

CHAPTER - 2

GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Introduction

In this Chapter we have tried to provide a general perspective on gender and development through seven sections. The second section provides a global perspective on gender and development. The third section provides an Indian perspective on gender and development covering its economic and social dimensions under two sub-sections. The fourth section focuses on the gender and development dimension in Assam covering its economic, social and political dimensions under three separate sub-sections. The fifth section looks at gender disparities in Northeast India and the sixth section considers the specificities of Char areas relating to gender, community and development. The final section is the concluding section.

2.2 The Global Perspective

The United Nations since its emergence has been throwing lights on the question of women as it is committed to achieve the goal of equal rights for all men and women as proclaimed in the Charter and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Charter Preamble sets forth the principle of "the dignity and worth of human person" and of "equal rights of men and women" and lists in Article-I among the United Nations purposes and principles the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms without distinction as to sex. A number of measures designed to raise the status of women have originated from the Commission on the Status of Women, a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council, established by the Council in 1946. The functions of the Commission are:

“to prepare recommendations and reports to the Economic and Social Council on promoting women’s rights in political, economic, civil, social and educational fields. [to] make recommendations to the Council on urgent problems requiring immediate attention in the field of women’s rights with the object of implementing the principle that men and women shall have equal rights, and to develop proposals to give effect to such recommendations” (United Nations Publications: 1973). Though the Commission on the Status of Women adopted its own resolutions and recommended draft resolutions for adoption by the Economic and Social Council yet the United Nations (UN) held its first official conference on women in Mexico City in 1975 and the conference launched the UN decade for women (1976-85). It is said that because of women organizing worldwide that the UN has put women’s issues on its agenda (J. Ann Tickner: 2008). In 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) adopted by the UN General Assembly was the significant milestone regarding the question of women. We can witness second UN World Conference on Women in Copenhagen, Denmark. During the UN Decade for women (1976-85), womenfolk from both the North and the South took initiative in organizing themselves on global economic issues. Thus a network of Southern women known as Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN)¹ was established in 1984. DAWN is not only engaged in political advocacy. Using feminist knowledge, it also publishes analyses of the impact of global economic policy on Southern countries, focusing on Southern women (Ibid: 2008). In 1985, under the above circumstances, the UN conference was held in Nairobi, Kenya to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the UN Decade for women.

It is worthwhile to mention here that in the Nairobi Conference, the progressive women organizations have succeeded to raise the issue

of advancement of women's status along with their resource and political empowerment as primary objectives. Their method was to create political 'pressure' and also the advancement of women's status in legal way. It is also observed in the last part of 1980's that development-related Non-Governmental Organizations and Women Organizations not only participated regularly in the international political arena specially in the UN-sponsored conferences but also played significant role. The objectives of their movements were to achieve the recognition of Gender-related approach along with holding position in different States and also in getting position in international association with the initiative of Government for the rights of women. During this period largest group of women's organizations took birth. For example DAWN (Development Alternatives With Women for a New Era) as mentioned earlier and WEDO (Women's Environment and Development Organisation)²; they placed proposals and put pressures in Rio Conference of 1992 (Environment and Development), in Cairo Conference of 1994 (Environment and Population), in Copenhagen Conference of 1995 (Social Development) and in the Conference of Beijing, 1995 and it is noted that after the Beijing Conference of 1995 they were very much active in presenting proposals and creating pressure in international conferences (Sofi Charliye & Elen Riqmunch 2004, Translated from Bengali).

Pressure from women's groups was important in getting the United Nations to disaggregate its data, such as its quality of life indicators, by sex. The availability of data is important in getting issues on policy agendas. Adoption of the Gender Development Index (GDI)³ by the UN Human Development Programme in 1995 was an important step in helping to formulate policies to improve women's well-being and another important step towards gender equality was the adoption by

the UN and other international intergovernmental organizations of a policy called gender mainstreaming (J. Ann Tickner: 2008).

In the year 1996, Gender mainstreaming⁴ was adopted as official UN policy by the UN General Assembly and in the year 2000, Women 2000: emphasizing on Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st Century which is also known as 'Beijing + 5', was held at UN headquarters, New York, USA. Forty Ninth Session of United Nations was held in New York in 2005 to Review and Appraisal of the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing and Beijing + 5 and Commission on the Status of Women. All these efforts on the question of women from global perspective can be considered as significant achievements in order to formulate policies and programmes adopted by different national governments. District Human Development Report Bankura, 2006 has rightly observed thus:

"The debate on 'women and development' had begun to take shape in the decades of 1970s and 1980s (UN Decade for women 1975-85) and the issue came at the center stage in the international arena in 1995 because of the United Nation's Fourth International Conference of Women at Beijing as well as United Nations Social Summit Conference at Copenhagen in March in the year 1995. The central message which United Nations Development Project (UNDP) laid stress on its Human Development Report 1995 was "Human Development If not Engendered is Endangered." Accordingly UNDP's suggested construction of gender related development index (GDI) and gender empowerment measure (GEM) have been considered as the significant agenda of almost all the Governments". (District Human Development Report Bankura: 2007).

2.3.1 Indian Perspective

Though the Constitution of India has provided certain special privileges for the women since its first adoption in the Parliament incorporating some articles contained in the chapter of Fundamental Rights⁵ and Directive Principles of State policy⁶ together with adopting various plans and programmes in order to improve the socio-economic and political status of women-folk yet it can be stated from the observation of various World Development Reports and United Nations Development Project Reports that the Gender Development Index and Gender Empowerment Measure of our country is not at all satisfactory in comparison to other developed and developing countries. For instance, as per UNDP-Human Development Report 2005 India's Human Development Index rank is 127 out of 177 countries and so far as Gender related Development Index is concerned she ranks 96 out of 140 countries. According to UNDP Human Development Report 2007/2008 India ranks 128 out of 177 countries and as far as Gender related Development Index is concerned India ranks 113 out of 157 countries and areas.

Recently, to mark the International Women's Day, the Govt. of India and the UNDP launched summary of a Report that uses India-Specific gender-related development indices and estimate the country's score card on gender equality.

Titled, "Gendering Human Development Indices: Recasting the Gender Development Index and the Gender Empowerment Measure for India", the report by the Ministry of Women and Child Development recasts the global gender-related indices first introduced by UNDP globally in 1995, making its more relevant for India.

According to the report, the level of both human and gender-related development indices have gone up between 1996 and 2006 but

gender-based disparities continue to exist. While the estimated Human Development Index (HDI) increased from 0.584 in 1996 to 0.648 in 2006, the Gender Development Index (GDI) score for India has remained lower than the HDI score over the 10 – year period. GDI scores have increased from 0.568 in 1996 to 0.633 in 2006, implying that progress has been made. The report also ranks India's Union Territories (UT) and States in order of their respective HDI and GDI scores. The UT of Chandigarh has overtaken the Southern India State of Kerala to record the highest HDI and GDI scores in 2006 at 0.801 and 0.781, respectively. Kerala which had the highest score in 1996 came to second. The States with the consistently low achievement on both HDI and GDI are Bihar (lowest in the country), UP, MP, Rajasthan, Orissa. The States that accomplished the largest gains on HDI over the Decades were Uttarakhand and Jharkhand. These states also had the largest improvements in GDI.

The Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), which is intended to measure women's and men's ability to participate in economic and political life and their command over economic resources, was also calculated. The aggregate score for GEM for India was 0.413 in 1996 and 0.451 in 2006. Though this is higher than the GEM Scores for India estimated by the UNDP in 1998, the values attained still reflect the existence of sharp disparities low in gender empowerment. The score also reflect that women in India have particularly lower power over economic resources.

Though the Gender Development Index of India as per UNDP Human Development Reports is dismal yet it is equally true that a number of plans, programmes, schemes along with some Acts have been undertaken by the Government of India in order to improve the socio economic condition of womenfolk of the country as has been

accepted in The Vision of Ministry of Women and Child Development⁷ thus: The vision of Ministry of Women and Child Development is “Ensuring overall survival, development and protection of women and children of the country to enable them to lead productive and wholesome lives as citizens.” The Ministry has evolved policies, plans of action, legislations, programmes and schemes for advancement of women and children and has been implementing these with the support of State Governments, other Government agencies and voluntary sector (India 2009, A Reference Annual: P. 992-993). According to D. Mukhopadhyaya (2006) from the First Five Year Plan the planning strategies on Women and children was changed from, ‘Welfare’ to ‘development’ to ‘empowerment’ and he has rightly observed that Eight Five Year Plan (1990-95) tried to ensure that ‘benefits of development from different sectors do not bypass women and special programmes are implemented to complement the general development programmes.’ If we look at Ninth Plan (1997-2002) we can observe two significant changes relating to women: One is ‘Empowerment of Women’ and another is ‘Women’s Component Plan’. It is noted that the ‘National Policy for Empowerment of Women’ was approved (2001) and ‘Women’s Component Plan’ attempted to convergence existing services, resources, infrastructure and manpower available in both women specific and woman related sectors. In the Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007) three Working Groups were formed: (a) Working Group on Empowerment of Women; (b) Working Group on Child Development and (c) Working Group on Improving Nutritional Status of Population with special Focus on Vulnerable Groups. The main recommendations of the Working Group on Empowerment of Women are as follows:

1. Impact or 'market driven forces' should relate the expectations of women.
2. Designing strategic investment plans to enhance social gains in terms of good health, education and capabilities for empowerment of women.
3. Step-up investment to social sectors and to focus on strategies to optimize the scarce public resources to increase gains for larger numbers of women and men.
4. The planning process for the development of women has evolved through 'welfare' to 'development' to 'empowerment' to 'participation'. But even then gender discrimination is big challenge.
5. Life expectancy of women, literacy and representation in the local self-governing institutions have increased. But it can be strengthened by grass roots level leadership from among women.
6. The 'Approach to the Tenth Five Year Plan for the development of women should be based on the prescriptions of the National Policy' for Empowerment of Women.
7. The Tenth Plan on women should essentially be in the nature of an Action Plan and should set certain measurable goals in different social sectors.
8. The development of women should be in accordance to the prescriptions of the National Policy for Empowerment of Women.
9. The Tenth Plan should set certain measurable goals in different social sectors in tune with the National Policies in the related fields. (Ibid:2006)

2.3.2. Schemes relating to economic empowerment of women

In consistent with various plans a number of Schemes for the development and advancement of women are in vogue in the country. One of the significant Economic Empowerment Schemes for women is STEP which means Support to Training and Employment Programme for women (STEP). It was launched as a Central Sector Scheme in 1987. It has made a significant impact on women in traditional sectors by upgrading skills and providing employment on project basis by mobilizing them into viable groups, arranging for market linkages, support services and access to credit and the Scheme covers traditional sectors of employment such as agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Dairying, Fisheries, Handlooms, Handicrafts, Khadi and Village Industries and Sericulture. The scheme is being implemented through Public Sector Organizations, State Corporations, DRDAs (District Rural Development Agencies) Co-operatives, Federations and registered Voluntary Organizations, which have been in existence for a minimum period of three years (India A Reference Annual, 2009).

