

Chapter - VI

Conclusion

The conclusion has been drawn from the analysis of the data in the previous chapters.

The first chapter makes an attempt at a conceptual understanding of the concept of public space along with a detailed understanding of the same in relation to women. The concept of public space is understood in different manner by different social theorists. An emphasis was made of Jurgen Habermas Nancy Fraser, J. Hartley and P. Howell, Craig Calhoun, who have dwelt extensively on the concept of public space. The chapter includes a detail discussion on the various ways in which the concept has been understood, specifically by the feminist scholars. The feminist scholars like Joan Landes, Geoff Eley and Hannah Arendt. The critical point emphasized by these scholars is one that of exclusion of women from the public spaces. These public spaces are argued to be political centers where decisions on public affairs are being made, like the government agencies, parliaments and courts. Discussion which follows in this chapter is on the utility of the public space, The Assam Legislative Assembly, in the context of the study through the act of political representation by women of the state. Issues raised in the chapter includes women's nature of women's presence in the space, what do the space entail in general and for women in particular and how women negotiate their issues in spaces as this. Besides, these the most important question of the implication of the presence of women in such spaces is also discussed. Because of dominant idea of women's interest being 'private' a detail understanding of the issues discussed in this public space is analyzed. The dichotomy of the public and the private is also analyzed to investigate the problem under study. One of the most important observations which can be concluded from the chapter is that the public space of the Assam State Legislative Assembly is a gendered space not only in terms of the 'presence' of women in the space but also in terms of the issues on women. Issues of 'general' nature have been found to

be more in discussion than the ‘women’s’ issues. The presence of women in comparison to the total strength of the House is considerably low. The limited presence of women in the space can be said to be more of ‘symbolic’ in nature without showing much changes to be brought in for women in the state. This has reinforced the idea that the ‘public spaces’ are gendered.

The second chapter begins with a brief understanding of the concept of representation and links with women and their issues. The concept of representation is itself vexed and when it comes to understanding of representation of women it becomes all the more complex. The chapter attempts to analyse the concept of women’s representation in public spaces like the legislature. The two important perspectives through which political representation of women is seen to be understood by the gender sensitive literature is through its qualitative (referring to the representation of women’s interest and policy processes and outcomes) and quantitative content of representation (meaning the number of women in elected bodies, political parties and decision making positions). The multidimensional concept of women’s representation brings in a number of questions as like what women representatives are to represent? Do women representatives represent ‘women’s issues’ or not? In relation to the above issues, another pertinent question is the role of the various agencies which like the political parties in a party based system as like India where they form one of the most important modes of expressing a ‘common concern’. As the locale of our study is Assam, the role of the major national political party, the Congress in this aspect of representation is thoroughly analyzed in this chapter. The chapter includes the analysis of the party’s role on the question of women through its Constitution, the Constitution of the women’s wings, the Assam Pradesh Mahila Congress Committee and the election manifestos of the elections conducted under the period of study. The role of the women representatives in the Assembly is attempted to be understood through an analysis of the

issues that the women representatives take part in. The issues have been identified into the general, which includes the issues concerning the entire state, while the issues concerning women have been categorised as women's issues. These together along with an in depth interview with the women representatives demonstrated the kind of representation that is at work. The study further attempted to understand gate keeping role of the party in women's representation. The study again attempted to understand the co-relation between the socio economic status of the women and the party's role in representation. The study suggested a few findings. The first is the performance of the party on women's representation in the Legislative Assembly which takes a leap, if a comparison is to be made between the Congress and the other parties like the AGP or the Communist Parties. The party since the days of Independence has been able to not only field considerable number of women but also make them win in the elections. But the number of women representatives in comparison to the strength of the Assembly has been very low. Secondly, within the socio economic factor, the factor of family linkage and occupation precedes, followed by caste and education. On the number of issues initiated and discussed by the women members during the rule of the Congress party, it is seen that it has been extremely less. Similarly, if a comparison is to be made with the general issues with that of the women's issue and women's participation on it, the number is even lesser. But if we undertake an analysis of only the women' issues raised and the comparative participation of women in those limited questions, the participation has been positive. The minimal participation of women during the party's role as opposition too remained the same. Similarly, no co-relation has been seen with the number of women in the Assembly and the support of women's issues. Even when under the period the number of women was on a rise, there has been no co relative increase in the number of women's issues. Therefore, what can be found is that under the Congress party, the kind of representation that the women representative confirms is

symbolic in nature. There have been no result which could indicate that the women representatives had any substantial role to play in matters concerning women.

