

Chapter 9

Political Participation and Women

9.1. Political Participation of the Muslim Women :

The participation of Women in politics is felt desirable only in the first quarter of the twentieth century. The Indian women obtained the right to vote first in 1929. Political participation means involvement of individual activities with the input side of government function. Its aim is to influence the policies and to motivate the government machinery to a particular end. Political participation is multidimensional indicating a wide range of political activities e.g. political discussion, attendance of political meetings, rally, procession, posturing, joining the election campaign, taking membership in political parties, casting votes, contesting election and being elected, to hold public office doing the expected role and functions. The thrust of the present study is on the last part of various dimensions i.e. her right to vote to be elected. Though men and women participate almost equally in casting votes and India has had a female prime minister also and even the women have occupied higher position in many offices of administration, the overall participation of women is very low. Their 'participation through acts other than voting is almost nil'. Some research study on political participation of women in West Bengal has concluded the low rate of participation of women (Roy Chowdhuri: 1993)

In the present study, political participation of Muslim women adds a new phenomenon only after the introduction of Three-tier Panchayat System. Though she has had full constitutional rights for participation in politics, so long she has enjoyed only to elect her chosen candidate and exercised seldom the right to be elected. Mere right to choose the representative is not a complete political right without exercising the right to be elected. The number of Muslim women voters casting vote in favor or against of any political party is not less than the sisters of other communities but their active participation to hold public office was absolutely nil in this state so long. Due to various reasons, the representation of Muslim women in the politics of Tripura is

not found in recent past. Usually, the women irrespective of ethnic and religious identity would get rare chance to have entry in the highly competitive market of power politics.

Since the Statehood in 1970, Tripura has been represented by five female ministers and one M.P. but none of them was Muslim. Though Muslim men were found with rank and file in different level of state politics, Muslim women were far away from this. When the women of other backward communities have come forward, they have lagged behind. The socio-economic condition, religious and cultural tradition along with their minority position did not support them to step in this new dimension of life. One or two women ventured to compete in the legislative election but defeated.

But as soon as the situation is changed with the chance of 33 percent reserved quota for women in the Panchayat election, the common Muslim men— whether father-in-law or husband or community member, have allowed their women to come out of home (with reservation) to hold public office. Apparently, men are to go off from certain seats but their purpose is to keep indirect hold on public affairs which they dealt earlier directly. Thus Muslim women have appeared in the scene with the full support of the family and society. The following discussion has shown that the number of women members has increased in three terms election in almost all levels in Tripura. They have gradually made themselves adapted with new identity. As far as the report is available about their performance, they are coping up with the new situation. This is certainly a break from the traditional life so long.

However, political participation of women in three villages and towns under study is analysed in two ways: a) their representation in the urban administration like Municipal Council and Nagar Panchayat; b) representation in the villages under study. In addition to these, a survey was conducted in the state level of three tier Panchayat to have a distinct idea about the participation of Muslim women. This is a micro analysis reflected from the macro level.

9.2. Women in Local Governance :

An enquiry into the rural and urban units show that though women are now an integral part of these two administration, Muslim women are less represented in the

urban units in contrast to rural units. It is seen that in the urban administration of Agartala Municipal Council and two Nagar Panchayats of Udaipur and Kailasahar, Muslim women are found totally absent. Agartala Municipal Council consists of 14 Councilors and five of them are women (35.71%) including one Vice chairman in the reserved and general seats. There is no Muslim Councilor except a nominated man. In the Ward no. 9 of Udaipur Nagar Panchayat, two Muslim Women are found member in a Committee of Community Development Society along with other four women members'. Though the sub divisions hold a large number of population, their representation in urban administration is almost nil. In other Nagar Panchayats also, Muslims are found absent e.g. Sonamura Nagar Panchayat in west district, Dharmanagar Nagar Panchayat in north district etc.

In the rural administrative units of Panchayats, Muslim women's participation is noticeable. They have not only fulfilled the reserve quota for women but also contested in the general and unreserved seats irrespective of castes and male-female. Particularly in the Muslim dominated villages, Muslim women's participation is significant. They are elected not only member of the Panchayat but also selected Gram Pradhan in the Muslim populated villages. They are trying to contest in the upper levels and some of them have become successful to be member of Panchayat Samiti. The following study of the representation of Muslim women in three-tier Panchayat has been discussed on comparative analysis with the other community women since the election of 1994.