Another important integrated scheme, which has been considered as Economic Empowerment Scheme for the development and empowerment of women is Swayamsidha. The long-term objective of the scheme is to achieve all round empowerment of women, especially, socially and economically, by ensuring their direct access to, and control over, resources through a sustained process of mobilization and convergence of all the on-going sectoral programmes. The immediate objectives are establishment of self-help groups, creation of confidence and awareness among members of Self-Help groups regarding the status, health, nutrition and education of women, sanitation and hygiene, legal right etc. strengthening the savings habit of rural women and their control over economic resources, improving

access to micro-credit, involving women in local planning and convergence of services of Ministry of Women and Child Development and other departments (Ibid: 2009). The scheme was launched in 2001-02 covering 650 blocks in the country including 238 IMY blocks in 335 districts and each block consists of 100 Self-Help groups in 31 States/Union Territories. The programme is being implemented and SHGs are formed by the ICDS machinery in most of the states (Ibid: 2009). Over 69,156 Women's Self-Help groups have been formed under the scheme covering 10.02 Lakh women members. An amount of Rs. 149.87 crores have been saved by SHGS formed under the scheme 64,935 SHGs have accounts in banks 35,042 SHGs (80%) constituting over 6.17 Lakh women are engaged in Income Generation Activities (IGA). 42,395 SHGs (65%) have created over 4339 community assets. The scheme has come to an end on 31.3.2008 (Ibid 994).

2.3.3. Schemes Relating to Social Empowerment of Women

A number of schemes relating to social empowerment of womenfolk are going on in the country. The Swadhar Scheme was launched in 2001-02 as a Central Sector Scheme for providing holistic and integrated services to women in difficult circumstances, such as destitute widows deserted by their families in religious places like Vrindaban and Kashi, women prisoners released from jail and without family support; women survivors of natural disasters who have been rendered homeless and are without any social and economic support etc.

Another scheme is short-stay Homes which was launched in the year 1969 with the objective to protect and rehabilitate those women and girls who are facing social, economic and emotional problems due to family stress, social ostracism, moral danger etc. Family counseling centre is another scheme, which has been working since 1984, which

seek to provide preventive and rehabilitative services to women and children who are victims of atrocities and family mal-adjustments. Condensed courses of Education of women and Awareness Generation Programme for Rural and poor women are other two significant schemes, which are covered by social Empowerment schemes. Condensed courses of Education of women is the scheme which aims at facilitating social and economic empowerment of women and providing them with education and relevant skills and the scheme is designed to help dropouts and failed candidates to complete their school education and the beneficiaries under the scheme is women of the age of 15 years and above. Awareness Generation Programme for Rural and poor women is the scheme which seeks to create awareness in the community on issues relating to status, rights and problems of women. Registered voluntary organizations eligible to apply under the scheme (Ibid: 2009)

Apart from this, a number of initiatives have been taken for the development of women. One of such initiatives is prevention of Trafficking in women and children. As a follow up action, the Ministry of Woman and Child Development has formulated a National Plan of Action to combat Trafficking and commercial sexual Exploitation of women and children in 1998, with the objective to mainstream and reintegrate the women and child victims of commercial sexual exploitation in society. The Ministry has issued guidelines to the states for the implementation of National Plan of Action and as a result Central and State Advisory committees have been formed and the ministry of WCD (Women and Child Development) has taken comprehensive approach to cover "Trafficking in persons" for any purpose. Today an integrated plan of action to prevent and combat Human Trafficking with special focus on children and woman is on

going plan and programme of the Ministry of Women and Child Development.

A new scheme 'Ujjawala' – a comprehensive scheme for Prevention of Trafficking with five specific components- Prevention, Rescue, Rehabilitation, Reintegration and Repatriation of victims of Trafficking was launched on 4th December 2007 (Ibid: 2009).

Gender Budgeting is one of the significant initiatives taken by the Ministry of Women and Child Development. In fact, Gender Budgeting is the application of gender mainstreaming in the budgetary process and it encompasses incorporating a gender perspective at all levels and stages of the budgetary process and paves the way to translating gender commitments to budgetary commitments and carrying out on assessment of the budget to establish its gender differential impact.

2.4.1. Gender Profile of Assam:

It is believed that the progress of a community is judged by the position/status of females in society. No region/area can develop if the females are neglected. In population growth control strategy, it is the female status and female education, which are considered as crucial. It is said that they are a neglected lot and suffer in traditional society a lower status. This has greatly contributed to low female literacy rates, early marriage, high fertility, high infant mortality, high maternal mortality and declining sex ratio. In rural areas females are usually discriminated from the birth as in a traditional family a boy is preferred. Malnourishment of a girl child is another glaring instance of female negligence. Lack of health-care and proper nutrition are due to an extent of sex-specific discrimination. The neglect of female child may be due to economic and social factors such as dowry and bride price. Sex ratio is a good indicator of female status in society. Low sex ratio means lower status of women. The sex ratio – the number of women per

1,000 men in the country's population has been very low throughout the 20th century, reaching a level of 935 per 1000 – 2001. Thus, it has developed the concept of “missing” women. It has also served to focus attention on certain basic social, economic and cultural dimensions in Indian society, which perpetuate and perhaps even deepen the discrimination against women (K. Nagraj: 1991). This decline in the sex ratio is a matter of concern. The socio-economic discrimination against women in society is to be highlighted systematically if we analyze the demography of a particular society.

2.4.2. Demographic Profile of Assam with special reference to Gender

North East India comprises Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Manipur, Maghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura. With a geographical area of 78,438 sq.kms, Assam accounts for about 2.4 percent of the country's total geographical area. Major portion of the population of the state lives in the lush and verdant valleys of its two major river systems in the twenty-two districts of the Brahmaputra valley and the three districts of Barak valley. Less densely populated are the two hill districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar hills, set in the low-lying hills that separate the two valleys. For administrative and revenue purposes, the state has 27 districts including the newly created Kamrup urban district and four districts under the newly created Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) areas viz. Kokrajhar, Baksa, Chirang and Udalguri (Economic Survey; Assam 2004-05).

According to the census of India, 2001 the population of Assam stands at 2,66,55,528 of which 1,37,77,037 are males and 1,28,78,491 females which is shown in Table No. 1. The sex ratio of state's population like the country's population, defined as the number of per 1,000 males, has always been adverse to females. The sex ratio of

Assam is below than the all India ratio during 1901 to 2001 except 2001. The literacy rate of Assam as per census 2001 comes to 64.28 percent with 71.93 percent for males and 56.03 percent for females. It also indicates gender bias. Almost half of our women-folk are illiterate which also indicates the lower status of women.

The literacy rate of Assam which has been shown in Table No. 2 & 3 as per 2001 census is 64.28 percent which is also below the country's literacy rate though female's rate of literacy of Assam is slightly above the country's female's literacy rate. Assam ranks 14th in size of population among the states of India as per 2001 census, but the state ranks 18th in sex ratio and 24th in rate of literacy among the states of India.

The data obtained from the Sample Registration Bulletin published by the Registrar General of India depicts some idea about the trend in the birth and death rates and infant mortality rate in the state. Accordingly, in most of the years 1991 to 2002 birth rates, death rates and infant mortality rates were found to be higher in the state than that of the country as a whole although there is a trend of gradual declination. During the year 2006, the birth rates, death rates and infant mortality rates of Assam have been 24.6, 8.7 and 67 per mille as against 23.5, 7.5 and 57 per mille respectively at all India level. The Table No. 4 shows the birth, death and infant mortality rates of Assam and India from 1991-2006.

Table - 1

Assam: Demography and gender.

Item	Unit	1971	1981	1991	2001
Urban					
Population: Total	Lakh	13.27	20.47	24.88	33.88
Male	Lakh	7.59	11.58	13.54	18.04
Female	Lakh	5.68	8.89	11.34	15.84
Sex ratio	Female/1000males	749	768	837	878
Urbanization	Percentage	8.87	10.29	11.10	12.90
Birth rate	Per 1000 persons*	31.0	24.50	23.60	15.5**
Death rate	Per 1000 persons*	9.5	7.20	6.70	6.6**
Rural					
Population: Total	Lakh	136.31	178.50	199.27	232.48
Male	Lakh	71.26	93.10	103.04	119.83
Female	Lakh	65.04	85.40	96.22	112.65
Sex ratio	Female/1000males	912	917	933	940
Rural Population	Percentage	91.13	89.71	88.90	87.10
Birth rate	Per 1000 persons*	39.3	35.60	30.40	27.8**
Death rate	Per 1000 persons*	18.7	12.50	10.70	9.8**
Total Area (Assam)	000 Sq.km.	99.61	78.44	78.44	78.44
Population: Total	Lakh	149.58	198.97	224.14	266.38
Male	Lakh	78.85	104.67	116.58	137.87
Female	Lakh	70.72	94.29	107.56	128.50
Sex ratio	Females/1000males	896	900	922	935
Birth rate	Per 1000 persons*	38.5	34.70	29.50	26.8**
Death rate	Per 1000 persons*	17.8	12.10	10.20	9.5**

1. Source: CIME, 1997.

2. Statistical Handbook Assam: 2002

*3. Basic Statistics NER: 92

**4. Economic Survey, Assam: 2004-05

Table No. - 2
Population of Assam and India

Particulars	Unit	1991 Census		2001 Census	
		Assam	India	Assam	India
1. Population	Lakh	224	8463	266	10270
2. Sex- Ratio	Females per 1000 males	923	927	932	933
3. Literacy	Percent	52.89	52.21	64.28	65.38
4. Urban population	Percent	11.10	26.13	12.90	27.28
5. Rural Population	Percent	88.90	73.87	87.10	72.22

Source: Economic Survey, Assam, 2004-05

In the Table No. 2 a comparative study of population of Assam and India has been depicted depending on the Census data of 1991 and 2001. The total population of Assam in 1991 was 224 lakhs (22.4 M) while the total population in India was 8463 lakhs. (84.63 M). In 2001 the population of Assam has been increased to 266 lakhs (26.6 M) and population of India has been increased to 10270 lakhs (102.70 M) i.e. population of Assam during the last decade (1991 - 2001) has been increased by 18.92% whereas at the national level the population has been increased by 21.34%. Sex ratio of Assam was 923 in 1991 and with a little increase in 2001 were 932. The sex ratio at the all India level was 927 in 1991 and has been increased to 933 in 2001 Census. The literacy rate of Assam was a little high than the national literacy rate according to 1991 Census but in 2001 the national literacy rate has been increased to 65.38 while the literacy rate of Assam lies below at 64.28%. In Table No.3 it has also been shown that the rural-urban distribution of population in both the state and national level was unequal.

