

WOMEN'S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN NAGALAND: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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Abstract

Naga women are frequently lauded for being independent, educated, and diligent, and the Naga society is also recognised for protecting women. However, being safe doesn't mean that Naga women are being treated in the same manner as Naga men. The political sphere is still closed off to Naga women, despite the fact that they have greater freedom in Nagaland than in other regions of India. With reference to Nagaland's cultural tradition, this paper seeks to explore the election procedures that have developed there. This paper discusses about the political status of women in Nagaland and the reason behind Naga women not getting enough opportunity to participate in political affairs and what kind of role and status do they hold and play in Naga society, Why, despite their education, the majority of people do not support them in politics, and what difficulties do they have in Naga society, particularly in the political sphere?

Keywords: Customary laws, Democracy, Decision making, Education, Electoral system, Equality, Gender gap, Nagaland, Naga women, Politics, Political parties, State, Traditions.

Introduction

India, the second most populated country in the world after China, is a country full of diverse culture, languages, religions, traditions, races, etc. It is also the largest constitution and the biggest democracy in the world. Nagaland is the sixteenth state of the Indian subcontinent and it was formed on 1st December 1963. (Nagaland Profile). It can be said that Nagaland is a safe and bright place for everyone but it is still patriarchal in nature. Women are equally important in society as men are. Women's capabilities must never be underestimated based on their gender, and they should be given equal opportunities to showcase their talents. In the olden days, people considered women as someone who was responsible to take care of all household tasks and manage their children and take care of the family. But if we look closely and compare between the old and new generation, the empowerment of women has opened new doors so that women can flourish, thrive and shine. Even in the rural regions, young girls have started going to school, which is positively affecting the literacy rate in India. Nagaland is surrounded by the Indian states of Arunachal Pradesh to the northeast, Manipur to the south, and Assam to the west and northwest and the country of Myanmar (Burma) to the east. Kohima is the state capital and is located in the southern part of Nagaland. As per the study, Nagaland is a patriarchal society but it is not as extreme as the other states in India. However, it depends from person to person, family to family, what kind of environment he or she is from, etc. As per Census 2011, the literacy rate for Nagaland is 79.55%. The female literacy rate in Nagaland is 76.22% which is higher than the national average of 65.46% and the male literacy rate in Nagaland is 82.75%. Nearly 90.7% of the women in Nagaland make their own decisions or decisions jointly with their husbands, which is the highest in the entire country (according to The National Family Health Survey). The workforce participation rate for females in the state is 44.7% as against 53.4% for males, according to the 2011 census. (Morung Express, February 28, 2021). The presence of women in government jobs in Nagaland is also quite high at 30.35%, according to the annual administrative report of 2019-2020 of the state government's economics and statistics department. What is more significant is that of the female government employees, 29% are Class I officers. Although women in Nagaland play a major role, those statistics about gender equality do not translate into political empowerment for women. Be it in social, cultural, economic, educational or any sort of activities, women in Nagaland occupy important and high status. However, the political participation of Naga women in the state is still inadequate. This is largely because the Naga society is still deeply rooted in traditional values where

gender roles are clearly divided. Nagaland, being part of the democratic India, would also mean that it is a democratic state and that democracy is a matter of inclusiveness. The true essence of democracy is that every citizen must be treated equally and to make each and every person feel included, protected and empowered. However, why are Naga women still not being supported in politics by the general public? What could be the problem? What could be the reason behind these young educated women of Nagaland who are discouraged to participate in elections? Can we really say that Nagaland is a state in which women are treated in a fair and equitable manner?