9.3. Women Representatives in Three tier Panchayats : Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad :

The representation of Muslim women in three Gram Panchayats of N.C.Nagar, Khilpara and Kailasahar has been shown in the following Table no. 9.1. The data on their representation in two terms election of 1999 and 2004 show that there is an increasing tendency of participation among the Muslim women in all the Panchayats from the previous years. In 1999, total number of Muslim participation was 20 (62.90%) in the three villages together and women's participation was 36.36 percent; in 2004, women's participation has increased into 70 percent with the increase of total

Muslim participation (79.31%). N.C.Nagar and Yeajekhowra villages are populated by above than 90 percent Muslims whereas Muslim population in Khilpara consists of 50 percent of total population. In 1999, there were 6 Hindu women among total 15 members but no Muslim woman was there. In the next election (2004), out of 4 women they have 2 (50%). In Yeajekhowra also, the percentage of Muslim women has increased. The most important thing noticed here is the hundred percent fulfillment of reserved seats (33.%) by the Muslim women in N.C.Nagar Gram Panchayat. Their highest participation is found in this village.

Table no. 9.1
Muslim Women in Three Gram Panchayats,

1999						
Name of Gram Panchayat	Male	Female	Total	Muslim Men	Muslim Women	Total (M)
N.C Nagar	06	03	09	05 (83.33%)	03 (100%)	08 (88.89%)
Khilpara	09	06	15	05 (55.55%)	00 (00 %)	05 (33.33%)
Yazekhowra	06	02	08	06 (100%)	01 (50 %)	07 (87.50%)
Total	21	11	32	16 (76%)	04 (36.36%)	20 (62.9%)

2004						
Name of Gram Panchayat	Male	Female	Total	Muslim Men.	Muslim Women	Total (M)
N.C Nagar	06	03	09	06 (100%)	03 (100 %)	09 (100%)
Khilpara	07	04	11	04 (57.14%)	02 (50 %)	06 (54.54%)
Yazekhowra	06	03	09	06 (100%)	02 (66.67%)	08 (100%)
Total	19	10	29	16 (84.21%)	07 (70%)	23 (79.31%)

Table no. 9.2
Women Members in Three-tier Panchayats
(1994, 1998, 2004)

1994						
Name of three tiers	Women	Men	Total	Muslim		Total
				Women	Men	
Gram Panchayats (525)	1809 (33.24%)	3618 (66.66%)	5427	119 (6.58%)	N.A.	N.A.
Panchayat Samiti(16)	67 (34.18%)	130	197	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Zilla Parishad (3)	24 (34.28%)	46 (65.71%)	70 (100.00)	01 (4.17%)	01 (2.17%)	02 (2.86%)
1999						
Gram Panchayat-535.	1895 (33.33%)	3790 (66.67%)	5685 (100.00)	159 (8.39%)	438 (11.56%)	597 (10.50%)
Panchayat Samiti--23.	105 (35.44%)	194 (64.88%)	299 (100.00)	06 (5.71%)	15 (7.73%)	21 (7.02%)
Zilla Parishad-4.	28 (34.14%)	54 (65.85%)	82 (100.00)	02 (7.14%)	02 (3.70%)	04 (4.88%)
2004						
Gram Panchayat-513.	1785 (33.35%)	3567	5352 (100.00)	147 (8.23%)	394 11.04%	541 10.11%
Panchayat Samiti-23.	118 (35.45%)	179	297	11 (10.38%)	13 7.26%	24 8.08%
Zilla Parishad-4.	32 (34.5%)	57	89	03 (9.37%)	02 3.51%	05 5.26%

The Table 9.2 shows that since the first Gram Panchayat election in 1994, the participation of Muslim women is found in a considerable number, 119 (6.58%). In the next succeeding elections of 1999 and 2004, they are found increased 8.39 percent and 8.23 percent respectively. The most important thing is that women in Tripura have superseded the reserved quota of 33 percent since 1994, not only in the gram panchayat level but also in two other levels of Samiti and Zilla parishad. Muslim women's participation has increased in encouraging manner in these levels also. The encouraging participation of Muslim men in general seats is to be noted.