Table No. 3
Progress of Literacy: (Assam)
Literate Population

	Population (Lakh)				% of population			
	1971	1981	1991	2001	1971	1981	1991	2001
Urban: Total	7.79	X	16.98	25.91	67.02	X	79.39	85.76
Male	4.90	X	9.91	14.51	72.57	X	84.37	89.88
Female	2.89	X	7.06	11.40	59.35	X	73.32	81.02
Rural: Total	35.17	X	78.19	117.37	31.26	X	49.32	60.90
Male	24.43	X	48.36	68.74	41.10	X	58.66	69.02
Female	10.74	X	29.82	48.63	20.23	X	39.19	52.25
Total: (Assam)	42.96	X	95.16	143.28	34.60	X	52.89	64.28
Male	29.33	X	58.28	83.24	44.31	X	61.87	71.93
Female	13.63	X	36.89	60.03	23.52	X	43.03	56.03

Source: 1. Data of 1971, 1991 CIME, 1997; 2. Data of 2001; Basic Statistics of NER, 2002. In 1981 census was not held in Assam and hence literate population & rate of literacy could not be worked out.

Table No. - 4

Birth, Death and Infant Mortality Rates of Assam and India (Per Mille)

Year	Birth Rate		Death Rate		Infant Mortality Rate	
	Assam	India	Assam	India	Assam	India
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1991	30.9	29.5	11.5	9.8	81	80
1997	28.2	27.2	9.9	8.9	76	80
1998	27.9	26.5	10.0	9.0	76	72
1999	27.0	26.1*	9.7	8.7*	76	70
2000	26.9	25.8	9.6	8.5	75	68
2001	26.8	25.4	9.5	8.4	73	66
2002	26.6	25.0	9.2	8.1	70	63
2003	26.3	24.4	9.1	8.0	67	60
2004	25.1	24.1	8.8	7.5	66	58
2005	25.0	23.8	8.7	7.6	68	58
2006	24.6	23.5	8.7	7.5	67	57

* Excludes data for Jammu and Kashmir and Nagaland (Rural)

Source: Sample Registration Bulletin, R.G.I. New Delhi as quoted in Economic Survey Assam, 2007-08.

Table No. 4 shows differences between some of the important population statistics, (such as birth rate, death rate and infant mortality rate) of India and Assam since 1991. It can be seen from the table that all the indicators of population statistics are higher in Assam than the all India level. The birth rate of Assam in 1991 was 30.9 as compared to 29.5 of all India level. Through out all the years from 1991

to 2006 the birth rate of Assam was higher than the birth rate of India. It indicates that the people of Assam are less conscious about the family planning or there are some other reasons such as religious, lack of education etc. behind this difference between the national level birth rate and state level birth rate. The highest gap is calculated in the year 2003, which is from the table we also draw the same conclusion about death rate and also infant mortality rate of the state and the national level. The causes behind these differences are divergent. Lack of medical facilities, health programme for children, number of PHE are very low in the state. In the 1991 the death rate of Assam is 11.5 and it has come down to 8.7 i.e. only 2.8 percent in 15 years. According to 2006 economic survey of Assam the infant mortality rate is 67 whereas it is 57 at the all India level. Though infant mortality rate has been declined from 81 in the year 1991 to 67 in 2006 the rate is very high.

2.4.3. Economic Dimension

Apart from this, marginalization of women and Feminization of Poverty are the Central issues of women-related issues. This arises from the increasing proportion of women among the poor due to several factors. These factors are insecure land tenure, poor access to basic social needs like health and education and effects of various forms of discrimination against females. World Bank study entitled Gender and poverty in India (1991) documented the significant role of females in Indian Economy. It had to focus the close relationship between Gender and Poverty. Female labour force participation and their relative contribution to total family income are higher in house holds with lower economic status. The poorer the family, the more it depends on the earnings of its female members. Thus the economic productivity females are critical to households, which live below the poverty line. World Bank advocated for the creation of employment opportunities for

poor women and to increase the productivity of female workers particularly in the primary sector.

It also focused on the health nutrition and education status of females and drew links between these and their economic situations. If we analyze the data on mortality, morbidity and nutritional status we will be able to come to the conclusion that womenfolk of Assam have disadvantages at all stages of the life cycle. High female child mortality usually reflects a cultural preference for male child. The consequent lower literacy among women is both an outcome of their disadvantage and major contributor to its perpetuation. Preference for male child, higher female child mortality, lack of access to appropriate health care, low social and economic status, lack of access to schooling and low level of literacy, all contribute to the continuing high reproductive rates of our females.

Improving females work productivity is an essential element of any strategy to reduce their poverty. Changed perception of female economic value will change resource allocation in the families. Increasing female capacities to learn and earn will have a significant impact on family status and well being. Great investment to female literacy and skill development and health and right to reproductive needs will enable them to improve their productivity and thus lowering their poverty level. In this context the observation of Assam Human Development Report, 2003 is noteworthy regarding the position of women in Assam's society.

Assam Human Development Report – 2003 has rightly observed: “Through the ages, women have played an extremely important role in Assamese society. History is replete with tales of courage and of extraordinary achievement. Martyrs such as Kanaklata were at the forefront of the struggle for independence. In today's world, women

have attained levels of eminence and distinction, as educationists, doctors and technologists, contributing to the growth of the state, and to the strength and uniqueness of its social fabric. Contributing at work and at home women their status and their role –hold the key to the advancement of the state, its people and the economy.

There is, however, an uncomfortable incongruity. For women even today, asymmetry and inequity are unfortunately a fact of life. Despite their contribution, they continue to be severely disadvantaged, and even discriminated against. In most fields of professional endeavour, women have had to struggle to reach the top. In the process combating indifference, occasionally even obstruction and hostility. At the other end of the economic scale, women are deprived access to basic services, and relegated to subservient yet physically demanding roles. In this context the position of women in Assam is no different from that of women in other regions of the country. In fact, in some respects, women in Assam are even more disadvantaged.”

Though women’s participation in economic activity is significant yet it is a fact that the womenfolk cannot easily control the income. It is said that women’s labour burden has increased under the changed economic scenario yet it is equal true that this is not reflected in their share of the income. Women also get lower wages for corresponding work by men. Much of women’s labour is non waged since it is categorized as household labour , even when it is for market consumption and as a result of which women’s share of work is larger in most of the societies yet their share of income is lower. (AHDR: 2003)

Desai and Thakkar have rightly observed that the complexity of the issue of women’s work is such that even the census data does not capture the accurate rate of women’s work participation (Desai and Thakkar: 2001). Though we cannot come to conclusion regarding the

rate of women's accurate work participation with the help of census data yet we cannot summarily reject the data as these data may show some light on women's socio-economic status. Apart from this it can also indicate relating to the enhancement rate and decline rate of work participation, which will ultimately contribute to highlight the employment scenario of womenfolk. An analysis relating to women's work in Assam from a feminist perspective shows that invisibility of women is a reality. As work is defined in terms of activities performed for pay or profit so many activities that remain outside the domain of work for which women's work remains uncoun ted and unreflected in the Census (Ibid: 2001) at least prior to the 1991 Census. Methodological changes took place from the 1991 Census and the socially productive role of women and their contribution to the economy has been given a degree of formal recognition in the official data system. In Assam, as in other states, the impact of this change certainly raised the contribution of women to economic activity. As a result, in the state of Assam, the Female Work Participation Rate (FWPR) rose from 4.66 percent (1971 Census) to 21.61 percent recorded by the 1991 Census though it is noted that FWPR in Assam included both main and marginal workers (AHDR – 2003). But the Female Work Participation Rate as per 2001 Census is 20.80, which is less than 1991 Census. Rural Female Work Participation Rate has also decreased from 23.27 (Census 1991) to 22.28 though FWPR in Urban Assam has been enhanced from 7.52 (1991 Census) to 10.29, which has been shown in Table No. 5. If we analyze the main and marginal workers as per 2001 Census, which has been shown in Table No. 6 it is found that much fewer women were employed formally in the agricultural sector than men. In 2001, 9.68 percent of women were classified as main workers while 42.35 of men were classified as main workers. Only 7.58 percent of men worked in a marginal capacity (both rural and urban), while 11.12 percent women

worked as marginal workers, which has implications for the respective income shares and the control over resources within the family (Ibid: 2003)

It is also worthwhile to mention here that “gender disaggregated data on the rural-urban distribution of main workers confirms that most women work in the agricultural sector on family farms and for no wages and a majority of women workers in the rural sector (51 percent) work on their own land – land that belongs to their family, to which the women are unlikely to have title or rights. They receive no wages for this work but contribute to the family income. Marketing of produce is mostly in the hands of men, and rarely do women have access to the income earned. Amongst some communities, and in some areas, women do play an important role in marketing. Even in these cases, the income received is pre-empted for household expenses, and the common pool, and is not available for asset building by the women, or for their own needs.” (AHDR – 2003)

