also the need to explain why women's participation in politics is very negligible. Regarding this, a number of reasons have been given ranging from hard work, dedication, political skills, financial security...etc that are required for a political career (Short, 1996). Moreover it has been observed that the continued male predominance of politics allows a particular and exclusive kind of masculinity to dominate the culture of political organizations (Lovenduski, 1996). Besides these factors other barriers such as - lack of confidence including inexperience in public speaking, or fear of making a fool of themselves, have been cited as important factors that prevented women from putting

themselves forward. An established truth in the study of politics is that men and women are different political beings, women participating less than men.

In the present times the study of women with reference to their political role is gaining attention. The degree of political participation of women varies from country to country and state to state. It has been noted that the general experience in most countries is that not many women come to the forefront and remain largely inactive and indifferent towards politics. There has been general agreement that at the most effective levels of political activity women have participated less than men. This disparity is visible in all types of societies and in all economic and political systems. Social scientists in the 1950s and 1960s who drew attention to this phenomenon attempted to explain it in terms of psychological assumptions. Analysing women's participation Joni and Jill (1981) conclude that women in general tend to be more traditional and conservative, that women are temperamentally unsuited to masculine styles of political activity. Whatever be the reasons, theories or assumptions given for the low participation of women in the political field, it cannot be denied that political participation being the hallmark of

a democratic set-up, its nature, success and affectivity largely depends upon the extent to which equal, effective and actual participation is provided by the system to all its citizens. Participation is a pre-requisite and the minimal requirement for a successful democratic political system.

### **Political Participation and Electoral Politics:**

Political participation is a broad and complex term, expressing itself in various kinds of overt and manifest political activities. It is not confined to the selection of decision-makers only but also to affect their political behaviour and hence the societal decisions at large (Jharta, 1996). Political participation has also been defined as those voluntary activities by which members of a society share in the selection of rulers and directly or indirectly in the formation of public policy (McClosky, 1968). In more clear terms, the concept of political participation typically include activities like voting, seeking information, discussing and proselytizing, attending meetings, contributing financially and communicating with representatives. The more active forms of participation include informal enrollment in party, canvassing and registering voters, speech writing and speech making, working in

campaigns and competing for public or party office (ibid). The right to participate is an essential element of a democratic government.

Political participation is a complex phenomenon, a dependent variable that relies upon many factors such as the psychological, socio-economic and political, which orient individuals towards or away from political participation. According to Jharta (1996), psychological variables refer to the degree of interest of citizens about politics and public affairs. Here people who are more interested, concerned about political matters and are surrounded by political conflicts are likely to be more active political participants than those who are occupied with their private lives. Those who have preferences for a party and a candidate, have feeling of efficacy and have some political goals, are likely to participate more actively in political affairs. Jharta further states that “psychological variables have however, greater say in the most complex modes of political participation”.

Socio-economic variables include education, occupation, income, age, sex, religion, family background, residence...etc. According to McClosky (1968), participation tended to be higher among better

educated, higher occupational and income groups, middle aged, dominant ethnic and religious groups, people with political family backgrounds, settled residents, urban dwellers and members of voluntary associations. The correlation, however, between participation and some of these socio-economic variables are likely to vary from culture to culture with different political contexts and their effect on political participation may not be stable (Jharta, 1996).

Among the various ways of political participation, taking part in the electoral process is one. Elections and the electoral process manifest formal and legal mechanism providing for a regularized means of political recruitment and communication of demand-inputs into the political system. As elections are the most common design of popular control, the government is kept under constant control by means of elections. Elections are a means to elicit generalized motives which describe the broad contours within which the freshly given mandate is to operate. There are those who compete for governance and there those who simply vote to elect rulers (Ahuja, 1992). Elections have different meanings and different roles in different political systems. While in liberal democracies elections are valid means and a way of peoples'

participation, in a totalitarian state elections are mere rituals. In modern democratic systems elections have to be considered as an integral part of the democratic system itself. According to Palmer (1974) elections are taken as an institutionalized democratic procedure through which governments are formed and controlled. They provide agencies for interest aggregation and channelisation of grievances and perform the system maintenance function. By means of seeking to integrate people's will, they help the individual to identify the political system. As such, Palmer notes that elections ensure people's involvement in the process and provide channels of interaction among individuals and between the individuals and the political system. Elections are seen to provide linkage patterns acting thereby as the most important and influential agency of political socialization.

Participation is more than voting and more than an activity in the electoral system. Though only a few people contribute in the process of governmental decision-making activity, greater ratios of people participate in voting and electioneering activities. However there is also a section of eligible citizens who do not participate in any political activity which could be due to a sense of apathy and inefficacy. There

are two classes of apathetic individuals – those who fail to participate out of ignorance, indifference, incapability or exclusion and those who choose consciously not to vote because of the dissatisfaction with the system or the absence of required alternatives (Jharta, 1996).

Voting is seen as the simplest and least demanding political activity that does not require much information, initiative and motivation as do most political activities. Since the 'vote' determines who holds elective office, it exerts a great deal of pressure upon the leaders and is called the blunt instrument of control over the government. Though it imparts less information of a citizen's preferences to the political leaders, yet people take part in voting frequently as its results affect almost all. Contesting elections on the other hand is seen to be the highest and most serious form of political participation than other forms or modes of political participation.

Woman herself is an important variable that affects the nature and scope of political participation and consequently the political system as a whole. The study of political participation of women is important as women comprise about half of the vote power and moreover have

become beneficial to political parties and political leaders due to their natural qualities of honesty, affection and sense of duty. Their participation is not only the mobilization of power to solve their problems but much more. Applying their point of view in policy-making would also affect the whole society. There is also the need to understand the attitude of women towards politics, and why women in general seem to have a dislike for politics and anything that has to do with its various activities. Moreover it would also be worthwhile to examine how those few women pursuing, or with political careers fare in a field regarded as a male domain.

Taking into consideration what has been discussed above it is important to understand the women's point of view regarding politics and its various activities. It is also important to find out how far women exercise their recognized political rights, their degree of involvement, whether there are differences in their political involvement and behaviour by age, education, marital status, social status? Do these differences arise from their psychological and personality make-up? How far do role beliefs influence their political participation and behaviour? Do women behave as they do due to the fact that they are

women or are there other factors that affect their attitudes towards politics? Does tradition influence their mode of behaviour and attitudes towards politics? Or, do women in general feel that politics is a male domain and hence best left in the hands of the men?

Coming to the question of women and their involvement in politics in Meghalaya, Gassah (1992), War (1992) Lyngdoh (1995), amongst a number of scholars note that women traditionally had no role to play in political matters, and that they were not allowed to attend *dorbar* (local councils). But today women are allowed to attend *dorbar* (local councils) and are also included in the executive committees of some localities in Shillong. Women are now taking part in all political activities though very few of them come forward to contest in elections.

Looking back at the seven general elections held so far since the attainment of Statehood in 1972, Meghalaya has seen only 12 women (out of the 65 that contested) elected to the Assembly. In a time where empowerment of women in politics is being advocated this number presents a very disappointing picture. In Meghalaya women constitute almost half, 634520, of the total electorate of 1278715 voters, while the

male electorate comprises of 644195 voters (Pocket Statistical Handbook, Meghalaya, 2003). In a society where women are said to be held with high esteem and honour, where they are said to be relatively better than women of other societies, one is left to wonder as to why, after half a century of freedom to vote on an equal basis with men besides having equal opportunities to stand for office, the Khasi women are still struggling for space in the political world. The need of the hour, as such, is to get a better understanding of the political participation, aspirations, perceptions and attitude among Khasi women.

#### **Review of Literature:**

The study of women from a political perspective is gaining significant attention in the present times. There have been a number of studies conducted on women to understand them as political actors. In anthropology, early ethnographic studies do not elaborate much on the political status of women except for passing references made that women do not play an active political role. In this regard mention may be made of Fortes and Evans Pritchard (1940), Leach (1964), Abraham (1967) and Malinowski (1972).

In the book *African Political Systems* (1940) edited by Fortes and Evans Pritchard which is a comparative study of African political institutions, Radcliffe-Brown in the preface, makes a brief comment on political inequality which is based on sex and age, and that it was the men, not the women, who played a major part in war and in maintaining internal order. The other contributors to this book like Gluckman, who studied the Zulu tribe of Africa, simply say that women worked the fields. Richard, who did a study of the Bemba matrilineal tribe, observes that the women of the royal family were given equal respect as the royal male members. The mother was highly honoured, taking part in tribal councils. Sisters of chiefs were allowed to rule a few villages. Among the Tallensi, Fortes says that only the men could inherit property, transmit the ritual and moral observances and could succeed to clan offices.

Among the Kachin of Burma, Leach (1964) notes that in the total absence of male heirs in the chief lineage, succession passes through a daughter instead of a son, but this was possible only if members of closely related lineages of the same clan agreed.

Abrahams (1967) who studied the Nyamwezi Bantu-speaking people observes that the first two wives of the early chiefs held prestigious statuses. Besides looking after the household affairs of the chiefs, they took part in many ceremonies performed by the chiefs. The mothers of the chiefs were also held with high esteem, their function being mainly advisory. Women sometimes held office, though in the lesser headmanships, in divisions of the chiefdom that did not border upon enemy country. Women headmen were counted as males for the purpose of descent.

Malinowski (1972) who studied the Trobriand Islanders observes that women as a rule did not join councils, though they did have their own way in many matters and controlled several aspects of tribal life.

Mead (1977) who initiated the study of gender roles found that it was culture and not biology that was responsible for differences in gender roles. She studied three New Guinea societies – the Arapesh, the Mundugumor and the Tchambuli, and observed that the Tchambuli females were politically and economically dominant, they were the breadwinners, political leaders and engaged in warfare. She notes that

society can both minimize and exaggerate social and cultural differences between males and females, and argues that gender differences are extremely variable from society to society. Her study shows that it is culture and not biology that determines or limits gender roles.

As more attention began to be paid towards women and her role in society, her political role in society has now become a much researched topic. Mention may be made of the studies undertaken by Lane (1959), Taper (1976), Sertel (1979), Baker *et al* (1980), Rappoport (1981), Ross (1986), Bhatt and Sharma (1992), Nelson and Chowdhury (1994), Guha (1996), Norris and Lovenduski (1996), Short (1996), Kaushik (1997), Verma (1997), Kumari and Kidwai (1998), Jharta (1999) and Panda (2002).

Lane (1959) has expanded the theme of sex roles and participation. He notes that culture does not reinforce a political image for women and that the media and also the literary heritage reread by every generation tended to create images of women in domestic or perhaps artistic and literary or dramatic, or even career roles, but not in political roles.

Tapper (1976) has tried to examine to what extent the political behaviour of women is a special problem and whether their political behaviour is a consequence of certain factors that pertain to them as women. He notes that the social situation of women, especially their family duties, means that they encounter constraints making it hard for them to participate in politics beyond the mere act of voting.

Sertel (1979) in her article "Peasant Political Cognition" writes that the structural restrictions on participation imposed upon women (restrictions which were supported by cultural norms) reduced the women's chance of being viewed as powerful as well as their ability to make accurate power attributions. She also notes that the difference in power conception that existed between the two sexes was due to women's inferior status, their low level of education, low level of social and physical mobility, little exposure to mass media, extremely limited knowledge of politico-administrative office etc. Basing on data from Turkey, she also notes that women, though entitled to vote by law, did not do so, allowing the heads of the households to represent them.

Baker (1980) and her associates note that several factors such as social, economic and demographic variables as well as psychological factors have a differential affect on the voting participation of women. Their study of women's political behaviour reveals that female political activity is remarkably similar to those of the males, they vote as frequently as men and that their party identifications, like those of men, are a reflection of their socioeconomic status rather than sex. One area that distinguishes female behaviour, according to them, was in public opinion. Generally women were seen to be more opposed to war and violence, not so sensitive to economic issues, more sympathetic to minority groups' problems and less tolerant of nonconformity and corruption in office.

Rappoport (1981) in his article "The Sex Gap in Political Persuading", notes that the relatively low level of female attempts at political persuasion is related to reluctance of female adults to express attitudes and that this reluctance finds its root in children and adolescent socialization.

Ross (1986) does a multivariate analysis of data from 90 pre-industrial societies in order to understand societal-level mechanisms associated with gender-based inclusion and exclusion from political life. His analysis found two conceptually and statistically independent forms of female participation – their involvement in decision making, and the existence of organizations and/or positions controlled by or reserved for women. His study identifies social structural, psycho cultural and behavioural variables affecting female inclusion and exclusion. He also discusses their role in a theory of female political participation.

In a Nelson and Chowdhury (1994) edited book, various authors make attempts to analyse women's participation in politics on a cross-national scale and from a feminist perspective. All together a total of 43 countries were surveyed. The various authors describe the political history and institutions in the country under study, summarise the organizations of women's movement there and analyse how groups of women articulate political demands and the response they receive from their government or community. The study reveals that though the context of activism was found to be widely varied, issues that engaged women politically were more or less similar across the globe. A common

observation made by the various authors is that in no country did women have political status, access or influence equal to that enjoyed by men.

The low number of women recruited to the Parliament and other levels of government raised an obvious question as to why their representation is so low. Pippa Norris and Joni Lovenduski (1996) who carried out a survey of candidates standing for the General Elections in the U.K. analysed the influence on participation and recruitment at 3 different levels – systematic factors, political party factors and individual recruitment factors. They concluded that the reasons for the poor participation were interrelated in a complex way and operated on the three levels identified by them.

Short (1996) notes that the narrow path leading to a political career is usually risky, grueling, unglamorous requiring stamina, optimism and dedication as well as considerable resources. She argues that the flexible working hours, useful political skills, social status and political contacts etc. make it difficult for women to fit in with the demand of political activity.

In India and the North Eastern region, the study of women from a political perspective is gaining importance. This is evident from the number of studies and researches conducted in order to get a better understanding of women as political actors. Mention may be made of studies undertaken by Shukla (1987), Bhatt and Sharma (1992), Guha (1996), Kaushik (1997), Verma (1997), Kumari and Kidwai (1998), Jharta (1996) and Panda (2002).

Shukla (1987) tries to examine and assess the nature and extent of political socialisation on Indian women and its impact on their voting behaviour. He notes that political behaviour of the people stems from the political culture as operative in society. The political attitudes and beliefs that the people develop in a society proceed from one generation to another. The process by which the political culture is shaped at the level of both the individual and the community and is continued for generations together, is what we call political socialisation. He brings out four factors that contribute to the process such as – family, education, mass-media and political parties. He writes that the political beliefs and attitudes developed in early part of life may undergo continuous changes according to varied experiences of later years. What he observes is that

family influence decreases with the increase in the level of education. Education, he notes, is the most important socializing agent in shaping and transforming the ideas about the things connected with political life. Educated women vote more than the less educated; they vote more by a sense that vote is their right. He also notes that the perception of vote does not solely depend on political knowledge.

Bhatt and Sharma (1992) use three main indicators to assess the political status of women, viz., 1) participation in the political process as voters and candidates in elections, 2) political attitudes such as awareness, commitment and involvement in politics and autonomy in political action and behaviour, 3) their impact on the political process. They found that patterns of political behaviour among different regions are influenced by various interrelated factors such as the social status of women, their economic position, the cultural norms and the overall regional outlook towards women's participation in the wider society. They note factors such as increasing expenses of elections, threats of violence and character assassinations deter women from active participation in politics and from contesting in elections.

Guha (1996) presents an overview of the socio-political developments that are taking place in recent decades in women's political participation. The study aims at examining the extent of women's participation in politics of West Bengal and identifying the gaps that exist between popular notions and the empirical realities between what the law provides for and the polity demands and what society actually permits. She also examines the nature of mobilization of women, whereby they could have been made aware and organized so that they might be able to break the shackles of constraints which they find themselves in.

Kaushik (1997) in her book studies and examines the various factors contributing to the failure/success of women and men candidates in elections. Her study includes the candidate's profile, issues raised by them, their campaign strategy, their focus on women issues, voters' response to women candidates, particularly on gender issues and factors that contribute to their success or failure in elections. The study also analyses facilities required by them and the limitations they face. The author concludes that in the fiftieth year of India's independence, the

lopsidedness and imbalanced state of women's representation needs to be reversed and women in India should attain their rightful place.

Verma (1997) in his book analyses women's search for equity and justice in the political arena. Using statistical data he studies the political role women played in the realm of enfranchisement, voting pattern and behavior, tickets reserved for women by various parties and the number of seats won in various assembly elections as well as the place women acquired in the manifestoes of various political parties. His findings show that though women constitute half of the world's enfranchised population, they are still politically a powerless group.

Kumari and Kidwai (1998) attempt to look at the underlying reasons for marginalization of women and women's issues in political parties. Their study shows that the problem of women in politics is located at different levels of history, tradition, patriarchal political structures and the way democracy works in this country. All political parties, according to them, discriminate women whether it is in holding high post within the party or even in issuing of tickets in elections. Men, they say, are not willing to lose seats to women. The study also reveals

that women find the political environment not conducive to their participation in politics. It further reveals the importance of family in one's political career. Besides family support, politically influential families were seen to enable an easier process of getting tickets and fighting elections.

Jharta (1996) analyses and evaluates the role and impact of family and education on women's participation in politics. These two variables were seen to be significantly related to the political participation of women and were considered both a booster as well as a hindrance to their participation in politics. Her analysis showed that these two variables do influence women's active participation in politics. Education was seen to play a vital role in the political efficacy of women. Her findings were that married women, women in their middle ages were more likely to take part in the various political activities such as voting, campaigning, party membership, contesting elections etc. Having a political family background was also seen to have a positive effect on women's political participation. Better economic status was also found to be a positive factor. Children were found to be a hindrance in the political activity of women.

Panda (2002) in her book epitomizes the recent debate on women's political empowerment through reservation. She explores the provision of reservation at two levels, by relating the debate to local and national government, focusing on women's status, cultural impediments and attitudinal determinants impacting on women's participation in high level political institutions. She notes that the attitudes surrounding the dichotomous division of the society and gender role do have an impact on women's access to high level decision making institutions. Her analysis reveals the contradictions in the promises and practices with interesting facts, about the autonomous character of the emergent women representatives donning local government offices contradicting the speculation about their capabilities to manage political office. She concludes with elaborate analysis of remedial measures for strengthening the leadership capabilities of women where women themselves have to play a significant role in transforming their life situations.

Coming closer home the earliest monograph written of the Khasis by Gurdon (1990) focuses on women only through their association with

matriliny besides making a brief reference to the prestigious place the high priestess (who also happens to be the mother of a *syiem* or chief) occupies in religious ceremonies.

In a Sen (1992) edited book, Sen and the various contributing authors study the status of women in Meghalaya. Questions such as whether matriliney assigns a greater role to women, whether the responsibilities shouldered by women in this system without access to power do not compromise their role and status in the social order are asked. Sen observes that women have no decision-making authority, either in the household or in the socio-political power structure. The various scholars note that traditionally women were not allowed to hold political and administrative offices, but in the present times changes are seen.

Lyngdoh (1995) in her article "Women and Politics in Meghalaya" observes that women are yet to make their presence felt in the political field. According to her though the women in Meghalaya excel in other areas of activity, their political role presents a rather dismal picture. Politics, according to her is still considered a male domain while the

home that of the women. She stresses the need for implementation of the reservation policy so that more women are given the opportunity to get into politics.

Gassah (1995) in his article “Women: Their Participation and Role in Meghalaya Politics”, notes that women traditionally played no role in political activities. According to him women’s participation in politics was initiated with the introduction of new types of administration, firstly under the British and secondly under the Indian Constitution. Moreover he observes that it was also with the growth of modern education that women are no longer averse to participation in politics. Analysing women’s participation and their role in politics, he observes that the women in Meghalaya did not get the required encouragement for political participation. According to him even the women organizations that were functioning prior to independence did not enlighten their women on the importance of their representation in the decision and policy making process. He further states that women do not seem to favour women candidates, otherwise many women would have won the seats they contested.

Malngiang (1996) in his article "Women and Elections in Meghalaya" traces the history of women's participation in electoral politics in Meghalaya. His study shows that women in Meghalaya are largely a politically passive group. He observes that this is so because women themselves hold on to traditional custom that their primary function as women is to be home makers. He further notes that the women organizations as well as the women's wing of various political parties do not play any major role in bringing and encouraging more women to participate in the political field.