The next Table no 9.3 shows that women were selected Gram Pradhan, Upa-Pradhan at Gram Panchayat level, Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson at Block Level and Sabhadhipati and Sahakari—Sabhadhipati at Zilla level. In several Muslim dominated gram-panchayats, Muslim women were selected as gram pradhan. The data shows

**Table no 9.3
Women Office Pradhan in Three-tier Panchayat.**

1994*						
Name of office	Women	Men	Total (100%)	Muslim		Total (% of total)
				Women (% of total women)	Men (% of total men)	
Gram Pradhan	184 (35.05%)	341	525			
Upa Pradhan			525			
Samiti Chair Person	06 (37.5%)	10	16	Nil		
Vice Chair Person			16	Nil		
Sabhadhipati	01 (33.33%)	02	03	Nil	Nil	
Sahakari Sabhaadhipati	01 (33.33%)	02	03	Nil	Nil	
1999						
Gram Pradhan	223 (41.68%)	312	535	12 (5.38%)	27 (8.65%)	39 (7.29%)
Upa Pradhan	45 (8.41%)	490	535	02 (4.44%)	64 (13.06%)	66 (12.34%)
Samiti Chair Person	11 (47.83%)	12	23	Nil.	Nil	
Vice Chair Person	02 (8.69%)	21	23	Nil	03 (14.28%)	03 (13.04%)
Sabhadhipati	02 (50%)	02	04	Nil	Nil	
Sahakari Sabhaadhipati	01 (25%)	03	04	Nil	Nil	
2004						
Gram Pradhan	215 (41.91%)	298	513	22 (10.23%)	19 (6.37%)	41 (7.99%)
Upa Pradhan	38 (7.40%)	475	513	02 (5.26%)	51 (10.74%)	53 (10.33%)
Samiti Chair Person	09 (39.13%)	14	23	Nil	Nil	Nil
Vice Chair Person	00	23	23	Nil	02 (8.69%)	02 (8.69%)
Sabhadhipati	02 (50%)	02	04	Nil	Nil	Nil
Sahakari Sabhaadhipati	01 (33.33%)	03	04	Nil	Nil	Nil

* Note : Details information on the Muslims (1994) was not available.

that in 1999, Muslim. Women were 12 (5.38%). Muslim men were 8.65 percent Pradhan and 13.06 percent. Upa—pradhan Among 12 women Pradhans, 4 are from Melaghar block (west district) Another four gram panchayats under this blocks are headed by Muslim women. Certainly some Panchayats were headed by Hindu women belonging to SC and ST community. , The north district like the west district has also some gram panchayats dominated by the Muslim population, but none of the Panchayat was led by women.

The Table 9.3 shows that though the women are selected as Pradhan, Upa-Pradhan at Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson (Block Level) and Sabhadhipati, Sahakari—Sabhadhipati (Zilla level), Muslim women are found only as Gram Pradhan under few blocks where Muslims are in large majority; they are elected member of Samiti and Zilla Parishad but they do not represent any head of office in two higher levels. Muslim men are also not found as head of office in the higher levels except as Vice Chairman in some Samities.

Muslim women as pradhan are found often higher than that of the men who are largely found as Upa-Pradhan. The Table no 9.4 shows that women participation in almost all levels is behind their men. However, women representation in all levels of three tier Panchayats is progressive one. Some times they have exceeded the reserved quota for women. It's a remarkable point in the State politics. The representation of Muslim women in the Zilla level is only from the Paschim (west) Zilla. Among three members for 2004, one woman is re-elected from Melaghar block, another is elected from Boxonagar block of same sub-division (Sonamura) and the third one is elected from Bishalgarh block of Bishalgarh sub division. The north and south district have no Muslim woman representative in the district level indicating poor level participation in these districts.

