

CHAPTER- 8  
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

	<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
8.1	Introduction	266
8.2	Summary & findings	267
8.3	Factors that hinder political participation of women	286
8.4	Suggestions	290

**8.1 Introduction**

The thesis was set out to study and analyze the political participation of women in Meghalaya. The research sought to understand the extent of participation of women as voters, political party members, election campaigners etc. (conventional participation) and their participation in agitation and protest (unconventional participation). The significance of the study is based on the constructive approach that envisaged political stability between the government in power and the masses (citizens). It thus sought out to bridge the gap between theory and practice of democracy by ensuring gender equality in sharing political power. Generally, women in Meghalaya have been making wonderful contribution to family as passionate mothers and to the society as equal partners with men. Their contribution in diverse fields has been enormous as they have come up as rational actor in every possible opportunity that they get. On the contrary, their participation in politics especially as political representatives is almost invisible.

The previous studies and research conducted on women do not deal extensively on a comparative study of the two communities (Khasi and Garo women), especially with regard to their participation in politics. The significance of the research is the inclusive study of the urban and rural areas of both the communities. It thus gives a broader understanding on the political participation of women in Meghalaya.

The following sections attempt to summarise the empirical research conducted with the help of survey method and SPSS analysis as well as the outcome of the interviews conducted with a few women leaders. It also contains discussion on the relationship between the various variables, facts and data available through the various records available in various department and government official records. The results obtained from the work done thus

provide us with an important understanding of the whole phenomenon. It also attempts to conclude the chapter by making necessary suggestions for the future research. In this chapter we also highlight suggestions to address the problems faced by women in general and Meghalaya in particular which may be helpful for the policy makers, social workers, civil society actors and researchers who are interested in the field.

## **8.2 Summary and findings**

The socio- economic status of the women in Meghalaya is seen as the role model for women in other parts of India due to its matrilineal society. However, the percentage of women as political leaders is comparatively very low in the state. The research question arises as to why participation of women in politics is low and why it matters? Like other patriarchal society, women in Meghalaya have been in a position of a secondary status in terms of representation in decision making bodies.

The customary practices of the Khasi and Garo communities endorse males as their traditional chief since time immemorial. Women were nonetheless holding secondary position. They were given the chance only if there is no male heir. The Khasi traditional chief who is known as the *Syiem* has certain rule of succession to the female, but in reality the case is rare. Though there is a female Priestess known as the *Syiem-Sad*, her power is that of the religious ceremonial head. Similarly, in Garo hills the wife of the *Nokma* was entrusted with the authority to own the land but administration and management of the land belongs to her husband and her male relatives (*maharis* within the *machong* and members of the *A'king* land). The husband of the *Nokma* who inherits the *A'king* land became the *Nokma* or the chief. The clan and other members of the community recognize him to be the rightful head to manage the administrative affairs. Succession to such post by the female is rare.

The thesis studies the history of women's representation in Meghalaya in the pre-independence period till the last 2009 Lok Sabha Election. It also touches upon the latest election to the State Legislative Assembly in 2013. Under the Government of India Act 1935 women were given the right to vote, though it was limited and restricted. Few women politicians were seen in the Assam Legislative Assembly since 1937. Interestingly, the existence of the reservation of seats for women in Assam Legislative Assembly which is known as the Shillong Women Seat and the General Seat provide an opportunity for women representation in the legislative assembly. There were few women who contested for the elections in 1937, 1939 and 1946. There were, however, only two women who were able to come to power of the then undivided Assam.<sup>1</sup> Ms. Mavis Dunn Lyngdoh became the first woman from North East to become a minister; and she was inducted in the Md. Sadulla Ministry in 1939-41 and again 1942-45. Mrs. B. Khongmen contested from Autonomous District Constituency of the then undivided Assam against two male candidates, Shri Wilson Reade and L.L.D. Basan. She was nominated by the Congress against the seat reserved for the hill tribes. She was elected and became the first and only woman from Assam to represent the Lok Sabha in 1952. She was a member of the Assam Legislative Assembly from 1946-52 and elected as a deputy speaker in 1952. In 1957, she returned to state politics but was defeated. And thereafter, no woman candidate contested for the election in 1962 and 1967.

Women's representation as decision maker at the district level is another area of concern. The existence of the Autonomous District Council is to empower the people at the lower level and to ensure decentralization of power. However, the number of women politicians in the three Autonomous District Council from 1952-2009 shows gender disparity at the district level. There were eighteen elected and six nominated members to the first United Khasi and Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council in the year 1952-57 in which only

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<sup>1</sup> Miss Mavis Dunn Lyngdoh and Mrs. B. Khongmen who are Khasis were elected from the Shillong women Seats which later became the Capital of Meghalaya.

one woman, that is, Smt. Lariam Shullai Khongwir was nominated as one of the members. There were eight women in the KHADC (1952-2009) in which seven were elected and one nominated (1952-57). There is only one woman in the JHADC till today and that too she was a nominated member in the year 1973. There were five women who got elected and seven nominated (and re-nominated) members to the GHADC (1952-2009) in which Smt Clarish K. Sangma was re-nominated, as Shri John Manner Marak was de-nominated (1999-2004), Smt. Ethelwitty Ch. Marak was also re-nominated as Shri. Dijon Behari Richil was de-nominated in the 10<sup>th</sup> term of the year 2004-2009. Out of the six terms that women candidate got elected to the GHADC, Smt Surjomoti (1952-57, 1957-64), Smt. Ch. Momin and Smt Reboti Barman (1983-89, 1989-1994) were elected for two consecutive terms.