It is interesting to note here that though a large proportion of women are engaged in agricultural activities, agriculture is perceived as a male activity. In fact, ADHR – 2003 has rightly observed that traditionally men are the owners of land though as per laws women have the right to own and inherit property. But in practice, women rarely do inherit land. Social taboos against women during certain agricultural tasks like ploughing bar women from farming on their own, even if they possess land. Patrilocal marriage systems make impractical women’s inheritance or management of such inherited landed property. Without possession of land women cannot get credit from banks. Most government programmes related to agriculture such as extension services and special training are directed at men. Women’s presence in the workforce has been recognized in the official data system, yet they

are still deprived of the economic rewards of participation and this is largely attributable to traditional customs and attitudes. (ADHR – 2003)

Table No. 5
Work Participation Rate: Assam
Work Participation Rate (Percentage)

	2001	1991
Total : Persons	35.88	36.09
Female	20.80	21.61
Male	49.93	49.46
Rural: Persons	36.46	36.73
Female	22.28	23.27
Male	49.77	49.31
Urban:Persons	10.29	7.52
Urban: Persons	31.98	30.92
Male	51.03	50.52

Source: Assam Human Development Report, 2003

Table No. 5 depicts the work participation rate of Male and Female in rural and urban areas of Assam in the year 2001 and 1991. In 2001, work participation rate has been declined to 35.88. As per 1991 Census work participation rate of Assam was 36.09. Number of Female workers has come down to 20.80 from 21.61 whereas number of Male workers has increased from 49.46 in 1991 to 49.93 in 2001. If we classify total number of workers in rural and urban workers from the table it has been found that Female workers participation rate in the urban areas has been increased from 7.52 in 1991 to 10.29 in 2001 whereas in rural areas female workers participation rate has been declined from 23.27 in 1991 (as it is in 1991) to 22.28 in 2001.

Table No. 6
Main Workers & Marginal Worker: Assam as per 2001 Census
(Percentagewise)

	Main Workers	Marginal Workers
Total: Persons	26.59	9.29
Female	9.68	11.12
Male	42.35	7.58
Rural: Persons	26.15	10.30
Female	9.86	12.42
Male	41.46	8.31
Urban: Persons	29.62	2.36
Female	8.40	1.89
Male	48.26	2.77

Source: Assam Human Development Report, 2003

Classification of workers on the basis of Main and Marginal in the year 2001 has been shown in Table No. 6. In the year 2001 total number of main workers in Assam were 26.59 percent and total number of marginal workers were 9.29 percent. Among them only 9.68 percent were female workers working as main workers and 11.12 percent as marginal workers whereas percentage of male main workers were 42.35 percent. It shows the gap between male and female main workers are very high in the State and we can easily conclude from the above data that until and unless women work participation rate becomes higher they will not be able to economically empowered. In fact, in both the rural and urban areas the gender wise participation rate is very low.

2.4.4. Women Employment in Organized Sector

In the 1990s the employment of women in the organized sector as a proportion of total organized sector employment was around 30 percent and the employment of women in organized sector of the State during the same period revolved round 301.2 thousand to 350.0 thousand as has been shown in Table No.7 and Table No.8. But the employment of women in organized sector of Assam was 380.7 thousand during 2006 accounting for 34.0 percent of the total employment. In the public sector, women constitute a little less than about 15 percent of the employee workforce which includes women workers in the State and Central Government service, in Quasi Government employ, and in establishments in the private sector (AHDR – 2003) which has been shown in Table No.9 and in the Figure No. I.

Table No.7

Total and Women Employment in Organized Sector in Assam (in thousand Nos.) till 2006

		2006	2005	2004	2003	2002	2001	2000	1999
Public Sector	Total	519.7	524.5	525.1	528.0	530.4	525.9	535.1	534.0
	Women	81.8	81.5	77.3	77.4	77.4	75.4	78.9	75.8
	Male	437.9	443	447.8	450.6	453.0	450.5	456.2	458.2
Private Sector	Total	599.7	605.2	572.0	551.1	553.7	605.0	575.8	547.4
	Women	299.0	268.4	255.6	241.1	244.5	286.6	274.2	278.6
	Male	300.7	336.8	316.4	310.0	309.2	318.4	301.6	268.8
Public & Private Sector	Total	1119.4	1140.0	1097.2	1079.1	1081.1	1131.0	1110.9	1081.4
	Women	380.7	350.0	332.9	318.5	321.9	362.0	353.1	354.4
	Male	738.7	790.0	764.3	760.6	762.2	769.0	757.8	727.4

Source: 1. Economic Survey, Assam: 2005 – 06
2. Economic Survey, Assam: 2007 – 08

Table No.8
Women's Employment in Organized sector in Assam
(In thousand nos.) & Percentage

Year	Public sector		Private Sector		Pub. & Pri. Sector		Percentage share in Organized sector
	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1993	67.0	521.3	234.3	529.3	301.2	1050.7	28.7
1994	69.0	526.4	301.5	636.3	370.5	1162.7	31.9
1995	71.4	536.0	256.4	576.8	327.8	1112.8	29.4
1996	72.9	540.0	303.7	647.7	376.6	1187.7	31.7
1997	70.9	531.7	256.9	573.6	327.5	1105.3	29.6
1998	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
1999	75.8	534.0	278.6	547.4	354.4	1081.4	32.7
2000	78.9	535.1	274.2	575.8	353.1	1110.9	31.8
2001	75.4	525.9	286.6	605.0	362.0	1131.0	32.0
2002	77.4	530.4	244.5	553.7	321.9	1084.1	29.7
2003	77.4	528.0	244.1	551.1	318.5	1079.2	30.0
2004	77.3	525.1	255.6	572.0	332.9	1097.2	30.0
2005	81.5	524.5	268.4	605.2	350.0	1140.0	30.7
2006	81.8	519.7	299.0	599.7	380.7	1119.4	34.0

Source: 1. Economic Survey, Assam: 2005 – 06
2. Economic Survey, Assam: 2007 – 08

Table No.7 depicts the poor percentage of women employment in Assam. It shows the employment percentage of women in organized sector of Assam since the year 1999 to 2006. The percentage of women employment in organized sector in the 1999 is 32.7, which has been declined to 31.8 in 2000 and again it was declined to 29.7 in 2002 and

then increased to 34.0 in the year 2006. Organized sector is divided into public sector and private sector. It is clear that the percentage of women employment in public sector is very low in Assam. In the year 1999 employment percentage of women in public sector is only 14.19 percent and it has been increased to 15.73 in the year 2006 and the increment of 1.54 percent during seven years is not at all a significant change.

2.4.5. Distribution of Assam Govt. Employees

As per the latest data available from the Assam Govt. Employees Census, the number of employees stood at 3.26 lakh as on 31st March 1999 as against 3.04 lakh as on 31st March 1994. Thus the number of employees has recorded an increase of 7.24 percent during the period from 01-04-1994 to 31-03-1999. The Table No.9 shows the distribution of Govt. employees according to the status/caste/tribes and sex as per Employees Census, 1999.

Table No. - 9
Assam Govt. Employees according to the status/caste/tribes and sex as per Employees Census, 1999

Status	SC		ST (H)		ST (P)		OBC		Others		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Class-I	433	50	118	34	585	68	1490	200	4995	490	7621	842
Class-II	458	44	74	21	512	61	2049	300	5026	680	8119	1106
Class-III	12069	2516	3872	1674	21373	4851	61666	16142	100768	25127	199748	50310
Class-IV	5932	718	1729	142	5310	365	16175	1148	24921	1875	5406	4258
Total	18892	3328	5733	1871	27780	5345	81380	17800	135710	28172	269555	56516

Source: Economic Survey, Assam: 2005 – 06, 2007-08.

The Table No. 9 also depicts the percentage of employment both male and female on the basis of status (Grade) caste, Tribes in the year 1999. At first we like to analyze the status of female workers in Class-I category. Number of total female employees in Class-I category is 842 of which 50 female workers are from SC, 34 from ST(H), 68 from ST(P), 200 from OBC and 490 from others which include General caste too. As compared to women employees the number of male employees are much more higher in all the cares. In Class-II category it is shown that the total number of female Government employees is 1106 and number of male employees is 8119. The percentage of women employees is simply dismal as it is only 11.98%. In the other two categories i.e. Class-III and Class-IV, the position of participation rate of Female employees show the same picture. Thus it is seen that female employees accounted only about 17% of the total employees in the year 1999.

As per the Assam Government Employees Census, the proportion of different categories of employees by status as on 31st March 1999 were, Grade I – 2.5 percent, Grade II – 2.8 percent, Grade III – 76.7 percent and Grade IV – 17.9 percent. It is noted here that the female employees accounted for about 17 percent of the total employees, as on the above-mentioned date and Table No.10 and Table No.11 show the distribution along with percentage of women employees.

Table No. – 10

Distribution of Assam Government Employees and the percentage of Women employees – 1999

Category	Total	Women	Percentage of Women employees.
Class – I	8463	842	9.95
Class – II	9225	1106	11.99
Class – III	250058	50310	20.12
Class – VI	58325	4258	7.30
Total	3,26,071	56516	17.33

Source : Statistical Handbook and Economic Survey, Govt. of Assam (2004 & 2005).

From Table No.10 it is found that in 1999 there were 3.26 lakh State Government employees in the aggregate women formed 17.33 percent of the employees and most of these women employees were in class III level jobs Secretarial Jobs in Government Offices and teachers in provincialised schools. Figure No. 2 has also been shown in support of our analysis relating to women's lower proportion in Government Employment in the State of Assam.