#### **Objectives of the Study:**

The Khasi society is a matrilineal society where descent is traced through the female with ultimogeniture. In a society where women are said to be held with 'high esteem and honour', where they take part in all socio-economic and cultural activities, they were traditionally debarred from taking part in the administration of the Khasi state, *ka hima Khasi*. As the society goes through changes, tradition is also not left untouched. At present, women are taking part in the political process at the State level though the same cannot be said of their participation at the local level (that is, at the level of the traditional political and decision making

bodies existing in Khasi society). Except for a few localities, women are still not allowed to be members of the local *dorbars* (councils). At the State level it cannot be said that women's participation is any better for women's representation has been abysmally low. Taking these points into view, the objectives of the study are:

1. To study the participation of the urban Khasi women in electoral politics,
2. To study the urban Khasi women's awareness, commitments, involvement and attitudes towards electoral politics and its various activities,
3. To study the attitude of the urban Khasi women towards women's participation in electoral politics in Khasi society,
4. To find out the role and response of the *dorbars* (councils) on women's participation in the *dorbars* (councils).

#### **Method:**

The study is empirical and exploratory in nature. This study aims at analyzing the urban Khasi women's perspective of politics and its various activities. As Khasi women enjoy the status of being part of a matrilineal society, one would naturally assume that they enjoy a higher

status in various fields. This assumption is however not true if we look at the political scenario. This study assumes significance as it intends to enquire into the reasons as to why the Khasi women's participation in politics has been abysmally low and to also look into the urban Khasi women's perception of politics.

For the purpose of study the Greater Shillong Area has been taken as the locale of study due to the following reasons: a) a majority of the constituencies located in this area comprise of a Khasi populace, b) this area comprises of some of the most important constituencies of the State, c) this area also covers Shillong which happens to be the capital of Meghalaya and is the hub of almost all activities, be it educational, trade, political activities, centre for all government offices both central and state...etc.

The universe of the present study is the Khasi women voters enlisted in the electoral roll, living in the Greater Shillong Area (East Khasi Hills District) of Meghalaya. The constituencies included in the Greater Shillong Area are - Laitumkrah, Malki-Nongthymmai, Pynthorumkrah, Jaiaw, Mawkhar, Mawprem, Laban, Mawlai and parts of

the Myllem constituency (here, only the 4<sup>th</sup> mile, the 5<sup>th</sup> mile and Lummawbah are areas that fall within the Greater Shillong Area). The present study is based on fieldwork conducted in the above mentioned areas.

The universe of the study, as mentioned earlier, comprises of the Khasi women voters enlisted in the electoral role within the Greater Shillong Area. The total women voters within the Greater Shillong Area is approximately 71,311 out of which approximately 49,000 comprises of Khasi women voters. It may be mentioned that it would almost be impossible or extremely difficult to get an accurate number of Khasi women voters as the Khasis and Jaintias have some common surnames, for example – the surname ‘Lyngdoh’ is used by both Khasis and Jaintias. There are a number of Jaintias who have settled in Shillong and as such have their names enlisted in the electoral role falling within the Greater Shillong Area. As such the number of Khasi women voters can, in all possibility, be lesser than the amount stated above. For the purpose of selecting respondents, cluster sampling with probability proportionate to size was used. Probability proportionate to size method was used as the voters in each constituency were not equal in size and it was necessary

that larger cluster or area should have a greater chance of being included in the sample. In the next step, systematic sampling method was used to pick up the samples, selecting every 200th number on the electoral roll. Using this method a total of 500 samples was taken. The respondents were classified in terms of their age, marital status, literacy, occupational status and income group. Data was collected with the help of interview schedules, questionnaires, primary documents and secondary sources. Besides that, some women who had stood for elections were taken for an in depth case study.

**Plan of the thesis:**

**CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION:** It deals with the statement of the problem, the review of literature, the objectives of the study and the methods of the study.

**CHAPTER II – LAND AND PEOPLE:** It deals with the land and people of Meghalaya with special references to the Khasis.

**CHAPTER III – KHASI WOMEN – THEIR PLACE IN TRADITIONAL POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND THEIR PARTICIPATION IN ELECTORAL POLITICS:** In this chapter the discussion is on the traditional political institutions of the Khasis, the role women played in

these institutions and it also deals with the historical development of the Khasi women in State politics.

CHAPTER IV – PARTICIPATORY ATTITUDES OF WOMEN TOWARDS ELECTORAL POLITICS: It deals with the study of the attitudes of the Khasi women towards electoral politics and its various activities.

CHAPTER V – KHASI WOMEN IN ELECTORAL POLITICS: It studies Khasi women candidates as well as women politicians in State politics.

CHAPTER VI – CONCLUSION: The last chapter contains the conclusions of the study.

## CHAPTER II

### LAND AND PEOPLE

#### **Location of Meghalaya:**

The State of Meghalaya, often called the 'Scotland of the East', is situated between 25°2' N and 26°6' N latitude and 89°50' E and 92°50'E longitude. The total area of the State is approximately 22,429 square kilometers with a total population of 23,06,069 (Pocket Statistical Handbook- Meghalaya, 2003). Meghalaya is bounded on the north by Goalpara, Kamrup and Nowgong Districts, on the east by the Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills districts, of Assam, and on the south and west by Bangladesh.

Meghalaya is the twenty-first State of the Indian Union. It was declared a full fledged State on the 21<sup>st</sup> of January, 1972. Before 1970, Meghalaya was a part of the State of Assam. From April 2, 1970 to 21<sup>st</sup> January 1972, it was declared as an autonomous State.

### **State Administration:**

The State of Meghalaya has seven administrative districts, namely, Jaintia Hills, Ri Bhoi, East Khasi Hills, West Khasi Hills, East Garo Hills, West Garo Hills, and South Garo Hills. The district head-quarters of the following districts are Jowai, Nongpoh, Shillong, Nongstoin, William Nagar, Tura, and Baghmara respectively. The State has a unicameral legislature consisting of 60 members – 7 from the Jaintia Hills, 29 from Khasi Hills, and 24 from the Garo Hills. The State also has three Autonomous District Councils – the Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council, the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council, and the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council, entrusted with discharging the duties and functions in accordance with the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. Besides these constitutionally recognized administrative bodies there are traditional political institutions, called *dorbars* (councils), right from the *shnong* (village) level to the *hima* (state) level, which function as grassroots institutions alongside the government administrative bodies.

### **Inhabitants of Meghalaya:**

Meghalaya is predominantly inhabited by three major ethnic groups – the Garos, the Khasis and the Jaintias. The Garos inhabit the western parts of Meghalaya. Besides the Garos other smaller communities like the Rabha, Hajong, Koch, Man, Dalu and Bania inhabit this region. The Khasis and the Jaintias inhabit the eastern parts of Meghalaya. Khasi is a general name given to the sub-tribes Bhoi, War, Khyntiam and Lyngngam. The Bhoi inhabit the north-western part of the Khasi Hills, which is today called the Ri-Bhoi area under Ri-Bhoi District, the War inhabit the southern part of the Khasi Hills, the Khyntiam occupy the central and highest peaks of the Meghalaya plateau, while the Lyngngams inhabit the western border of the Khasi Hills. All these Khasi groups share the same language and social structure but each group tends to be exogamous (Bareh, 1985). The Khasis collectively define themselves as the children of *U Hynniew Trep* (The Seven Huts) a name derived from a myth, *Ki Khanatang u Hynniewtrep* (Tales of the Seven Huts), referring to the seven ancestral families that came from heaven to form the Khasi race on earth (Nongbri, 2003).

Majority of these population groups in Meghalaya belong to the Indo-Chinese Linguistic Family of which Mon-Khmer and Tibeto-Burman are two important sub-families. The Garos belong to the Bodo-Kachari group of the Tibeto-Burman family, while the Khasis and the Jaintias belong to the Mon-Khmer family. The Khasi, Jaintia and Garo communities use the Roman script which was first introduced in this region in 1842 by Thomas Jones, a Calvinist Missionary (Roy, 1994).

The three major ethnic groups of Meghalaya, i.e., the Khasis, Jaintias and Garos, share a common matrilineal tradition under which descent is reckoned through the female line, children belong to the clan of the mother and women have rights to property.

#### **The Khasis – A Brief Overview:**

The Khasis inhabit the Khasi Hills of Meghalaya. The Khasi Hills are located in the north eastern corner of India bounded on the south by the Sylhet District of Bangladesh, on the north by the Kamrup District of Assam, on the west by the East Garo Hills District of Meghalaya, and on the east by the Karbi Anglong District of Assam and the Jaintia Hills District of Meghalaya. The Khasi Hills lie between 25°07' and 26°07'N

latitude and 90°45' and 92°16'E longitude (Simon, 1991). The Khasi Hills is divided into the East and West Khasi Hills. The East Khasi Hills covers a total area of 5196 square kilometers with a total population of 6,65,218 out of which the total population of the Scheduled Tribes is 5,21,482. The West Khasi Hills has a total population of 2,20,157 out of which 2,15,995 belong to the Scheduled Tribes (Census of India,1991).

The Khasi and Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya are a plateau interspersed with river valleys which in the southern part take the form of ravines. Altitudes vary from 1220mts. to 1830mts. above sea level (Meghalaya, Basic Facts, 1975). The mountain ranges in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills run from west to east. An important peak in the Khasi Hills is the Shillong Peak, which also happens to be the highest peak in the region. It has an altitude of 1964mts. Another peak, the Navel of Heaven, Sohpet-bneng stands at an altitude of 1350mts. and is situated about 20kms. north of Shillong.

Due to topographical features of the Khasi Hills, the highest range runs from west to east, and the main rivers flow in a northerly or southerly direction. The rivers of the State flow either to the

Brahmaputra or to the Surma river. The rivers of the Khasi Hills are fed seasonally by the monsoon rains. The main rivers that flow towards the north, that is to the Bramaputra river, are the Umkhen, Khri, Umtrew and Umiam. Those rivers flowing towards the south to the Surma river are the Kynshi, Umiew and Um-*Ngot*. The terrain of the Khasi Hills lends itself to the formation of magnificent waterfalls. Some of the well known waterfalls in and around Shillong are the Bishop's Falls, Beadon Falls, Spread Eagle Falls, Elephant's Falls and Sweet Falls (Sten, 1977).

#### **Physical Appearance of the Khasis:**

With regard to the physical appearance of the Khasis, Gurdon (1990) gives the following description – ‘the skin of the Khasis is usually brown, varying from dark to light yellowish brown. People inhabiting the uplands were lighter in complexion.’ He further notes that the people of Cherrapunji village are fair, the Syntengs of the Jaintia Hills are darker than the Khasi uplanders, Wars living in the low valleys have swarthy skin, the Bhois have yellow skin, while the Lyngngams were considered darker than the Khasi, perhaps the darkest complexioned people in the hills. The Khasis have medium sized eyes, black or brown in colour and their eyes obliquely set though not so acutely as the Chinese and some

other Mongols. Gurdon further writes that – ‘The Khasis are usually short in stature with bodies well nourished, and the males are extremely muscular. The trunk is long in proportion to the rest of the body, and broad at the waist; calves are very highly developed. The women when young are comely, of a buxom type, and, like the men, with highly developed calves, the latter always being considered a beauty.’

### **Religion:**

With the advent of Christianity into the Khasi and Jaintia Hills the majority of the people embraced the Christian faith. In Meghalaya Christians dominate the population in respect of religion. According to the Census of India, 1991, the number of Christians in Meghalaya was 11,46,092, i.e. 64.58%. It has been estimated that there are now 17,04,584 Christians, i.e. 74.39% in 2000 out of a total estimated population of 22,91,634 (Pocket Statistical Hand Book, Meghalaya,2003). There are still many Khasis who follow the traditional religion. Khasi religion was branded as animistic and theistic by early British writers, which however has been contradicted by many Khasi writers and others. According to a local scholar, Lyngdoh (1991), the Khasi religion is monotheistic where God is known by different names and addressed in

different ways. Gurdon (1990) describes Khasi religion as animistic and spirit-worship or propitiation of spirits both good and evil on certain occasions, principally in times of troubles. For the Khasis, religion is a way of life. Chowdhury (1998) writes that the Khasis designate their religion as '*Niam Khasi*', meaning 'rule of conduct' which clearly implies that Khasi customs and manners are regulated by religion and therefore sanctimonious. They have the conception of a high God whom they called '*U Blei Nongthaw*' or 'God the Creator', and whom they conceived as the ultimate source of all creation, of life and of the world.

### **Marriage:**

The most remarkable feature of the Khasi marriage is that it is usually the husband who goes and lives with his wife in his mother-in-law's house and not for him to take his bride home. The Khasis practice the matrilineal pattern of residence after marriage. According to Nakane (1967) both Khasi and Garo societies combine matrilineal (uxorilineal) residence with unigeniture in respect of inheritance but the method of nominating the heiress is completely different by reason of the structural difference of organization. Khasis have numerous prohibitions of marriage between near-relations both on the paternal as well as on the

maternal side. The Khasis practice and observe strict rules of exogamy. The first and second parallel cousins are avoided and also those related to the father within three generations are avoided. Marrying within one's own '*kur*' or clan was and still is regarded as taboo. Further Gurdon (1990) observes that marrying the daughter of one's maternal uncle during his lifetime is forbidden as the maternal '*kni*' or uncle is regarded as a father rather than an uncle. A Khasi cannot marry two sisters but can marry his deceased wife's sister after a year by giving payment of '*jing sang*' or price of taboo, to the wife's clan. A widow is not debarred from marrying though she usually has to wait for a year after her husband's death. Nakane (1967) observes that sororate only of the junior kind is known among the Khasis and that too only in case of marriage with a non-heiress. A man can stay on with his children after his wife's death but has to return to his '*iing*' or youngest sister's house, if he was married to a heiress. A man married to a heiress cannot marry his death wife's elder sister. Levirate is another form of marriage for which no social sanction or approval seems to exist among the Khasis. The Khasis do not have the custom of bride-price or dowry nor is polygyny or polyandry practiced by the people. A non-Khasi woman marrying a Khasi man was not only accepted but becomes the progenitress of a new

clan. In the Khasi society there are no illegitimate children (Lyngdoh, 1991). Divorce, observes Gurdon (1990), is common among the Khasis and occurs for a variety of reasons such as adultery, barrenness, incompatibility of temperament...etc. In the event of a divorce the mother is always allowed the custody of the children.

#### **Descent and Inheritance:**

The social structure of the Khasi originated from the *kur* or clan which formed the nucleus of all Khasi social organisation. According to Nongbri (2003), the Khasi clan is a matrilineally-related and exogamous unit that provided group identity to its members. Nongbri (2003:233) further states that - 'For women, particularly, the clan has special significance. As perpetuation of the clan is effected through the female, it is vital that women get married, produce children and incorporate them into the clan to ensure its continuity. Failure to produce children is a matter of serious concern not only to the woman in question but to the whole family, so much so that barrenness and sterility are valid grounds for divorce'. According to Gurdon (1990) many clans trace their descent from ancestresses, '*ki kiaw*' (grandmothers) who are styled '*ki lawbei Tynrai*' (grandmothers or the root of the tree of the clan). The

descendants of one ancestress of the clan, '*ka lawbei-Tynrai*' are called '*shi kur*' or one clan. Next in order comes '*ka lawbei-Tymmen*' or the great grandmother of a sub-clan or a '*kpoh*' (womb), and then comes '*ka lawbei Kynraw*', the youngest grandmother, who is the ancestress of the family or '*iing*' (house). There is a Khasi saying '*long jaid na ka kynthei*' meaning - from the woman sprang the clan. The Khasis when reckoning descent count from the mother's clan. According to Bareh (1985) traditionally a man is '*U Nongda*' (protector) and a woman '*Ka Nongri Iing*' (keeper of the house), the custodian of the family property.

From birth a Khasi belongs to the '*kur*' or clan of his or her mother and the stigma of illegitimacy is rarely recognized (Simon, 1991). Khongphai (1974:75) quotes Cantlie "A woman cannot have a child who is illegitimate in the meaning of the word under other systems of law. The child is the heir of its mother, whoever may be the father". He further states that the youngest daughter of a traditional Khasi family is only a custodian of the ancestral property, including heirlooms, as also of the religious duties that go with it. While the eldest daughter may have a share in acquired property, ancestral property is the youngest daughter's by customary usage. The '*Khatduh*', that is, the youngest

daughter, enjoys the privileges of the lion's share of the property including the residential house of her parents. Her house is called '*ka iing khatduh*' or the youngest daughter's house, which has special sanctity; it is the ancestral house of generations of youngest daughters which provide refuge and shelter to the poor members of the family (Lyngdoh, 1991). The youngest daughter cannot dispose off the ancestral house without the unanimous consent of her sisters. If the youngest daughter dies she is succeeded by the next youngest daughter and so on (Gurdon, 1990).

#### **Traditional Political Institutions:**

The Khasis have distinct traditional political institutions, which have evolved from clan based units into village based units and finally to the apex level of polity evolution, that is, *hima* or state. According to Nongbri (2003) the Khasis never owed allegiance to a single authority and that it was not till colonialism came on the scene that the society comprised of independent principalities, each under the rule of a *syiem* (chief). Khasi polity consisted of a three-tier democratic system of governance with *dorbar shnongs* or village councils at the bottom, *raids* or communes (which are composed of several federated villages) in the

middle and *dorbar hima* or state council (composed of several federated villages and communes) at the top. The village council looks after the immediate needs of the village and is headed by a village headman (*rangbah shnong/tymmen shnong*), the *raid* or commune is headed by a commune representative designated in different communes by various names (*syiem raid/lyngdoh raid/basan raid* and *bongthai raid*) and the *dorbar hima* or state council is headed by a representative designated in different states (*hima*) by different names, *syiem*, *lyngdoh*, *sirdar* and *wahadadar* (as in the solitary case of the Shella confederacy). In these traditional political institutions and systems of governance, women were not allowed to be members of the councils nor were they even allowed to attend dorbars. Nongbri (2003:241) comments on this aspect – “Despite the fact that the Khasi society is characterized by the matrilineal system of kinship in which descent, inheritance and residence are focused on the woman, Khasi women have no role at all in the political domain. Not only are women traditionally excluded from politics, the Khasis also make a sharp distinction between the domestic and the politico-jural domains. Both, in structural and functional terms, these domains are clearly demarcated: the former belongs to the sphere of the family and kinship and the latter to the public realm. While men wield

power in both domains, women have been kept fully out of the latter as politics has always been regarded as men's sole prerogative." The reason that it is a taboo, against tradition and customary practice of the Khasi, that women be allowed to attend dorbar, is still argued by the proponents of these traditional political institutions. Today, there are some localities in Shillong that allow women to attend meetings of the local, village councils and a few also have women as members of these local councils.

#### **Shillong – The Study Area:**

Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya is situated in the East Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya. It is the home of the Khasis. Shillong is located at 25°34' North Latitude and 91°53' East Longitude, the altitude varying between 1400mts to 1900mts above sea level. Prior to British occupation, Shillong existed in the form of a few cluster of scattered hamlets under the jurisdiction of the *Syiem* of Myllem. With the separation of Assam from Bengal in 1874 Shillong became the provincial headquarter of Assam. However with the attainment of Statehood of Meghalaya in 1972, Shillong became the capital of the State (Master Plan, 1991–2011).

Shillong is characterized by moderate warm wet summers and cool dry winters, with temperatures ranging between a minimum of 4.8 degrees in January to a maximum of 24.5 degrees in the month of August (Pocket Statistical Hand Book, Meghalaya, 2003).

Shillong has an area of 21.27 sq. km. and comprises of the following urban areas: Mawlai, Nongthymmai, Madanrting, Shillong Municipality, Shillong Cantonment, Pynthorumkhrah and Nongmynsong (District Level Statistics, 2002). These urban areas fall under the Greater Shillong Area. For electoral purposes, the Greater Shillong Area is divided into the following constituencies:

1. 15-Mylliem Constituency
2. 16-Malki-Nongthymmai Constituency
3. 17-Laithumkhrah Constituency
4. 18-Pynthorumkhrah Constituency
5. 19-Jaiaw Constituency
6. 20-Mawkhar Constituency
7. 21-Mawprem Constituency
8. 22-Laban Constituency and
9. 23-Mawlai Constituency.