The total number of electorates to the KHADC election 2009 were 5, 30,599 in which, 2, 52,921 are males electorates whereas 2, 77,678 are females. The number of females' electorates surpasses the number of male electorates. However, the number of women contestants is very low in comparison to men contestants. The total number of contestants was 144 in which 133 were males and only 11 were female contestants. In the JHADC General Election 2009, female electorates were 85,465 as against 79,701 male electorates. With regard to the number of contestants, there were 120 contestants out of which 3(three) were female contestants. Interestingly, none of them got elected. The study reveals that the increase in the number of female electorates has no bearing on results for women who won the election in the KHADC and JHADC 2009 elections. In the GHADC 2009 election, males outnumbered females unlike in KHADC and JHADC elections. Out of 168 contestants, only one woman contested for the election to the GHADC 2009 election.

The thesis has also examined women representation in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly from 1972-2008. There were 189 male and 9 female contestants to the first General Election of the Meghalaya Legislative Assemblies which was held in the year 1972, but only one woman got elected.

Therefore, out of 60 seats, 59 seats were occupied by the male legislators and only one female legislator. Similarly, in the year 1978, there were 255 men and 7(seven) women contestants; only one female was elected. In 1983, there were 309 men and 8 women contestants but no woman got elected. Consequently, 60 seats were fully occupied by male legislators and zero woman representation in the government. The year 1988 shows that there was a drop in number of women who contested for the election to 3(three) whereas, there were 268 males who contested for the election and two women got elected. In 1993, again there was a slight increase in the number of women contestants to 7(seven), among whom only one got elected. In 1998 and 2003, the number of women contestants was increased to 14 and 3(three) women got elected in 1998 and 2(two) were elected in 2003. In the year 2008, the number of women contestants has increased to 21 as against 317 males, but only one woman was elected. The number of the elected women to the Assembly had a positive impact on the subsequent elections as the number of women contestantss gradually increased in the following elections. In the years 2003 and 2008, female electorates outnumbered male electorates, but, it has no impact on the number of elected women. Their participation in voting as electorates does not entail their representation in the Legislature. There was an increase in the percentage of female contestants who contested for the legislative assembly election; but the percentage of female legislators from the first election, when Meghalaya attained its statehood till the last election is very low. It may also be noted that in all the elections so far held the Congress Party had field the highest number of contestants. This is in contrast to other national and regional parties who only field women candidates occasionally.

The research reveals that highest percentage of women who contested in the Legislative Assembly Election after Meghalaya attained its full statehood (1972-2008) is the year 2008 with 6.2 percent. The highest percentage of elected women in the Legislative Assembly (1972-2008) is 5(five) percent which is in the year 1998. Next to that were the years 1988 and 2008 with 3.3

percent. The percentage of the elected women in other years of elections is always less than two percent and no woman in the Legislative Assembly of the year 1983. Further, the election to the recent Meghalaya Legislative Assembly, 2013 shows a marked increase in the percentage of women legislators. So far this is the highest percentage in women representation in the Legislative Assembly. It is 6.6 percent. As such, the political power has been dominated by males only.

Interestingly, there were 18 bye-elections which were held so far in the state, in different constituencies due to various reasons. There were six women candidates so far who have contested in the bye-elections to the Legislative Assemblies from different constituencies. However, only two got elected. They were Jopsimon Phanbuh and Ampareen Lyngdoh, who got elected in the year 2004 and 2008 respectively. Mrs. Phanbuh contested and won the seat for the bye-election as her husband, Mr.T. H. Ryngad who won the 2003 election from Laban Constituency passed away. Smt Ampareen Lyngdoh, who resigned from the UDP and the legislature due to political reasons, did contest the 2008 bye-election under the Congress ticket. She retained her seat which she had won in 2008 under the UDP ticket.

The number of women who contested for the Lok Sabha elections after Meghalaya attained its statehood was comparatively very insignificant. Enilla Shira from BJP contested the Tura seat in the 1996; and Dr Elizabeth Laitflang from BJP contested the Shillong seat in 1998; they were not successful. Interestingly, Miss Agatha Sangma from NCP, however, contested and won the Tura bye-election in 2008, after her father Purno Sangma vacated his parliamentary seat on being elected as a legislator to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly. She became the first woman M.P. from Meghalaya. There were three women contestants for the 2009 General Election to the Lok Sabha. They were Agatha Sangma from the NCP, Deborah C. Marak from Congress and Arlene N. Sangma as an Independent candidate. Miss Agatha Sangma was again re- elected for the Lok Sabha seat from Tura-seat against her rival

Congress candidate Deborah Marak, who lost by 17,945 votes. So far, from 1972- 2009, there was only one Khasi woman who contested for the election and there were 5(five) women from Garo Hills till today. Until recently, Mrs. Wasnsuk Syiem (Khasi) won the Rajya Sabha seat unopposed in the bye-election which was held on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2013. She became the first woman from Meghalaya to be a member of the Rajya Sabha.