Statement of the problem

Nagaland was formed in 1963 and since the formation of the state, the number of women elected to the Assembly has stood at zero. It is the same lamentable history with parliamentary elections. So far, Nagaland has had only one woman as a member of Lok Sabha, the late Rano Mese Shazia who won back in 1977 and recently, in March this year, a BJP nominee S Phangon Konyak was elected to the Rajya Sabha becoming the second woman to be elected as a member of Parliament. (Namita Bhandare, "The big story: Why Nagaland continues to shut women out of politics," Hindustan Times, July 17, 2022). The wait for a woman parliamentarian ended when BJP candidate S Phangnon Konyak was elected without opposition to the Rajya Sabha. Prior to her, Rano M Shazia was the only woman in the state who was a member of the Parliament. The late Shaiza was chosen as an independent candidate for the Lok Sabha in 1977. It took 45 years for Nagaland to elect its second woman parliamentarian. This clearly shows that patriarchy exists in many different forms in the state. (Purkayastha, "Nagaland women shine in all spheres, but find little space in politics"). In the 2008 election, four women candidates contested in the election and not even one of them won a seat. Women in Nagaland constitute at least almost half of the total electorate of around 2 million voters, however, it is an undeniable fact that women in Nagaland are still struggling to make a place for themselves in the political field even after many decades of having freedom to vote as well as to have equal opportunities to stand for office. If we study more in depth about the culture and traditions of the North-eastern state, one can say that these northeast states have one of the lowest crimes against women, child marriages have never been practised, young girls are being sent to schools with Mizoram having female literacy rate at 89.27%, Nagaland at 78.30%, Meghalaya at 89.24%, Tripura at 82.73, etc. which is ahead of India's average rate of 77.70% as per National literacy rate 2022. The Naga community has long been known as an egalitarian society with a gender balance. However, recent research shows the opposite. It points in the opposite direction. At a broader level, gender inequality, especially when it comes to politics, has been identified as the critical barrier and main obstacle to social development in the 21st century. It is therefore necessary to respond to the need to include women in institutions and decision-making bodies at all levels.

Review of Literature

Amer Moamenla, in her article **Political status of women in Nagaland (2013)**, clearly states that one of the most difficult issues in Nagaland's electoral surveys is the discourse about excluding women from the electoral process. There is a visible tendency for men to dominate politics at all levels, while female participation and representation in politics is invisible and this is also the case in Nagaland. She also states that women in Nagaland only possess the role as voters in the field of politics. Naga women excel in many spheres but they are still not considered as good or capable enough to take part in politics. This article debates over the role and status of women in the realm of politics in Nagaland. The constitution of India grants full political rights to women, equal to those of men. Women have equal rights as men. They can participate in the political process as voters and also contest in elections. Naga women have been actively participating in many activities. However, they are being completely excluded in one area and that is in the political arena. Even after over four decades of statehood, Nagaland is the only state that has never had a woman MLA. This reinforces the view that Nagaland's electoral policy is still male-dominated. Although elections in Nagaland have sometimes taken place with evidence of widespread electoral dissemination, official statistics show an overall increase in women's electoral participation. This shows that women vote in the same way as men. There are

several general inferences that can be made from table 1 as given in her article. The data shows that women tend to vote more than men. In eight out of ten legislative elections under review, women voted in greater numbers than men. This also leads to the assumption that if voters vote for women candidates, they can be elected to political posts. It is not just because of parity that it is important for women to be elected to political office, but also women elected to political office have the potential to engage women in politics. Where more women politicians are in power, women are more likely to discuss and get involved in politics as they draw on the activities of visible role models (Wolbrecht and David Campbell, 2007). However, the high voter turnout of women has not been matched or equalled by a corresponding increase in the number of women elected as candidates and representatives. In Nagaland's electoral history, over a period of more than forty years, fifteen female candidates represented themselves, but all were defeated repeatedly. A better comparative evaluation can be obtained by looking at Table 2 which shows the number of male and female candidates who stood for election to the Assembly from 1969 to 2013. There are many reasons why women do not have the opportunity to succeed in elections. Nagaland's political parties do not give much importance to women's candidacy. Despite the fact that political parties have female wings, women are often not recruited for an elected position. Another thing the political party does that marginalises women in politics is that the few female candidates they nominate are given a ticket in the constituencies where the party is likely to win. Another reason is that the voters of patriarchal societies are likely to view women candidates as less skilled than men to stand for public office. One should not underestimate the impact of gender socialisation. By and large, sexist stereotypes are still commonplace and accepted in our society. Society conditions women and men in different roles. In fact, politics and women are regarded as the opponents of each other. As a result, the general electorate may perceive women as qualified and less politically capable than men and almost invariably cast ballots for the male candidate. This attitude towards women contributes to the lack of trust many voters have in female candidates and has become a major obstacle in electing women to elected office. Despite the establishment of a modern governance system since Nagaland became a state on December 1, 1963, the old traditional practices and values still prevail. In Nagaland, patriarchy seems to control every institution in society, both modern and traditional. Nagaland's political parties seem to have been dominated by men. They haven't really addressed the issue of women's political participation, whether it's within the party through leadership positions or outside the party through running for election. This translates into the almost total absence of women in the party leadership and thus influence the party's decisions. In addition, the traditional institutions around which Naga's social and political life is built have never acknowledged women's rights as primary policy makers. An example is the Naga Hoho which is considered as the supreme decision-making body of the Naga people and is represented by several Naga tribes. So far, there is no female representative. At the local level, the village council is the highest decisional body represented by all the clans within the municipality. However, traditionally, women are still not allowed to participate in the village council decision-making process. In contrast to their male counterparts, women receive no positive support from society as a whole for their participation in politics. Naga women live with the identity of being marginalised above all in politics. The opposition to the 33% women's seat reserve in local bodies clearly demonstrates the dominance of power in deterring those who participate in politics. This shows that there is prejudice against women who participate in election activities. Thus, the author concludes by stating that despite the introduction of modern democratic systems for over four decades and the statutory equality provisions in the Indian constitution, women's political status has not been improved. Without a significant participation and representation of women in politics, based on the principles of equality, a democratic civil society cannot be built. Therefore, the barriers to women's access to elected positions lie in the way in which society as a whole perceives women in public roles.