An enquiry was done in some blocks selected for Muslim population in a considerable number for the purpose of wide knowledge about the participation rate of Muslim women in the State level. It is shown in the in the Table no. 9.4. The data shows that in 2004, the participation of Muslim women is hopeful in some blocks.

Table no 9.4
Women Representatives for Gram Panchayat under Selected Blocks

Sl. No..	Name of the Block	Women Elected	Muslim Women & % of total women
1	Dukli	17	04 (23.52)
2	Jirania	93	07 (7.53)
3	Bishalgarh	32	14 (43.75)
4	Kathalia	21	13 (61.90)
5	Boxonagar	23	19 (82.61)
6	Melaghar	23	17 (73.91)
	West district	160	123 (76.87)
1	Gournagar	55	28 (50.91)
2	Salema	11	04 (36.36)
3	Panisagar	15	05 (33.33)
4	Kadamtala	61	26 (42.62)
	North district	142	63 (43.37)
1	Matabari	14	07 (50.00)
2	Kakraban	08	02 (25.00)
3	Rajnagar	03	01 (33.33)
	South district	25	10 (40.00)

Muslim women are found there as more than 50 percent of total women participants of the concerned blocks. In the west district, out of 160, Muslim women are 123.(76.87%) but in the rest 17 blocks; they are about nil due to their absence or microscopic presence in those blocks. Similarly, in the four blocks of north district, out of 142 they are 63 (43%). In the three blocks of south district, they are 10 (40%). It means that the larger number of representation of Muslim women in the west and low percentage in the south is consistent with the ratio of population.

It is clear from the above facts and figures that along with the increased participation of women in other communities, participation of Muslim women has been increased in all levels since 1994, but they are not still able to hold the head of office in upper levels while a good number of other community women is found in the

head of offices at Samiti level. For the men also, the percentage of political participation is extensive in the Panchayat level but not so in the upper structure.

It seems that the reason lies in their low profile of socio-educational achievements. So an investigation is done to find out the link between their literacy level and political participation

9.4. Women's Position in the Structure of Political Parties :

The organizational structure of the major political parties is divided into the State level Committee, District level Committee, Division level and Local Committee.

1. In CPI (M), one woman is selected for the district level committee. She is Jasmine Sultana, a graduate young lady from N.C. Nagar, her electoral constituency. There is no Muslim woman in the state level.
2. In RSP, another Muslim woman, Momta Begum is found as member of district level. She is educated in primary level and a resident of Palatana village under Matabari block of Udaipur sub division in south district. She is known as social worker in the village. A Muslim man, namely Sardar Uddin is found as the member of the state level committee.
3. In National Congress of Tripura, no Muslim women is found in the state level.

9.5. Educational Qualification of Muslim Women Activists :

Educational qualification of the Women participants is an important factor for requisite perceptual knowledge about politics. In the hierarchical position of party structure as well as in the governmental administrative structure, low educational qualification may be a hindrance to the advancement of political carrier of the women activists. For present study, an investigation was done about the academic qualification of the Muslim women activists in the three levels of Panchayat Raj viz. Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad. It is found that in some Muslim populated villages of Tripura, a good number of Muslim women have been elected for Panchayat member and selected for Gram Pradhan. Samiti member and Zilla Parishad Member.

