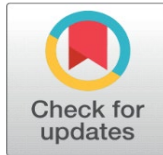


POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF NAGA WOMEN IN ELECTORAL POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

Patriarchy is deeply rooted in the Naga society and men are taught to live and believe for centuries that women are inferior to men. This societal conditioning of men has made them perceive themselves as leaders. Women were always sidelined and were considered politically lacking the ability to govern. Therefore they were not given the opportunity to take part in the decision making process. This article seeks to study the political representation of Naga women and how they were politically marginalized as a result of societal norms and attitudes. In the past the societal discriminatory mindset has forced women to prioritize gender role as care givers rather than take part in decision making. However gradual changes have started taking place as we see few women coming out to participate in decision making. But more women still need to come forward as adequate representation of women is an indicator of gender political equality in a true democracy. The study will attempt to highlight the role and contribution of Naga women in the past, present and future of Naga politics in Nagaland.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Representation, Mindset, Norms, Attitudes

1. INTRODUCTION

In a true democracy both men and women should be entitled to equality of opportunity to engage themselves in the political processes of the state. However, in the Naga society politics is completely male dominated which results in the political exclusion of women in decision making. But if the idea of democracy is to be achieved in reality women's representation cannot be ignored as equal political participation will foster just and equitable political environment for all.

2. OBJECTIVE

The study will present the importance of political participation, Trends that has been taking place and challenges that the Naga women have faced in the fight for equal participation. It will also suggest some measures for the same.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study is descriptive in nature. The necessary secondary data was collected from books website, internet source, newspaper and local daily etc.

4. TRENDS IN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Naga women have been making their political visibility not only as voters but few women have been taking part in electoral politics since 1969. In the same year Ravole-u contested from Western Angami assembly constituency securing 32.6% and R L Kinghen contested from Bhandari assembly constituency under wokha district gathering 37.07%. Rano M Shaiza contested in the 5th assembly election from the 8th western angami assembly constituency.

Thereafter in the 6th assembly election 3 women contested but none could win it. In the 7th and 9th Nagaland Legislative Assembly no women candidate came forward to take part in election. However from the 10th -14th Assembly elections, Nagaland saw few women candidates coming forward making their presence felt in electoral politics. In the 6th Lok Sabha election in 1977 Rano M Shaiza was elected as the first and only women MP from Nagaland from United Democratic Front Party. The election of Rano M Shaiza was a historic development in the history of Naga politics since the first assembly election in 1964. She has not only defeated the sitting Chief Minister Mr. Hokishe Sema but has shown the resilience of Naga Women breaking gender barrier and paving way for future generation.

The table below shows that even in terms of voting, women are contributing in large numbers.

Table 1

Table 1 Gender Statistics 2023, Directorate of Economics and Statistics.							
General Election	Year	Total no. of Electors (voters)			% of Electors(voters) voted in		
		Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 st	1964			124166			50.51
2 nd	1969	83102	93829	176931	80.51	76.47	78.49
3 rd	1974	176156	224166	400322	77.47	71.09	74.28
4 th	1977	183223	214812	398035	74.48	82.21	78.345
5 th	1982	266163	330290	596453	76.53	72.75	74.64
6 th	1987	262574	319379	581953	86.02	83.29	84.655
7 th	1989	261805	320611	582416	86.01	85.35	85.68
8 th	1993	381661	421250	802911	91.05	91.98	91.515
9 th	1998	438848	487721	926569	21.72	22.65	22.185
10 th	2003	485364	529477	1014841	85.98	89.56	87.77

11 th	2008	635875	666391	1302266	86.39	85.99	86.19
12 th	2013	590150	608299	1198449	91.33	89.09	90.21
13 th	2018	591440	579108	1170548	82.48	86.09	84.29
14 th	2023	655144	652938	1308082	87.15	84.92	86.04

Election in 31 Akuluto (ST) Ac was uncontested during 14th Assembly Elections

Source: Chief Electoral officer, Nagaland:Kohima.

However, while women vote in higher numbers the political representation is still very low in Nagaland comparing to the national average. It also shows that male electors outnumber female electors but women outnumber males in the number of vote cast in 8 Assembly elections. In fact if the political supports of these women get converted into votes in favour of women candidates, Nagaland can see an increased representation of women in politics as noted by Maomenla Amer in her article Political status of women in Nagaland.