Comparatively, the number of Khasi is more in number than the Garo women who contested in different Legislative Assembly elections. Out of the 79 women who have contested in seven Legislative Assembly General Elections (1972-2009), there were 51 Khasi women and 28 Garo women. So far Garo women have won four times and Khasi women have got elected five times to the legislative assembly elections. Among them Debora Marak of Garos and Roshan Warjri of Khasis got elected twice. In 1978 and 1993 elections, however, the number of Garo women was higher than the Khasi women. From 1972-2009, there were 18 bye-elections held in Meghalaya. In these elections, seven women contested only one Garo woman did contest and won the bye-elections while there were six Khasi women contested and two of them got elected. There were 8(eight) Khasi women who represented in the KHADC of which 7(Seven) were elected and one was a nominated member. Similarly, there were 12 Garo women in the GHADC from 1952-2009 of which, 7(seven) were nominated and 5(five) were elected members. There was no Khasi women elected to the Lok Sabha Election, nevertheless, only one Khasi contested in the year 1998 and 5(five) Garo women contested to the Lok Sabha Election.

Keeping in view the low representation of women in politics, the thesis has further explores the political recruitment and role performance of women who were able to come to power as well as those who did not win the elections. The study reveals that there is no bar for women with respect to Christian religion, as all the women in power are Christians. The essence of Christianity itself is that both men and women are equal in the eyes of God. Although



Meghalaya is predominantly a Christian state, the political participation of women has no direct link with religious precepts.

Age has no bearing on contesting and winning election. Teilinia Syiem Thangkhiew is the youngest MDC in Meghalaya where she won the election at the age of 27 and similarly, Agatha Sangma became the youngest MP in India. Therefore age shows no bar for women's participation at the highest level. Educational status seems to give them confidence to come forward and contest in election. In fact, lower educational qualification discouraged them as it is difficult to cope-up with the issues and challenges of the present scenario, even though no restrictions on educational qualification has been put forward by the constitution of India for contesting election. The type of occupation too has no special role towards the political recruitment of women at the highest level in Meghalaya as women who have been elected are from different occupation and background. A study on the motivations and family background of the respondents clearly illustrates that family background of the candidate determines her success. Thus, it demonstrates that the matrilineal system of Meghalaya shows no exception to the patriarchal values when it comes to political recruitment at the higher level. A study on political recruitment of the women politicians is intended to explain the reasons for the low representation of women in politics, and the obstacles faced by women in entering political office. Research has found out that one thing in common is the history, culture and tradition, which played a dominant role as barrier towards the active participation of women in gaining political power.

Interestingly, it has been found out that political background of the women candidates is one of the important factors to win the election. Family plays a very important role in motivating to contest the elections, and support from the family is important throughout the political journey of the candidate. Political arena is a new environment which requires confidence as well as moral and physical support for women from every sphere. In their journey as political leaders women have to play triple role performance i.e. at home

(family matters especially married women), in the society (prove their leadership capability that they can perform their duty well like males) and in their political office as peoples' representatives. The political background of the women politicians weighs heavily in their political recruitment, as they inherit the traits and qualities of politicians before they came into the main political process for recruitment. They recieved training about politics and so are not alien to the political environment. This factor facilitated their recruitment in politics. Political family background has a positive and significant impact on women's political participation and in holding political office as well. It is true that without the readiness to join politics or get one self acclimatize in politics, it is unfeasible to contest elections especially for women. As politics is a full time job; as such, they need stimulus to enter politics. Family background, in fact, provides the requisite stimuli to join politics.

This study reveals that to enter politics it is important that women candidate should have the money power as well as the moral support of the family. Behind most of the successful women in politics stand the successful male politicians. Their recruitment to politics needs to be an all round preparation. First, they need to have the motivation and willingness to join politics, confidence on themselves, family support, political party support and they need to gain the confidence from the community both male and female electorates and the society at large. Politics is more than contesting and winning election. Family support therefore required not only at the initial stage but throughout. Domestic sphere is still considered as the arena of women in Meghalaya, no matter what the political office or high job ranking that the women hold. Management of the private sphere and public sphere would perhaps be the biggest challenge for women to face when decision is made to join politics especially for the married women.

Even though Indian government upholds the spirit of equality, and women are having equal rights to contest with men, women do not generally

find themselves in a friendly atmosphere to contest election because of the belief that the area of women is not the political arena. It is merely a psychological factor that women are barred from entering politics. This idea has its roots in the mentality of both men and women in the community. Two factors have been identified that resulted in such mentality; firstly, except few localities in the urban area of Shillong, women are not allowed to attend *Dorbar* or village council until recently. Similarly, in the case of the Garo women, the *Nokma* are always men. The mentality of the community is that women in Meghalaya do not need to enter politics as they are socially and economically empowered. Secondly, it is often felt by the community that women are weaker than men in thinking as well and they generally lack experience. Confidence is another psychological factor that affects women's participation in politics. It is a dependent variable which generally depends on the political background, education, and political experience or exposure. Women usually lack confidence about their potentiality unless they have a strong political family background, better education, having experience or receiving the moral support of the community. Money alone cannot buy confidence but is derivative in nature.