Table no. 9.5
Educational Status of Muslim Women Gram Pradhan in Tripura, 2004

Sl no	Name of Gram Pradhan	Education	Representation for—village	Sub division	Block	District
1	Sarifa Begum	Class 11	Bhagyapur	Dharmanagar	Kadamtala	North
2	Afia Begum	Class 11	Kurti	Dharmanagar	Kadamtala	Kadamtala
3	Safali Begum	Class 11	Kalagangerpar	Dharmanagar	Kadamtala	North
4	Fuljan Bibi	Class 11		Dharmanagar	Kadamtala	North
5	Kamrun Necha		Fulbarikandi		Gournagar	North
6	Jahanara Khatun	Class V	Chandranagar	Bishalgarh	Bishalgarh	West
7	Chanura Begum	Class VI	Purathai	Bishalgarh	Bishalgarh	West
8	Momtaz Begum	Class V	Uttar Charilam	Bishalgarh	Bishalgarh	West
9	Amena Bibi	Class V	Aralia	Sonamura	Melaghar	West
10	Tahera Khatun	Class VI	Paschim Durlavnarayan	Sonamura	Melaghar	West
11	Rehana Begum	B.A.	Indiranagar	Sonamura	Melaghar	West
12	Monoyara Begum	Class VIII	Durgapur	Sonamura	Melaghar	West
13	Lilufa Begum	S.F.	Bejimara	Sonamura	Melaghar	West
14	Rasonara Begum	Class V	Sonapur	Sonamura	Kathalia	West
15	Parvin Sultana	Class V	Putia	Sonamura	Boxonagar	West
16	Parvin Akhtar	Class VIII	Ashabari	Sonamura	Boxonagar	West
17	Seuli Akhtar	Class VI		Sonamura	Boxonagar	West
18	Jahanara Begum	Class V	Motinagar	Sonamura	Boxonagar	West
19	Anjara Khatun	Class V	Baspadua	Belonia	Hrishayamu	South

Source : State Election Commission Report, Directorate of Panchayat, Agartala

The result of the investigation is discussed in the below. In Zilla Parishad, the Three District level members are:

1. Jasmine Sultana, elected from Sonamura, an Arts Graduate (B.A),
2. Rehana Begum is elected from Bishalgarh. She is a Law Graduate.
3. Milanen Necha is elected from Boxonagar she is a School Final. All of them represent the west district and none is found from other three districts of Tripura.

Gram Pradhan

The following Table no.9.5 shows the educational level of women gram Pradhan in 19 Gram Panchayats of Tripura. No wonder that only 2 of them (10.53%) have finished senior basic level of education. The rest 89.47 percent remains in the primary level—either finished or drop out. These women with this low level of formal education are able to run the head of office. There is no allegation about their incapability of leading such a responsible public office. There are also two Upa-Pradhan Muslim women: Smt. Jahura Khatun is elected from Joynagar village under Jirania block of Sadar subdivision in west district. She is educated into——level. Another Upa Pradhan is elected from Khedabari under Melaghar block of Sonamura subdivision in the west district. She is qualified up to —— In the Samiti, among nine women members, three are educated up to Secondary level, two are higher secondary, one is primary and two are graduates.

As Member of Panchayat Samiti

In the Samiti level Muslim women are only nine. They are:

1. Susia Begum, an uncontested member from Kakraban block under Udaipur sub division of South district. She is a Higher Secondary in educational achievement.
2. Jubeda Begum, an elected member from the village Jarulbachai for Dukli blocks Panchayat Samiti under Bishalgarh sub division of west district. She has education in upper primary level.
3. Hasina Begum, elected for Kathalia block Panchayat Samiti under Sonamura sub division of west district. She is a Madhayamik.

4. Bilkis Necha, elected for Kathalia Block. She is an Arts Graduate (B.A).
5. Nilu Bibi, elected for Kathalia block Samiti Member. She is only lower primary educated.
6. Milanen Necha, elected for Boxonagar block Samiti under Sonamura sub division. She is a Madhayamik(S.F)
7. Murseda Begum, elected for Boxonagar block Samiti. She is also a Madhayamik (S.F)
8. Parvin Akhtar is elected for Boxonagar block Samiti. She is a Higher Secondary
9. Dilara Sultana Mon is elected for Kadamtala block Samiti under Dharmanagar sub division of north district. She is an Arts Graduate (B.A). In Panchayat Samiti, among 9 members, 3 (33.33%) are educated up to Secondary Level, 2 (22.22%) are Hr. Secondary, 1 (11.11%) is primary and 2 (22.22%) are Graduates.

As member of Zilla Parishad, the members are:

- 1 Jasmine Sultana, elected from Sonamura, an Arts Graduate (B.A),
2. Rehana Begum is elected from Bishalgarh. She is a Law Graduate.
3. Milanen Necha is elected from Boxonagar she is a School Final. All of them represent the west district and none is found from other three districts of Tripura.