Note: 59 ACs contested and 1 AC I.e 11-Northern Angami-11 Ac uncontested during 13th State Legislative Assembly.

Table 2

Table 2 Gender Statistics 2023, Directorate Of Economics And Statistics.								
General Election	Year	Total no. of seats	No. of contestants		Female		Male	
			Female	Male	No. of elected	% of winning to total seats	No. of elected	% of winning to total seats
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 st	1964	40	0	73	0	0	40	100
2 nd	1969	40	2	142	0	0	40	100
3 rd	1974	60	0	219	0	0	60	100
4 th	1977	60	0	204	0	0	60	100
5 th	1982	60	1	244	0	0	60	100
6 th	1987	60	3	211	0	0	60	100
7 th	1989	60	0	140	0	0	60	100
8 th	1993	60	1	177	0	0	60	100
9 th	1998	60	0	80	0	0	60	100
10 th	2003	60	3	222	0	0	60	100
11 th	2008	60	4	214	0	0	60	100
12 th	2013	60	2	187	0	0	60	100
13 th	2018	59	5	190	0	0	60	100
14 th	2023	60	4	180	2	3.33%	58	96.67%

Source: Chief Electoral officer, Nagaland: Kohima.

Table 2 shows that though women take a very active part in voting only 25 women have come forward to contest in elections from 1964-2023. Even in the last

14th State Assembly Elections there were only four women contestants in contrast to 180 male contestants out of which only two female candidates won with winning percentage of below average 3.33% against 96.67% male candidates. This reflects the disparity in terms of representation of Naga women in electoral politics.

Recent trends: The 14th Nagaland Legislative Assembly Elections was a remarkable point in the history of Naga Politics when Smt. Hekani Jakhalu and Smt. Salhoutuonuo Kruse were elected in the state assembly elections in 2023. They were the first ever women to be elected since 1964. Smt. Hekani Jakhalu was elected from Dimapur III Assembly Constituency with a margin of 1536 votes. Whereas Smt. Salhoutuonuo Kruse was elected from 8 western Angami Assembly Constituency by 7 votes. Smt. Salhoutuonuo Kruse achieved another milestone when she became the first women to be appointed as Cabinet Minister marking a significant development towards gender equality in political participation.

In another landmark development towards gender equity, a prominent women politician Smt. S Phangnon Konyak was sworn in as a member of parliament in Rajya Sabha representing BJP on 4.4.2022. She is the first women to achieve this feat from Nagaland to sit in the upper house of parliament. She also has in her credit to become the first women member from Nagaland to preside over the upper house of parliament on 25th July 2023.

Further, the conduct of urban local body election on 26th June 2024 after a gap of 20 years was another remarkable step towards gender parity. However these journey was not easy as it has even led to the resignation of the then Chief Minister of Nagaland T.R Zeliang when an attempt was made by the government to go ahead with the election with 33% women reservation in 2017. Nevertheless with the successful implementation of the historic 33% women reservation after a long struggle of more than 20 years, election was made possible. As many as 198 women contested in the ULB election where 102 women were elected. This is quiet a remarkable achievement in the political journey towards equal representation in the state.

5. IMPORTANCE AND CHALLENGES OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN ELECTORAL POLITICS:

Equal political representation is important as it will ensure equal opportunity for all irrespective of gender biases and guarantee the attainment of progressive political environment for everyone and achieve gender equality. There is hardly any aspect of life where women have not achieved and contributed for the betterment of the society. But because of the overwhelming inequality and injustice many women are suppressed and remain voiceless. Therefore in order to represent the voiceless community more women should be empowered through equal representation. Economic and political empowerment of women will go a long way in bringing about a change in the societal mindset and contribute to effective governance and accountability. Further society will thrive more if gender balance is maintained in leadership role which can benefit all.

However in the context of naga society equal political participation for Naga women will have more questions than answers as societal and cultural barriers still pose a great challenge for women's representation in decision making. Society is male dominated in all facets of life. Acceptance of men as decision makers or leaders and retaining all these age old privileges has almost become a way of life that women find it challenging to come out and break into this political sphere. Therefore men

end up being the popular choice in decision making by the electorates, political parties and all institutions of support systems over women.