Political recruitment of women show that low participation of women at the decision making level is largely influenced by both internal and external factors. There is no single factor responsible for the widening gap between men and women's participation at the decision making level. The factors are gender related and gender neutral as well. The challenge for women starts from home, society and if elected after holding the post as well. They have to go through different stages. First, they need to have financial resources, family support and community support. Normally when women candidates contest elections, there are tendencies that they are judged more than that of male candidates. For women to contest election is somewhat unusual, while for men to contest election is natural. This is partly due to historical evidences that there are few women who choose to join politics. Therefore, support of the male members is

very important in the recruitment process. The present study shows that most of the successful politicians who are in power have the political background where male members facilitate their entry into politics.

The first challenge that women have to face is the motivation to join politics. If there is no political background, they need to have political experience, better education so as to have self confidence. Self confidence without experience in politics can also help if the candidate has strong political background. Women also need the support of the family, political parties and the community. Only when they possessed these qualities, they will contest and win the elections. After they win the election, their route to success is not yet over, which they still have to prove their potentiality.

The idea of weaker sex as decision maker should be removed and they are equal to men in mental power. After they got into power, they have to prove their potentiality so as to gain the community confidence to continue their political career. The challenges and prospects that women are facing in politics are not because of discrimination but generally because of the attitude and doubts about women's ability to hold political office. The patriarchal attitude acts as a barrier towards women's participation in politics as decision maker that discourage them and they tend to lose their self confidence.

To sum up, the present study on the political recruitment and role performance of women in politics demonstrates that women generally face problems at the first stage in order to get themselves into politics. Lack of experience does not seem to be the problem with women only, as men also do face such handicaps. It is a fact that women's participation in politics has been very low. Both men and women tend to believe that women are not capable of making decisions. Therefore, it is more of psychological factors rather than other factors that obstruct women's participation in politics at the higher level as decision makers. Taking into account the low representation of women at the higher level, several researchers and academicians suggested different factors

that are responsible to it. However, the nature of the obstacles and challenges that women have in traditional societies like Meghalaya may not hold the same picture in the present situation. Thus, the types of problems differs from time to time and place to place or from one state to the other. In respect of Meghalaya, matrilineality has no bearing on the overall participation of women in politics.

In view of the rise of the civil society groups in Meghalaya, an attempt has also been made to study the activities and the views of the civil society actors with regard to participation of women in politics. The activities of the various civil society groups in Meghalaya have been focused on the public issues and government policies. Though most of the objectives and activities of the various women organizations under study are basically concerned the plight of women in the society, however, they do not directly contribute towards political participation of women. The civil society actors clearly stated in their interviews that their organisation has no political motive and are non-political in character. Yet, it provides a grand platform for the women members to have exposure in the public arena. Majority of the women organizations favour reservation of seats for women in the Legislature while the civil society led by male leaders like the Khasi Student Union and the Federation of Khasi-Jaintia and Garo People (Tura), feels that reservation policy is not relevant in Meghalaya. They were of the opinion that women in Meghalaya face no discrimination and merit should be the point of consideration than reservation for women.

There is a slight difference in the activities of the civil society groups in the village or the locality based organisation and women organisation in the urban areas; as those in the rural areas are narrow in scope than those in the urban areas. The women organizations in the villages are concerned about domestic problems, like family related problem such as husbands' drunkenness that often leads to domestic violence and broken marriages etc. Other related issues include checking abusive languages in the street and prohibition of group gathering in dark places at night and so on. Their other concern is about

cleanliness. On the other hand, urban based women organization take up issues other than the domestic women related issues such as, issues concerning governmental policies and developmental issues. However, the village based organizations or the locality based women organizations are more specific in their activities and they do not like to involve in any controversial issues. The common problem that women organisation leaders face as leaders of the organisation is that of family responsibility and time management.

Women organizations directly contribute towards the participation of women in the public sphere as civil society actors and indirectly towards the representation of women in politics. Civil society groups other than women organizations generally do not acknowledge the importance of women representation in politics as they believed that women in Meghalaya enjoyed social and economic equality. No doubt modernization and education have brought radical changes in the mentality or the ideological consciousness of both the genders in the Khasi society with respect to women's participation in every aspect of the society. However, participation of women in the traditional institutions is still considered unfit for the women. An interview with the headman in one of the villages where the study was conducted reveals the dominant role of the male members in all matters of decision making. Women have no part to play in the *dorbar* meetings. It is purely male dominated administration. Considering the eligibility criteria of the member of the *dorbar*, it *clearly* shows that there is a discrimination against women. Interestingly, the former president of the *Thangmaw village women organization* stated that even the decision of the Sengkynthei (Women organization) is to be decided by the *dorbar*. This shows that the women organisations in the urban areas are more vocal than those in the village. In some locality of the Shillong area, women leaders are allowed to attend as representatives to the *dorbar* meetings.