9.6. Case Studies on women Activists :

Case 1. Maya Chowdhury is a resident of N.C Nagar, Sonamura. .She is a forty years old a widow. She contested in Panchayat election as a candidate by the party, CPM (I) to contest in the Panchayat election of N.C. Nagar Gram Panchayat. But she got defeated. One of the reasons of her defeat was the hostile attitude of her in-laws. They might belong to the banner of anti political party. Though she attends the party meetings very less, she takes part in various social works of the village e.g. she is a voluntary teacher of T.L.C., teacher of a pre-primary standard school of 28 students. She has a source of income from a part time job of injection pushing. She also gets financial help from some of her relatives. Her husband had no savings of bank balance

left for her. She says that his earning was not Rs. 500 per month but their conjugal life was happy. She was the third wife of her husband. Why her husband married three times? Her answer to this question was that the first two wives were driven out by the torture of the in-law family. Both of them got no protection from the husband who was a driver by occupation and he had to remain outside the home day after day. At last he married Maya Chowdhury when she was only a 19 years old. She was educated and intelligent. She passed Matric (Secondary) examination from Comilla Board of the then East Pakistan. But her husband had only class IV standard education. After marriage she came to India and used to reside with the in-laws. She also had to bear the burns, specially from her mother-in-law, but she was a spirited girl to fight with these till the death of her husband in 1989. Now she has a son of 18 years old. She has sent the boy to his maternal uncle's house in Bangladesh for education. She live separate from the in-laws in the present homestead which she has secured as a part of her husband's property. In her daily life, she performs all the household activities. She maintains a separate kitchen from the in-laws. She maintains some religious performances. During the Ramzan month, she reads out the *Quran* regularly to her neighbors. This upright, self dependent woman with a height of 5' 5" is happy at her present life with the loveable neighbors.

Case 2. Jasmin Sultana is the first Muslim woman as member of the west district Zilla Parishad. She is from CPI (M) party, elected in 1994. In the hierarchical structure of C.P.I. (M) party, she is the only Muslim woman member in the District Committee. She is a young lady of 27 years and Arts Graduate from Sonamura College. After passing H.S. Exam she was married at *Bejimara* village of Sonamura sub-division in 1989. Her natal house is at *Dudpuskarini* situated at the village of *Jamjuri* in Udaipur sub-division. Her husband is a physical instructor by occupation under Tripura government. He is very progressive in outlook and it is only because of his support and backing of all kinds, Jasmin came forward to participate in politics through the student politics during her study time in Sonamura College.

Her father is a school teacher. He is also source of inspiration for her orientation to politics. She gets all kind of cooperation from him. Her younger sister is a M.A in

English and working as a school teacher. Her younger brother is a Graduate and earning through private tuitions for the time being of him getting a job. Her mother is also a literate one, able to read and write. Coming from this background, Jasmin is quite a forward lady. She is blessed by a son of five years old (1999). She has father-in-law, mother-in-law and also a brother-in-law in her family. When she goes out for her occupational need, her son is looked after by them. There is no problem with her in-laws because they are “very considerate” – She comments. She stays for long hours out of the house for various activities. Usually she cooks in the morning and casually in the evening. She does not get enough time to look after the family members even her husband and son. But this does not make any adverse effect on family relations as her husband manages all the things. She appreciates her husband jubilantly when it comes about his interest in politics. She says, he loves politics and wants to see his wife well ahead in political position. She herself also loves political participation which is the “need of the day” as she comments. Jasmine is tall in structure, lean and thin in appearance. She is very popular in the area, especially among the Muslim people who did cast their vote in favour of her. She obviously had to face criticism in the first stage of her career in politics.

She attends the executive meetings of the Zilla Parishad held once in a month and also the general meetings held in three months interval throughout the year. Along with other twelve female colleagues of the Zilla Parishad, she participates in decision making functions in the development Programme of the district. She is very conscious about the backwardness of the Muslim woman in Tripura and is very prompt in expression of her thoughts. She explicitly opines in favour of common civil law of the country. She thinks common civil law will be a safeguard for the Muslim girls who are the victims of early marriage and gets their future buried for any further development in life. Jasmin, without wearing any Burqua, works door-to-door in the village and listens to their problems. She has even accompanied the present researcher in the survey tour. Is she not sufficient to prove that Muslim community is not as conservative as it is supposed by the people? Jasmine has also succeeded in the next two terms election in 1999 and 2003.