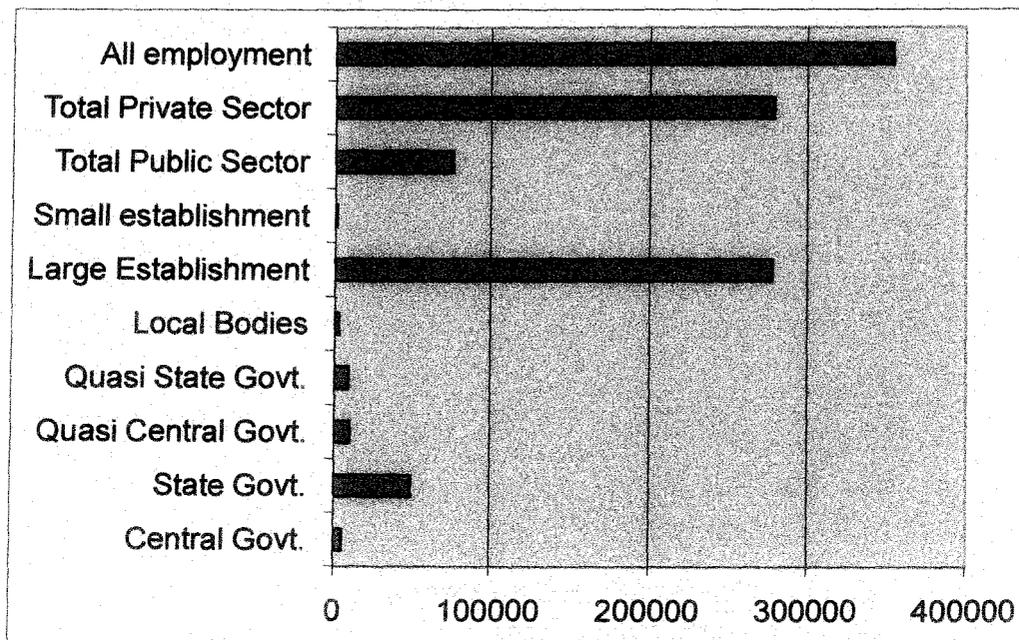
Table No. 11
Organized Sector Employment, Assam, 1999

	Number of establishments	Employment of men	Employment of women	Total employment
Central Government	300	76,411	4,863	81,274
State Government	3,601	257,768	49,445	307,213
Quasi Central Government	993	66,324	10,020	76,344
Quasi State Government	495	46,949	9066	56,015
Local Bodies	109	10,688	2,451	13,139
Total public Sector	5,498	458,140	75,845	533,985
Large Establishments	1,083	260,839	277,590	538,429
Small Establishments	625	8,007	1,010	9,017
Total Private Sector	1,708	268,846	278,600	547,446
Total Employment	7,206	726,986	354,445	1,081,431

Source: Assam Human Development Report, 2003

Figure No.I

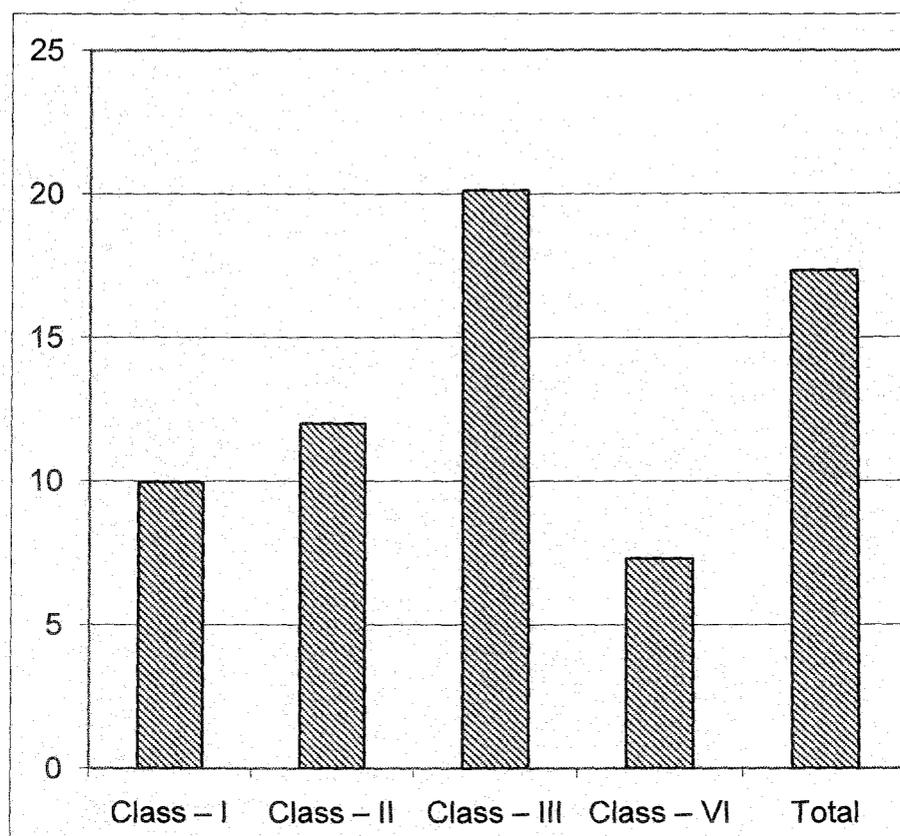
Bar Diagram of Women's Share in Organized Sector Employment (%) in Assam



Source: Assam Human Development Report, 2003

Figure No.2

Bar Diagram of Women in Government Employment (%) in the State of Assam



Source: Assam Human Development Report, 2003

2.4.4. Social Dimension

The NFS-2, conducted during 1998-1999, also revealed some other interesting and important data about the condition of women and children of Assam. The NFHS-2 has prepared a report that 27% of women are under nourished. Nutritional deficiency is particularly serious for illiterate women and women living in household with a low standard of living. Women who are under-nourished are likely to have children who are also under-nourished. Overall, 70 percent of women in Assam have some degree of anaemia, the highest in the country. The

effect of all is 36 percent of children under 3 are under-weight, 50 percent is stunted and 13 percent are wasted. NFHS-2 has also revealed that poor nutrition is a serious problem in Assam.

NFHS-2 also admits that if women in Assam are not using family planning, it is not due to lack of knowledge about contraception. About 98 percent of currently married women do know at least one modern family planning method but in spite of this only 43 percent of women use contraceptive methods. This low use of contraceptive methods is indicative of poor service delivery by family planning workers. Another factor is low exposure of women in the mass media. During the three years preceding the NFHS-2, only 18 percent of births in Assam, were delivered in a medical facility. Exposure to mass media is also low in Assam. Two-thirds of all women in Assam have not heard of AIDs. Awareness about the fatal disease is particularly low among women in rural areas, particularly those with low standard of living, Muslim Women, illiterate women and women not exposed to the media. Slightly more than half of currently married women report some types of reproductive health problems.

The life style indicators collated by the report (NFHS-2) says that 32 percent of men and 3 percent of women smoke, 28 percent men and 11 percent of women drink alcohol and 48 percent of men and 25 percent of women chew tobacco. All these indicators, except smoking among women, are higher than the national average. As per NFHS-2 report there is widespread acceptance of domestic violence with two-thirds of women accept at least one of the six reasons as a justification for a husband beating his wife. This is of course, an interesting finding. One out of every six married women has experienced beatings or physical mistreatment since age 15 and most women have been beaten or physically mistreated by their husbands.

The incidence of crime and violence against women has registered a sharp upward trend in almost all the states together with the country as a whole. That is, women are not at all safe both at work place and at home. Unfortunately, Assam, which had been a relatively safer for women in the not-too-distant past, has also witnessed a spurt in violence against women in the last one-decade or so. According to the latest survey conducted by the National Women's Commission (NWC), the state has recorded an alarming 36 percent increase in crime against women. While cases of kidnapping, molestation and rape have swelled, the number of women affected by dowry and domestic violence has also raised, something that was thought to be alien to the Assamese social ethose until recently. Though statistics does not speak always true, nevertheless we can sketch a picture with the help of these statistics. From the year 2000 to June 2005, 24,942 cases of crime against women (CAW) were registered by the Police in Assam. Crime includes molestation, kidnapping, and rape cruelty by husband and dowry deaths, which are shown in Table No.12.

Table No. 12
Crimes against women in Assam (2000-June 2005):

Year	Molestation	Kidnapping	Rape	Cruelty by Husband	Dowry death	Total
2005*	338	535	613	1089	35	2590
2004	758	1238	1036	1843	74	4949
2003	772	1271	1049	1737	60	4889
2002	984	1278	903	1694	70	4927
2001	850	1070	785	1248	59	4012
2000	777	1101	669	978	50	3575

*upto June 2005.

Source: Assam tribune: Oct 2/2005

Table No.12 depicts the crime against women in Assam during 2000 June–June 2005. Crimes, which include molestation, kidnapping, rape, cruelty by husband and dowry death. The highest number of cases of molestation have taken place in the year 2002. The highest number of kidnapping cases were registered in the year 2002 too. Rape cases were the highest in the year 2003 and cruelty by husband and dowry death were the highest in the year 2004. In the table number 12 it is shown that in the year 2005 the number of crimes against women has declined to a large extent but from the Table No.13 it is found that these numbers have increased at the end of the year 2005 and 2006.

The figures available with the state Central Investigation Department (CID) for last five years indicate that women in the state continue to face violence within their houses as well as outside which is shown in Table No.13.

Table No. 13
Crime Against women in the State of Assam

Year	Rape	Kidnapping	Cruelty by husband	Others	Total
2005	1217	1456	2206	1159	6038
2006	1203	1150	2378	1141	5872

Source: (Assam Tribune: 9th April/2007)

A senior police official talking to the Assam Tribune pointed out that one of the main reasons for increasing alarmingly the number of crimes against women is the growing presence of consumerism in the state making the lives of people more money oriented. The official also added that women unemployment is another driving forces behind such menaces. (Assam Tribune 9th April 2007). According to Mridula Saharia, Chairperson of Assam State Commission for Women the ongoing insurgency and other political problems complicating the prevailing situation in many parts of North-Eastern States has intensified the violence faced by Women. Probably she has rightly observed in the following manner:

“Although all the members of communities are affected by the armed conflict, the impact on women and girls is far greater because of their status in society and their sex” (Mridula Saharia: 2007). Thus more active role of legal bodies against violence against women is the utmost necessity as Assam is one of the five states having highest crime rates in 2004 as compared to earlier years are shown in Table No.14.