These constituencies are inhabited by the Khasis, Jaintias, Bengalis, Assamese, Nepalis, Marwaris, Punjabis, Biharis...etc. The voting populace of these constituencies is mixed, especially in the Laban, Pynthorumkhrah and Mawprem constituencies, which have a high percentage of non-tribal voters (Sources: Fieldwork). Besides these groups there are other smaller tribal groups, other than the Khasis, residing in the capital like the Mizos, Nagas, Garos, Bodos and Bhutias (Census of India, 1981).

Today, Shillong is a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic city, a product of over 130 years of development. A few years after Shillong (then a town) was made the Headquarters of British Administration, it became obvious that the population would not be a homogenous one comprising only the Khasi stock. The reason for the cosmopolitan nature of Shillong has been due to settlement of outsiders within Shillong for business enterprises or due to jobs opportunities (Nongrum, 1998).

## CHAPTER III

### KHASI WOMEN: THEIR PLACE IN TRADITIONAL POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND THEIR PARTICIPATION IN ELECTORAL POLITICS

#### a) Traditional Political Institutions and the Khasi Women:

The written history of the Khasi people indicates that they had their own traditional political systems. The arrival of the British into this region and the subsequent establishment of their system of administration, had left practically untouched the traditional administrative institutions of these people from where a fair idea of how they functioned can be inferred. According to Simon (1991:2) the entire geographical area inhabited by the Khasis was called *Ka Ri ki Laiphew Syiem* meaning 'land of thirty kings' (The Khasi term for *laiphew* means thirty). However, today it is generally understood and accepted that the term *laiphew* does not necessarily mean thirty but rather denotes many. British records indicate that there were as many as 25 petty states at the time of their occupation of the Khasi Hills. These 25 states varied in

size and population. Each state was under a traditional head called a *Syiem, Lyngdoh, Sirdar* and *Wahadadar*.

Before studying the role of the Khasi women in the traditional political institutions it would be appropriate to examine in brief the traditional political institutional set-up. There are a number of books written on the traditional political institutions by local as well as non-local scholars from where a fair idea of how these institutions functioned in the past and how they are functioning today can be inferred. In Khasi society, the *kur* or clan formed the nucleus of all traditional socio-political institutions (Giri, 1998). The art of politics and governance takes shape at this level when clan matters were entrusted in the hands of an eldest maternal uncle to be addressed. The Khasis developed a distinctive four-tier form of governance with the *hima* (state) at the top, *raids* (communes) at the middle, the *shnong* (village) and the *kur* or the clan at the base (Lyngdoh, 1996). The *dorbars* or councils were the highest decision making bodies in the Khasi political and administrative set-up. The *dorbars* or councils have no written law of their composition or functioning but functioned purely on uncodified customary laws and practices, which were more or less binding on all members of the village.

In the present age changes have been seen wherein some *dorbar shnongs* or village councils have their own written constitutions, rules and regulations (War, 1998). Every stage of administration, from the village to the state, has its own *dorbar* or council. The *dorbar* or council was a sacred institution and was called *Ka Dorbar Blei* or God's council, because it was believed that God Himself was present in the *dorbar* or council (Bareh, 1985; Singh, 1985). The Khasi *dorbar* (council) is conducted very solemnly and decisions are taken unanimously.

As mentioned earlier, the *kur* or clan forms the core of Khasi political institutions. Each *kur* or clan is generally a unit within the political and social framework (Lyngdoh, 1996). Each clan has its own *dorbar kur* (clan council) which is presided over by the *rangbah kur* (clan headman). The *rangbah kur* (clan headman) was elected by the male members of his clan and was also called the *kni rangbah* (head uncle) as he was the eldest male member of the clan. At the lowest level, the *kur* or clan council functioned as an organized political unit (War, 1998). The *rangbah kur* (clan headman) was the spokesman of his clan and together with the *dorbar kur* (clan council) managed all internal affairs of the clan. The *dorbar kur* (clan council) performs the important function of

selecting clan delegates to represent the clan in the electoral college of the *hima* or state. Though the functions and powers of the *dorbar kur* (clan council) are limited, it plays a moderately effective role in the political affairs (Mathur, 1979).

Every Khasi village has its own *dorbar shnong* (village or local council) which plays a pivotal role in the village administration and is presided by the *rangbah shnong/tymmen shnong*, that is, the village headman, who is elected by the adult male members of the village. The village administration is run according to local customs and traditions. A significant feature of a Khasi village administration is that the village headman alone cannot decide on any issue, and that it is only after long deliberations and discussions on all issues before the *dorbar* or council that consensus is arrived at (Simon, 1991). The welfare of the village such as water supply, health, roads, education etc., are looked after by the village headman and the village council. The village headman looks after law and order of the village and as such performs the dual role of magistrate and police officer in the village administration besides seeing to the payment of tributes to the chiefs or the territorial headmen by the villagers (Mathur, 1979).

The largest political unit under a *hima* or State over which the Khasis wield political authority is the *raid* or commune. It is a political unit which is a confederacy of villages that federate into a political system for the purpose of social control and harmonious civil and judicial administration. The *raids* or communes have their *dorbar raid* or commune council which may be called territorial tribal councils (Mathur, 1979). The *dorbar raid* (commune council) elected its head who is known as the *rangbah raid* (head of commune). Members of the *dorbar raid* consisted of all village headmen with additional representatives whenever necessary (War, 1998). The *dorbar raid* looked after all internal affairs of the villages under its jurisdiction but in matters of serious crimes the *syiem's* (chief) authority was called upon.

The highest traditional political authority of the Khasis is the *syiem* or chief. Several *raids* or communes form the *hima* or state with an elected chief called the *syiem*. The *syiem* along with other elected officials ruled the Khasi state under the overall supervision of the *dorbar hima* (state council). Besides presiding over the *dorbar hima* he also presided over his own council, that is, the *syiem's dorbar* or *dorbar myntri* or council of ministers (Das, 1998). Members of the *dorbar myntri*

consisted of all elected clan officials like the *myntris*, *lyngskors*, *basans* and *lyngdohs* and were collectively called *ki bakhrav* or noblemen (Mawrie, 1981). The *syiem* or chief is elected by an electoral college that comprised of the *bakhravs* and *basans* or representatives of clans (Lyngdoh, 1996). In general the *syiem* was elected from a pre-ordained royal clan, the *syiem* clan and heirship to the office of the *syiem* is in all cases traced through the female offspring. In the case of total absence of male heirs, a woman was eligible. In such cases the *syiem* was succeeded by the eldest of his uterine sisters (Bareh, 1985).

From the above discussion of how the traditional political institutions functioned it can be observed that the Khasi traditional political institutions manifest a blend of partial democracy and limited monarchy. It is partial democracy because it encourages the participation of only adult males in the political affairs of the state. This trend is strictly adhered to even today where Khasi states, especially in rural areas are reluctant to allow women to participate in state affairs. Secondly it is a limited monarchy because the *syiem's* (chief) powers are to a large extent circumscribed (Gurdon, 1990). He performs important acts only after consulting and getting the *dorbar's* (council) approval. As

such the *syiem* was not a territorial ruler but was and still is a functionary of his state, his duty being to put into action decisions of the council (Singh, 1985). The present day functioning of these traditional political institutions remain the same.

With this brief preview of the traditional political set-up of the Khasi society, we can now examine the role played by women in these political institutions. As mentioned earlier the *dorbar* or council was considered a sacred institution of the Khasis. Singh (1985:22) notes that the Khasis have tried to maintain it as the sole electoral body, the sole legislative, administrative and judicial body in the state, *ka hima*. Even the *syiem* was below the *dorbar*. Strict rules of conduct were imposed. An interesting issue here is that though the political institutions were democratic in nature, they had some limitations. Lyngdoh (1996:143) points out four factors in this regard. Firstly, he notes that it was the *kur* or clan and not the individuals who formed the political unit. The second factor is that the *syiem* or chief was elected only from the *syiem* clan. Thirdly, smaller *kurs* or clans had no voice in the *syiem's* election and lastly, women had no share or role in the political and administrative set-up of the Khasi society. In general the traditional political

institutions of the Khasis have been eulogized as being very democratic. However a closer examination proves the contrary. According to Bareh (1985:255), in no case were women elected to the councils. Total adult male franchise was followed where they were both voters as well as candidates. A woman was also not allowed to hold the office of the *syiem* (chief) nor could she speak up in the *dorbar* or council (Singh, 1985). All *dorbars* (councils) right from the *dorbar kur* (clan council) to the *dorbar hima* (state council) had only male members. Administration was regarded as a burden for men while home, the domain of women.

It may be worthwhile to note a few tenets regarding the role and place of the Khasi woman as noted by Singh (1985:14) - 1) *Ka said ka thew, ka sain ka tiah, kiba khia kiba shon ka jong u Rangbah* - Delibrations and decisions, planning, administration and politics and the burdens of management belong to man; 2) *Ka wait, u sum, ka sang, ka barshi, ka knia, ka khriam baroh ka jong u rangbah. Ka kynthei tang ka lum ka kynshew ka taiar ka dah ka dang* - the weapons of war and the sacerdotal performances belong to the man. The woman is the keeper of the home and the one who prepares and collects the things connected with the rituals; 3) *Ka akor Khasi ka khang ban kynih ka iar kynthei ne*

*said thma ha dorbar* – according to this tenet, a woman is forbidden to speak or deliberate before the *dorbar*. He further observes that the blind, the lame, epileptics, men without moustaches, the mentally imbalanced and one who is the last or sole surviving member of his clan could not hold office. Sen (1985:101) writes – “Chastity of women glorified magnificently is an aspect of keeping womenfolk confined to the household……women are also denied the right of franchise”. According to Lyngdoh (1991:33) there is a Khasi saying, *wow la kynih ka iar kynthei, ka pyrthei ka la wai*, which means that the world will come to an end or there will be destruction when the hen crows. There is a saying that as it is the rooster that crows, the crowing should be done by it and not by the hen, for when the Khasis say – *kynih ka iar kynthei* or crowing of the hen, it means that she does not know her role as the mother of the house (Giri, 1980). This tenet also implies that by ‘crowing’ or partaking in those activities not sanctioned by tradition, she has overstepped her jurisdiction and role. There is another Khasi saying wherein women are regarded as *Ka thei shibor* meaning that women are of one device and one power, while the man was regarded as *u rang khadar bor* which means that a man with twelve powers (Giri, 1998).

In Khasi tradition, a man is *U Nongda* or protector and the woman *Ka Nongri ling* meaning the custodian of the family property (Bareh, 1985). This is best illustrated by the symbols or objects that are used at the birth ceremonies of a newly born child. A bow and three arrows are placed near a male child to signify his role as a warrior, hunter and protector of the family, clan and the race. For a female child, a head strap or *u star*, a conical basket or *ka khoh* and a knife or *ka wait* are placed to symbolize her role as a hardworking house-wife and co-worker in the field, who contributes not only to the welfare of the family and the clan but also to the race in general (Lyngdoh, 1991). Mawroh (1990:3) gives another example for this social thought where in she interprets the *shad suk mynsiem* or the Thanksgiving Dance. In this Thanksgiving Dance the male dancers hold the sword on their right hands, the whisks on the left hand, the shield, the bow and arrows at their back indicating that they are the defenders of the clan, the community and the land. The turbans on their head with the crest of a feather on the back of their turbans, indicates that they are the rulers, the law-makers and the administrators. The female dancers dance in the inner circle of the arena while the male dancers dance surrounding them. The female dancers adorn themselves with costly gold and silver

jewellery and ornaments indicating that they are the custodians of the ancestral properties. They also wear a gold or silver crown which according to Mawroh, symbolizes the various virtues that a Khasi woman should maintain - dignity, honesty, virginity and courtesy in all walks of her life in society. Analysing the participation of a Khasi woman in matters of statecraft, Synrem (1992:32) notes - "the mother would not meddle with the affairs of the state as this would interfere with her duties and responsibilities in the home." She further observes that the position of a woman in a Khasi family is unique. Not only has her right over the home and property been sanctified by custom and religious tradition, but on her depends the very continuation of lineage and inheritance. It is believed that it is from the woman that the clan will multiply - *ban roi ka jait ka kynja*, and the family household will continue to expand - *ban iar U tnum u tyndai*. Commenting on the Khasi woman's place in the Khasi society, Nongbri (2003:242) writes that - "Implicit in the division of gender roles among the Khasis is the hint that women lack expertise and skill to handle important and major matters. The exclusion of women from politics and the denial of rights to manage their property gives the impression that society finds them lacking in administrative and managerial abilities - roles which demand tact,

shrewdness and decisive action. Thus, while formal stratification of gender is absent in Khasi society, ideologically, women have always been seen as inferior to men. This inequality is camouflaged by matrilineal descent, which creates a false impression of aura and prestige around women. Ironically, matrilineal descent helps to keep women in subjugation. By conferring descent rights on women, men not only succeed to isolate women from politics but also in legitimizing their own position as their protector”.

What can be inferred from above is that, the Khasi woman has no place in the political sphere and that her main role was that of a home maker. Despite restrictions being imposed on women participating in the decision-making process of these institutions, Khasi history tells us of women who did rule. According to Bareh (1985:237) in a few western and northern states women were instituted as *syiem-synshar* or ruling heads of states which distinguished them from the role of the *syiem-sads*, high priestesses, concerned with religious functions. These female *syiem-synshars* were – *ka Iaw Saring* of the *raid* Iapngar in Bhoi area, *ka Wan* of the Maharam state, *ka Latympang Sutnga*, *ka Jem* and *ka Sanglar* of the Nongkhlaw state and *ka Lar* of the Nobosohphoh state,

who reigned till 1869. Bareh opines that these women were in office for some time due to non availability of a male successor. This was done so as to prevent dissensions arising from succession quarrels which would have disastrous effects on the state. Existence of such female rulers indicates that women could take part in administration and that they were also accepted. However this is more of an exception than a rule.

The Khasi women did take part in political administration, but on very rare and peculiar circumstances. The general trend was and still is that women have no part to play in any activities associated with traditional political institutions. The normal rule was that the *dorbars* or councils practice male suffrage and women had no representation in these councils. Women were allowed to attend *dorbars* or councils only when cases or matters concerning them were discussed. Her foremost role was that of a mother and proprietor of her clan. In the present times there has been a perceptible change in this rigidity of debarment to *dorbars* or councils for we now see women taking part in the affairs of traditional political institutions though only at the village level. Women in some localities in Shillong attend *dorbar* or council and are also included in the executive committees of the *dorbar* or council. For example –

Laitumkrah, Nongrim Hills and Lachumiere dorbars include women in their executive committees. These localities are more cosmopolitan and the residents belong to different communities. There are also some women organizations like *Ka Seng Longkmie* (Mother's Association) Laitumkrah and *Seng Kynthei* (Women's Organisation) Nongrim Hills, which send two representatives to the executive committee of the local councils. The representatives sent are usually the president and the general secretary of these women organizations. The Lachumiere local dorbar had a lady treasurer in the executive committee. Another locality, Nongrim Hills, has a woman executive member. Ms. Cerila Khonglah was elected as the treasurer of this locality and is at present serving her term as an executive member of the Nongrim Hills dorbar. Besides her, there are two other women sent from the *Seng Kynthei* (Women's Organisation), to represent women from this locality. Yet this is just a tiny drop in the ocean of women's participation in traditional political bodies. In some localities there are women members not at the *shnong* or village level but at the *dong* or block level. For example the locality of Malki is divided into 8 '*dongs*' or blocks. Each *dong* has its own *rangbah dong* or block head who represents his respective block. In this locality there are women members not at the locality level but at the sub

divisions of the locality, that is, the block levels. An interview conducted with a woman member (who is the general secretary of her block) revealed that women are reluctant to hold posts that are being held by men, post such as that of the headman. Women according to her are reluctant to take up such posts because of the enormous responsibilities attached to them.

There are still many *dorbars* which do not allow women to participate in the meetings. Interviews conducted with some *rangbahs shnongs* (village headmen) reveal that men are still reluctant to release the reigns of control of a domain they regard as solely theirs. Those opposed to change and who adhere strictly to traditional tenets are of the opinion that since tradition does not encourage the participation of women in political matters even at the grassroot level, the question of accommodating women in the *dorbars* does not arise. The moderate opinion on the other hand is that if women receive the encouragement and support of men from the level of the *dong* (that is, the block) itself then their entry and occupation of important posts at the *dorbar* level stands unhindered. According to Hipshon Roy (cited in Lyngdoh, 1991), the Khasis in the evolution of their democratic system had wisely

avoided burdening their women with politics, and as such she had no place or function in it, her most important role being that of a mother. Affairs of the state were and are still regarded the domain of men.

What has been observed is that ideas about and attitudes towards the Khasi women are crucially linked to the institution of marriage, family, the home, children and household activities. Writings on Khasi woman portray her as a mother through whom the lineage and continuity of the clan depends, and that she is subservient to the tenets of Khasi society as imposed by tradition. Though Khasi society is matrilineal, it is no different from the patrilineal societies when it comes to the role women are expected to play in the society. Women in general construct themselves through culturally given definitions of womanhood. The outcome is defining women who are crucially dependent on the concept of mother and all activities and associations that the concept draws to itself. There is no doubt that there are women who do not agree with this sexual stereotyping of the gender but it is very hard to shake off a practice that has been followed for a long period of time. In the end it all depends on the way an individual interprets or looks at her expected role and sees it as appropriate or not. For the Khasi woman her role in

the traditional political institution is still very limited. However she realizes that this practice of exclusion needs to be reversed.

**b) Historical Development of Khasi Women in Electoral Politics:**

Having discussed the role played by women in the traditional political institutions, an attempt will now be made to study the role of women in the State politics of Meghalaya. This would lead to the study of the role of women in the Khasi Hills during (a) the pre-independence era, (b) the post-independence era, and (c) the period after the creation of the State of Meghalaya and the present state of women in electoral politics.

The struggle for equal voting rights has been a long one for women in general. The grant of franchise to women has not been uniform (Table 3). There is common consensus that the status of women is subordinate to that of men. As a matter of fact though women may hold some measure of influence or informal power, the degree of influence varied from culture to culture, the gender system, the class or status, caste or religious sects to which they belonged. Basically women

were regarded as the weaker sex and have certain cultural restrictions imposed on them. Today these cultural barriers are weakening and women are treading fields that were regarded taboo to them. One such taboo imposed on women was their participation in affairs of the state, which was regarded as the monopoly of men. Today women in most parts of the world participate in politics and its activities. Women's active participation in politics has always been able to evoke either strong favourable or unfavourable reactions. Arguments and reasons have been put forward as to why women should or should not take part in politics. The argument that women should refrain from politics is a much debated issue. Today, it is an accepted fact in most parts of the world that equal rights to vote and to be elected to national office are fundamental to women's status. The almost worldwide recognition of the political rights of women and equality of franchise with men was obtained after much pressure and struggle. Furthermore, feminist movements began demanding the right to vote, as elections were considered to be the fundamental act of political life. The obtainment of the right to vote was taken to be vital as basic decisions are made in the political arena which shape the patterns of society in which women live. As such, gaining the right to vote was seen as a means to ensure the

elimination of other forms of discrimination as well. “Historically, suffrage came first, eligibility to hold office next and actual access to public office still later” (Hymer, 1972, 103). The fight for women suffrage was not without any opposition. In general, established laws, customs, attitudes and habits of thinking were slow to change, especially when they concerned acceptance of new ideas about women and their place in society.