Case 3. Pushpa Begam is a woman *Gram-Pradhan* in the second election term of 1999. She is thirty years old and elected as a member of the N.C. Nagar Gram Panchayat. She is selected as head of the Panchayat, called *Gram-Pradhan*. Though she had no political background, she contested for election because of the insistence of her father-in-law in reserved quota for women seat. Her father-in-law was a member of the previous Panchayat from CPM_(I) party for the last ten years. Puspa won the election because of this background and influential of her father-in-law. Her husband named Abdul Kalam is a petty businessman. Puspa has her household earning from the domestic livestock business e.g. Rs 700 per month. It is absolutely her income. As a Panchayat member she draws a salary. This is her new identity.

She has no formal education except putting her signature as she has told. But it is observed that she is quite articulate and smart in nature. She has described the reasons for her educational backwardness. She was the eldest daughter of her parents who were not so much aware of girls' education to send her to school. Besides, the school was also quite distant from her residence i.e., her natal home located at *Kulubari*, a vilage under Sonamura sub division. She has told that her parents have now become aware of girls' education and so her younger sisters are studying in the schools at secondary level. Pushpa was married only at the age of fifteen and no dowry was given to her in laws except a 'bicycle' to her husband. Her in-laws are good people and she is quite happy with them along with her children. A few months ago, before election, she lost one of her four children by an accidental death. She was so shocked by the mishap that she was almost losing her mental balance. In the mean time, her participation in politics helped her to recover her broken mind – she expressed it in this way.

In this double role, as a housewife and as a Pradhan, she is however able to manage. She does not need to go Panchayat office daily and need not be present regularly in the meetings as because her father-in-law manages all these things. But when some issues need her presence, she visits the spots herself along with the other male members of the Panchayat. She does not wear any burqua and works with them freely as the Hindu women do.

Case 4. Kamana Begam, 45 years old, is a active party worker in the village level. She is a member of different local committees in Udaipur District. She does not face any role-conflict because her family members are very much co-operative and helpful. Her husband is a farmer but forward in his outlook. He has never raised any objection in his wife's role as activists. Kamana visits the people and tries to solve their problems with the help of others. She organises some married girls as workers in the ground level. One of her son is an Arts graduate from M.B.B. college of Agartala, another son is in North India for military training in the Force Department. Her one daughter was married when she was in tenth (class x) standard. The reason is early marriage lies in the social environment. However, the in-laws house of the daughter are also good.

Kamana Begam is simple in life style but smart up to the standard. She expressed her feeling of disgust about the educated people. She does not have formal education more than fourth standard. Usually she cooks for the family doing all the household duties. But when time demands, she leaves it and her son and husband manage all these. She is a happy woman.

9.7. Hindrances to Political Participation :

There are some hindrances also for the Muslim women participants in politics. For investigation, informal conversation was with the activists and the outcome of that discussion deserves to be mentioned here:

1) Political participation needs a person to go out and interact with people, to read newspapers regularly, to keep oneself aware of the needs of the people and the incidents or happenings in the surroundings to keep close contact with information media a supportive family and above all full cooperation from the machinery of party politics. Very few women under study have the scope of such favorable environment. e.g. most of the households are not served newspaper and other media.

2) Muslim women are still under the strong customary bindings and traditional way of life which compels them not to move out of the home or to have frequent conversation with the persons having higher knowledge. It hinders them to take part in

the instant decision making functions which is necessary for a successful political activists.

3) Educational qualification of the participants is an important factor for prompt action as well as perception politics. But Women members elected in gram Panchayats have not crossed even upper primary standard. In the hierarchal system of political position there is every chance for them to be monitored / tutored by the men.

4) Women are more committed to family and children than their men. Men spend their time either in economic pursuit or political activities or otherwise; sometimes they work as whole timer in party. Naturally, she has to protect her family first with all her time and energy and thus no time to spare for politics. In this condition, women with higher educational qualification and political aspiration need co-operation of all family members, political party and the neighbor people with whom they have daily interactions. Above all, it needs the change of role expectation of women in society.