Table No. 14**States having Highest Crime Rates in the Country: Percentage**

States/UT	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
All-India	14.1	14.0	14.1	13.2	14.2
Delhi	17.3	16.6	15.4	22.1	24.1
Andhrapradesh	18.9	21.8	24.5	23.6	24.0
Madhyapradesh	22.3	24.1	24.6	23.0	23.5
Rajasthan	24.0	21.6	20.7	19.9	21.7
Assam	14.2	15.9	18.7	19.2	20.2

Source: 'Yojana', Oct/2006

The Table No. 14 has been shown the crime rate of some of the Indian states during the years 2000 – 2004. In the year 2000 the average crime rate in India was 14.1. But it is seen that the crime rate varies so far as different states are concerned. In Delhi the crime rate was as high as 17.3 in the year 2000 and it was raised to 14.1% in the year 2004 when the all-India average was only 14.2 in the year 2004. In the year 2004 the highest criminal incidents took place in Rajasthan (24) and the lowest in Assam (14.2). But the rate was decreasing in Rajasthan during the years and in 2004 it decreased to 21.7 whereas the rate was increasing in Assam and it was 20.23 in the year 2004. In Delhi the highest crime took place in the year 2004 and again it was the lowest in Assam (20.2), Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh were in the second and third place.

Another disturbing situation relating to women folk in Assam is the issue of missing women. In fact, no civil society can ignore such situation when the number of missing females, both adult and children, are going high alarmingly.

According to data, prepared by Police Department 3,903 females went missing in the state between 2000 and 2004, which is shown in Table No. 15.

Table No. 15
Number of Missing Women in Assam:

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Missing female adults	442	459	210	270	347
Missing female Children	547	528	382	369	349
Traced female adults	235	275	59	60	78
Traced female Children	298	259	69	125	118
Untraced female adults	207	184	151	210	269
Untraced female children	249	269	313	244	231

Source: The Assam Tribune, April 23/2006.

From the Table No.15 we can draw a disturbing scenario of women population in the state of Assam from the year 2000 to 2004. A large number of women population was missing in the state and also most of them remain untraced. It is seen from the table that in the year 2000 total number of Missing female adults was 442 and female Children was 547 giving a total number of 989. In the year 2001 the total missing female adults and children were 987. In 2002 and 2003 the total number of missing female population were decreased to a small extent but again it was increased to 696 in 2004.

For the state the growing number of missing females has implications, which go beyond effects on family and friends. The trend could be perceived as a clear violation of human rights, if female children fall victims to trafficking. Similar is the case if adult females are compelled or induced to enter into prostitution. (Assam Tribune: 23 April 06). Human trafficking is turning out to be major problem for

Assam and according to records available, more than 7000 females and female children were reported missing from different parts of the state in the last 10 years, of which 3184 were adult females and 3840 were female children. The problem is so acute that the Assam police organized a seminar cum workshop on the issue in collaboration with the Bureau of Police Research and Development in 2006. The findings of the Seminar was that the North East region became more vulnerable to trafficking as it shares international boundary with Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Bangladesh, which resulted in easy operations in human trafficking. The report prepared in the Seminar also adds that free flow of narcotics, persistent armed and ethnic conflict, stagnating economy etc. are also contributing factors for the growth of human trafficking in the region. It is a matter of great concern that the traffickers carried out drives to "recruit" women from Kokrajhar relief camps where nearly two lakhs people used to live as internally displaced people without proper shelter and food. The State Police indicate that on an average, three or four hundred females and about same number of female children are reported missing from different parts of Assam. It is certainly a gloomy picture so far as social status of womenfolk of Assam is concerned.

As mentioned earlier, the disadvantageous position that the women in Assam find themselves is reflected in the gender-related equality and development indexes. It is important to remember here that gender inequality often lies at the root of atrocity and violence on women. These gender indexes reveal areas of concern like adverse sex ratio, low female life expectancy rates, high fertility rates, literacy, etc. where women are left prejudicial position compared not only to men, but to their counterparts in most other states of the country as well. Even today, women's access to health care, education, employment and political process continue to be alarmingly low in the state. The failure to bring down fertility rates and infant and material mortality rates in

spite of incurring huge expenditures on family welfare and population control measures is attributable, to a great extent, to the low female literacy rate and the low level of women education. In the Gender Equality Index, Assam is ranked a miserable 29th among 32 states and Union Territories. The precarious position that our women are confronted with should be evident from the fact that even among the seven North-Eastern states it is well behind Manipur, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland (Assam Tribune: 2006) which is shown in Table No.16.

Table No. 16
Gender Disparity Indices in North East India:

State/Country	Year	
	1981	1991
Arunachal Pradesh	0.537	0.776
Assam	0.462	0.575
Manipur	0.802	0.815
Meghalaya	0.799	0.807
Mizoram	0.502	0.770
Nagaland	0.783	0.729
Sikkim	0.643	0.647
Tripura	0.422	0.531
India	0.620	0.676

Source: 1. National Human Development Report 2001.
2. Planning Commission Govt. of India

Women in Assam enjoy a higher status as compared to the Greater Indian Society. Social evils like dowry, child marriage, bride-burning etc. not at all deep-rooted in Assam's society though the society is not totally free from these evils. In fact, practices like dowry,

child marriage, and bride burning are rampant in most parts of India. Of late, dowry and bride burning are being practiced in the Assam's society. Along with this we can witness a derogatory practice of 'witch hunting' in the civil-society of Assam. In fact, more than 50 persons were killed in Assam in different incidents of witch hunting in the four years, which has proved that the incidents of witch hunting are increasing in the state, which is very disturbing phenomenon. According to records available with the CID of Assam Police, the number of incidents of witch hunting is increasing over the years, which has been shown Table No.17.

Table No.17
Persons Killed in Assam because of derogatory practice of Witch Hunting

Year	No. of Persons Killed
2003	5
2004	8
2005	23
2006 till Aug, 13	20
Total	56

Source : The Assam Tribune.

It is worthwhile to mention here that the Assam Police launched a 'Project Prahari' in 2001 to eradicate this derogatory practice of witch hunting from the society. But the increasing number of killings branding them as the witches has certainly proved that the govt. and other concerned agencies have miserably failed to eradicate this social evil and decrease from the civil society of Assam. Though the practice is prevailing in the interior parts of 'tribal' society yet the civil society must take the responsibility in connection with eradicating the social evil.

2.4.5. Political Participation of Women

The UN child agency's latest report (2006) on the "State of children" has remarked "Empowering women has positive impact on Communities."

Thus, the UN has suggested steps like providing quota for the fair sex in legislatures in order to eliminate gender discrimination. According to UN Report on "The state of children" Gender Equality gives 'double dividend', benefiting both women and children and is pivotal to the health and developments of families, communities and nations suggesting steps to help attain gender equality, the report stressed on the need for spending more on and creating conducive atmosphere for girls' education as also reserving quotas for them in legislative bodies to enable them to participate in political decision making.

In this respect, UNICEF's Executive Director Ann M. Veneman's observation is note worthy who has observed thus: "If we care about the health and well-being of children today and into the future, we must work now to ensure that women and girls have equal opportunities to be educated, to participate in Government, to achieve self sufficiency and to be protected from violence and discrimination" (Assam Tribune 12Dec/2006).

Though women of Assam have been playing major roles in the society, since the 1921 freedom movement till date, their role in decision-making has been nominal and insignificant. The Table Nos. 19 to 22 show the sample of the trend of increasing number of women voters in the several elections to the Legislative Assembly and gender bias in the proportion of women representatives to the Assam Legislative Assembly and the Lok Sabha.

Table No. 18

Year wise Distribution of Electorate showing Male/Female and Total in Assembly Election in Assam from 1952-2003

Years	Total Voters	Male Voters	Women Voters	P.C. of women voters
1952	41,41,720	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
1957	44,95,359	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
1962	49,42,816	27,20,916	22,12,900	44.77
1967	54,49,309	29,52,629	24,96,676	45.82
1972	62,96,198	33,93,829	29,02,363	46.10
1978	79,62,645	42,99,377	36,63,268	46.00
1983	86,82,138	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
1985	98,82,648	52,99,705	45,82,979	46.37
1991	1,18,92,170	63,71,265	55,20,905	46.42
1996	1,21,19,125	63,88,955	57,30,170	47.28
2001	1,44,39,167	75,10,492	69,28,675	47.99
2003** (01-01-03)	1,45,92,788	75,90,272	70,02,516	47.99
2009*	1,74,94,302	90,46,541	84,50,761	48.31

1. Source: Assam Tribune, 17 March/2006
2. ** Excluding Electors of Khumtai: LAC under Golaghat District; Source: Statistical Hand Book of Assam, 2004
3. * Hindu 27 March/2009.

In Table No. 18 we have shown the number of Male and Female voters in Assam from 1952 - 2009. It is seen from the table that during all these years the percentage of women voters was less than 50% but not below 45%. It is also seen that numbers of women voters during these years were in an increasing trend and it was 44.77% in 1962, and enhanced to 48.31% in 2009. So it can be said that participation of

women in political process was upward trend which contributed a lot to broaden political awareness.

Table No. 19
Turnout among women: Lok Sabha Elections. (Percent) (Assam, N.E. India)

State/Country	1989	1991	1996	1998	1999	2004	Average
All India	57.3	50.6	53.4	57.9	55.6	53.5	54.7
Assam	*	73.3	76.5	59.5	69.5	64.9	68.7
Manipur	70.4	69.9	73.8	55.9	64.0	53.3	64.5
Meghalaya	49.7	49.6	61.0	74.9	53.3	52.0	56.7
Mizoram	56.1	56.9	73.9	69.2	63.1	61.5	63.4
Nagaland	75.7	78.2	85.5	43.1	75.3	90.3	74.7
Arunachal Pradesh	56.0	47.8	52.5	57.8	75.4	55.2	57.5
Tripura	81.9	61.6	77.5	80.5	65.1	63.5	71.7
Sikkim	67.7	47.9	73.9	62.5	83.3	76.0	68.5

*Election was not held in Assam in 1989.

Source: CSDS, data unit, EPW, 18-24 Dec/04 Vol. XXXIX No. 51.