TABLE 3

Enfranchisement of Women in Selected Countries

COUNTRY	YEAR
New Zealand	1893 (First in the World)
Norway	1901 (Local elections)
	1910 (Legislative elections)
	1913 (National elections)
Australia	1902
Denmark	1903 (Local councils)
	1915 (Parliament)
Finland	1906
Iceland	1915
USSR, Netherlands	1917

Great Britain	1918 (above 30 years)
	1928 (above 21 years)
Luxembourg, Canada	1918
Germany, Sweden, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland	1919
USA	1920
Ireland	1922
Mongolian People's Republic	1924
Ecuador	1929
South Africa	1930
Spain	1931
Brazil, Uruguay and Thailand (First Asian Country)	1932
Turkey	1930 (Municipal election)
	1934 (National election)
Ceylon, Cuba	1934
Burma	1935
Philippines	1937
Dominican Republic	1942
France	1944

Guatemala, Hungary	1945
Panama, Italy, Albania,	
Rumania, Japan, Yugoslavia	1946
Argentina, Bulgaria, China,	
Venezuela	1947
Belgium, Israel, Korea	1948
Chile, India, Indonesia, Costa Rica	1949
Ghana	1950
Nepal	1951
Greece	1952
Mexico	1953
Colombia	1954
Ethiopia, Honduras, Peru, Nicaragua	1955
Pakistan	1952 (Provisional election)
	1956 (National election)
Cambodia, Guinea, Laos, Mali,	
Mauritania, Niger,	1956
Senegal, Vietnam, Egypt	
Haiti, Lebanon, Malay	1957
Somalia	1958

Cyprus, Morocco, Tunisia	1959
Nigeria	1960
Paraguay, Sierra Leone	1961
Algeria, Jamaica, Rwanda, Trinidad, Uganda, Burundi	1962
Iran, Kenya, Fiji	1963
Malawi, Malta, Zambia	1964
Switzerland	1971

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*Source* : Compiled from *Encyclopedia Americana*, Vol. 29, 1972, p. 107; B.Das and L.N.Das, "Women in Politics and Social Affairs", in *The Feminine Gender* (New Delhi: Manak Publications, Pvt. Ltd., 1995) pp. 107-109.

#### KHASI WOMEN IN ELECTORAL POLITICS

##### **a) Pre-Independence Period:**

As discussed earlier, traditionally, the Khasi women did not have any part to play in the administration of the state. There were debarred from taking part in the political affairs as war and politics were regarded as the activities of the men and the home affairs that of the women. Though tradition makes mention of some female rulers, this was under very rare circumstances. It has been observed that traditionally women

did not involve themselves with political affairs and left the affairs of the state in the hands of the men. According to one school of thought, as women are already burdened with having to look after the family, an additional work such as taking part in politics would be too heavy a task for them to cope with (Gassah, 1995). In the pre-independence period women were not given any role to play in the traditional political institutions. But changes were seen when new types of administration were introduced, firstly under the British, and secondly under the Indian Constitution, thereby initiating the participation of women in politics at the non-traditional levels. The Government of India Act 1935, under the British rule, had granted women the right to vote, though on a very restricted and limited basis. The Act provided special provisions for the representation of women to the Assam Legislative Assembly whereby there was a seat reserved for women in the Shillong constituency, the reason being that there were more women here than in any other constituency. Moreover they were also eligible to contest from the general seats as well (Rao and Hazarika, 1983, 171). As such in the 1937 election, two Khasi women, Mrs. Berlina Diengdoh and Miss Mavis Dunn Lyngdoh, contested from this reserved Shillong constituency as Independent candidates. There were 2199 women voters in the Shillong

constituency, out of which 1228 or 55.84% had exercised their votes, Miss Mavis Dunn polling 938 votes (ibid). She was declared a winner thereby becoming the first woman from Khasi Hills to become a member of the Assam Legislative Assembly and also the first woman to become a Cabinet Minister from the North East Region of India (Rao and Hazarika, 1983, 171; Gassah, 1995, 300). Miss Mavis Dunn Lyngdoh was inducted into the Muhammad Saadulla Ministry twice, first in the year 1939 to 1941 and again in 1942 to 1945. The 1946 election saw an increase in the number of women contestants though their number was not quite substantial nor in proportion to their population strength. In this year there were five women candidates – Mrs. Bonniely Khongmen, T.W.Shadap, Berlina Diengdoh, Padma Kumari Gohain and Miss Mavis Dunn Lyngdoh. Mrs. Bonniely Khongmen was the Congress nominee while the rest of the contestants were all independent candidates. Padma K.Gohain contested the general seat while the others from the reserved Shillong Constituency seat. In this election Mrs. Bonniely Khongmen won from the reserved seat, getting a total vote of 1454 out of 2878 votes polled (Rao and Hazarika, 1983, 172).

**b) Post-Independence Period:**

In India with the grant of universal adult franchise in the year 1949 the number of women voters also increased. The first general elections of free India were held in the year 1952. This election saw quite a few women contesting the general election in spite of the absence of reservation for women. In this general election six women filed their nominations – four were from the plain districts of Assam, while two were from the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Miss Mavis Dunn Lyngdoh who was an independent candidate, and Manorama Mehta, contested the Shillong seat against J.J.M.Nicholas, the Indian National Congress candidate. Both female candidates lost to the lone male candidate. Mavis Dunn who was the only tribal woman candidate had polled just 1622 votes out of 14188 votes polled, while the winner polled 4458 votes (Rao and Hazarika, 1983, 173). In the Parliamentary elections to the Lok Sabha which was held in the same year, Mrs. Bonniely Khongmen of the Indian National Congress contested from the Autonomous Districts against two male rival candidates – Mr.Wilson Reade of the Khasi-Jaintia Durbar, and Mr.Donaldson Basan of the Hills People Party. Mrs.Khongmen won with a clear majority, polling 59326 votes out of 109663 valid votes polled, thereby becoming the first tribal lady from

the Khasi-Jaintia and Garo Hills to have represented the people in the Lok Sabha. It may be mentioned that prior to 1952, she was a member of the Assam Legislative Assembly from 1946 to 1952, and was also elected as the Deputy Speaker in 1952. During the 1957 Assembly elections she again returned to state politics and contested the Shillong seat as a Congress candidate but lost. She was the only tribal woman from the nine constituencies of the Khasi-Jaintia and Garo Hills (Lyngdoh, 1992, 10-11; Gassah, 1995, 301). The 1962 and 1967 elections did not witness a single woman contestant to the Assam Legislative Assembly from the Khasi-Jaintia and Garo Hills Districts (Rao and Hazarika, 1983, 107).

**c) After the creation of the State of Meghalaya:**

On 24<sup>th</sup> December 1969, the Bill for the creation of Meghalaya was passed by Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha and the Autonomous State of Meghalaya was brought into existence on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April 1970 (Rao et al., 1984, 70). The Autonomous State of Meghalaya had its own Provisional Legislative Assembly. The year 1970 saw members of the Provisional Legislative Assembly being indirectly elected by members of the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills Autonomous District

Councils respectively, while some members were nominated by the Governor (Gassah, 1995, 302). A total of 38 members were elected out of which two were women, Maysalin War from the Khasi-Jaintia Hills and Josephine Momin from the Garo Hills, while three members were nominated by the Governor (Malngiang, 1996, 37).

Meghalaya achieved statehood on the 21<sup>st</sup> of January 1972 and the first general election to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly was held on the 9<sup>th</sup> of March 1972. In this election nine women contested, 6 of them were from the Khasi Hills – Silverline Swer, Muriel Salena Dunn, Plissibon Marbaniang, Rosida Sohtun, Maysalin War and Luisa Brosila Lamin, and 3 from the Garo Hills – Miriam D.Shira, Percylina R.Marak and Herilla B.Sangma. There were no women candidates from the Jaintia Hills. Percylina R.Marak, (contested on an APHLC ticket) from the Garo Hills was elected. In this election while four contestants forfeited their security deposit, the other four were defeated by their male rivals (Rao et al., 1984, 107). In the year 1973 when a bye election was held, two women candidates contested wherein Miriam D.Shira, who had contested the previous year, won the seat (Gassah, 1995, 303).

In the 1978 Meghalaya Legislative Assembly election, seven women contested, three were from the Khasi Hills - Neena Rynjah (Indian National Congress - I) from 22-Laban constituency, Maysalin War (All Party Hill Leaders Conference) from 36-Mawthengkut constituency and Drosily Mukhim (Independent) from 16-Malki-Nongthymmai constituency, three from the Garo Hills - Miriam D.Shira (Independent) from 43-Songsak constituency, Percylina R.Marak (Indian National Congress) from 51-Rongram constituency and Fridina Marak (Independent) from 52-Tura constituency, and one Assamese lady, Usha Bhattacharjee (Indian National Congress I) from 17-Laithumkhras constituency. Mrs. Miriam D.Shira, an independent candidate from the Garo Hills polled 1156 votes and was declared the winner. Out of the remaining six contestants three (Neena Rynjah, Drosily Mukhim and Usha Bhattacharjee) lost their deposit while the other three escaped forfeiture of deposit. Maysalin War lost by just 27 votes to her male opponent (Meghalaya Election Book, 1978). What had been observed in these last few elections by political analysts was that in spite of a sizeable women electorate the defeat or forfeiture of deposit of the women candidates indicated that women did not necessarily or readily vote for their kind. What can be said from this trend is that the female

electorate did not seem to favour women candidates. Questions such as these come to mind – what could be the reason for such attitude? Do the public in general, whether male or female, view women as incapable political leaders? Does social conditioning, the way one is brought up and expected to behave reasons for such behaviour?

The next general election held in 1983 saw an increase in women contestants, this year eight women stood for election. They were – Ivoryna Shylla (Public Demand Implementation Convention) from 6-Nongbah-Wahiajer constituency, Tiplut Nongbri (Indian National Congress) from 17-Laithumkhrah constituency, Evandalyne Massar (Indian National Congress) from 18-Pynthorumkhrah constituency, Maya R. Kyndiah (Indian National Congress) from 19-Jaiaw constituency, Naramai Langstieh (Indian National Congress) from 24-Sohryngkham constituency, Luisa Brosila Lamin also an independent candidate from 28-Nongshken constituency, Maysalin War from the All Party Hills Leaders Conference (hereinafter APHLC) from 36-Mawthengkut constituency and Miriam D.Shira also an APHLC candidate from 43-Songsak constituency. None of these women were elected; four were

defeated while the other four lost their security deposit (Meghalaya Election Handbook, 1983).

The Assembly election held in 1988 witnessed a very low level of women contestants. Three women, one from Khasi Hills and two from the Garo Hills, contested wherein two were elected – Maysalin War won on the Congress ticket and Miriam D.Shira from the Garo Hills as an independent candidate, both were inducted as Cabinet Ministers (Gassah, 1995, 304; Malngiang, 1996, 38).

In 1993, seven women candidates contested, five of them from Khasi Hills and two from the Garo Hills. Only one woman, Roshan Warjri from the 20-Mawkhar constituency was elected on the Hills People Union (hereinafter HPU) ticket and served as an MLA. Three women forfeited their security deposits while the remaining three were defeated (ibid).

In the next general election held in 1998, as many as fourteen women contested. They are – Lucia Malngiang, a Bharatiya Janata Party candidate (hereinafter BJP) from 16-Malki-Nongthymmai constituency,

Margaret Rose Mawlong, a United Democratic Party candidate (hereinafter UDP) and Naramai Langstieh, a Hill State Peoples Democratic Party candidate (hereinafter HSPDP) from 17-Laithumkhrach constituency, Mena Kharkongor, a Samata Party candidate (hereinafter SP) from 18-Pynthorumkhrach constituency, Maya R. Kyndiah, an Indian National Congress candidate (hereinafter INC) from 19-Jaiaw constituency, Roshan Warjri (UDP) from 20-Mawkhar constituency, Amanda Pathaw (INC) from 23-Mawlai constituency, Simil Gury Kharhujon from the People's Democratic Movement (hereinafter PDM) from 29-Sohra constituency, Johanara Kharbhil as an independent candidate (hereinafter IND) from 31-Mawsynram constituency, Queentina Nongbet (UDP) from 33-Pariong constituency, Maysalin War (HSPDP) from 36-Mawthengkut constituency, Debora C. Marak (INC) from 39-Rongjeng constituency, Miriam D.Shira (IND) from 43-Songsak constituency and Bijeta Daring (IND) from 49-Rajabala constituency. Three women, two from the Khasi Hills – Roshan Warjri (UDP) and Maysalin War an independent candidate, and one from the Garo Hills– Debora C. Marak from the Congress party, were declared elected in this election. Altogether seven women contested from constituencies within the Greater Shillong Area out of which only one of them, Roshan Warjri,

was elected. She was inducted as a Cabinet Minister and was given charge of the following departments in different periods of time between 1998 and 2002 - Urban Affairs, Tourism, General Administration Department (GAD), Municipal Administration and Co-operation.

In the latest election held in the year 2003, a total of fourteen women contested but only two were elected - Deobora C. Marak from Garo Hills and Irin Lyngdoh from the Khasi Hills, both Congress candidates, though by very slim margins of 61 and 29 votes respectively. This year there were only three women contestants from the Greater Shillong Area - Larisha Kurkalang (HSPDP) from 15-Mylliem constituency, Maya R. Kyndiah (UDP) from 19-Jaiaw constituency and Amanda Pathaw (INC) from 23-Mawlai constituency. All these three women forfeited their security deposits. Besides the two elected ladies, another lady, Mrs. Jopsimon Phanbuh, the wife of the then sitting MLA of the 22-Laban constituency, T.H. Rangad, was elected in the bye election held when her husband passed away in July 2003. This bye-election was held in the same year of the Assembly elections on the 26<sup>th</sup> of September 2003. It has been rumoured that this lady won due to sympathy wave that have engulfed the Laban constituency when its

elected candidate passed away. All together there are now three women in the present Legislative Assembly. Mrs Irin Lyngdoh was inducted to the Government in 2003 as a Minister of State and was given the following portfolios – to assist the Ministers of Soil Conservation and Irrigation. With the downsizing of the Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (hereinafter MDA) ministry in July 2004, Irin Lyngdoh lost her ministerial berth in this ministry and was made a parliamentary secretary – to assist Minister in charge of Soil Conservation department; to assist Minister in charge of Sericulture and Weaving department. Mrs. Debora C. Marak was privileged to have been appointed a minister of Cabinet rank on both occasions, before and after the downsizing of the MDA ministry. Between the period of March 2003 and June 2004 she was minister in charge of Mining and Geology (Cabinet rank). In July 2004 after the downsizing she retained her cabinet berth and was given additional charge of Tourism, Cooperation, Art and Culture and Weights and Measures.

In the seven general elections (1972, 1978, 1983, 1988, 1993, 1998, and 2003) held so far, a total of only 65 women have contested in these elections out of a grand total of 1985 contestants. Out of the total

of these 65 women who had contested in the elections, only 12 of them have been elected so far.

Coming to the elections of the Autonomous District Councils, there were a number of women representatives who were either elected or nominated. In the first election to the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council held in the year 1952, a lady, Mrs.Lariam Shullai, was nominated as a member. The Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council in 1973-74, also had a nominated lady, Dr. (Mrs.) K.Rymbai. The next election held in the year 1972 saw two women, Mrs.Louisinia Brosila Lamin and Mrs.Etris Syiem, contesting and winning the election. In 1972, the Chief Executive member of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council, Mr.L.G.Shullai, selected Mrs.L.Brosila Lamin as one of the executive members. She became the first lady executive member in all District Councils in the North East. Another lady, Mrs.E.Syiem, also served briefly as an executive member in 1977. Maysalin War who was a member of the Provisional Assembly in 1970 contested in 1984 and was elected to the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council. She won on a Congress ticket (Lyngdoh, 1995, 12). The election held in 1991 saw three women contesting - Doris Bell Giri

Kurkalang (IND) from Myllem, Lucia Malngiang from the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) from Laitumkhrah-Malki constituency and Velvet Rose Jana (RJD) from Mawlai constituency. All three contestants lost the elections. In the year 1993, Mrs.L.Brosila Lamin contested from the Mawlai constituency but lost. The nomination of women has not been repeated except for the two cases mentioned above.

The Garo Hills Autonomous District Council also held its first election in the year 1952. Out of the twenty-four members in the council there were two women, Mrs. Sujomoti W. Momin and Mrs. Roneswari Marak. Sujomoti was elected as an independent candidate while Roneswari was nominated by the Governor. Mrs. Sujomoti again contested in the year 1957, defeating two of her male rival candidates. Due to the Chinese aggression elections could not be held in the year 1962, it was postponed to 1964. In this election Mrs. Ewine Marak, the only women candidate contested against three male rival candidates and lost. In order to represent women in the District Council the Governor nominated a lady, Bisadini Sangma. In the 1972 elections Evangeline Shira, the only women candidate lost as an independent candidate. However, two women, Alleswary Momin and Janje Marak, were

nominated. There was a total absence of women members in the year 1978 to 1983. Two women, Enilla D.Shira and Reboti Burman, were elected in the year 1983, while in 1989, there was one elected lady member, Mrs. Reboti Burman. In the 1994 District Council elections, no female candidates were elected (Lyngdoh, 1995, 12-13).

Despite the fact that very few women actually contest for elections, it has been observed that the turnover of women voters is usually large, sometimes outnumbering male voters. But, the right to vote, though an essential means of influencing the distribution of political power in a democracy, does not by itself carry political power. The proportion of women elected as members of the Parliament, State Legislative Assembly, the Autonomous District Councils or even high officials within the state government, is by far very negligible. An interesting fact is that though political parties, whether at the national or regional level, have their women's wing to work for their parties, very rarely do they nominate a woman candidate from their party. Women seem to play a more effective role in campaigning for parties during the elections besides casting their votes. Even the various women organizations that emerged after the creation of the state were mostly

socio-economic in outlook, working for the socio-economic upliftment of the women besides looking into the general welfare of the society as a whole. Some women organization such as '*Ka Synjuk Ki Kynthei Riewlum*' or the Tribal Women Welfare and Development Association of Meghalaya (TWWADAM) formed in 1979, has taken up political issues besides social and cultural issues (Lyngdoh, 1998, 95). The women's wing of political parties such as the Mahila Congress I Committee and the Women's Wing of the Hill People's Union have also raised issues regarding the representation of women in the political and administrative spheres (Lyngdoh, 1995, 20). These women's wings were basically set up to give support and strengthen their political parties through their social and political activities. There are others who have observed that despite dynamic women party workers in the various women's wing of different political parties, they are never projected as future candidates of any constituency. This has been seen as a major set back to the success of the Khasi women in the field of politics. Moreover it has also been observed that on many occasions political parties approached women to contest for election either as a last resort or merely to split the votes of their opponents.

After more than a half century of women's suffrage, the number of women in high positions of political power and influence is still negligible. Actual political power has been achieved only by a handful of actively participating courageous women. Though there have been in a number of countries women ministers, some even of cabinet rank, very few have held office outside spheres usually considered women's interests such as social welfare, public health, family affairs...etc. A study conducted by the International Parliamentary Union shows that the percentage of women in the world Parliaments has dropped over the years, the ratio being quiet disproportionate to the total women population. Ten Parliaments in the world do not have a single woman representative. There are only 4512 women parliamentarians as against 33,981 men elected to the Parliaments in the world (*The Hindu*, June 17, 1997).

The present scenario in India is not very different. As such women in India have been clamouring for the 81<sup>st</sup> amendment to the Constitution for reserving 33% of the seats in the Lok Sabha and the Legislative Assemblies. This bill was first introduced in the Lok Sabha in September 1996, by the then United Front Government and later referred to the

joint select committee of Parliament chaired by late Geeta Mukherjee. This reservation policy for women has not been able to get the approval of all political parties. In 1997, the then Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Mr.P.A.Sangma, was of the view that if women were to play any significant role in governance, they should themselves undergo a change of attitude. Moreover, he suggests that political parties practice and promote equal partnership for women in political participation – in enrolment of members, giving positions in party hierarchies, giving training to them in political work at all levels, in offering candidatures for elections, in meaningfully financing candidatures and electoral contests and in giving ministerial berths and positions, including weighty portfolios (*The Shillong Times*, August 21<sup>st</sup>, 1997). The Women's Reservation Bill has been able to evoke a lot of debate but consensus is yet to be arrived at.