It may be mentioned that crimes against women, domestic violence and husband drunkenness have been the major problems that Khasi and Garo women have been facing. Rural life is marked by poverty and alcoholism,

deserted wives and children where women cannot claim maintenance if deserted by their husbands. They remain silent since women feel ashamed to speak out about their private life. Therefore, the presence of the women organizations as civil society actors in the society is of utmost importance and they have been playing important role in fighting against the social evils. The women organizations work together with the Meghalaya State Commission for Women (MSCW) for the protection of the rights and security of women.

Most importantly, the present research explores the political activity of women in Meghalaya other than those who contested for the political office. In view of the significance of participation of women at different levels, an empirical analysis has been made on the voting behaviour, political party members, their participation in electioneering and campaigning, attending political party meetings, political communication with political leaders, giving donations to candidates or party. The study reveals that the total women in Meghalaya mostly participate as voters at all levels of general elections except during unavoidable circumstances. The study found out that those who did not go for voting are due to old age or illness. As a result, it shows that there is positive involvement of women as voters in Meghalaya in terms of number with slight difference between the Garo and Khasi women. The percentage of women voters in Meghalaya in the 2009 Lok Sabha election was 64.16 percent which was even higher than female voters at all India level with 55.9 percent (Lok Sabha Election 2009). However, an illustration has also been made on the basis of the personal interview method to measure political participation of women as voters from qualitative perspective. Questions were asked on their motivation and knowledge about the candidate they voted for in the election so as to take note of the factors behind voting. Their responses prove insignificant participation in terms of quality. Women are not generally aware about the consequences of their votes, especially those women living in the rural areas lack political awareness.

With regards to the participation of women in electioneering and campaigning, the data implies that Khasi women do participate sometimes, while the Garo women hardly participate in electioneering and campaigning and over all the participation of women in election campaign and participation in Socio-economic and political issues are comparatively low and it is rated as  $0.97 < 1$  score. Further, the study reveal that women have very low political affiliation, Mean = 0.97 and comparatively, Garo women have less political affiliation than the Khasi women (Khasi  $M=1.09$  and Garo  $M=0.77$ ). Interestingly, only 6.70 percent of women participate as office bearer, 21.53 percent participates as party members, while 33.08 percent remains as apolitical groups. Data show that there is a gap in comparison to percentage of voter turns out during election and the political affiliation as office bearers. In all the above mentioned areas of political activity the Khasi women are found to participate slightly higher than the Garo women. With regard to political mobilisation, Khasi women are found to have higher participation in political mobilization than the Garo women. Khasi  $M=0.90 >$  Garo  $M=0.52$ . Their participation however varies with the types of political mobilization. Women's participation in political rally is very low; Mean= 0.79 (Garo  $M=0.47 <$  Khasi  $M=0.98$ ). Data clearly show the insignificant participation of women in political rally in both the communities even though the Khasi women are found to have slightly higher degree of participation. Women have least participation in giving donations to political parties and candidates: Mean= 0.60 (Garo  $M=0.34 <$  Khasi  $M=0.61$ ). Donation to political parties and candidates is not a common form of political participation for women in Meghalaya.

Political communication is understood as formal communication and informal communication with the political leaders and political party representatives. Data reveal that hardly women communicate with the political leaders, Mean=0.60 (Khasi  $M=0.69$  and Garo  $M= 0.44$ . Formal communication, Mean=0.56; Informal communication, Mean=0.63. When asked about the reasons behind it, normally, men communicate with the politicians in case of



any requirements, especially on issues concerning the village or locality at large. This is because the family is generally represented by the husband, father or brother; and women do not discuss with the political leaders. Matters relating the village are discussed or communicated to the candidates by the headman of the village.

In view of the above analysis on the participation of women in the various modes of political participation, the data reveal the insignificant participation of women. On the other hand, corresponding to the reports of the Meghalaya Election Commissioner Department, there is a positive participation of women as voters in the study area. Generally women do not miss voting. The research study found out that mere act of voting does not imply the active participation of women as voters. The reasons that they gave for their act of voting clearly determine their political behaviour and the lack of political awareness among the women folks.

Majority of the women in rural areas has no political reasons and they have no awareness about the leaders or political party that they voted in different elections. Their political awareness has been less than 2(score) which implies that they know very little (0=not at all, 1= little, 2 = well, 3= very well). They know very little about their political leaders, Mean=1.28 score (Khasi  $M=1.35 > \text{Garo } M= 1.17$ ), political parties, Mean=1.11score (Garo  $M=1.01 < \text{Khasi } M=1.17$ ) and their fundamental rights, Mean=0.80 (Khasi  $M=0.94 > \text{Garo } M=0.56$ ). In fact, political awareness is one of the important criteria that the electorates need to have when they exercise their voting rights. The reason that Khasi women have more political awareness than the Garo women is mostly because of the educational factor. In fact the literacy rate of the Khasi women is higher than the Garo women. According to the 2001 Census the percentage of Khasi women literacy rate is 67 percent and the Garo women is 47 percent only.