Findings

The data on the political status of Muslim woman reveals that since 1994, they stepped to the active politics in a slow but steady process. Their participation in three tier Panchayats may be characterized in this way. In all the levels viz. Gram, Samiti and Zilla, their participation is progressing from the previous ones. In a male dominated social structure of the community life, the ordinary housewife, the shy and obedient women have come out from their traditional life and adapted with new identifiable role with the capital of mere primary education standard. No serious report of collision or conflict with colleagues is found against her. Really it is a silent revolution for women in Tripura. Obviously the credit of this goes to the laws of the country, the support of the community and the individual families too. This is a positive side of Women's empowerment in Panchayat Raj of Tripura. Any negative feature of women's empowerment in three tier Panchayat is still not experienced by the people of Tripura.

Political situation of a country i.e. laws of the state and the attitude of the community she belongs to, are the important factors to determine the level of participation of women in politics. The prevailing unawareness and apathetic attitude to politics among the Muslim women has undergone a change when the National Law provides them a chance to be elected by the guarantee of reservation of seats in three tier Panchayat system.

Muslim women are found less involved in extra household activities like association and organizations of different kinds in the society e.g. literary and cultural organizations, the NGOs. In the local governance of Urban administration, both Muslim men and women are found about nil. In the governance of Gram Panchayat, they have proved their presence, like the women of other communities. In the Muslim dominated villages, they have been selected as head of office i.e., Gram Pradhan. The increasing tendency of their number in the succeeding elections indicates the positive aspect of the women empowerment in the villages of Tripura. They are gradually becoming able to occupy the seats for representation in the upper rank of the three tier hierarchy. In some places they have exceeded the quota of (33%) reservation for women. In some

blocks and districts which are Muslim populated, Muslim women have secured 76.87 percent seats of total women elected.

Literacy and education has a relation with active participation in politics. The previous studies of scholars show that education does not necessarily mean political awareness and participation of women. Higher education does not necessarily mean higher participation in politics. The present study also confirms it. Most of the Muslim women Representatives are from the west Tripura while the female literacy percentage is highest in north Tripura (Dhali). Though there is not much difference in female literacy, but difference in participatory role of women in between south and west is significant. The demographic factor like number of the community population may be a rational cause for this, so the rate of literacy or formal education may not be treated as highly important for political participation. Often educated persons keep themselves away from politics. Rather the reverse may be true viz. political participation makes people conscious and educated providing knowledge of practical life and social reality. There is no dearth of example of this truth. The present empirical study on the political participation of women may prove this. Majority political participants under study are only primary educated. As soon as they have availed the chance of participation, they have been adapting themselves with the new role and position. They are to learn everything in the practical field. As far as the report is available about them, their political orientation is from their family background e.g. parental house and in-laws house. On the basis of family supports as well as community supports, they are able to run the responsibility of public office. Women are behind their men in political participation. Their presence is almost zero, in the associations and organizations involved in various social activities. It is seen that though some women have political aspirations but they are to withdraw or keep themselves away for the sake of children and family. Being educated and a conscious mother, she gives her first preference to the family wellbeing rather than commitment to the party-politics. Men usually spare their time in economic pursuits or whole time politics or may be busy otherwise and thus they do not give required-time for family. Hence a woman has no other alternative but to withdraw herself from politics which demands sufficient time. In Kailasahar

(Baoulabasa), a Commerce graduate woman is a mother of two children and her husband is a whole time worker in a political party; though she has joined in the women wings of the party, she can not give more time there because of her family commitment. She needs immediately a job for the economic stability of her family.

The case studies on political activities reveal that they are able to manage both the family and the public responsibility. This discussion leads to the investigation of the factors other than education as stimulant for political participation of women. These are very important to be noted: i) Party Sponsorship, ii) Co-operation from family, iii) Role Expectation of the society, iv) Law of the country, v) Economic stability of the family, vi) Leisure for extra familial works, vii) Mental orientation or attitude to think or do for the welfare of the people of the country overcoming the too much attachment to family and household works.