In Meghalaya, the question as to whether this reservation of seats for women should be implemented or not is yet to be answered. Political leaders majority of whom are men, reason that as women in Meghalaya already have enough power under the matrilineal system, reservation of seats for them would not be applicable. Women legislators in the State

are also against reservation. Women legislators like Mrs. Roshan Warjiri and Miss Debora C. Marak, have voiced their agreement on this. The former who was the lone female Cabinet Minister of the State in the year 1998-2003, said - 'being a matrilineal society, women are equal to men and do not require reservations' (*The Telegraph*, June 1<sup>st</sup> 2000). But in a recent personal interview with Mrs. Roshan Warjiri she was of the opinion that women do need reservation of seats though not the present percentage of 33 but maybe a lesser percentage. Reservation according to her would enable more women to come forward in a field regarded as the male domain. Once we see more participation of women then reservation of seats can be done away with. The three Autonomous District Councils, the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills Autonomous District Councils, have opposed allotment of quota for women in the Assembly Councils. The Chief Executive Members of all these three autonomous district councils have opposed the idea of seat reservations for women in the councils. They contend that the women in this society have a higher status than men. They also claimed that since women were debarred from taking part in the traditional political institutions, quotas cannot be allocated for them now. Yet as equals to men, they argued, women can join the fray (*ibid*). Even in the Shillong Municipal Board 33% reservation

had been demanded for women but was opposed. A leading social activist, Mrs. Probity Nongpluh, had even approached the court demanding 33% of the seat be reserved for women in the 2000 municipal election. Though the Gauhati High Court, Shillong Bench, passed the judgement in favour of Mrs. Nongpluh twice and later Gauhati High Court, Double Bench once, the State government had approached the Supreme Court ignoring the plea of Mrs. Nongpluh and others. Though the Gauhati High Court, Shillong Bench passed an order directing the State government to grant 33% reservation for women in the municipal election, this has yet to be implemented (*The Shillong Times*, May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2000).

What would be the outcome of the women's reservation bill in the State as well as at the centre is yet to be seen. The question is whether the women are in favour of this bill or not, whether they will aggressively contest for its implementation, whether tradition still has a strong hold on them when it comes to politics, or whether women feel that they are educated and matured enough to take on the reigns of governance in a more public way. In totality it is important to find out what is the general women's perception of politics and its various

activities. Do women themselves feel that more women should step forward in the political arena, do they think that women would make better political leaders, or whether they would actively participate in politics if given the chance to do so.

## CHAPTER IV

### PARTICIPATORY ATTITUDES OF WOMEN TOWARDS ELECTORAL POLITICS.

Much of the behavioural political science literature of 1950s and 1960s assumed that men and women were substantially different political beings and that women participated in politics less than men, focused more on personal qualities of candidates and were less interested in and less knowledgeable about politics. These differential political orientations of women have affected the kind of influence they exert upon the political system. Dowse and Hughes write, "some of the most solidly researched and validated findings in the social sciences relate to the differential participation of men and women in political activities of all kinds...Women have been found to vote less than men, to participate in political parties less than men, to know less about politics than men. With very few empirical exceptions these relationships hold even controlling for socio-economic status" (cited in Ted Tapper, 1976, p.188). The relatively low level of

female attempts at political persuasion is seen to be related to the reluctance of female adults to express attitudes and that this reluctance finds its roots in childhood and adolescent socialization (Ronald B.Rapoport,1981,p.35). As such in order to understand the behavioural process in man as influenced by social relationships we have to mention one of the most important products of socialization, the attitudes. Attitudes are the feelings of likes and dislikes, attraction or repulsion, interest or apathy towards some objects.

A discussion of attitudes, interests and values must begin with a realization that they are dynamic phenomena that interact with all other elements of the organism rather than the static units that they may seem to be when they are discussed. Different researchers have sought to define attitude in different ways. According to G.W.Allport (1935), an attitude is a mental and neutral state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individuals response to all objects and situations with which it is related. Daniel Katz and Ezra Stotland (1959) define attitude as “an individual tendency or predisposition to evaluate an object or a symbol of that object in a certain way”

(cited in Lindgren,1974,p.90 ). They conceive of attitudes as having effective cognitive and behavioral components, i.e. as involving feelings and emotions, beliefs and action. They also maintain that each attitude has a single referent, but that attitudes maybe organized into consistent and coherent structures known as value systems. According to Lindgren (1974) a system of attitudes and values may also be conceived as a learned perceptual style that we come to depend on for the apprehension of reality.

Attitudes are acquired from a number of experiences gradually over a period either consciously or unconsciously. Attitudes may change, be influenced and be standardized in accordance with the social set up an individual lives in. Though the attitudes are subject to change, initially resistance may be there, and if change does take place , it is gradual and unconscious. In this way an attitude is a developmental state of organismic valence created by psychobiological process exerting a motivational influence upon the responsive behaviour of the individuals (Russel, 1964).

As culture of a society involves attitude, beliefs and values acquired through generations, the attitudes have to be taken as a set of cultivated behaviour acquired through the process of continuous interaction in society or the group to which the individuals belong. Likes and dislikes developed on the basis of attitudes vary in their degree of intensity. But when shared by other members of the community they take the shape of values of the society which determine the social preferences or the estimates of worth in the society. In this way the attitudes, ultimately, form a system called the value system. These general enduring preferences govern behaviour and decision. In other words, they are the powerful determinants of human behaviour, the criteria, basic to the functioning of society (J.B.Chitamber:1977).

Attitudes cannot be directly observed, but must be inferred from behaviour, either from observation of an individual's responses to objects, persons and other events or from his/her evaluative statements and other verbal expressions . Attitudes and values are determined by how people perceive, which in turn tends to be determined by pre-existing patterns of attitudes and values (Lindgren: 1974, pp.85-92).

Taking into consideration the above definitions of attitude, this chapter will deal with the evaluation and analysis of the nature and extent of differences in the attitudes of the Khasi women towards electoral politics and its various activities such as their attitudes towards politics, women's participation in politics, voting, elections, women politicians and also as to whether women should take part in the traditional political systems, that is the *dorbars* or councils. The respondents were classified on the basis of age groups, marital status, educational qualifications, occupation and income. The total number of respondents taken was 500, who were either married or unmarried, belonging to different age groups, having different educational levels, professing different occupations and earning different incomes.

Given in Table 4.1. are the total number of respondents belonging to different age groups. Table 4.2. shows the total and percentage of the marital status of the respondents, while Table 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5 respectively show the total and percentage of the educational qualifications, occupations and income groups of the respondents.

TABLE 4.1. AGE GROUPS OF THE RESPONDENTS

Age (in years)	Total	%
18 -27	115	23%
28 - 37	129	26%
38 -47	109	22%
48 - 57	75	15%
58 -67	51	10%
68+	21	4%
Total and %	500	100%

SOURCE : FIELDWORK.

TABLE 4.2. MARITAL STATUS OF THE RESPONDENTS

MARITAL STATUS	Total	%
Unmarried	132	26%
Married	368	74%
Total and %	500	100%

SOURCE : FIELDWORK.

TABLE 4.3. EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION OF THE RESPONDENTS

EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION	Total	%
Illiterate	39	8%
Under Matriculate	79	16%
Matriculate	63	13%
Under Graduate	97	19%
Graduate	147	29%
Post Graduate	75	15%
Total and %	500	100%

SOURCE : FIELDWORK.

TABLE 4.4. OCCUPATION OF THE RESPONDENTS.

OCCUPATION	Total	%
Unemployed	31	6%
Student	49	10%
House-wife	159	32%
Govt.Service	97	19%
Teacher	59	12%
Others	105	21%
Total & %	500	100%

SOURCE : FIELDWORK.

Others – Retired govt.servants, Daily wage earners, Part time workers. Business.

TABLE 4.5. INCOME GROUP OF THE RESPONDENTS.

INCOME (in Rupees)	Total	%
No Income	250	50%
1 – 2000	63	13%
2001 – 4000	30	6%
4001 – 6000	46	9%
6001 – 8000	37	7%
8001 – 10000	36	7%
10001 +	38	8%
Total & %	500	100%

SOURCE : FIELDWORK.

## ATTITUDE TOWARDS POLITICS

As mentioned earlier attitudes affect behaviour and as such it is natural that attitude towards politics has its effect on the political participation of women. Besides, the question as to whether women discuss politics or not has been asked, as discussion of politics with others gives an indication of politicisation because it presupposes certain awareness or knowledge of political events, political leaders, political parties, political issues and political phenomena. Majority of the respondents, 75% (377), regarded politics as dirty. A general opinion among these women was that "*ka politiks ka dei ka kam kaba jakhlia* (politics is a dirty profession). Majority of the respondents have the perception that politics is dirty due to the fact once an individual gets elected, he or she forgets the promises of development for the society and is busy making money for oneself. One of the respondents, a 37 year old post graduate, comments – "Politics is a dirty profession. No matter how much a person promises to do for the society if elected, once elected, turns the other way round. Politicians change their tunes once elected and also become very unapproachable. It becomes very obvious that they are more interested in making more and more money and becoming more powerful". Even an illiterate house-wife, 58 years of age

strongly airs her views regarding politics. According to her - "Politics is about money, corruption, bribery and power games". This is the view that most of the respondents attach to politics. For them politics involves a lot of compromises, lies, bargaining and vested self-interest. The remaining 25% (123) said that it was not politics that was dirty but the people, basically the politicians, who make it dirty. The attitude of the women towards politics with respect to their interest level, besides the question as to whether they discussed politics is shown in the Tables - 4.6 to 4.10. Table 4.6 shows the interest levels taking into consideration the marital status of the respondents. Among the unmarried women, only 14% of the respondents said that they were interested in politics, 43% said they were not that interested, while the remaining 43% said they had no interest in politics at all. To the question as to whether they discussed politics or not, 20% said that they discuss politics, 31% replied that they did not discuss politics, while 49% said that they discussed politics sometimes. Among the married women only 7% said that they were interested in politics, 29% said that they were not that interested, while majority of them, that is, 63% said that they had no interest in politics. Replying to the question whether they discussed politics or not,

15% said that they did discuss politics, while 55% replied that they did not discuss politics at all. About 30% of the respondents said that they

TABLE 4.6. RESPONDENTS' MARITAL STATUS AND INTEREST IN POLITICS

MARITAL STATUS	INTEREST IN POLITICS						DISCUSS POLITICS					
	Interested		Not that interested		Not interested		Yes		No		Sometimes	
Unmarried	18	14%	57	43%	57	43%	26	20%	41	31%	65	49%
Married	27	7%	108	29%	233	63%	57	15%	201	55%	110	30%
Total	45	9%	165	33%	290	58%	83	17%	242	48%	175	35%

SOURCE : FIELDWORK.

sometimes discussed politics. What has been observed is that women, irrespective of whether they were married or not, showed very less interest in politics and discussed this topic seldomly. The reason given for this was that they had no time for politics and neither did they find any need to discuss about it. Those who showed interest stated that the reason they discussed politics was merely out of the need to be informed of what was going on. There are very few exceptional cases where women have shown keen interest in politics. Married women show lesser interest in politics than those who are not married, the reason being that they are already occupied with family matters and have no time for politics.

TABLE 4.7. RESPONDENTS' AGE GROUP AND INTEREST IN POLITICS

AGE GROUP (in years)	INTEREST IN POLITICS						DO YOU DISCUSS POLITICS?					
	Interested		Not that interested		Not interested		Yes		No		Sometimes	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
18-27	14	12%	30	26%	71	62%	14	12%	59	51%	42	37%
28-37	8	6%	51	40%	70	54%	24	19%	60	47%	45	35%
38-47	9	8%	49	45%	51	47%	23	21%	41	38%	45	41%
48-57	8	11%	15	20%	52	69%	10	13%	42	56%	23	31%
58-67	4	8%	18	35%	29	57%	10	20%	23	45%	18	35%
68+	2	10%	2	10%	17	81%	2	10%	17	81%	2	10%
Total	45	9%	165	33%	290	58%	83	17%	242	48%	175	35%

SOURCE : FIELDWORK.

Table 4.7 (above) shows the various interest levels of the respondents based on the age group. The interest level is highest (12%) among the 18 to 27 age group, while in the other age groups interest levels ranges between 6% - 11%. Women belonging to the 38 - 47 age groups show the highest percentage (45%) of moderate interest in politics, while in the other age groups' interest level ranged from 40% to 10%. Irrespective of which age group the women belonged to, a high percentage of the respondents showed disinterest in politics. Older women, especially those who were 68 years and above, showed a high percentage (81%), of disinterest. Discussing politics does not seem to be a favourite topic as can be seen from the table. Among those who

discussed politics the percentage ranged from 9% to 21% only. A high percentage of women said that they do not discuss politics at all. The older generation of women, those who were 68 years and above, showed the highest percentage (81%) of lacking interest in discussing politics. Then there are those who discussed politics occasionally the percentage of which ranged between 10% and 41%.

TABLE 4.8. RESPONDENTS' EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION AND INTEREST IN POLITICS

EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	INTEREST IN POLITICS						DISCUSS POLITICS					
	Interested		Not that Interested		Not interested		Yes		No		Sometimes	
Illiterate	2	5%	3	8%	34	87%	2	5%	24	62%	13	33%
Under Matriculate	4	5%	25	32%	50	63%	10	13%	38	48%	31	39%
Matriculate	4	6%	10	16%	49	78%	6	10%	49	78%	8	13%
Under Graduate	6	6%	20	21%	71	73%	6	6%	53	55%	38	39%
Graduate	15	11%	70	48%	62	42%	33	22%	58	39%	56	38%
Post Graduate	14	19%	37	49%	24	32%	26	35%	20	27%	29	39%
Total	45	9%	165	33%	290	58%	83	17%	242	48%	175	35%

SOURCE : FIELDWORK.

Table 4.8 (above) shows the interest levels of the respondents with respect to their educational backgrounds. The post-graduates show the highest percentage (19%) of interest in politics while the illiterates

show a high percentage (87%) of disinterest in politics. The post graduates also show the highest percentage (35%) of discussing politics while the illiterates show the lowest percentage, 5%. A large percentage (78%) of the matriculate group said that they did not discuss politics followed by 62% of the illiterates. About 35% of the respondents, irrespective of their educational qualifications, said that they discussed politics occasionally.

TABLE 4.9. RESPONDENTS' OCCUPATION AND INTEREST IN POLITICS

OCCUPATION	INTEREST IN POLITICS						DISCUSS POLITICS					
	Interested		Not that interested		Not interested		Yes		No		Sometimes	
Unemployed	6	19%	17	55%	8	26%	8	26%	8	26%	15	48%
Student	6	12%	14	29%	29	59%	8	16%	21	43%	20	41%
House-wife	5	3%	34	21%	120	75%	7	4%	112	70%	40	25%
Govt. Service	8	8%	45	46%	44	45%	28	29%	38	39%	31	32%
Teacher	10	17%	23	39%	26	44%	16	27%	20	34%	23	39%
Others	10	10%	32	30%	63	60%	16	15%	43	41%	46	44%
Total	45	9%	165	33%	290	58%	83	17%	242	48%	175	35%

SOURCE : FIELDWORK.

Table 4.9 (above) shows the interest level taking the occupation of the respondents into account. The highest level of interest is shown by 19% of the unemployed group, followed by the 17% of the teachers. Only

3% of the housewives said that they were interested in politics. Among the unemployed, 55% of them said that they were not that interested in politics. Housewives show the highest percentage, 75%, of them showed disinterest in politics. Discussion of politics seems to be more (29%) among office goers, that is, government employees. Only 4% of the housewives said that they discuss politics. It is no surprise as such when 70% of them said that they did not discuss politics. About 25% to 48% of the respondents said that discussed politics occasionally.

TABLE 4.10. RESPONDENTS' INCOME AND INTEREST IN POLITICS

INCOME (in Rupees)	INTEREST IN POLITICS						DISCUSS POLITICS					
	Interested		Not that interested		Not interested		Yes		No		Sometimes	
No income	19	8%	67	27%	164	66%	23	9%	146	58%	81	32%
1 - 2000	6	10%	10	16%	47	75%	8	13%	37	59%	18	29%
2001 - 4000	-		17	57%	13	43%	4	13%	9	30%	17	57%
4001 - 6000	8	17%	18	39%	20	43%	12	26%	18	39%	16	35%
6001 - 8000	6	16%	15	41%	16	43%	12	32%	8	22%	17	46%
8001 - 10000	4	11%	16	44%	16	44%	10	28%	12	33%	14	39%
10001 +	2	5%	22	58%	14	37%	14	37%	12	32%	12	39%
Total	45	9%	165	33%	290	58%	83	17%	242	48%	175	35%

SOURCE : FIELDWORK.

Table 4.10 (above) shows the various income groups of the respondents and their interest in politics. Respondents belonging to the

income group 4001 to 6000 show the highest interest level, 17%, while those in the 2001 to 4000 group show no interest in politics at all. About 58% of the highest income group said that they were not that interested in politics. Those in the income group of 1- 2000 show the highest percentage, 75%, of disinterest in politics followed by the no income group. When it comes to discussing politics those in the 10001+ group show the highest percentage, 37%, that they discuss politics while those with no income show the lowest percentage, 9%. Those in the lowest income group show a high percentage, 59% that they do not discuss politics at all, followed by those with no income. Among those who sometimes discuss politics the income group 2001-4000 show the highest percentage, 57%.

The observation made here on the basis of the above tables is that unmarried women tended to show more interest in politics than the married women. A high percentage, 63%, of the married women said that they had no interest at all. The reason that most of them gave was that they are already preoccupied with family work besides other chores. The respondents between the age group of 18 to 27 showed more interest (12%) in politics while the oldest among the respondents, that is

the 68+ group, showed a very high percentage, 81%, of disinterest in politics. The data thereby indicates that when one is young, interest level is considerably high but tends to go down as one grows older. With regard to education it does appear to be an important intervening variable for political interest. In the data collected the post graduates showed the highest percentage, 19%, of interest compared to the others. The illiterates showed a very high percentage (87%) of disinterest in politics. Occupation wise the unemployed and the teachers show more interest than the others. Basing on the income of the respondents those with no source of income tended to show a high percentage (66%) of disinterest in politics. What can be concluded is that women in general lack interest in politics, a very small percentage, 9%, of the women said they were interested in politics. About 33% of the respondents said they were not that interested in politics while more than half of the respondents, 58%, said they had no interest in politics at all. The main reason given for disinterest was that politics is too dirty or that they are preoccupied with the family (in case of married women). Some said they are just not interested in politics. When it comes to discussing politics, a large percentage, 48%, of the respondents said they do not discuss politics. Only a small percentage of the respondents, 17%, said that they

do discuss politics. Those who occasionally discussed politics (35%) said they do so only when the topic arises, on the eve of or during the elections or just in order to keep oneself updated about the political events around the world.