In Table No. 19 we have shown the percentage of turnout among women in the North-East India. It is found that though the literacy rate of women in Assam is low but the women-folk are much aware of their voting right as it is observed participation of women in a large number in the Lok Shabha Elections during last few years. The National percentage of women voters is below 60 percent whereas in Assam it is always more than 60 percent barring 1998. In 1998 the percentage of women voters was 59.3 just a little below of 60 percent. Among the North-Eastern States Tripura showed the highest turnout of women voters in the Lok Shabha Elections during the years 1989 – 2004

including the year 1999 when women's turnout was highest in Sikkim though women's turnout among seven sisters states was Arunachal Pradesh. In Assam, the highest turnout was in the 1996 Lok Sabha Elections. Among the States of North-East Meghalaya is the State where the average turnout of women was the lowest. The highest average turnout of women in the Lok Sabha Election was in Nagaland, which was 74.7 percent. After average turnout of Naga women-folk Tripura and Assam's women occupied the position of second and third in respect of average voting turnout.

The Gender Bias:

A very slow improvement in the proportion of women representatives in Assam Legislative Assembly Election has proved Gender Bias.

Table No. 20
Election to Assam Legislative Assembly (1952 to 2006)

	Year	Total No. of Seats	No. of women members	% to the Total
First	1952	108	2	1.85
Second	1957	108	5	4.60
Third	1962	105	4	3.80
Fourth	1967	126	5	3.90
Fifth	1972	114	8	7.00
Sixth	1978	126	1	0.79
Seventh	1983	126	2	1.58
Eighth	1985	126	4	3.17
Ninth	1991	126	5	3.96
Tenth	1996	126	8	6.34
Eleventh	2001	126	10	7.93
Twelfth	2006	126	9	7.14

Source: Rao & Hazarika (1983) & various reports of Election Depts.

The Table No.20 depicts the dismal picture of women representative to the Legislative Assembly of Assam from 1952 – 2006. The first Assembly Election in Assam is held in the year 1952. The total number of constituencies is 108 and number of women members is only 2, the percentage being 1.85. In the second Assembly Election though the number of women members has been more than doubled as it has raised 5, yet the percentage is 4.60. In 1962 the number of seats decreased to 105 and number of women members are 4. In the fifth Assembly Election i.e. in 1972 the number of women members has raised to 8 being the percentage 7.00. But surprisingly, in the Assembly Election 1978, though the number of seats has been increased to 126 yet the number of women members has come down to just 1 and the percentage being 0.79. In the table it has been shown that in the Eleventh Election held in the year 2001, the number of women members were the highest as it raised to 10 and the percentage of women members to the total number of members is 7.93%. The last (12th) Assembly Election was held in the year 2006. The number of women members were 9 and the percentage is 7.14 which is a little lower than the previous election.

Table No. 21

**Gender Advantage in connection with success rate to the Election
of Assam Legislative Assembly (1952 to 2006)**

Year	Total No. of Seats	Total of Contestants	Male		% of Winning	Women		% of Wining
			Contested	Elected		Contested	Elected	
1952	108	458	452	106	23.45	6	2	33.33
1957	108	312	302	103	34.00	10	5	50.00
1962	105	409	405	101	24.94	4	4	100.00
1967	126	487	478	121	25.31	9	5	55.56
1972	114	476	464	106	22.84	12	8	66.67
1978	126	938	918	125	13.61	20	1	5.00
1983	126	-	-	-	-	-	2	-
1985	126	1153	1124	122	10.85	29	4	13.79
1991	126	1657	1607	121	7.53	50	5	10.00
1996	126	1228	1183	119	10.06	45	8	17.77
2001	126	1019	964	116	12.3	55	10	18.18
2006	126	992	924	115	12.45	68	9	13.24

Source: Rao & Hazarika (1983) and various issues of the Assam Tribune & Records of Election Deptts.

The Table No. 21 analyses the Gender advantage in connection with success rate with male counterpart in Assam during different elections to the Legislative Assembly of the State. In the first election held in the year 1952 after 5 years of Independence for total number of 108 seats. Total number of contestants was 458 being male contestant was 452 and got elected 106, and the success rate was 23.45%. On the other hand, the number of women contestants was 6 and elected 2 being the success rate of 33.33%, which was almost 10% higher than male contestants with respect to success rate.

It is to be pointed out that in the 3rd Assembly Election the number of women contestants was 4 and elected all the contestants 4 i.e. success rate was 100 percent. On the other hand, in this election out of 405 male contestants 101 got elected and the percentage was only 24.94. But in the following elections particularly since 1972 it is seen that though the number of women contestants has been enhanced to a small extent unfortunately they are not able to keep up their winning momentum and as a result of which percentage of success rate fell down although in comparison to male counterpart the success rate of women-folk was always better and higher than the success rate of male. In the 6th Assembly Election (1978), one woman representative was elected out of 20 women contestants. The 12th Assembly Election was held in 2006 and out of 68 women contestants only 9 members were able to win their respective seats. Out of 924 male contestants 117 were elected. Thus it is seen from the table that the success rate of women-folk is always higher than male counterpart barring the 6th Assembly Election, which was held in 1978.

Like the Assam Legislative Assembly the number of women representatives in successive Lok Sabhas from Assam has remained between 1 and 2 ever since the first general elections (see Table 22) though the success rate of women in these elections too was always higher than the male counterpart. In fact, the dismal presence of women in both the legislative bodies has not only failed to protect issues concerning women's rights but also failed to ensure more vigorously women's participation in the political arena of the State.

Table No. 22

**Number of women representatives to the Lok Sabha From Assam:
1952 to 2009**

Year	Contesting Candidates Male	Contesting Candidates female	Total Contesting Candidates	Total Seats won by women	Total Seats won by Male	Total Seats in lok sabha
1952	38	2	40	1	9	10
1957	29	2	31	2	8	10
1962	38	3	41	2	10	12
1967	45	2	47	1	13	14
1971	75	3	78	1	13	14
1977	37	3	40	2	12	14
1980	5	2	7	Nil	2	14
1985	105	1	106	Nil	14	14
1989	-	-	-	Nil	14	14
1991	-	-	-	Nil	14	14
1998	-	-	-	Nil	14	14
1999	-	-	-	2	13	14
2004	116	-	-	Nil	14	14
2009	-	-	-	2	2	14

*Two seats for Lok Sabha election were held only from Barak Valley in 1980.

Source: Election Department's Reports & The Assam Tribune (Various issues).

2.5. Gender Disparities in NE India

Preet Rastogi (2003) has shown systematically a wide range of gender indicators using state wise and gender disaggregated data across Indian states. According to Rastogi these indicators cover demographic factors, women's health, education, economic participation, decision-making and security. Based on her analysis and supplemented by that of Kishor and Gupta (2004), Sumi Krishna (2005) selected II significant gender indicators relating to the analysis of gender related study of North-Eastern States which has been shown in Table No.23.

Table No. - 23
Selected Gender Disparity Indicators: Northeastern States

Table 12: Selected Gender Disparity Indicators: North Eastern States.

States (Listed in order of poverty level)	Demographic, Survival factors			Health Anaemia		Education	Rural Female work Participation		Private Decision Making Percent			Crimes against women	
	(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	(F)	(G)	(H)	(I)	(J)	(K)	(L)	(M)
	Below Poverty level Percent 2001	Child Sex Ratio 2001	Sex Ratio Above Six Yrs 2001	Severe and Moderate Anaemia Percent 1998- 99	Mild Anaemia Percent 1998- 1999	Gender Gap in Literacy Rate 2001	RWFP Rate 1993- 94	RWFP Rate 1999-2000	Involved in Decisions on own Health 1998-99	Freedom to go to the market 1998-1999	Freedom to decide about own earnings 1998-1999	Recorded cases per Million Population 1999	Composite Gender Rank (B to L)
Mizoram	19.5	971	932	12.8	35.2	4.6	31.7	44.0	73.2	64.2	26.4	176	1
Manipur	28.5	961	<i>981</i>	7.1	21.7	18.2	30.8	25.3	43.3	28.6	59.0	29	3
Nagaland	32.7	975	899	9.7	27.8	9.9	21.6	44.1	69.4	17.3	17.8	11	5
Arunachal	33.5	961	888	11.9	50.6	19.8	40.9	31.0	70.0	46.8	46.4	148	7
Meghalaya	33.9	975	<i>974</i>	29.9	33.0	5.7	49.3	41.8	78.9	46.5	40.7	25	2
Tripura	34.4	975	947	16.3	43.0	16.1	12.8	7.3	51.2	27.4	37.7	98	6
Assam	36.1	964	926	26.5	43.2	15.9	15.9	15.1	65.1	13.2	40.0	138	8
Sikkim	36.5	989	858	23.8	37.3	15.3	19.8	24.1	60.2	38.2	69.8	56	4
All India	26.1	927	934	16.7	35.0	24.5	32.8	29.9	51.6	31.6	41.1	127	

Notes: Figures in bold font indicate negative divergence, italics positives divergence from national average, except where indicated.

Column A percent of population Below Poverty Level, Planning Commission, CSO, 2001.

Column B Child Sex ratio (no. of females per 1000 males in population below six years), calculated from Census of India, 2001.

Bold Font most unfavourable ratio among north-eastern states, italics indicates improved ratios over the previous decade.

Column C Sex ratio in population above six years (No. of females per 1000 males), census of India 2001.

Column D and E percent of women with severe and moderate Anaemia (taken together); and Mild anaemia, National Family Health Survey - 2, 1998-1999.

Column G and H Rural Female Work force Participation Rate (Population of total workers among population above six years),
Calculated from National Sample Surveys 50th and 55th rounds, 1999-2001

Column H Bold font indicates decline, italics indicates increase in RFWP rate over the previous decade.

Column I, J, and K percent of ever married women (aged 15 – 49) involved (with husbands/family) in decisions about their own health; who do not require permission to go to market; who are free to take independent decisions on their own earnings, National Family Health Survey – 2, 1998-1999.

Column L Crimes against women; number of cases per million populations, National Family Health Survey – 2, 1998-1999.

Column M Estimated from on the basis of B to L.

Source: Derived from Rustogi (2003), Kishore & Gupta (2004) and Sumi Krishna (2005). EPW. Vol.XL.No.25, June 18-24, 2005.