Rekha Ojha, in her work **Women in Electoral Politics in Nagaland, India (2014)**, mentions that women can be seen running business establishments, teaching at the university, campaigning against alcohol abuse, etc. in Nagaland. They can also be seen wearing hard hats and shovelling gravel alongside a road repair roller. But, the only place where women won't be seen is the State Assembly.

Nagaland is home to 16 major tribes, each with their own culture and traditions. Despite the diversity of culture and traditions, the different Naga tribes have a common characteristic and that is being patriarchal in nature where men have dominated the society. While the Indian constitution gave equal status to men and women, they continued to lag behind in politics. Although women have contributed to the socio-economic spheres of life, the prevailing patriarchy of Nagaland has denied women equal status and opportunity in electoral politics. Women are essentially independent and free, and their role within the community and the family is well recognised, in comparison with the rest of the country. However, politics is still elusive to women. There can be no real democracy or adequate participation in government and development unless there is an equal contribution of gender in all aspects of life and to various levels of decision-making. The author also discusses that how women's political empowerment through participation can promote women's freedom with men and can help reduce the gender gap. To tackle the issue of socio-economic change in Naga society and expand the structure of the political elite, the political status of women needs to be improved. If electoral politics remained dominated by men, it cannot be called democracy. In table 1 as given by Rekha Ojha in her article, it shows the proportion of men and women who voted in each of the parliamentary elections held during a period of over five decades (1964-2013). This table clearly shows that female voters take part in elections in the same way as male voters. And according to table 2, from the first election in 1964 until the final election in 2013, there were only 15 female candidates out of a total of 1960 candidates. Nagaland political parties give women candidates low priorities. Women often find their efforts to get involved in politics marginalised by the inability of parties to support their sustainability as candidates. The author states that the determinants of the Nagas' vote include considerations of kinship ties, clans, economic considerations, and political affinities of family members, and not in accordance with political ideology or party principles. In many cases, the choice of the candidate depends on the decision of the men in the family. The political parties of Nagaland are predominantly male. They haven't really spoken about women's political participation. The author of this article also partly puts the blame on women for their failure to get into politics. She states that the Naga women do not want to come forward, and many are of the opinion that it's better for men to run politics and women to run other areas of life. Thus, the writer strongly believes that the traditional political system in the socio-cultural patriarchal system of the Naga's is heavily impregnated even in the spirit of the Naga women which again contributes to their exclusion from the role of decision making in politics. In general, it is considered that the role of women should be within the household, like family responsibilities, raising children, whereas the leadership role is for men. This predominant attitude towards women contributes to the lack of confidence in women, which becomes an obstacle to women's election to the Legislative Assembly. Politics is seen as a domain in which only men can exercise authority and control over power. As a result, the male dominated tradition continues to hold women in second-class status in politics. Thus, such negativity makes many qualified and competent women hesitate to engage in politics. Given the growth of women's education and their achievements in areas other than politics, it is expected that a gender-sensitised restructuring of the formal in the society, both traditional and modern, will allow Naga women in equal partnership with men in electoral politics so that women can also take part in decision-making at the legislative level. The writer concludes by stating that there are now women in the soil who can express their views and also express their opinion and hence, they need to be encouraged, supported and given a chance to engage in that decision-making process in the Legislative Assembly.