#### ATTITUDE TOWARDS WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

Politics at every level of participation has been considered the realm of men and it is only in recent times that women's participation has been advocated. A generally known fact is that women participate less than men do. This raises a number of questions – why do women shy away from politics? What is their attitude towards politics? What is their perception of politics? Hence, it is important to know what women actually feel. Do women feel incapable in this field that is regarded as men's domain of activity and interest? Do they feel that more women should take part in this field? Do they feel women would make good political leaders? Would they stand for office if given the opportunity? Would they vote for women candidates? These are some questions that were asked of the respondents. Basing on the marital status of the respondents, see Table 4.11, what has been observed is that a high percentage, 83% and 88%, of both the unmarried and married

respondents respectively, feel strongly that women should take part in politics. The reason mainly stated was that men and women are equal and it was high time women took part in politics. A very less percentage of women feel that woman should not take part in politics. The reason given was that politics was dirty and was best handled by men; women should be at home looking after the family; women are neither mentally

TABLE 4.11. RESPONDENTS' MARITAL STATUS AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

MARITAL STATUS	WOMEN SHOULD TAKE PART IN POLITICS		WOMEN WILL MAKE GOOD POLITICAL LEADERS		IF GIVEN OPPORTUNITY WOULD STAND FOR ELECTIONS		WILL VOTE FOR WOMEN CANDIDATES	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Unmarried	109 83%	23 17%	96 73%	36 27%	22 17%	110 83%	112 85%	20 15%
Married	325 88%	43 12%	275 75%	93 25%	18 5%	350 95%	323 88%	45 12%
Total	434 87%	66 13%	371 74%	129 26%	40 8%	460 92%	435 87%	65 13%

SOURCE :FIELDWORK.

nor physically fit for politics. To the question as to whether women would make good political leaders majority of the respondents, 74%, are of the view that women would certainly make good political leaders. Women are regarded as being more honest, understanding, dedicated to any work they do, have moral values, are efficient and not corrupted at

all. A very less percentage, 26%, think otherwise. They feel that a woman is not well equipped as a man is, is not far-sighted, nor able to reason out properly as men do (which would lead to chaos and confusion) and is weaker than men. One respondent felt very strongly for this issue and said, "How much can a lady lead, it's a man's job, women's duty is at home, not politics". It is interesting to note that in spite of a very high percentage of the respondents favouring women's participation in politics, a very negligible percentage, 8% (both married and unmarried women), said they would stand for elections if given the opportunity to do so. Here the unmarried women show a higher level of interest in standing for elections. The main arguments given were that a lot needs to be done for the women; to uproot corruption; to acquire power and money. A greater majority of the respondents, 92%, said that they would not stand for elections even if given the opportunity to do so. The married women show a higher percentage, 95%, than the unmarried women (83%). The main reason given by the married women was that they have no time for politics as they are already preoccupied with the family. Majority of the respondents said that politics is dirty and as such would not like to get involved in it. Moreover it was regarded as a hard job needing total dedication to public life and no time for oneself. To the

question as to whether they will vote for a woman candidate, majority (87%) of the respondents said they would. Both married and unmarried women share more or less similar views on this issue. They felt that if a woman was efficient and had leadership qualities, they would certainly vote for her. A small percentage of the respondents (married and unmarried) were not in favour of voting for a woman candidate because they felt that women are weak and incapable of dealing with politics.

Table 4.12 shows the views of the respondents taking the age factor. The view that women should take part in politics, shows a high percentage among all age groups with the 68+ group showing the highest percentage, 95%. Here the older women opined that women should certainly take part in politics and that it was high time they did. According to them women of today are much more educated than they were before and as such should not lag behind in this field. The rest of the respondents too felt that women as equals to men should not be left behind in politics. That women should not take part in politics shows percentages ranging from 5% to 19%. The reason was that women have the home to look after. That women would make good political leaders is accepted by majority of the respondents with the percentages ranging

TABLE 4.12. RESPONDENTS' AGE GROUP AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

AGE (in years)	WOMEN SHOULD TAKE PART IN POLITICS		WOMEN WILL MAKE GOOD POLITICAL LEADERS		IF GIVEN OPPORTUNITY WOULD STAND FOR ELECTIONS		WILL VOTE FOR WOMEN CANDIDATES	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
18 - 27	93 81%	22 19%	83 72%	32 28%	10 9%	105 91%	99 86%	16 14%
28 - 37	115 89%	14 11%	91 71%	38 29%	22 17%	107 83%	118 91%	11 9%
38 - 47	99 91%	10 9%	87 80%	22 2%	4 7%	105 96%	99 91%	10 9%
48 - 57	60 80%	15 20%	55 73%	20 27%	4 5%	71 95%	60 80%	15 20%
58 - 67	47 92%	4 8%	39 76%	12 24%	-	51 100%	43 84%	8 16%
68 +	20 95%	1 5%	16 76%	5 24%	-	21 100%	16 76%	5 24%
Total	434 87%	66 13%	371 74%	129 26%	40 8%	460 92%	435 87%	65 13%

SOURCE : FIELDWORK.

from 71% to 80%. Very few of them feel that women would not make good political leaders. Women of all age groups said that they would certainly cast their votes for women candidates if they were capable. Those not in favour of voting for women candidates show a smaller percentage with the 68+ group topping the list, 24%. Though the women of this age group showed the highest percentage in favour of women

taking part in politics, when it came to voting for women candidates, majority of them said they would not do so. The reason stated was that the women who do stand for elections were not capable enough.

TABLE 4.13. RESPONDENTS' EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION	WOMEN SHOULD TAKE PART IN POLITICS		WOMEN WILL MAKE GOOD POLITICAL LEADERS		IF GIVEN OPPORTUNITY WOULD STAND FOR ELECTIONS		WILL VOTE FOR WOMEN CANDIDATES	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Illiterate	27 69%	12 31%	30 77%	9 23%	2 5%	37 95%	31 79%	8 21%
Under Matriculate	60 76%	19 24%	48 61%	31 39%	4 5%	75 95%	66 84%	13 16%
Matriculate	49 78%	14 22%	41 65%	22 35%	-	63 100%	51 81%	12 19%
Under Graduate	87 90%	10 10%	84 87%	13 13%	8 8%	89 92%	89 92%	8 8%
Graduate	142 97%	5 3%	115 78%	32 22%	18 12%	129 88%	136 93%	11 7%
Post Graduate	69 92%	6 8%	53 71%	22 29%	8 11%	67 89%	62 83%	13 17%
Total	434 87%	66 13%	371 74%	129 26%	40 8%	460 92%	435 87%	65 13%

SOURCE : FIELDWORK.

Taking educational qualifications (see Table 4.13 above) into account, it is observed that as educational qualifications increases, so does the view that women should take part in politics. The illiterates

show the highest percentage against women's involvement in politics and the percentage decreases as qualifications increase. The undergraduates show the highest percentage, 87%, in their opinion that women will make good political leaders. A small percentage feels that women would not make good political leaders. If given the opportunity to stand for elections, those who are highly educated show greater inclination to do so than those with lower qualifications. A huge majority of the respondents said they would not stand for elections even if given the opportunity to do so. The graduates show the highest percentage, 93%, when it comes to agreeing to vote for women candidates. A very small percentage however said that they would not vote for women candidates.

Occupation wise the government employees show a high percentage (94%) of concurrence that woman should take part in politics (see Table 4.14). Those under the 'others' occupation show a higher percentage (19%) than the others, that women should not take part in politics. 82% and 84% of the students and those under government services respectively, agreed that women would certainly make good political leaders. When it comes to standing for elections, the students show the highest percentage, 16%, that they certainly would if given an

TABLE 4.14. RESPONDENTS' OCCUPATION AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

OCCUPATION	WOMEN SHOULD TAKE PART IN POLITICS		WOMEN WILL MAKE GOOD POLITICAL LEADERS		IF GIVEN OPPORTUNITY WOULD STAND FOR ELECTIONS		WILL VOTE FOR WOMEN CANDIDATES	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Unemployed	27 87%	4 13%	19 61%	12 39%	4 13%	27 87%	25 81%	6 19%
Student	42 86%	7 14%	40 82%	9 18%	8 16%	41 84%	40 82%	9 18%
House-wife	136 86%	23 14%	114 72%	45 28%	4 3%	155 97%	139 87%	20 13%
Govt. Service	91 94%	6 6%	81 84%	16 16%	10 10%	87 90%	89 92%	8 8%
Teacher	53 90%	6 10%	43 73%	16 27%	2 3%	57 97%	51 86%	8 14%
Others	85 81%	20 19%	74 70%	31 30%	12 11%	93 89%	91 87%	14 13%
Total	434 87%	66 13%	371 74%	129 26%	40 8%	460 92%	435 87%	65 13%

SOURCE : FIELDWORK.

opportunity to do so. Majority of the respondents said that they would vote for women candidates, the government servants showing the highest percentage.

TABLE 4.15. RESPONDENTS' INCOME AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

INCOME (in Rupees)	WOMEN SHOULD TAKE PART IN POLITICS		WOMEN WILL MAKE GOOD POLITICAL LEADERS		IF GIVEN OPPORTUNITY WOULD STAND FOR ELECTIONS		WILL VOTE FOR WOMEN CANDIDATES	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
No income	221 88%	29 12%	179 72%	71 28%	10 4%	240 96%	212 85%	38 15%
1 -2000	41 65%	22 35%	41 65%	22 35%	10 16%	53 84%	59 94%	4 6%
2001 - 4000	30 100%	-	23 77%	7 23%	2 7%	28 93%	26 87%	4 13%
4001 - 6000	44 96%	2 4%	44 96%	2 4%	2 4%	44 96%	42 91%	4 9%
6001 -8000	34 92%	3 8%	32 86%	5 14%	4 11%	33 89%	34 92%	3 8%
8001 - 10000	32 89%	4 11%	22 61%	14 39%	6 17%	30 83%	30 83%	6 17%
10001 +	32 84%	6 16%	30 79%	8 21%	6 16%	32 84%	32 84%	6 16%
Total	434 87%	66 13%	371 74%	129 26%	40 8%	460 92%	435 87%	65 13%

SOURCE : FIELDWORK.

Table 4.15 (above) shows the various income levels of the respondents. What can be observed is that irrespective of which income group one belonged to, the women in general seem to favour women's participation in politics and think that women would make good political leaders. 17% of those falling in the income group of 8001 to 10000 say

that they would stand for elections if given the opportunity to do so. Respondents in the no income group show a very low percentage, only 4%, of willingness to stand for elections if given the opportunity to do so. To the question as to whether they would vote for women candidates, all respondents of various income groups show high percentages of keenness to vote for women candidates.

Irrespective of marital status, age, educational qualifications, occupation or income, a high percentage of the respondents, 87%, are of the view that women should take part in politics and that they would make good political leaders. The popular view is that women are equal to men, women are taking part in all activities whether in social or economic spheres, so why not in the political sphere as well? Moreover, they are also of the view that women are as educated as men are, maybe even more. A huge majority, 74%, also felt that women would make good political leaders. The reasons are that, women are by nature less corrupted than men are, more sincere, more dedicated, approachable...etc. Though majority of the women said that women should take part in politics and that they would also make good political leaders, it is interesting to note that only a very small percentage, 8%, of

the respondents said they would stand for elections if given the opportunity to do so, while a majority, 92%, of the respondents were not in favour of standing for elections. The argument given in support of this view was that they do not have the qualities of a leader, while some found it very absurd to be asked this question that they started laughing and said, "certainly not". What can be said is that women generally attach high regard to morality and any profession devoid of this appears less alluring to them. When it comes to voting for women candidates, again a vast majority, 87%, of the respondents said they would certainly vote for women candidates, but on one condition – if they were capable, sincere and good women.

#### ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE VOTE.

The most common and simplest form of political participation is voting. It is one among a number of political rights granted to people in a democracy. Voting is the means of determining and measuring consensus in a democratic society. A voter does not have to decide political issues but merely make a choice between parties or the candidates. The voters bring the decision-makers under popular control. Women as citizens of the country form almost half the electorate and after decades of using

this voting right it would really be interesting to know what motivates the women to vote.

TABLE 4.16. RESPONDENTS' MARITAL STATUS AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE VOTE

MARITAL STATUS	EXERCISED FRANCHISE		REASONS FOR VOTING			REASONS FOR VOTING FOR A PARTICULAR CANDIDATE			
	Yes	No	Exercise Franchise	To elect representative	No reasons	Merit of candidate	Party of candidate	Candidate known personally	Others
Unmarried	110 83%	22 17%	94 71%	32 24%	6 5%	96 73%	18 14%	14 11%	4 3%
Married	364 99%	4 1%	238 65%	121 33%	9 2%	249 68%	57 15%	36 10%	26 7%
Total	474 95%	26 5%	332 66%	153 31%	15 3%	345 69%	75 15%	50 10%	30 6%

SOURCE : FIELDWORK

When the respondents were asked as to whether they exercised their franchise majority of them said they did (Table 4.16 above). The married women show a higher percentage, 99%, when it came to having exercised their voting rights. About 17% of the unmarried women said they have not yet exercised their franchise though they have attained the voting age. The major reason stated was that they were too preoccupied with other activities to go and cast their votes. Among the unmarried women, a high percentage (71%) of them voted in order to exercise their franchise; 24% said they voted in order to elect their representative, while 5% said they voted for no reason at all. A more or

less similar pattern is observed among the married women as well. Merit of the candidate seems to be the major reason of voting for a particular candidate both among the unmarried and married women. A small percentage voted either because of the party of the candidate, or because the candidate was personally known to them or for other reasons.

Basing on the different age groups of the respondents (see Table 4.17) what can be observed is that by the age of 38 a voter would have exercised his/her franchise at least once, if not more. The 68+ age group show the highest percentage, 81%, of voting in order to exercise their right to vote, while the other respondents in this age group voted mainly to elect their representatives or for no reason at all. Whatever are the reasons for voting, a high percentage of the respondents took into consideration the merits of a candidate when casting their vote. A small percentage from all age groups voted for a candidate taking into consideration the party of the candidate, while some voted for candidates who were known personally, some voted for no particular reasons.

TABLE 4.17. RESPONDENTS' AGE GROUP AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE VOTE

ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE VOTE		AGE GROUP (in years)						Total
		18 - 27	28 - 37	38 -47	48 - 57	58 -67	68 +	
EXERCISED FRANCHISE	Yes	95 83%	123 95%	109 100%	75 100%	51 100%	21 100%	474 95%
	No	20 17%	6 5%	-	-	-	-	26 5%
REASONS FOR VOTING	Exercise Franchise	82 71%	84 65%	72 66%	44 59%	33 65%	17 81%	332 66%
	To elect representative	26 23%	43 33%	33 30%	31 41%	16 31%	4 19%	153 31%
	No reasons	7 6%	2 2%	4 4%	-	2 4%	-	15 3%
REASONS FOR VOTING FOR A PARTICULAR CANDIDATE	Merit of the candidate	83 72%	91 71%	77 71%	40 53%	39 76%	15 71%	345 69%
	Party of the candidate	14 12%	20 16%	14 13%	19 25%	4 8%	4 19%	75 15%
	Candidate known personally	12 10%	8 6%	10 9%	10 13%	8 16%	2 10%	50 10%
	Others	6 5%	10 8%	8 7%	6 8%	-	-	30 6%

SOURCE : FIELDWORK.

Irrespective of the educational qualifications (see Table 4.18), all respondents showed a high percentage of having exercised their franchise, with 100% of the respondents who were illiterate having

exercised this right. The illiterate seem to vote mainly to elect their representatives (51%) while more than half the respondents voted in

TABLE 4.18. RESPONDENTS' EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE VOTE

EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION	EXERCISED FRANCHISE		REASONS FOR VOTING			REASONS FOR VOTING FOR A PARTICULAR CANDIDATE			
	Yes	No	Exercise Franchise	To elect representatives	No reasons	Merit of candidate	Party of candidate	Candidate known personally	Others
Illiterate	39 100%	-	17 44%	20 51%	2 5%	21 54%	12 31%	2 5%	4 10%
Under Matriculate	77 97%	2 3%	55 70%	20 25%	4 5%	53 67%	12 15%	8 10%	6 8%
Matriculate	61 97%	2 3%	46 73%	12 19%	5 8%	45 71%	10 16%	4 6%	4 6%
Under Graduate	89 92%	8 8%	66 68%	29 30%	2 2%	67 69%	14 14%	8 8%	8 8%
Graduate	143 97%	4 3%	101 69%	46 31%	-	102 69%	21 14%	18 12%	6 4%
Post Graduate	65 87%	10 13%	47 63%	26 35%	2 3%	57 76%	6 8%	10 13%	2 3%
Total	474 95%	26 5%	332 66%	153 31%	15 3%	345 69%	75 15%	50 10%	30 6%

SOURCE : FIELDWORK.

order to exercise their right to vote. The respondents, irrespective of whether illiterate, educated or highly educated, show a high percentage of voting for a candidate basing on his/her merits. Among the illiterate a little more than a quarter of them (31%) felt that the party of the

candidate was important and so voted for a candidate based on his/her political party affiliations.

TABLE 4.19. RESPONDENTS' OCCUPATION AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE VOTE

OCCUPATION	EXERCISED FRANCHISE		REASONS FOR VOTING			REASONS FOR VOTING FOR A PARTICULAR CANDIDATE			
	Yes	No	Exercise Franchise	To elect representatives	No reasons	Merit of candidate	Party of candidate	Candidate known personally	Others
Un-employed	23 74%	8 26%	25 81%	6 19%	-	23 74%	4 13%	2 6%	2 6%
Student	33 67%	16 33%	36 73%	11 22%	-	39 80%	6 12%	4 8%	-
House-wife	159 100%	-	111 70%	42 26%	6 4%	124 78%	15 9%	10 6%	10 6%
Govt.-Service	97 100%	-	63 65%	32 33%	2 2%	49 51%	20 21%	16 16%	12 12%
Teacher	59 100%	-	37 63%	20 34%	2 3%	39 66%	8 14%	8 14%	4 7%
Others	103 98%	2 2%	60 57%	40 38%	5 5%	71 68%	22 21%	10 10%	2 2%
Total	474 95%	26 5%	332 66%	153 31%	15 3%	345 69%	75 15%	50 10%	30 6%

SOURCE : FIELDWORK

Table 4.19 discusses the respondents' occupation and attitude towards the vote. Students show a high percentage of not having exercised their franchise. About 33% of them said they are yet to exercise their voting right when compared to the respondents in other categories who show a high percentage of having exercised their

franchise. The main reason given by this group is that they did not feel the need to cast their votes as they found no capable and dynamic leader worth voting for. Among those who voted in order to exercise their right, the unemployed showed the highest percentage, 81%. More than half the respondents of all occupational groups said they voted for someone based on the candidates' merits while the rest voted taking into consideration the candidates' political parties or because the respondents were known personally to the candidate or for some other reasons.

Basing on the income of the respondents (see Table 4.20) what is observed is that, those who had no income show a higher percentage of not having exercised their franchise. This group mainly comprises of the students, housewives and the unemployed groups. Those getting incomes between 6001 to 8000 show a high percentage, 84%, of voting in order to exercise their right to vote followed by those who had no income. A good number of the respondents also said that they voted in order to elect their representatives, while a small fraction of them said they voted for no reason at all. Again those with no income show a high percentage, 80% of voting for a candidate basing on their merits while

TABLE 4.20. RESPONDENTS' INCOME AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE VOTE

INCOME (in Rupees)	EXERCISED FRANCHISE		REASONS FOR VOTING			REASONS FOR VOTING FOR A PARTICULAR CANDIDATE			
	Yes	No	Exercise Franchise	To elect represent- atives	No reasons	Merit of candi- date	Party of candi- date	Candidate known personally	Others
No income	226 90%	24 10%	176 70%	65 26%	9 4%	201 80%	19 8%	18 7%	12 5%
1 - 2000	61 97%	2 3%	38 60%	22 35%	3 5%	39 62%	14 22%	4 6%	6 10%
2001 - 4000	30 100%	-	17 57%	13 43%	-	16 53%	10 33%	2 7%	2 7%
4001 - 6000	46 100%	-	22 48%	22 48%	2 4%	22 48%	12 26%	4 9%	8 17%
6001 - 8000	37 100%	-	31 84%	6 16%	-	21 57%	6 16%	8 22%	2 5%
8001 - 10000	36 100%	-	22 61%	13 36%	1 3%	19 53%	7 19%	10 28%	-
10001 +	38 100%	-	26 61%	12 32%	-	28 74%	6 16%	4 11%	-
Total	474 95%	26 5%	332 66%	153 31%	15 3%	345 69%	75 15%	50 10%	30 6%

SOURCE : FIELDWORK.

less than half of the respondents, irrespective of their income groups, voted for a candidate basing on their political parties or because they were personally known or for other reasons best known to them. The respondents seem to be very aware and conscious of their voting rights. A very high percentage, 95%, said that they have exercised their franchise. Those who are yet to exercise their franchise stated that they

were either out of station during the election, the polling stations were too far, were not well or did not vote due to apathy towards the political system. The main reason for voting was in order to exercise their right to vote, according to 66% of the respondents, 31% said they voted mainly to elect their representatives, while a very small percentage, 3%, said they voted for no reason at all. Majority (69%) of the respondents voted for a candidate based on his/her merits, while 15% voted for a candidate because he/she stood from a particular party. 10% of the respondents voted for candidates who were known personally while 6% said they voted for the candidates due to other reasons best known to them.

From the above analysis what can be concluded is that women are aware of their voting rights. A high percentage of them, 95%, have exercised their franchise while a small percentage, 5%, said they are yet to exercise their franchise. The main reason for voting according to 66% of the respondents was in order to exercise their right to vote. Thus voting does not seem to be guided by interest in politics for there are women who vote regularly despite having no interest in politics.