Thus it can be stated as per Table No. 23 Column (A) except Mizoram all the states of North-East have miserably failed to eradicate poverty because the percent of people below the poverty line barring Mizoram is above all-India average. Though poverty ratio of Assam has come down from 51.21 percent in 1973-74 to 36.1 percent in 2001, it is much higher than all-India average of 26.1 percent. The child sex ratio (Column B) is a significant indicator of female discrimination and fortunately enough, all the states in the region are in a better position than the all-India average. The sex ratio above six years as per Census 2001 shows that Manipur, Meghalaya and Tripura are in a better position than all India average and the position of other states of the region is below than the all India average. The National Family Health Survey – 2 conducted in 1998-1999 and according to NFHS – 2 one out of two women in India suffer from severe, moderate or mild anaemia; it clearly indicates women's undernourishment. According to survey conducted by NFHS – 2 Assam, Meghalaya and Sikkim have high levels of severe and moderate anaemia (Column D) as these figures are above the all India average and so far as high level of mild anaemia is concerned we can witness in Arunachal, Tripura and Assam. The

gender gap in literacy rates is another area of female discrimination in our society and as per Column (F) all the states of North-Eastern region are in a better position than the all-India average. Of course, Assam ranks 5th among the North-Eastern states in regard to reducing gender gap in literacy. Fortunately enough Mizoram, Nagaland and Meghalaya have occupied the position of five lowest gender gap in literacy in India.

Women's economic participation is known to be related to improved social status and the rural female workforce participation (RWFP) rate is very significant in relating to analysis of women's participation in productive activity. As per National Sample Survey between 1993-94 and 1999-2000, the all India average RWFP rate declined except Nagaland, Mizoram, Sikkim, Punjab and Gujrat. The RWFP rate in Manipur, Tripura and Assam was below than the all India average and this rate in Meghalaya and Arunachal was above the National average.

Women's autonomy relating to take decisions with respect to (i) what to cook; (ii) obtaining healthcare with her own; (iii) purchasing jewellery; (iv) staying with family; (v) spending money and freedom of movement with respect to (a) go to market and (b) visit relatives are relatively recent indicators relating to measurement of women's autonomy and power. NFHS-2 conducted in 1998-99 shows that an average 85 percent of women in India can decide about cooking. About one in two adult married women in India (with husbands/families) can take decisions about their own health as per column (I). Women's status/position in society can also be judged in analyzing women's freedom of movement. One in three women in India takes permission to go to the market and those who do not need such permission has been shown in Column J. Both Assam and Nagaland lag behind the national average. Women's autonomous position can also be analyzed taking

into consideration independent decisions on one's own earnings (Column K). In this respect, Sikkim and Manipur have advantageous position than the national average. Assam's position is below than the national average. One of the significant indicators of gender disparity is crime against women both in home and public places. Among North-Eastern states Mizoram has the highest record of crime (178) cases against women. Arunachal Pradesh with 148 cases and Assam with 138 cases also show higher level of crimes against women comprising molestation, rape, kidnapping and abduction etc. Low level of crime against women is to be witnessed in Nagaland, Meghalaya and Manipur, which are shown in Column L.

Thus, it is seen that there is gender disparity in all the states of North-East India and after analyzing these indicators of gender disparity Sumi Krishna (2005) has rightly prepared for a composite gender rank (Column M) and the composite gender ranking indicates that in the North-Eastern region gender-disparity is least in Mizoram and less in Meghalaya while it is greatest in Assam (Ibid: 2005)

2.6. Gender, Community and Development Specificities of Char Areas:

United Nations Development Project (Here after UNDP) Human Development Report-2005 has observed thus:

The percentage of underweight women is four times higher in South Asia than in Sub-Saharan Africa, and deficiencies in nutrients and vitamins linked to child death are far greater. South Asia has lower levels of poverty and higher average incomes than Sub-Saharan Africa but South Asia's child malnutrition rate is 20% higher than Sub-Saharan Africa's. Half of the world's underweight children live in South Asia. These human development deficits are strongly associated with gender inequalities.

In fact, gender inequality is one of the most powerful impediments on human development as UNDP – Human development Report–2005 has rightly observed that life chances in any country are constrained by complex layers of inequality. Disparities in opportunities for health, education, income and political influence are to be found in every country, in varying magnitudes; inequalities linked to wealth, gender, location, race and ethnicity, along with other, markers for disadvantage. They interact to create dynamic and mutually reinforcing cycles of disadvantage that are transmitted across generations. Breaking these cycles is one of the keys to accelerated progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (henceforth MDGS) (UNDP HDR–2005).

It has been observed from various studies that (Muslim Women Survey conducted by Zaya Hassan and Ritu Menon) the socio-economic status and political awareness of Muslim Women in India in comparison to other cultural groups/communities is not at all satisfactory. Even the location or area is to be taken into account as crucial criterion relating to the question of gender development of a particular community. That is why we have specifically selected some 'Char' (Reverine) areas of Brahmaputra Valley of Assam highlighting the economic and political empowerment of womenfolk of 'Char' areas of Barpeta District. In this connection it is also worthwhile to mention here that almost all the 'Chars' of Brahmaputra Valley along with 'Chars' of Barpeta District are Muslim dominated. Hence, we would like to focus economic and political empowerment of womenfolk belonging to Muslim cultural groups in the subsequent analysis as Chandra Mohanty (1998) has rightly justified that women's subordination must be addressed within their own cultural context, rather than through some universal understanding of women's needs. In fact, the several studies of Post-colonial feminists should not be underestimated as they

(post-colonial feminists) suggest that women's subordination must be differently understood in terms of race, class and geographical location, and that all women should be seen as agents rather than victims (J.A. Tickner: 2008).

Selecting the socio-economic and political empowerment of women in the 'char' areas of Brahmaputra Valley of Assam highlighting the Muslim women as dominant cultural groups of 'char' areas of Barpeta District of our study, probably it would be a right direction.

2.7. Conclusion

After analyzing the issue of Gender and Development from Global perspective it is clear that the United Nations Organization has given much stress on the question of equality between men and women and the United Nations Organization adopted a lot of steps and as a result of which gender related Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) have been considered as significant indicators for calculating Human Development Report of several countries.

It has been also observed from the earlier analysis that the Government of India since the last few years focused on achieving legal, social, political and economic rights for women being participated in the convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979. Today like other countries, the Government of India too, calculates the Human Development Report emphasizing on Gender - related Development Index along with highlighting Gender Equality Index. After analyzing of gender profile of Assam it can be observed that there is huge disparity between Human Development Index and Gender related Development Index in the various districts of Assam and it is also seen that this gap is bigger and

sharper amongst the Muslim dominated districts of Brahmaputra valley where major portions of 'Chars' are observed and located.

Notes and References:

1. Development Alternatives with woman for a New Era:

DAWN was formed in 1984. It was an attempt of a group of Feminists as a preparatory measure before the Nairobi conference. The objective of this association was to show how the four inter-related disasters—famine, credit, war policy and fundamentalism had damaged the lives of poor Southern women, along with indicating alternative policy. From feminist perspective, DAWN was concerned with holistic analysis of development and the root of that analysis would be confined to experiences of womenfolk and its inspiration would be provided to women's joint planning and tactics. In this way, they would inspire global exponents relating to development.

Source: Sofi Charliye & Elen Riqmunch (2004: Translated from Bengali)

2. **W E D O** - Women's Environment and Development Organization was an international Organization formed in 1990. The objectives of this Organization were:

- (a) The women should be involved in economic and political decision-making process with equal status.
- (b) Such solutions of development to be worked out which are considered beneficial for women, community and whole universe.
- (c) Awareness to be grown relating to the issues that how globalization has shattered the hopes of women, their family,

community, environment along with call for economic equality for women.

Source: Sofi Charliye & Elen Riqmunch (2004: Translated from Bengali).

3. **Gender development index:**

The Gender Development Index (GDI) measures states' development using the Human Development Index (HDI) indicators: literacy, life expectancy, school enrolment, and income disaggregated by gender, to illustrate a state's development, adjusted for degrees of gender inequality. This index takes as its central assumption that the larger the degree of gender inequality, the more this has a negative effect on states' quality of development. The GDI also shows that states high on the HDI may have high degree of gender inequality.

Source: J. Ann Tickner (2008).

4. **Gender mainstreaming:**

Gender mainstreaming was established as a global strategy for achieving gender equality in the Beijing Platform for Action ratified by all UN member states. It has been adopted as the official policy of the United Nations, the European Union, the Organization of American States and a number of other governmental and inters-governmental organizations. Gender mainstreaming prescribes the review and revision of policy processes in all sectors of government, with an eye towards eliminating gender-based disparities in policy formulation and implementation.

Source: J. Ann Tickner (2008).

5. **Constitutional guarantees to Indian Women through fundamental rights:**

Article 14 provides that "The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India."

As per Article 15 (1) "The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, cast, sex, place of birth or any of them".

As per Article 15 (3) "Nothing in this article shall prevent the state from making any special provision for women and children".

As per Article 16 (2) "No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, residence or any of them, be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect of, any employment or office under the state."

6. **Directive Principles of State Policy relates to Indian Women:**

As per Article 39 of the Constitution of India "The state shall, in particular, direct its policy towards securing

- (a) that the citizens, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means of livelihood;
- (b) that there is equal pay for equal work for both men and women;
- (c) that the health and strength of workers, men and women, and the tender age of children are not abused and that citizens are not forced by economic necessity to enter avocations unsuited to their age or strength".

As per Article 42 of the Constitution of India “The state shall make provision for securing just and human conditions of work and for maternity relief.”

7. Earlier a separate Department of Women and Child Development was functioning as a part of Ministry of Human Resource Development since 1985 to look into matters related to Women and Children. Keeping in view its importance, a separated Ministry of Women and Child Development came into existence from 30th January 2006, vide Government notification dated 16-2-2006, all subjects relating to Child Welfare / Protection like the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2000, Central Adoption Resource Agency (CARA) and adoption which were under Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment have been transferred to the newly created Ministry of Women and Child Development. (India 2009 – A Reference Manual: 992).