Karl Pearson's Coefficient Correlation analysis further elucidates the inter-relatedness between the various variables and the various modes of political participation under the present study. There is a direct relationship between education, household income and exposure to mass media on the political awareness of the respondents. The study depicts that higher the education, higher family income and higher exposure to mass media lead to higher political awareness of the respondents. On the contrary, family income has no direct impact on the political participation of women. Some of the demographic characteristics of the respondents such as age and family income are the two independent variables that have effect on the political participation, which is a dependent variable. Age has direct impact on some aspects of political participation of women, that is, on election campaign, political rally and protest, demonstrations, political party meetings and communication with political leaders. The study reveals that the lower the age the lower is the participation of women in those aspects and vice versa. However, it has no positive impact on the political affiliation of women. On the other hand education has a significant impact on political affiliation and political communication of women in Meghalaya. The study demonstrates that those who have political affiliations are mostly educated women. Low level of education results in low level of political affiliation. It is also a fact that illiterate women generally considered themselves unfit to affiliate and engage in any political office and they have no interest to join politics. It is also a fact that illiterate women stay away from any direct or indirect communication with political leaders. Even when situation compels, they generally depend on some literate people to help them with the matter.

The study broadly classified two agents of political socialization namely, mass media and interpersonal communication and their impact on the political attitudes and political behaviour of the women in joining politics. Mass media includes public meetings, radio (local and national, local or English channel) television local and national (local or English channel),

posters, leaflets, banners, films (English and local language) and internet. Interpersonal media includes information about politics from friends, neighbors, family members, political party workers, and relatives, headman of the locality, church organizations and other organizations. The study found out that women are more exposed to inter personal-media than mass media. Women received more information from interpersonal communication than mass media with the mean score of  $1.63 > 0.27$ . Comparatively, Khasi women are more exposed to interpersonal media than the Garo women with the Total Mean Score of the Khasi =  $1.76 > \text{Garo} = 1.42$ . Thus, the findings of the research suggest that women are more exposed to interpersonal media mainly due to two factors besides other personal factors i.e., education and economic factor. Literacy is considered as the important criterion for selection of the field work area in the present study, with the intention to avoid bias in representing the most literate or most illiterate area. The data reveal that 22.97 percent of the respondents are illiterate. 8.61percent are literate without schooling which means that they only know how to read but without formal schooling, 21.05percent are below primary level, 15.31percent studied up to secondary school, 13.88percent up to higher secondary school and graduate 5.74percent, post graduate 1.44percent only.

Comparatively, Khasi women are more educated than the Garo Women as 40.51 percent of the Garo respondents are illiterate while 12.31 percent of Khasi are illiterate. This shows the lack of education of the respondents. Secondly, economic status of the respondents is considered as another factor. First, respondents' occupation is considered essential for the measurement of economic status. Data indicate that 34.84 percent of the respondents depend on agriculture as their main occupation, 19.62percent are casual labour, 15.79percent are doing business, only 2.87percent are getting regular salaries whereas 19.62percent remains at home as housewife without any earning. Another area of economic status concerned the husbands' occupation. 27.75percent depends on agriculture, 21.05percent as casual labour, 16.27 percent are doing business, 9.09 percent are having regular salary, 5.74percent

can't work either due to illness or old age and others who don't fall under the above category is only 0.96percent only. The third criteria of measuring the economic status is the family monthly income with 28.23percent are below Rs. 1000, 35.89 percent of the respondents family income is below Rs. 3000,16.27percent are getting approximately Rs. 5000 monthly,7.66 percent are getting up to Rs. 15,000 per month and only 2.39percent are those who are getting Rs. 15000 and above. Looking at the type of occupation of husbands and wives, the total monthly family income, clearly shows the low economic status of the family. No doubt, mass media is one of the important channels for political awareness of women but they are largely influenced by interpersonal communication due to lack of educational level and poor family background. In fact, food for sustenance is their main concern than any other entertainments and politics. Inter-personal communication has a positive impact on the political participation of women in Meghalaya as information about politics is obtained through communication with other people only

Lastly, an important finding of the study was the direct relationship between political awareness and political participation except voting. In fact, the higher the political awareness the higher is the political participation of women. The low participation of women in Meghalaya is because of their low political awareness. The reason that political awareness has no bearing on the voting behaviour of women in Meghalaya is due to the fact that generally women involved in voting activity have by and large, no political awareness or knowledge about the candidate that they vote. Karl Pearson's correlations analysis shows that perceived effects on politics on their life which reflect the political attitudes of the respondents have significant effect on political affiliation, electioneering and campaigning, and political communication. However, with regard to voting it is not so. Those who believed that politics has an effect on their lives have more inclination with political parties or political leaders and their participation in election campaign is more. Those who believed that politics has nothing to do with their lives and those who have negative attitudes towards politics have no interest to participate in politics.