Phangnon Konyak, the president of Bharatiya Janata Mahila Morcha (BJMM), spoke during a programme to mark the launch of the BJMM's state-wide tour, reminding the members of their roles in politics, stating that they need to be more effective. According to her, the participation of Naga women in political activities should be reflected in a position or role in decision-making. She appealed to the leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) female wing to put greater emphasis on empowering women, to gain a better understanding of the party system and their active political involvement. She proceeds by saying that as the election time is drawing near, she asked the women party leaders to familiarise themselves with their party's ideologies and constitution, which provide guidelines for

moving forward. In her view, when members remain concentrated on the party's work system, they generate a good candidate to represent the party. She urged the mahila workers to disseminate information about the programmes and benefits of the regimes and schemes such as 'Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana', and 'Beti Bachao', 'Beti Padhao' among the citizens. She also recalled the 2009 Lok Sabha elections and stated that a total of 5,75,635 Naga women had turned up to vote and that was the highest number of voters in India that year. Given this statistic, she said, "it is sad that there is not even a single women MLA or minister in the state." Irrespective of the patriarchal nature of Naga society, she urged the members to support, reinforce and strengthen one another. According to her, patriarchy continues to define the political narrative. She concludes her speech by stating that it's past time for women to define diplomatic, strategic, and progressive politics.

Vehülü Lohe, in her article **Are women really treated as equals in Nagaland? (2021)**, talks about how tradition often goes against equality throughout the world. But with regard to the issue of gender equality, such situations may become unstable. And she also states that Nagaland is no different. Also, Nagaland is the only state in India where there was strong opposition to the 33% reservation for the participation of women in the public service. Customary tribunals and traditional tribal organisations have operated like the state's administrative and moral authorities. The traditional courts and organisations have enjoyed unprecedented influence even though there is a legislature where members are elected by the Indian electoral system every five years. There's a provision for Nagaland in the Constitution of India under Article 371(A) which ensures the protection of Naga culture and customs, the ownership of land, including preservation of local, social and religious practices. She also questions about equality in Nagaland when justice, equality and freedom in Naga society are still the prerogative of some and she also goes on by questioning whether a society can be described as democratic when a minority has defined such a heroic and masculine past? There is a belief in Naga society that women must be respected and that their safety cannot be compromised, especially by men. However, Naga's society is profoundly patriarchal. The traditional Naga society law sets out a clear distinction between gender roles and responsibilities. For example, women are responsible for domestic issues such as family while on the other hand, men take care of society including village administration and councils. Consequently, women have been left out of the political arena. Local awareness of a distinct social identity arose in a patriarchal discourse following the formation of the 'Naga Club' in 1918. Several Naga women groups have broken ties with their main women's organisation campaigning for the 33% quota under the pressure from local groups. Political violence broke out ahead of the municipal elections when women's organisations under the leadership of the Naga Mother's Association (NMA) demanded the implementation of Indian Act 243(T) of the Indian Constitution which stipulates that 33% of seats should be reserved for women in local political bodies. Their demand was forcefully rejected and the male politicians cited "tribal traditions" as their chief argument. The conflict unleashed deadly protests where crowds attacked offices and shops. Naga customary laws have always been interpreted as a patriarchal mindset. The writer of this article also talks about how Monisha Behal, who is the chairperson of North East Network and well-known women rights activist, views the Naga society as a whole. Behal states that Naga women belonging to various tribes suffer from disqualification in many ways such as a girl from the Ao community cannot become a member of Putu Menden (traditional village which is the highest decision making body in Ao society), or a married woman from the Chakhesang community, if she is caught for adultery, will be forced to leave the house of her husband with only the clothes she is wearing and nothing else and a fine will be imposed as well. But if a married man commits adultery, he isn't forced to leave the house but will hand over half the property to his wife that was acquired during his life of marriage.

Vehülü Lohe further states that gender equality cannot be measured on the scale of what is known as safety that is purportedly given to women by men which is the bitter truth about Nagaland.