The third chapter explores the role of the Communist parties- the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) in giving representation to women in Assam Legislative Assembly. The chapter begins with an analysis of the question of women through the Marxist perspective. A unified understanding of Marxism and Feminism was fraught with difficulties. The larger question found was the still persistent unchanged nature of the ideology when it comes to women. The following discussion entailed a detailed description of the history of the communist parties in the state. The study was conducted primarily to understand the role of the communist parties in the issue of women's representation. For the purpose of the study, analysis has been based on the Statistical Report of the Election Commission, the election manifestos of both the parties, the Constitution of the parties, the Constitution of the mass based independent women's organisations, The Asom Mahila Sangha and the Gonotantrik Mahila Samiti, that work in collaboration with the parties. The study found that the party could not send any women representatives to the State Assembly. Yet, the role of the parties has been undertaken for analyzing such a situation. The senior women leaders of both the parties who also are also members of the women's organisations have been interviewed for analyzing the role of these women even inside the party. The activities of both the parties under the period of study have been dealt in depth. The findings of the study found that the role of the party though has not been successful at the question of women's representation, yet has been the party which has aimed for the improving the condition of the women, especially the downtrodden. The role of the parties as opposition in the state has been seen to be very constructive. Another important finding has been that success of the political parties, the communist parties in the context of the study of the chapter, is crucial factor for making

women's political representation a reality. If the parties fail to acquire the seats in the Assembly, it even fails to implement its ideology, goals and objectives. With the parties failing in the electoral battles, the question of women's issues has been relegated to the back. This brought in the question of the women issue getting subsumed in the 'larger' issue of electoral battle. In spite of the active role played by the women's organisations of the parties, the link could not be established between the same and women's political representation. The activities of the party and the women's organisation have been found to be one of the most watchful so far the issues of women and otherwise are concerned. But the realisation of the greater goal of socialism which is supposed to have included the issue of emancipation of women did not feature. The issue of political representation was found to be confined to the discussions carried out inside the party or within the women's organisations. Attempt was made to understand the working of the party which claimed to be democratically based. But it was found that even within the party hierarchy, there was almost negligible presence of women. The linkage of the leftist ideology with its emphasis on establishing an egalitarian order could not be found with its activities. Another aspect which could be seen from the study is the integral connection between discussing women's issues and the adoption of the same by the party as its agenda.

The fourth chapter includes a detailed understanding of the role of the most important regional political party in Assam, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) towards the issue of women's representation in the Assam Legislative Assembly. The chapter begins with a brief discussion at understanding of the concept of regionalism and subsequently the growth of the regional political parties, in the country and primarily the AGP in Assam. The role of the party in the context of women for the act of political representation is understood with the help of the election manifestos of the party under the period of study, the Constitution of the party, the Constitution of the Women's wing

of the party, Asom Mahila Sangha and also the statistical report of the Election Commission. The chapter draws the genesis of the party from the days of the Assam Movement and what had been the role of women in it and even after the formation of the government. Along with the above, in depth interviews with the former women representatives of the party led to a bulk of information on the role of the party on women's political representation and also the role of women representatives in the space of the Assembly. It was found that the party has shown a static trend at facilitating women's representation. Since its first period from 1985 to 2006 the number of women from the party has not raised beyond four. Hence, a rigidity of the party is found to exist when it comes to promoting women for representation. The gate keeping role of the party has been found to be rigid. Besides, the fewer number of women from the party in the House, the role of these women members is seen to be not very noteworthy. An extremely circumscribed role of the women representatives is evident in supporting and facilitating women's discussion on women's issues. The findings suggest that gender has been one issue which the party has not been prioritizing, in spite of the given fact that women and children have been the most affected one during the party's rule. It is important to mention that in both the terms of the party in power, there were very rare discussions of women's issues while one can see the limited participation of women in the matters relating to the general issues. The interviews conducted suggested that the role of the party when it comes to women, even through its women's organisation is very slack. Therefore effectiveness of the representative capacity of the women representatives from the party in the Assembly has been extremely circumscribed without any substantive implications.

The fifth chapter undertakes an understanding of the effectiveness of the representative capacity of the women representatives through their participation in the deliberations on two major issues, having a profound influence in the social, political