Overall correlation analysis provides us with a clear understanding about the relationship between the various variables, such as age, education, family income and its significant impact on political awareness, political attitudes and political affiliation of the women in Meghalaya. Similarly, political awareness and political efficacy have positive impact on their political affiliation, which ultimately has an effect on the political participation of women in Meghalaya. It also signifies the existence of dependent and independent variables. Age and family income are two independent variables that have effect on the political participation, which is a dependent variable. Thus, the above analysis helps us to know about the determinants of political participation at the lower level other than those by contesting elections at the higher level.

The theoretical implication of the present study on political participation of women in Meghalaya provides us a clear understanding about why political participation of women matters and to what extent. Liberal democratic perspective is based on the concept of gender equality. Contemporary government and politics attempt to achieve economic and political stability, reliability and continuity. The effectiveness and continuity of any democratic government largely deepens the above goals. Political participation by both the genders is seen as an important element towards the growth of an individual intellectuality. The constitutions of India recognized the significance of the freedom of thoughts and expression and the absence of discrimination based on sex, caste creed etc. as such, it guarantee individual freedom through exchange of thoughts and ideologies, discussions and actions at the practical level. It is thus more than fulfilling the basic standards of democracy by enhancement of human development constructively. On the other hand, participation without being aware about the outcome is destructive in nature. It thus largely reflects the significance to participate and the reason to participate.

Further, the theoretical implication of the present research is to examine an inclusive form of political participation. It laid emphasis on the participation of women more than representation. The study on the political participation of

women from quantitative and qualitative perspectives provides a clear picture of women's participation other than those of representation. Representation of quantity explain the extent of participation of women in terms of numbers and the qualitative participation concerns the value effect of such participation which are of equal importance. It requires both participation and political knowledge in order to have a better form of political system and better standards of living. Participation of the citizen is thus important at different stages from the thought of choosing the representatives at the common level (as voters), political party members, participation in electoral campaign, participation in protest and agitations and as well as participation in decision making bodies.

### **8.3 Factors that hinder political participation of women**

In view of the above, the study sought to understand the factors that contribute towards low participation of women in politics. Some of those factors are discussed here below.

First, customs and traditions played a very important role in the political culture of women in Meghalaya. The practice of not allowing women to participate in the traditional political institutions since time immemorial greatly contributes to the manner of participation of women in political activity. Comparatively, men have more knowledge about the political affairs and administration as they were trained by being member of such political institutions. For them, it is made compulsory to attend such assembly.

Though the traditional political institutions of the Khasis and the Garos were having a kind of self governing institutions, women were excluded from such institutions. Women therefore have least knowledge about the political affairs and it is a new environment for them to be in political activity of the modern political institutions. Politics and administration were better known as the assembly of the adult males. The values and leadership training that the male members gained in the traditional political institutions left out women at a

disadvantage position with regard to political activity. The exclusion of women from participation in such traditional institutions makes them to lag behind in political experiences and knowledge than their male counter parts.

Secondly, the psychological factor that has its roots in the cultural beliefs that is reflected in the tenets such as “when a hen crows the world will come to an end”. The phrase refers to women who take the position of a decision maker or in a position to speak or control and she is compared to a hen that crows. Another saying like “The world will come to an end” means their belief that the world one day will come to an end and that would be when women take up the political position like men. The saying further reveals that it is not normal for a woman to take up the role of men in politics. The analogy of “*ka kynthai ka khynnah*” in Khasi language refers to the inferior attitude about the position of women as that of the infants. In both the Khasi and Garo communities’ women were considered as secondary in taking major decisions. The political culture of today has its roots in the traditional culture of the society as a result of longstanding usages and practices. Such beliefs have thus adverse effect on the political attitudes of both men and women that discourages women to come forward as political leaders.

Thirdly, the modern political institutions such as political parties and government in Meghalaya do not seriously recognize the need for women representation in decision making bodies. Though 33 percent reservation of seats in various Panchayats has greatly increased women representation in such bodies, but no alternative so far has been made under the Six Scheduled areas to increase women’s participation in such bodies through reservation. There is a sense of indifference among the civil society groups in Meghalaya to transmit awareness in this matter. The modern society too is not yet ready to endorse active participation of women in politics in Meghalaya.

Fourthly, education has a direct and positive impact on the political awareness and political participation of women; it is thus one of the important

factors that hinder the political participation of women. Women in the rural areas are mostly illiterate which makes them to have less exposure to the outside world and the political environment. It thus enables them to be content with their role in the family and left the political affairs to their male members only. Further, the study also reveals that lack of political awareness and political efficacy has a negative impact on the political affiliation of women in Meghalaya. It generally discouraged them to join politics and they have no confidence on themselves.

Fifthly, lack of political will on the part of the women themselves is another factor. They are pre-occupied with the household chores and family responsibility, and considered politics to be the area of men and people who have free time. This is also partly because of the game of power that wipes out the trust and confidence of the political community on any of the political leaders. It often resulted in political instability and corrupt practices that have become a part of the Indian modern political institutions in general and in Meghalaya in particular. Women generally are not willing to join politics as they considered it dirty.