Besides women are traditionally and culturally conditioned in an environment of discrimination at all stages of their life. They have to keep up with the societal expectations and priorities household responsibilities, unseen family obligations nurturing and care giving duties of children's, parents, professional responsibility etc over public roles. The challenges get even more compounded when their work life balance come in the way of keeping up with their political aspirations. Women are left with very limited time to strengthen their political influence like building alliance and connections with individuals, groups and associations, organizing and attending political meetings events, rallies, campaigning, etc which are essential for building their political network. Therefore to achieve political status at par with men appear to be a winding journey for women.

The challenges of Naga Women's political representation start from the village level administration. Village council members with the chairman are democratically elected represented by all the respective clans in the village. But women are nowhere to be seen in the picture as they are not given any representation. They only play as supporting and assisting the role of men. The situation is similar with the Naga Hoho, which is considered to be the apex decision making body represented by all the different Naga tribes. However, till date it has no women representative. (Moa Amenla Amer: Participation of women in political process in Nagaland : Issues and challenges). Few women representatives are included in the Village Development Board headed by a male VDB secretary. But women hardly enjoy any power as most of the privileges guaranteed to them remain only on paper.

Again, political party structure at the state level are equally male dominated and women hardly get an opportunity to play an equal role as men. They are treated as secondary. Moamenla Amer in her article participation of women in political process in Nagaland Issues and Challenges mentioned that in Nagaland there is no documented case of political parties promoting the active participation of women in party leadership. No doubt women committees exist but they only function as a channel to win the support of female voters and not to develop Women Political Cadre. Gendered division of labour is also visible in the party structure. The activities of women in the party organization are mainly to assist men and prepare meals and serve the party workers for various events and related activities.

In addition to all these, money and muscle power play a huge role during election in Nagaland. Candidates, supporters and party workers indulge in engaging rich people and criminals, intimidation to opponents, booth capturing, multiple voting, buying and selling of votes etc. These kind of unethical activities are not safe and a friendly environment for women. All these above factors have made political participation challenging for women.

In order to bring about positive changes and create space for women's representation, few suggestions can be stated:

- 1) More efforts should be given on filtering rigid traditional and customary practices based on gender discrimination and patriarchy and replace it with progressive conventions and laws. A sincere consideration on the right to inheritance can be a positive development for equal political empowerment, so that a customary practice does not compromise some basic women rights. This will go a long way in ensuring equal representation of Naga women.
- 2) Educational institutions can play a big role on sensitization of gender equity by introducing gender sensitive textbooks. This will enhance the

- understanding on the importance of equal representation among children. School curriculum should politically educate that equal representation is a shared responsibility of both genders. This will break down many societal barriers and stereotypes and normalize the political participation of women.
- 3) The government should give a serious thought on implementation of women sensitive laws to prevent discrimination based on all basis and promote equal opportunity for all.
 - 4) Political education of women is imperative to enable more women to consciously show support and solidarity to women candidates. This will motivate more women to take part in governance. Many issues based on gender inequality will be addressed if more women are represented.
 - 5) Government should implement strict laws to curb money and muscle power to prevent criminalization of politics. This will create a conducive environment for free and fair election where women can participate in the political process without any fear. Law enforcing agencies should not be partisan and priorities on upholding ethical political behaviour and transparency at all times.
 - 6) Women themselves are patriarchal in nature. Therefore the mindset of women need to change and they need to start thinking beyond the kitchen. Women need to be confident that they can take up leadership role in any important organization whether it is in offices, educational institutions, legislature or parliament etc.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion it can be stated that inspite of the challenges the new political developments can be seen as a positive step towards inclusivity that can change the political landscape of the Naga politics in terms of women representation in the days to come. Yet, these emerging trends highlight both challenges and breakthroughs in women representation as women still need to be accommodated in the political space by giving them more opportunities and addressing all kinds of societal barriers and stereotypes. Further if these emerging trend has to continue, sustained support and commitment is required from all network of support system towards equal political representation thereby bringing about equitable and just political order.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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