and economic milieu of the state, the issues of language and the illegal migrants. The political scenario of Assam since independence has been characterized by some landmark happenings which had have contributed to the change of the entire socio-political future of the state since then. Of the major issues that informed the culture and politics of post-independence Assam, none perhaps acquired the kind of centrality that language did. The intertwining of language and immigration have been immensely crucial issues in the politics of Assam for almost two centuries now. As like any other movement, even the language problem saw the dynamic participation of the civil society comprising of students, intellectuals and even the ‘women’. Through a detailed analysis of the Legislative Debates, it has been found that these issues were seen to be a part of discussions in the Legislative Assembly, but certainly to a limited extent. More limited was the role of women representatives then and even later who were seen seemingly pulled back in discussing such issues. There was no participation seen from the women representatives on the issue from 1962-1972. While in the following years, the issue of language was discussed for few times and almost no women took part in such discussion. This shows clearly the acute ‘non participatory’ role of women representatives on issue of language and or on its related subject. Similar picture is seen on the participation of women representatives in case of the very critical issue of illegal migrants in the state. The illegal migrants issue was the pivotal issue for the Assam Movement which had seen extraordinary participation of women in the state. The issues of illegal migrants, the IMDT Act, implementation of Assam Accord, clashes based on ethnic and linguistic identity etc. were what the state faced leading to turmoil one after another leading to uncertainties. And it needs to be mentioned that women and children were the most affected of all. But there have been no such discussions on it in a thorough going manner. Therefore the major finding suggested is that issues as important as language and illegal migration which has serious implications in the

politics of the state is not been taken up by the women members. Nor any attempt is seen to be made on the same through a gender perspective. The women members can be said to have made their ‘presence’ without any substantial contribution for the women of the state.

The major findings of the study:

Through the theoretical study of the concept of public space, we can see that the space like the Assam Legislative Assembly is one of the most important public spaces so far as women’s symbolic representation is concerned. But it does not form the important space for or descriptive or substantive form of representation. The presence has not brought in any significant changes so far as formulating policies for women in concerned. It has been found that because of the inadequate discussion on women’s issues there has been no attempt being made to even legislate on matters relating to women. It is again found that this public space forms an inappropriate space for discussion of women’s issues. The issues discussed and deliberated are issues broad in nature, which are not ‘women issues’ in particular but issues of a particular constituency/area. This therefore shows that the state legislature as the public space is inadequate for women’s representation.

The role of the parties on the issue of women’s political representation is seen to be restricted not only in terms of ‘number’ but also in terms of discussion of women’s issues. Mention needs to be made of the dismal role played by the regional party, the AGP and the leftist parties. The aims and goals promised by the political parties has not come into practice. The study of the women’s wings of the parties indicated that there is no reciprocal relationship between the activities of these wings with the aspect of the women’s representation in the state. Even if the party has been active in its attempt to

address the various issues of women through the women's wing or the party activity, it did not materialise into larger action of facilitating women's political representation.

Another significant finding has been the role of the socio-economic factors of the women representatives which is found to facilitate their selection for running elections, by the political parties. The factors like the prior occupation of the women representatives which is mostly found to be from the social service followed by the factor of caste is found to have a profound influence. This finding again suggest that the women representatives' prior engagement with the public activities. Majority of women have been found to have been carried out some or other forms of activities which dealt with women. But again, this experience did not get translated into action through support of various issues. The percentage of women having a priori knowledge on the issues of the society through their social service is seen to have given them 'confidence' and the 'motivation' to be in politics.

The role of the independent women candidates who has outshined women from the political parties is noteworthy here. This can be said to be a significant finding of the study which goes against the prevailing central idea of the over emphasized role of the need of the political parties at being the platform or the driving force to bring into fore issues to be resolved in a party based electoral politics. The significant participation of the independent women candidates has brought in the question the relation between women political representation and the political parties. Though the number of independent women candidates under the period of study has been extremely less, yet the participation of these women candidates brought in again the much debated issue of number versus interest to be represented. The independent candidates though is found to be engaged actively in the discussion of the general issues What can be drawn from the interview with the independent candidates is the fact that there is no binding on these

candidates of the party which even evades the ‘problem’ of toeing the party lines when in confrontation with the party on certain issues. The major accusation of the feminist has been the rigid role of the political as gatekeepers and the basis of the rationale of playing down the role of the women representatives in the act of sharing power through the distribution of ‘weaker’ portfolios. This is now challenged by the overriding role of the independent women candidates to a considerable extent. The success of the independent women candidates can lead to a deeper analysis of the reasons for better performance of the independent women candidates than their counterparts who were from the political parties.

Another very significant finding has been the space being a ‘unifying’ platform for the women members. Though it has been found that the issues of women have been very few, yet the inter relation between the women members across parties is found while the business of the House is being conducted. This inter relationship is characterised by an attitude of co operation between the women members. It has also been found that the increase in the number of women members in the House facilitates a ‘comfortable’ environment for women members to carry out their business.

The number in the increase of the women representatives, as in case of the Congress party, has not led to an increase in the discussion of women’s issues. This indicates to the fact that even though women get represented to spaces as such, it cannot bring about any changes for women in the state. The bigger question of the effectiveness of women’s representation is at play again.