Simran Sharma, in her article **Gender Politics in Nagaland (2022)**, aims to set the course for women's political participation in Nagaland using the LokDhaba: Indian Elections Dataset. Women in Nagaland perform better when it comes to literacy as well as in the workforce in comparison to national

averages (Laveesh, 2009). They also have significant power within civil society through a variety of women's rights organisations. Yet these statistics on gender equality are not translated into women's political empowerment. According to the data from LokDhaba Dataset, only 21 women have contested legislative elections since 1964. Despite the participation of women in the general elections since the formation of the state, only one woman, Rano M Shaiza, became a member of the Parliament in the year 1977. As per the data, the biggest percentage of women ever in the State of Nagaland participated in the 2018 assembly elections. Out of 196 candidates, only a pitiful five were female contestants. The low recurrent numbers may be attributed to the traditional rules and regulations which are prevalent in many aspects of the Naga society. The author mentions that one of the reasons that deters women from participating in governance is the conventional law which delineates gender roles and divides responsibilities. Hollow political manifestos call for increased political engagement for women but offer no seats for female candidates seeking the same. Due to the absence of support from political parties, women in the state are obliged to compete as independent candidates. The author further writes about how according to the rule, candidates must forfeit the security deposit, which is equal to Rs 10,000 for general candidates and Rs 5,000 for SC/ST candidates in assembly elections, if they receive less than one-sixth (16.7%) of the vote. Since the State's founding, 21 women have run for office in assembly elections; 13 of them have forfeited their deposits. Furthermore, none have ever won. In the 2018 elections, there were 5 women candidates in which they got less than one-sixth of the vote in their areas and three of them ultimately lost their deposits. Political parties utilise the loss of security deposits as a reason to field fewer women candidates, thereby reducing their political chances. Also, the author says that the traditional laws, which rule a large portion of Nagaland culture, have made it difficult for women to enter politics. Nagaland's tribal customary laws are safeguarded by Article 371(A) of the constitution (PTI, 2019). And as per these rules, women are not included in the governing bodies. The author concludes by stating that women in the Indian subcontinent still have a long way to go before they achieve political and socioeconomic equality, despite the constitution's adoption in 1952.

Namita Bhandare, in her article **THE BIG STORY: Why Nagaland continues to shut women out of politics (2022)**, writes that the north-eastern state excels in many areas for women, including having the fewest crimes against them, virtually no child marriages, and significantly higher female literacy rates than the national average of 64.6%. Nagaland, however, continues to be an anomaly when it comes to political representation. Five women, the highest number ever, ran for assembly in 2018, out of a total of 196 candidates. They all lost, and three of them didn't even receive the necessary number of votes to keep their deposit. Only one woman from Nagaland has been elected to the Lok Sabha in 59 years; she was the late Rano Mese Shaiza, who won in 1977. S Phangon Konyak, a BJP candidate and the country's second female MP, was chosen to serve in the Rajya Sabha in March of this year. A frustrated two-judge Supreme Court bench castigated Nagaland's attorney general, KN Balagopal, for the state's failure to organise urban body elections with 33% of seats reserved for women despite a 2011 Gauhati high court approval. Since the order was issued over 12 years ago, the justices stated that they "had no trust in the state government." When reflecting on the past, the author writes that 33% of the seats in village panchayats and urban local governments were reserved for women in 1992 as a result of the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution. Since then, women have made enough progress in 20 states—including Assam and Sikkim to raise their representation to 50%. Nagaland, which enjoys a special status that permits it to keep its customary laws, was not granted the reservation for women. Monalisa Changkija, the founding editor of Nagaland Page, emphasised over the phone to the author that traditionally, women have not participated in politics and have been excluded from Naga village councils and also stated "This is embedded in the psyche of the Naga male who has not gotten out of the cave." This engrained mindset, she continued, is the cause of the hostility to the urban body polls. Tribal bodies in the state that are headed by men have opposed the participation of women in public affairs, arguing that doing so violates their own customary laws. Some others made the concession that males would choose which women could run for office if at all women were to run in elections. As a result, the state has never adopted the 33% reservation that is in effect everywhere in

the nation. Senior attorney Colin Gonsalves, who represented the women at the Supreme Court, stated that the fight for the women of Nagaland to receive the 33% reservation in municipal and town councils required by the Constitutional amendment had taken more than 15 years. He also added, "The most horrific opposition to the emancipation of women in the state has been pushed by certain male-dominated organisations, putting out noisy attacks on those who have advocated for reservation." By the end of the year, Gonsalves predicts that Nagaland will have a historic election. Monalisa Changkija, on the other hand, was more cautious and stated that she is only "cautiously hopeful."