Moreover when it came to voting for a particular candidate, majority of the women regarded the merit of a candidate the most important criteria.

#### TRADITIONAL POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS.

The Khasis have their own traditional political institutions (mentioned in the earlier chapter) which have their own code of customary laws and regulations. Traditionally the Khasi women were debarred from taking part in these institutions but today there has been a change in attitude, though not drastically. Some local *dorbars* or councils have women members though this is not uniform through out the region. What women have to say on this issue would certainly throw light on the women's willingness or unwillingness of adhering to tradition or not. Are the Khasi women still tradition bound or are they slowly untangling themselves from the shackles of tradition?

Table 4.21 shows the unmarried and married women's opinion in this regard. A majority (86%) of the unmarried women said that women should also be members of the local *dorbars* or councils while 72% of

TABLE 4.21. RESPONDENTS' MARITAL STATUS AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN TRADITIONAL POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

MARITAL STATUS	WOMEN SHOULD ALSO BE MEMBERS OF THE DORBARS			POLITICAL TRADITIONAL TENETS RESPONSIBLE FOR LOW WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN POLITICS			WOMEN'S FIRST PRIORITY		
	Yes	No	Don't know	Yes	No	Don't know	Home	Career	Both
Unmarried	113 86%	15 11%	4 3%	77 58%	40 30%	15 11%	49 37%	22 17%	61 46%
Married	264 72%	93 25%	11 3%	179 49%	163 44%	26 7%	237 64%	8 2%	123 33%
Total	377 75%	108 22%	15 3%	256 51%	203 41%	41 8%	286 57%	30 6%	184 37%

SOURCE : FIELDWORK.

the married women also feel the same. A small percentage of both married and unmarried women said that women should not be members of the *dorbars* or councils while an even smaller percentage said they had no idea as to whether women should or should not be members. A high percentage, 58%, of the unmarried women felt that political traditional tenets are more or less responsible for the low level of representation of women in politics. According to 64% of the married women, a woman's first priority is the home and other matters come after that. Less than half, 37%, of the unmarried women are of the

opinion that home comes first, while majority, 46%, of them feel that there should be a balance between the home and one's career.

TABLE 4.22. RESPONDENTS' AGE GROUP AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN TRADITIONAL POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

AGE GROUP (in years)	WOMEN SHOULD ALSO BE MEMBERS OF THE DORBARS			TRADITIONAL POLITICAL TENETS RESPONSIBLE FOR LOW WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN POLITICS			WOMEN'S FIRST PRIORITY		
	Yes	No	Don't know	Yes	No	Don't know	Home	Career	Both
18 - 27	93 81%	20 17%	2 2%	63 55%	38 33%	14 12%	58 50%	16 14%	41 36%
28 - 37	91 71%	34 26%	4 3%	67 52%	53 41%	9 7%	74 57%	10 8%	45 35%
38 - 47	87 80%	16 15%	6 6%	63 58%	42 39%	4 4%	73 67%	2 2%	34 31%
48 - 57	45 60%	27 36%	3 4%	35 47%	32 43%	8 11%	43 57%	2 3%	30 40%
58 - 67	41 80%	10 20%	-	25 49%	24 47%	2 4%	29 57%	-	22 43%
68 +	20 95%	1 5%	-	3 14%	14 67%	4 19%	9 43%	-	12 57%
Total	377 75%	108 22%	15 3	256 51%	203 41%	41 8%	286 57%	30 6%	184 37%

SOURCE : FIELDWORK.

Basing on the age of the respondents (Table 4.22), those who are 68 years and above show a high percentage, 95%, of approval that women should be members of the *dorbars* or councils. Again, a high percentage of this age group feels that tradition is not responsible for

low-level representation of women in politics, while those in the age group of 38 to 47 strongly feel (58%), that tradition does affect political representation. Irrespective of age groups, almost half of the respondents said that a women's first priority is the home. That there should be a balance between the home and one's career has been agreed by the older age groups. The 18 to 27 age group shows the highest percentage, 14%, when it comes to putting one's career first.

Among the illiterates a high percentage, 46%, say that women should not be members of the *dorbars* or councils, while those who are educated show a high percentage in favour of women members in the *dorbars* or councils (see table 4.23). There is a small percentage of the respondents who say they do not know whether women should or should not be members of the *dorbars* or councils. Among the post-graduates, a very high percentage, 79%, feel that tradition could be a strong reason for low representation of women in politics. Those who are illiterate and have considerable lower educational qualifications on the other hand feel that tradition does not come into the picture. More than half of the illiterate respondents said that tradition played no role in the low representation of women in politics. To the question as to what was a

TABLE 4.23. RESPONDENTS' EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN TRADITIONAL POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION	WOMEN SHOULD ALSO BE MEMBERS OF THE DORBARS			TRADITIONAL POLITICAL TENETS RESPONSIBLE FOR LOW WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN POLITICS			WOMEN'S FIRST PRIORITY		
	Yes	No	Don't know	Yes	No	Don't know	Home	Career	Both
Illiterate	20 51%	18 46%	1 3%	11 28%	20 51%	8 21%	29 74%	-	10 3%
Under matriculate	52 66%	25 32%	2 3%	29 37%	42 53%	8 10%	55 70%	4 5%	20 25%
Matriculate	49 78%	9 14%	5 8%	29 46%	32 51%	2 3%	38 60%	4 6%	21 33%
Under Graduate	76 78%	19 20%	2 2%	55 57%	33 34%	9 9%	65 67%	11 11%	21 22%
Graduate	123 84%	19 13%	5 3%	73 50%	62 42%	12 8%	76 52%	7 5%	64 44%
Post Graduate	57 76%	18 24%	-	59 79%	14 19%	2 3%	23 31%	4 5%	48 64%
Total	377 75%	108 22%	15 3%	256 51%	203 41%	41 8%	286 57%	30 6%	184 37%

SOURCE : FIELDWORK.

woman's first priority, the illiterates, 74%, stated that the home was a woman's first responsibility, while only a small percentage, 3%, said there should be a balance between home and career. Among the highly educated, a large percentage, 64% among the post-graduates said there should be a balance between the home and one's career.

TABLE 4.24. RESPONDENTS' OCCUPATION AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN TRADITIONAL POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

OCCUPATION	WOMEN SHOULD ALSO BE MEMBERS OF THE DORBARS			TRADITIONAL POLITICAL TENETS RESPONSIBLE FOR LOW WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN POLITICS			WOMEN'S FIRST PRIORITY		
	Yes	No	Don't know	Yes	No	Don't know	Home	Career	Both
Unemployed	21 68%	6 19%	4 13%	19 61%	10 32%	2 6%	13 42%	8 26%	10 32%
Student	37 76%	10 20%	2 4%	25 51%	18 37%	6 12%	22 45%	7 14%	20 41%
Housewife	115 72%	37 23%	7 4%	69 43%	73 46%	17 11%	115 72%	6 4%	38 24%
Govt. Service	77 79%	18 19%	2 2%	54 56%	35 36%	8 8%	45 46%	-	52 54%
Teacher	49 83%	10 17%	-	45 76%	14 24%	-	31 53%	2 3%	26 44%
Others	78 74%	27 26%	-	44 42%	53 50%	8 8%	60 57%	7 7%	38 36%
Total	377 75%	108 22%	15 3%	256 51%	203 41%	41 8%	286 57%	30 6%	184 37%

SOURCE : FIELDWORK

Occupation wise (Table 4.24) majority of the respondents, 75%, from all occupational groups said women should be members of the *dorbars* or councils. Among the teachers a majority, 76%, felt that tradition does influence women's representation in politics. The housewives show a high percentage, 72%, regarding the home as a woman's first duty.

TABLE 4.25. RESPONDENTS' INCOME AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN TRADITIONAL POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

INCOME (in Rupees)	WOMEN SHOULD ALSO BE MEMBERS OF THE DORBARS			TRADITIONAL POLITICAL TENETS RESPONSIBLE FOR LOW WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN POLITICS			WOMEN'S FIRST PRIORITY		
	Yes	No	Don't know	Yes	No	Don't know	Home	Career	Both
No income	188 75%	53 21%	9 4%	116 46%	115 46%	19 8%	160 64%	18 7%	72 29%
1 - 2000	39 62%	22 35%	2 3%	29 46%	22 35%	12 19%	42 67%	6 10%	15 24%
2001 - 4000	26 87%	4 13%	-	16 53%	12 40%	2 7%	15 50%	2 7%	13 43%
4001 - 6000	40 87%	6 13%	-	24 52%	20 43%	2 4%	22 48%	-	24 52%
6001 - 8000	26 70%	9 24%	2 5%	22 59%	13 35%	2 5%	19 51%	-	18 50%
8001 - 10000	32 89%	4 11%	-	22 61%	10 28%	4 11%	16 44%	2 6%	18 50%
10001 +	26 68%	10 26%	2 5%	27 71%	11 29%	-	12 32%	2 5%	24 63%
Total	377 75%	108 22%	15 3%	256 51%	203 41%	41 8%	286 57%	30 6%	184 37%

SOURCE : FIELDWORK

Irrespective of which income group the respondents came under (see table 4.25), majority of them said women should be members of the *dorbars* or councils. Those in the higher income groups felt that tradition is somewhat responsible for the low representation of women in politics.

They are also of the opinion that there should be a balance between the home and career.

What can be observed is that women, whether young or old, married or unmarried, educated or uneducated, working or unemployed, with or without income, strongly felt that woman should also be members of the local councils. The popular view is that women know and understand women issues better than the men hence women can handle these issues better than men. Only a small percentage, 22%, said women should not be members of *dorbars* or councils. According to them women are talkative by nature, and their active participation would result in conflicts. Some strongly felt that tradition should be followed. When it comes to the question of whether tradition plays a role in the low representation of women in politics, about half of the respondents (51%) said that tradition did effect women's representation in politics. That political matters be left to the men still seems to hold ground. Women themselves seem to feel incapable in taking active part in politics. About 41% of the respondents felt that tradition was not responsible for low representation of women in politics. According to them women are now as educated as the men are and as capable as men are in other areas of

activity. Women do not join politics because they consider this profession as dirty and also because they are not given the chance to take part. Though majority of the respondents said that women should take part in politics more than half of the respondents felt that the home is the first priority of women. About 57% of the respondents said a woman should place her home and family before other issues. Here a high percentage of the married women (64%), women between the ages 38 to 47 (67%), the illiterates (74%), the housewives (72%) and those in the very low income group, Rs. 1-2000 (67%), said that the home is a woman's first priority. Those who regarded the career as one's priority formed only about 6% of the total respondents. Majority of the unmarried women (17%), those in the age group 18 to 27(14%), the undergraduates (11%), the unemployed (26%) and those of the very low-income group, Rs. 1-2000, (10%), said one's career came before other issues. About 37% of the respondents said there should be a balance between the home and one's career. When it comes to the question as to whether tradition plays a role in the low representation of women in politics, about half of the respondents (51%) said tradition did effect women's representation in politics. That political matters be left to the

men still seems to hold ground. Women themselves seem to feel incapable of taking up politics as a profession.

The above analysis indicates that women are still very hesitant to step into the political world. This can be observed from the fact that though women in general do feel strongly that it is necessary for women to take up political roles, yet a majority of the women interviewed declined to accept this role if the opportunity arose. Most of the women are still very much apolitical and are reluctant to join politics due to lack of interest. Women also do not show a tendency to discuss politics often. Women in general feel that women would make good political leaders and that they would certainly vote for capable women candidates. Yet this observation contradicts with the very low level of representation of women in the politics in Meghalaya, in general and in Shillong, in particular. If women in general see women as capable leaders why is it that very few women in Meghalaya get elected to office? When this question was raised the answer was that the women candidates were not capable enough. Another observation made is that women are very much aware of their voting rights though one may not strictly be a regular voter. Regarding the traditional political institutions, though women feel

that women should also take part, they are not yet ready to take on the role as head of such institutions. Many opined that tradition would not permit such changes indicating that women are still very much tradition bound. Whether one is employed or not, educated or not, salaried or not, does not change the fact that a woman's first duty is the home and then only other interests followed.

## CHAPTER V

### KHASI WOMEN IN ELECTORAL POLITICS

In the previous chapter an attempt was made to study the attitude of the Khasi women towards politics and its various activities. In this chapter an attempt will be made to study women who actually take part in the political process, that is, women who contested in the elections (Legislative Assembly and Parliamentary), women who had become and are members of the Legislative Assembly and women who held ministerial berths (having contested and won from constituencies within the Greater Shillong Area). There is no doubt that the number of women politicians remains very negligible through out the world and the picture in Meghalaya is no less different. The representation of women in the actual decision making process (that is, as Members of Legislative Assemblies, of Parliament and as Ministers) has been and is very negligible. A generally held view is that women participate less than men in political activities, but there are interested and qualified women, who if given the right opportunity could take on more political responsibilities, than is commonly believed.

An important indicator of women's participation in a democratic society is the degree to which they seek and gain public office. An individual contests an election to get into the government and to become an active participant in the decision-making process. Whether one gets elected or not, contesting an election in itself is a very important mode of political participation. Standing for office is the most intense form of political activity. Seeking an elected post invariably takes time, money and energy, besides exposing the individual to the public eye, a situation that gives rise to its own peculiar stresses and strains (Taper, 1976). Moreover, there seems to be many obstacles that women face when they think of a political career. To quote Short (1996, 13-14), "The narrow path leading to a political career is usually risky, grueling and unglamorous, requiring stamina, optimism and dedication as well as considerable resources. These are less available to women than men. Parliamentary careers are facilitated by the resources that certain middle-class occupations offer: flexible working hours, useful political skills, social status and political contacts, all enhanced by what have been termed brokerage occupations. The argument is simple but the insight is important. To run for Parliament an individual must have financial security, public networks, social status, policy experiences,

technical and social skills. Those who have brokerage jobs – barristers, lecturers, trade union officials, journalists, political researchers, work in fields that are complimentary to politics. Their skills translate between public and private life. Women and members of ethnic minorities are often concentrated in low paying occupations or in small businesses. Such jobs combined with family responsibilities, mean long hours which do not fit in with the demands of political activism”. Moreover, “powerful socio-economic, cultural, and institutional barriers seem to have blocked all, except for the most tenacious women, from the public spheres” (Reynolds, 1999). Rule briefly sums up the obstacles as “narrow gender roles, restrictive religious doctrines, unequal laws and education, discriminatory socio-economic conditions, male-biased party leaders or other political elites and some voters, and ‘women-unfriendly’ election systems. Such barriers are “typically interrelated and mutually reinforcing” (Cited in Reynolds, 1999). Could these be some reasons as to why very less women actually pursue a political career?

There is no doubt that there are women who have held the highest posts (prime minister or president or chief minister) in their countries though this not a very common trend. What has also been observed is

that as one proceeds up both the administrative and elective hierarchies the presence of women declines, until at the very highest levels there are either no women or they are present merely in token numbers. Women politicians whether at the local or national level do not commensurate with their number in society.

Keeping the above stated reasons in mind an attempt will be made to study women who take part in the most intense form of political participation, which is, contesting for elections, irrespective of whether they won or lost. By understanding the success or failure of women in the political field, it is hoped that it will throw light on women's place in the political arena. The participation of the Khasi women in the most intensive form of political participation is very negligible (as mentioned in the earlier chapters). So far only 12 women have been elected in the past 7 general assembly elections held. For the purpose of study nine women within the Greater Shillong Area were taken for case study, out of which only two of them have been members of the Legislative Assembly. The others are women who have contested but have not been able to win the elections.

**Case 1:**

Name – Mrs. Roshan Warjri

Age – 56 years

Marital Status – Widow

Educational Qualification – Graduate

Occupation – House-wife

Source of Income – Rent.

Constituency – Mawkhar

After the demise of her politician husband, Late Korbar Sing, the party, Hills People Union, as well as well-wishers approached her to contest from the Mawkhar constituency in the 1993 Assembly election. She won the election and served as an MLA for the next five years. Again in the year 1998 she contested from the United Democratic Party and won for a second consecutive term. This year she was inducted as a Cabinet Minister and was given charge of the following departments in different periods of time between 1998 and 2002 – Urban Affairs, Tourism, General Administration Department (GAD), Municipal Administration and Co-operation. According to her the reason for winning the election was due to her sincere and dedicated service to the people of the constituency during her initial term. Her method of campaigning was door to door, she made no promises but said would do

her best. However, in the 2003 Assembly elections she did not contest and since then has resigned herself to being only a party member of the UDP. Her interest in politics started back in the 1960s. She was a party worker of the Hill State Movement of which her mother was one among the pioneers.

As to her choice of opting for politics as a career, her family supported her totally. She has grown up children, which according to her could be the reason as to why she did not face any problem in fulfilling her family duties. Even as a minister she did not neglect her family and made it a point to cook for her children when at home.

Women according to her would make good political leaders as they are sincere and dedicated and have the instinct of motherhood. However, there are very less women in politics due to responsibilities of home and family besides traditional ethos. As such she feels that reservation of seats would encourage more women into the electoral fray.

According to her men and women do not necessarily have different attitudes when it comes to public issues, though to some extent

women may look more into women issues. As a woman working in a male dominated field she said that she faced no problems. She feels one has to do a lot of hard work, be identified by the people, be a peoples' person if one wants to pursue a political career. Regarding politics she says that as long as one stands by certain principles and more importantly on the mandate of the people, then politics is not dirty. At the moment she is a house-wife and has not yet decided to get back to active politics.

**Case 2:**

Name – Mrs. Nara Langstieh

Age – 60+

Marital Status – Married

Educational Qualification – Graduate, B.Ed.

Occupation – House-wife, Social worker.

Source of Income – Being the youngest and only daughter, she has inherited property, land and houses from which rentals are obtained.

Constituency – Laithumkhrah

This lady contested for election twice but lost on both occasions. She is more or less a housewife intermittently doing social work. It was through social work that she got involved in politics. People who knew her wanted her to stand for elections. She was also approached by the

Congress party. As such, she contested on an Indian National Congress ticket in the year 1983 but lost the elections, the reason according to her was that she had no political experience then. In 1996 she contested in a bye-election following the death of the sitting MLA of 17-Laithumkhrah constituency but lost this election too. She observes that there are a number of factors that may affect ones failure or victory in elections. One reason why people do not cast their vote in favour of a particular candidate could be out of jealousy, another could be a candidate's ability to spend which according to her plays a very important role. She also observes that the votes of ignorant or illiterate people can be bought very easily.

When she decided to join politics her husband and children were very supportive. She notes that she would not have joined politics if she had minor children for she knows that family life would be affected. Family according to her is very important and it was very important to bring the children up in the right way. To quote her, "The children suffer very bad psychological affects when left to fend for themselves. A mother is a mother; she should be there for the children when she is needed. As such if a woman has minor children, getting involved in

political activities certainly affects the home. Moreover if the family is not totally in favour of one's involvement in politics, problems will arise".

To the question as to whether women would make good political leaders, she notes that women are basically more honest and righteous than men. An honest woman would certainly make a good political leader, though of course she should have experience in this field, the ability to deal with situations and people, be capable of analyzing human relationships, have the guts to stand up for what is right besides possessing other qualities of a leader. According to her politics has been a male dominated field for ages and hence marked by low representation of women. Women according to her are so used to such patterns of functioning that they more or less accept this as a reality and hence have very little interest in politics. To the question of reservation she is not in favour of it. This is so as there is every possibility that the wrong women would become ministers, women who are uneducated, ignorant, who have no idea of dealing with situations that may arise and that there is always the possibility that unscrupulous politicians will put up women

candidates to contest elections and if victorious dictate these women to their terms.

**Case 3:**

Name – Mrs. Amanda Pathaw

Age – 47 +

Marital Status – Married

Educational Qualification – B.A.

Occupation – Business and Social worker

Source of Income – Business.

Constituency – Mawlai

This lady stood for election twice, once in 1998 and again in 2003, but lost on both occasions. She was nominated by party members (Congress). According to her there were many factors responsible for losing the election. It was not because she was a woman but had to do mainly with party rivalry, preference of the electorate for regional parties, a view held by many that her party was considered to be an 'Indian party', money power and muscle power. Before contesting she was already involved in politics helping out a relation who was actively involved in politics.