To sum up, the matrilineal system that is followed by the Khasi and Garo communities creates a different outlook about the status of the women in Meghalaya. The laws of inheritance of property, and the lineage system favour women and that make them to have better positions than women in a patriarchal society. Undoubtedly such practices enable them to be free from dowry system or any form of bride price, *purdah* system and *sati* system which are found to be common in other parts of India. However, the social evil that greatly affects women has been in a different form in Meghalaya. The women today especially those who live in the rural areas suffer from broken marriages due to drunkard husbands that generally lead to domestic violence. Meghalaya stood second in North East with regard to rape cases, and these are some of the social issues that greatly impinge on the women in Meghalaya. In fact, the ground reality is that like women in other parts of the country women in



Meghalaya are powerless and men are the heads of the family as well as administrative set up.

The findings of the study provide us some implications for the reforms of the democratic institutions in order to make it more democratic. Women in Meghalaya do not need liberation but there is a need of humanizing the existing system. The concept of women empowerment should not be confused with the idea of empowering women over men but adopting the concept of gender equality in a better way. Through the research study it is noted that women in the traditional society did not receive any political training as they were not allowed even to be an observer in the meetings of men. They had to confine themselves to the household chores besides helping their husbands in the field. Further, until recently women are still guided by the traditional mindset against women that also discouraged women to be politically active. Though developmental opportunities have helped the educated women to have exposure to the outside world and politics, but their degree of participation in politics is very insignificant.

In fact the significance of the present study identifies the relatedness between different variables that added up to the low participation of women in politics not only in terms of quantity but it adversely affect the quality of participation as well. The reluctance of women to come forward and join politics is not the problem of discrimination today but rather lack of political awareness, lack of confidence and lack of support from the social and political community which include both the genders. A changed political culture that may include equal participation of both men and women as rational actors is the need of the hour. Modern political institutions should provide ample opportunity to bridge the widening gap between men and women for political participation. In turn, it would link the gap between the theory and practice of the democratic ideals.

## **8.4 Suggestions**

As a result of the research conducted the researcher offers a few suggestions for the future research in the field, for the policy makers, the civil society groups and the social workers that may help to address some of the women issues.

### **Suggestions for the future research on women in Meghalaya**

- ✚ Future research on women in Meghalaya should focus on the different sub-tribes and Garos. Empirical research should be conducted on the qualitative political behaviour of both women and men in rural and urban areas. This will give a better understanding about the political participation and role performance of Khasis and Garos in Meghalaya.
- ✚ As crime against women and domestic violence is rising at an alarming rate in Meghalaya, a research may be conducted about the cause of problems in both rural and urban areas.
- ✚ A research may be conducted on the laws of inheritance and its impact on the economic life of women in Meghalaya and to what extent it empowers the one who inherits the property. A study may also be included regarding the role of the male members in managing such affairs today.

### **Suggestions for the policy makers regarding the problem faced by the women in Meghalaya**

- ✚ Through the research conducted, the study has identified lack of education as one of the important factors that led to the low participation of women in Meghalaya. Therefore setting up of good government schools in the rural areas with qualified teachers and affordable fees for quality education for women in Meghalaya is important.

- The research also identifies lack of political awareness among the women as one of the factors that led to low political participation of women. The policy makers should take up seriously about bringing development in the rural areas. Awareness about politics and women issues has to be included in the syllabus and curriculum of the lower primary and upper primary school to sensitize children about women issues. Further, awareness through attractive posters, banners in the language which could be understood by the people of particular area is needed.
- The mass media which is widely used by the people of any particular area has to be regularly utilised to take up women issues in a greater way. It may be through radio talks or movies or television programme or drama that may enhance the political awareness. It should be in the language understood by the people.
- The setting up of Centre for women studies in the North Eastern Hills University which is the only central university in the state is necessary to address the complicated problems faced by the women
- The Meghalaya State Women Commission should be an independent agency without any political interference so as to ensure transparency and efficiency.

**Suggestions to the Social workers, civil society groups and the community in general**

- In view of the social evil that strongly affects the life of women in such a matrilineal society, the social workers, civil society groups should be proactive to address the problems faced by women.
- There should be a counseling centre for the women who faced domestic violence and any other problems. Such centre should be run by women

themselves. The problems with those who have problems with their husbands are that these women usually do not want to take up to the police, as they considered it to be private matters. The cases that the State Women Commission records are generally those which they had registered with the police. Therefore family counseling would be more effective in this matter.

- ✚ Broken marriages are one of the problems that women face today in Meghalaya. Compulsory registration of marriage has to be enforced to combat such social evils.
- ✚ The traditional political institutions which continue to exist till today should include women as executive members in their meetings. Though few localities in Shillong allowed women representatives to attend the khasi *dorbar* but majority of the *dorbar* still excludes women. This may enhance the participation of women in the decision making bodies.
- ✚ The setting up of the women organizations in different locality should be encouraged to mobilize the women folk.
- ✚ The civil society organisation should have awareness programmes about the low participation of women in politics and its impact.
- ✚ National and regional political parties should activate the women wings sincerely to encourage political participation of women and to give them training to be political leaders.
- ✚ Inheritance of ancestral property has to be cautiously given to any daughter who is capable to look after parents rather than imposing on the youngest daughter.