Meneno Vamuzo, in her article **Narratives of Peace: Naga Women in the Self Determination Struggle (2012)**, discusses about how Naga women live in a politically sensitive atmosphere given their people's protracted fight for independence. They must also deal with the complexity of a society that is torn between change and continuity, with a strong modernization pull on the one hand and deep undercurrents of customs and traditions on the other. The latter are frequently designed with a strong patriarchal system that frequently favours men generally in mind. However, Naga women have been able to effectively participate in their traditional environment and have had a tremendous impact on their community. They have continued to affect the dynamics of peacemaking by taking a diplomatic and non-controversial position. This article examines several accounts of modern Naga women who actively promote peace in a politically and geographically divided Nagaland. The author focuses primarily on how Naga women respond to the internal political conflict through their efforts to mediate a settlement. The Naga customary laws which comes under Article 371A have benefited and harmed Naga society in different ways. Article 371A has aided in preserving Naga custom, but it has also contributed to discrimination in many sectors, notably against women. Women, for instance, are less likely to be granted leadership responsibilities and are thus left out of decision-making bodies. Inheritance and property ownership are other areas where discrimination occurs. This article has shown the role of Naga women in promoting peace in Nagaland that is bitterly divided. It is impossible to minimise a complicated topic like the political climate in the Nagas today. However, Naga women's insight and experience of the nuances of conciliatory methods should be valued and used more widely in a scenario when their core aim of self determination has been overtaken by much less important goals through internal warfare. Given the chance, Naga women have the capacity to profoundly and significantly change the Naga peace process.

Research Methodology

This paper's research technique heavily relies on secondary data sources. The researcher acquired the data from various articles, websites, journals, publications and books. The research focuses on the involvement of Naga women in politics and how men predominate in Nagaland's political institutions, leaving little room for women to occupy. The research also aims to examine the obstacles Naga women faced in their search for a political setting.

Women's role in the political system in Nagaland

Long known for its egalitarian attitude and gender-balanced interactions, Naga civilization is known for this trait. However, various researches demonstrate that this is actually quite the opposite. For instance, a report by the UNDP and the Ministry of Child and Women Development titled "Gendering Human Development Indices: Recasting Gender Development and Gender Empowerment Measure for India 2009" shows that Nagaland trails States like Bihar and Orissa on a number of Gender Empowerment Measures (GEM). The GEM evaluated both men and women's control over economic resources as well as their active engagement in political and economic life. With a GEM of 0.304, Nagaland and Jammu and Kashmir were the lowest-ranked of the 35 union territory till 2006. The issue of women's rights in Naga society is now quite apparent as a result. Women empowerment, sadly, seems to many to be an alien concept in modern Naga society. Women's empowerment discussions are seen by them as a danger to Naga society's very foundation. Perhaps it is for these reasons that Naga society retains a primitive mindset and way of thinking that continues to oppose the notion of women as equal partners in society. Despite the fact that numerous laws have been passed in

the nation, they have had no effect on the lives of Naga women. The Nagas have been controlled by customary rules, which have failed to treat women fairly despite constitutional provisions. As a result, it is clear that Naga women have been living in two different realities: one that is ruled by the law, and the other that is governed by social customs. The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR) and the country's constitution both explicitly state that everyone has the right to political, economic, and social opportunities regardless of their sexual orientation. The topic of women's political rights is one area that currently causes the Naga society much concern. Where do the issues of democracy, equality, justice, and human rights come into play when women, who make up almost 50% of our society, are not given the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes? It is true that women in the Naga culture did not have to battle for the right to vote. Political equality, however, also includes the right to access formal institutionalised centres of power, which is more significant than simply having the right to vote. In fact, Naga women are currently dealing with this issue. They have been cut off from decision-making institutions for many years. The deliberate and structural exclusion of women from decision-making bodies is the most egregious example of societal discrimination against women in Naga society, notwithstanding Nagas' pride in their claims to be an egalitarian society. In traditional and conservative societies that have a limited view of women's roles in public life, women face even more obstacles and opposition to entering politics. Without equal representation of women and men in all facets of life and at various levels of decision-making, there cannot be a real democracy or genuine citizen involvement in governance and development. Furthermore, it is impossible to achieve any development goals without women's full and active involvement in both the development process and the formulation of those goals. Political empowerment through participation is intended to assist women in achieving gender equality or, at the very least, significantly narrow the gender gap.