When she decided to contest her family stood behind her. She feels that women can also do what men can, understand problems better, are not corrupted and are less likely to use unfair means in elections. The Khasi women according to her are equal to men and as such should contribute to society even in the political affairs. She notes that if more educated women of substance and who have good understanding are given a chance in this field, politics would not be regarded as bad or as dirty. As such she feels that there should be reservation of seats for women.

**Case 4:**

Name \_ Mrs Margaret Mawlong

Age - 64+

Marital Status - Married

Educational Qualification - Graduate

Occupation - Retired I.A.S. officer

Source of Income - Pensioner.

Constituency - Laitumkhrah.

This lady stood for the Legislative Assembly election in the year 1998 but lost to a male candidate who she notes had a better electoral base than her. It was only after retirement that she began to take an

active interest in politics. She stood for elections because well-wishers as well as party workers of the United Democratic Party approached her. The reason as to why she lost she notes was due to the fact that the late father of one of her male opponents was already a well established, well known politician of the constituency, the State as well as a Parliamentarian. This familiarity of the electorate was a boon for the son who was to secure his maiden entry into electoral politics of the constituency. Moreover, rumours had been spread to tarnish her image by party workers of the other political parties. This occasion was also her maiden entry into politics. Before joining politics she had been active in advocating women issues and continues to do so.

When she decided to contest her family gave her their full support. Nevertheless, she notes that active participation could possibly affect the family. For married younger women problems can arise as politicians belong to his/her voters. Single women or women with grown up children can do better.

To the question if women would make good political leaders she feels that they certainly can as they are more sensitive to peoples' daily

problems. But family obligations and a general bias that people have towards women have resulted in their low representation. Moreover, she feels that authority and politics in matrilineal societies rest completely with men. As such, she feels that as there is no other option to get more women to participate in electoral politics, there should be reservation of seats for women. This would give women encouragement in the initial stages, then after a few years when women are more confident, reservation can be done away with. Women, according to her, generally have to work very hard to be accepted as an equal.

**Case 5:**

Name – Mrs Irene Hujon

Age – 51

Marital Status – Divorcee

Educational Qualification – B.A.

Occupation – Housewife

Source of Income – House Rent.

Constituency – Laban.

This woman stood for elections (Laban bye election) for the first time in September 2003, but subsequently lost. Her brush with politics began when she was enrolled as a primary member of the Bharatiya

Janata Party(hereinafter, BJP). She held the post of Vice President of the Laban Mandal Committee. In the year 1997 she held the post of District Vice-President of Mahila Morcha (Women's Wing). She held the post of President for a short term after the expiry of the then President. She stood for the bye-election not on a BJP ticket but on a Meghalaya Democratic Party (hereinafter the MDP) ticket.

When she decided to stand for elections her family fully supported her. She has four grown up children and as such was free to join politics. She notes that active participation would to some extent affect the family life.

To the question as to whether women would make good political leaders, she notes that they certainly would as women are more sincere and honest in the work they do and as efficient as the men. She laments about the low representation of women saying they have not been motivated enough. More women should come forward as there are enough capable women with leadership qualities. According to her reservation of seats for women is a necessity.

**Case 6:**

Name - Mrs. Jopsimon Phanbuh

Age - 54

Marital Status - Widow

Educational Qualifications - B.A., B.Ed.

Occupation - Member of the Legislative Assembly

Source of Income - Salary

Constituency - Laban

This lady recently got elected in a bye-election held on September 26<sup>th</sup> 2003, from the Laban constituency, following the demise of her husband, Late Thrang Hok Rangad, who was the then MLA of the constituency. She stood for election as she was guided by the urge to complete what her husband had left undone for the constituency. It has been suggested that this lady won the election solely on the wave of sympathy that had spread across the constituency following the death of her husband. She has no political experience as she was just a housewife looking after the family needs. At present she is trying her level best to look into the immediate requirements of her constituency, which she notes is not an easy job. She observes that her joining politics would not have been possible if she had minor children to look after. She

makes it a point to spend time with her children at least once a week, which is usually only on Sundays.

To the question as to whether women would make good political leaders she notes that women certainly can and that more women should take part in politics.

**Case 7:**

Name – Mrs. Maya R. Kyndiah

Age – 58 years

Marital Status – Widow

Educational Qualifications – B.A., B.Ed.

Occupation – Retired teacher, at present is a house-wife and social worker

Source of Income – House Rent.

Constituency – Jaiaw

This lady stood for elections thrice but lost on all three occasions. Her first brush with active politics began in 1983 when she contested on a Congress ticket. Initially she was not that keen to contest but as her party members approached her she agreed. She however lost the election. According to her the reason for losing was because voters tended to see her party as a national party and not a regional party. She

again contested on a Congress ticket in the year 1998 but once again lost. In the last election held in 2003 she contested on a UDP ticket but lost this election too. This time she notes that she did not have enough time to go campaigning and as such could not meet enough people to secure more votes. Asked if she would again contest in future she said that she was reluctant. Old age and the need to spend more time with her grandchildren are some of the factors that will probably not permit her to contest again in future.

This lady was involved in politics since her youth (her father was once the president of the Congress party) and as such faced no opposition from her family when she decided to stand for elections. Her husband and children gave her their full support. She notes that she would not have taken active part if she had minor children to look after. According to her good virtues are cultivated within one's home and as such it was very important that children be brought up in a right and conducive atmosphere. One reason, she points out, as to why there are very few women in politics is due to family responsibilities. Women are too caught up with looking after the welfare of the family and children, besides working, that they have no time to get involved with politics.

To the question as to whether women would make good political leaders, she is of the opinion that women certainly would as they are more honest, soft hearted and easy to approach. As such she feels that reservation of seats for women is a must as it would give them a chance to participate in the political process.

**Case 8:**

Name – Dr. (Mrs.) Elizabeth Laitphlang

Age – 47

Marital Status – Married

Educational Qualifications – Post Graduate, Ph.D.

Occupation – Lecturer

Source of Income – Salary

Unlike the other ladies who contested in the various Assembly elections, this lady stood for the Parliamentary election from the Shillong Parliamentary Seat in the year 1998 but lost. She stood on a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) ticket. The reason for not winning according to her was that her party was new, was not strong enough and moreover voters were not familiar with this national party. She was not new to politics as her grandparents and uncle were fore-runners in the Hill State movement and as such, was more or less involved in political activities.

Initially she was associated with regional parties of the State eventually joining the Congress party as an active member. She held a number of posts as an active member of the Congress party. She was the General Secretary of the City Youth Congress, Vice-President and later President of Mahila Congress, General Secretary of the State Congress, and then General Secretary of North East Mahila Congress Coordination Committee of India. In later years being disillusioned with the party on various issues she joined the Bharatiya Janata Party and eventually stood for election from the BJP ticket. At present she is the Vice-President of State BJP unit (Meghalaya) as well as in charge of the Mahila Morcha (Women's Wing). In the recently concluded Parliamentary elections of 2004, she had applied for a party ticket to contest from the Shillong Parliamentary constituency but here application was not approved.

Her main reason for contesting was because she felt that if one is in a position to make policies, then it is better than being just a member. Only as a representative can one bring issues into focus. In future if the opportunity arises she plans to contest again. Her family gives her their full support in her political pursuits. Moreover as she does not have

children to look after, she notes that she is more or less free from family responsibilities and is able to pursue other avenues of interest.

According to her women would make good political leaders. Yet she does point out that women need a lot of encouragement in this arena which is regarded as a male domain. As such she feels that though she is not totally in favour of reservation of seats for women, in a way it would ensure women's involvement in politics.

**Case 9:**

Name – Dr. (Mrs.) Tiplut Nongbri

Age – 53 years

Marital Status – Married

Educational Qualification – Post Graduate, Ph.D

Occupation – Professor

Source of Income – Salary

Constituency – Laithumkhras

This lady stood for elections under unexpected circumstances. She had been residing in New Delhi and came to Shillong in August 1982 following the sudden demise of her elder brother. After this tragic loss, Mrs Nongbri stayed back in Shillong for a few months to be with her family. It was in early 1983 that the Congress party was searching for

candidates to contest the forthcoming assembly elections. Having been persuaded and convinced by friends and well wishers, against the backdrop of a sudden loss to the family less than a year ago, Mrs. Nongbri in an unsettled mind applied for a Congress ticket. Her application was accepted and she was given an opportunity to fight the elections from the 17-Laithumkhrach constituency on a Congress ticket. She however lost the elections though she did not lose her security deposit. This election was to be her first and last brush with electoral politics till date.

When she contested the 1983 elections, her family members were very supportive of her decision. However she believes that every profession has its own demands and politics too, like any other profession, has its own demands. What is ultimately required is a balance between the home and the profession where the support of the husband and the family is very crucial.

Mrs Nongbri believes that “honest people should get into politics though she concedes that it becomes very difficult for them to survive”. Politics requires the incumbent to fulfill numerous demands in spite of

the fact that these demands may, on many occasions run contrary to what the incumbent stands for. Hence to fulfill them the incumbent will have to make compromises even at the cost of the ideals that she/he may stand for. This then becomes a very difficult proposition for women to enter the political fray.

On being asked whether women in a matrilineal society enjoy a better position than others when it concerns their political participation, Mrs. Nongbri observes that the chauvinistic ideas prevailing in such a society provide no support/advantage to women's participation in politics. She contends that few women participate in politics because they are hindered by the prevailing gender bias, the traditional ethos and also because of the flawed and biased socialization process. Nevertheless she feels that when it comes to women's participation in the traditional political institutions, they should actively participate in the *dorbars* not because they are women and need to be 'accommodated' but because they are competent to do so and have the ability to fulfill the responsibilities attached to the office.

A common trend observed here is that all these women have been approached either by party workers or by well-wishers to stand for elections and none stood as independent candidates. These women either had families with political backgrounds, or had been doing social work or fighting for the cause of women and eventually getting involved in politics. Another common characteristic feature of these women is that they are all educated, married and above 40 years of age indicating that they, more or less joined active politics somewhere near their forties. Yet another common trait is that these women have no minor children to look after. All have children who are grown-up who are either college going, working or settled down thereby leaving free time for them to pursue other avenues of interest. During the interview all had agreed that the family was their first priority and that they would not have got involved in politics if they had minor children to look after. As such they all had the support of their family when they decided to stand for elections. Economically, these women came from the middle and upper-middle class families. These women are all very dynamic and active individuals that one is left to wonder as to why they were not elected. But as some of them noted, financial investment in politics plays

a very big role here. Money power, muscle power, besides many other factors have been seen to play a major role in electoral preparations.

An interesting observation made here is that the two women who were elected are both widows of successful politician husbands. They contested after their husbands passed away and both were elected. Their husbands had been elected representatives of their respective constituencies and as their wives, they were well known to the people of the constituency. Initially, it is possible to assume that the sympathy wave that spread across the constituencies was responsible for seating these two ladies in the legislative assembly. However in the case of Mrs Warjri it was her dedication and commitment to the constituency that returned her a second successive time (in 1998) to the assembly. It however remains to be seen if these traits will also favour Mrs Phanbuh in the next assembly elections.

A number of observations can be noted from the above cases. One is that, not every and any woman totally commits herself into active politics. Most of these women entered politics due to the encouragement they received from their family members, their neighbours and well

wishers of their respective constituencies, the warm response of various political parties and above all their personal desire and interest to contest the elections. It can also be said that their personal desire and interest were reinforced by the above factors. Women who are active and involved in social work, women who have no minor children to look after, women who are retired or are wives of politicians, seem to look towards a political career. Moreover, age also seems to play a major role in one's entry into active politics. A common pattern observed here is that women entered into active politics after 40 years of age. This seems to be an indication of the ideal age for women to take up political offices, a time where one is relatively free from familial responsibilities like reproduction or nursing of children. This indicates that women take their responsibilities as home-makers seriously and are willing to venture out into the political domain only if they are confident that they can strike a balance between familial responsibilities and the demands of active politics. Politics, to these women is an activity undertaken only when they are confident that they are buoyed by financial stability. The various political parties were also influenced by the above factors when it came to the choice of candidates for various constituencies – elderly literate women, lesser degree of family responsibilities, well developed

inter-personal relationship, stable income and capability to mobilize people.

The Khasi women are yet to make their presence felt in the political arena. They are no doubt aware that the pursuit to rigorous politics is unglamorous, requiring untiring effort and self dedication, and the need of inculcating political skills in oratory as well as in their day-to-day association with the electorate. Being women they need to infuse extra effort in sharpening their political skills so as to be taken seriously not only by their male counterparts but by women as well.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

The aim of this empirical study is to examine and assess the nature and the attitude of the urban Khasi women towards electoral politics and its various activities. Attempts have been made to find out what is the urban Khasi women's perception of politics which would thereby enable us to understand women's attitudes towards politics.

As mentioned in the earlier chapters, the Khasi society is a matrilineal society where lineage is traced through the female line and the youngest daughter inherits the ancestral property. One would naturally assume that women in this society enjoy a more or less equal to or maybe even a higher status than the men of the society. Yet the fact that inheritance operates through women is no guarantee of the female political empowerment in any sense. In the Khasi society the ideal Khasi woman is one who is submissive, virtuous, honest, dignified and hard-working. It is from the women that the clan procreates and maintains clan continuity. She looks after the home and is the custodian of the family property. Tradition on the other hand does not allow

women to meddle in the affairs of the state. In the present times the political involvement of the Khasi women in these traditional political institutions has not seen much change. On the political front, which is the main subject matter of the study undertaken, the Khasi women are lacking behind like all women in other societies. Though women represent half of the world's enfranchised population, it is a universal fact that her representation is dismal in the political field.

Explanations for women's lower rate of participation in politics are well agreed upon. Women have been depicted more or less as the ones who look after the home while public affairs are attended to by the male members. Laws of the land, culture, folkways, mores and attitudes of peoples seem to favour men more than women. There is no doubt that women as individuals and as a class have distinguished themselves in the social sphere, but in the political sphere they are yet to make their mark.

In the study undertaken the Khasi women are yet to establish themselves in the political field. At the traditional level the general adage of male franchise still prevails. Though a few local dorbars within Shillong have women members the same cannot be said of a majority of

the local dorbars. The members of the dorbars themselves are very reluctant to let go of the traditional practice of total male members. Men still have the tendency to look upon woman as incapable of handling matters that are outside the home front. The modern administrative system on the other hand legally and constitutionally places no bar on women's participation in the politics of the nation. Despite the liberty given to them very few women take the opportunity to make full use of this right. There is a vast disparity between women's formal political equality and their meaningful exercise of political power. Though women exercise their franchise they lag behind when it comes to occupying prestigious political offices or positions. The representation of the Khasi women in the legislative bodies is very negligible as can be observed in the previous chapters. Given below are the findings of the study undertaken.

The attitude of the urban Khasi women towards politics is one of distrust and disgust. A large percentage (75%) of the respondents regarded politics as too dirty to get involved in. The reason for this distrust and disgust finds its root in the perception that politicians fail to keep their promises after being elected. Talk of development, of

generating employment, in addition to promises of allotting funds and providing aid, do not materialize once the candidate is elected. Politicians are too busy making money for themselves and this has frustrated the public, who in turn see politics just as a mere arena for personal gain. As such, a majority of the respondents are of the view that politics is a dirty profession lacking in moral values, it has become a profession where material values and money play a crucial role. There was on the other hand a small fraction (25%) of the respondents who felt that it was the people aspiring or holding political offices (politicians) that gave politics a bad image. Thus it is not surprising that the bigger bulk of the women tended to show no interest in politics while a very small number of them showed interest. In general, a low percentage of women seem to have very little interest in politics, married women showing lesser interest than those who are not married, the reason being that, with a family to look after where was the time to spare for politics and for that matter even take part in it. What has been observed is that it is the unmarried, young, educated, middle-income groups who tended to show slightly more interest than the rest. Women also seldom discussed politics. The lack of interest and limited knowledge of politics are the most immediate reasons. Women who showed tendency to discuss

politics are mostly the educated women, women in their late thirties to late forties, government servants and high income group women. But in conclusion what has been observed is that women in general, irrespective of their marital status, age, education, occupation or income do not show much interest in politics nor do they discuss politics on a regular basis. Very few women showed any interest at all.

An interesting observation here is that although women in general disliked politics, many are in favour of seeing more women taking part in politics. Women in general are of the view that more women should participate as it is a right one should make full use of. Women tend to regard women as being more honest, hardworking, are more approachable and of better understanding, and as such are of the opinion that they certainly would make good and capable political leaders. But not all women agree with this view that a woman is capable enough to handle the complexity of political activities. Women respondents agree to the need for greater women's participation and they think that women would make good political leaders but these respondents are themselves reluctant to join active politics if given an opportunity to do so. What can be concluded here is that women are still reluctant to step into a role

dominated by the men and seem to be more or less comfortable with the way things are.

The vote is the simplest and most common form of political participation. From the study undertaken it has been observed that majority of them have exercised their right to vote at least once, if not more, after attaining voting age. Voting did not necessarily mean showing interest in political activities or in politics at all. On the contrary what most of the respondents said was that it was merely an act of exercising one's right to vote. Women are very aware of their voting right. They are equally aware of the power of voting. When it came to the women voters' perception in choosing a particular candidate, they seem to show a preference for the personal merits of a candidate rather than party affiliations. It is only during the election period that women in large numbers participate in politics by exercising their right to franchise but this right is only seasonal and does not exactly bring out the total significance of participation.

Khasi society like other societies considered political institutions to be the realm of influence of men while women tended to the domestic

responsibilities. Women were considered incompetent to deal with the complexity of politics. In the past total male franchise was practiced but in the present times there are a few women members in these local political institutions. From the study undertaken it is very clear that women feel very strongly that it is time that women too should be given a chance to participate in these traditional political institutions. Women feel that there are certain issues they can handle better than the men. An interesting observation made is that though the respondents feel women should be allowed to take part in the dorbars, when asked if women should also be made head of these dorbars, there was uncertainty to this question. A majority of the respondents are not sure as to whether women should be heads of dorbars and stated that tradition would not permit such deviation. This shows that women are still influenced by traditional tenets. Women have submitted and acclimatized themselves to this reality that they cannot visualize even in the near future as being the bearers of traditional political authority. There is no doubt that these traditional political institutions are still very much male dominated institutions. Men still regard this arena as their domain and are reluctant to hand over the reigns of political control.

In the present times even though women's role outside the home is increasingly recognized, her first priority is the home nonetheless. The present study very clearly shows that irrespective of whether one is married or not, educated or illiterate, employed or unemployed, there are very few takers opting for a political career. Women themselves seem to be comfortable with the way things are as they find political matters to be beyond their comprehension and interest. This is quite natural as women have been kept away from the political arena far too long.

In the case of women politicians, they form just a handful of the lot. Women politicians have yet to make their presence felt in the State. A lot of hard work and dedication is required from their side in order to be acknowledged by the electorate, both male and female. Besides, they also need the support and favour of political parties which would ensure at least some percentage of women candidates in elections.

What has been observed is that women's own attitudes are the final pre-condition for their political participation. The study reveals that women choose not to actively participate in political life. Of the few who

did participate, only a fraction of them could finally become part of the decision-making process. These women had favourable family conditions like older children or none at all and family or outside help for domestic chores. The fact cannot be denied that political passivity of women has been due to the masculine world of politics where a women's chance of successful adaptation are very limited. Another reason is that women themselves still cling steadfastly to tradition, that the primary function of a woman is that of a home maker.

In conclusion what can be said is that the Khasi women are still a very apolitical group. They are yet to make their presence felt in this arena. Despite the liberty of franchise and ability to stand for office, very few women take the opportunity to do so. Those few women pursuing a political career face tough competition and need a lot of support not only from the men but also from women as well. That more women should take part in politics should also be complimented by more women coming forward to pursue political careers. If women themselves are reluctant to change their attitude towards politics then the whole exercise of advocating for more women's participation in this field stands void. What is important here is that women should cultivate a

favourable attitude towards politics. Until women themselves are ready to step out, no amount of reforms or measures to bring political empowerment to women would be successful.

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