The fact that women are not invisible in politics does not imply gender neutrality; rather, it is an example of the institutional, political, systemic, and personal impacts of gender distinction. In terms of shaping and sharing power, as well as the emphasis society places on this role of women, political status of women refers to their level of freedom and equality in these areas. This equality is essential to the growth of women and is inextricably linked to the political engagement of women. While voting rights for women have generally grown, they have not yet taken on a sizeable amount of responsibility in state governance. An article from the United Nations titled "Women At A Glance" provides a good illustration of the concept. Only seven women hold the top diplomatic positions at the United Nations, and only 24 women have been elected as heads of State or governments in this century. Women also hold only 10.5% of the seats in world parliaments. The aforementioned data show that women never participate equally in politics in a state in terms of political and governing power. The New Delhi Document on WOMEN in Development (1985) acknowledged that, in spite of the significant rise in women's participation in informal politics, their position in the development of official structures had essentially not changed. Even though every democracy guarantees the freedom to participate in politics, women's participation in politics lags substantially behind that of men. Naga women's experiences as women are ingrained in their distinct culture. The sociocultural context of a particular culture invariably has an impact on and greatly determines political participation. An individual is obliged to select between many courses of action by the culture of the society, which not only encourages activity but also offers knowledge about limitations and impediments. Because every aspect of a Naga's existence, whether it be religious, social, or political, is founded on tradition and culture, an analysis of the political engagement of Naga women must delve into their cultural context in order to comprehend the dynamics of their political behaviour. The Nagas in particular show a flourishing traditional agriculture. The village, not the tribe, serves as the foundational political and social unit in naga civilization. Even though Nagaland's women's literacy rate is lower than that of men, which is 83.29 percent, it is still significantly higher than the country's overall female literacy rate of 65.46 percent (2011 census). Present-day elections are held under the auspices of many national and regional political parties. The traditional socio-political structure of the naga village has not been much impacted by party politics, however, as seen by the continued strength of the village organisation

and social structure. In addition, Article 371(A) of the Indian Constitution, a specific clause, protects the customary laws and practises of the Naga people.

“(1) Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution,—

(a) no Act of Parliament in respect of—

- (i) religious or social practices of the Nagas,
- (ii) Naga customary law and procedure,
- (iii) administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to Naga customary law,
- (iv) ownership and transfer of land and its resources, shall apply to the State of Nagaland unless the Legislative Assembly of Nagaland by a resolution so decides.”

As a result, despite the changes brought on by contemporary politics and economic growth, the fundamental social structure of Naga society has not manifested many signs of fragility. Clan traditions, customary regulations, and the integrity of the village are strictly upheld and preserved. In Naga society's history, women had traditionally held a lower position in the social hierarchy. In significant part, males developed and carried out public policies. Women's difficulties are therefore seldom acknowledged, let alone addressed. This pervasive discrimination against women, which is ingrained in society norms, renders women politically helpless, underscoring the pressing need for more political participation by women in the State. Many democratic politics theorists hold the opinion that citizen engagement is vitally necessary for the well-being of the polity. All sectors of the population must be aware of politics and show interest for it to function as it should. As a result, citizens would participate in decision-making to a greater extent. Unambiguously stated in United Nations International Human Rights documents that women have the right to exercise all freedoms and rights on an equal footing with men. Equal participation of women is crucial to the success of democratic elections. The successful conduct of democratic elections depends on the equal involvement of women. Without active and ongoing participation by women in local party structures and at all levels of government, equality in its truest sense would continue to be illusory. The Committee on the Status of Women in India (1974) identified three primary indicators that can be used to evaluate the political status of women: (i) their participation in the political process as voters and candidates in elections; (ii) their political process attitudes such as awareness, commitment and involvement in politics and autonomy in political action and behaviour; (iii) their impact on the political process. The primary criteria for measuring the political engagement of Naga women in this context included their involvement in electoral campaigns, their affiliation with political parties, and their participation in politics as voters and candidates. Because males had previously been solely responsible for governing society, there had never been a purposeful effort made to politically socialise women in the Naga traditional social order. The socialisation of Naga women fostered the perception that they are not equal spouses or leaders, but rather supporters, followers, or entertainers both inside and outside of the home. As a result, women do not participate in making decisions in both the public and private spheres. Women from Nagaland were excluded from politics and government. Most political issues continued to be mostly unknown to women since they saw politics as being a man's domain. As a result, Naga women were never given the proper political socialisation, which stifled their enthusiasm in taking part in politics and managing public affairs. According to the Indian Constitution, democracy is practised in a representational and parliamentary manner, with elected officials accountable to the people. Without a question, one of the most significant institutions influencing women's political participation is political parties. For their nomination, their base of electoral support, aid during the election campaign, financial resources, and ongoing support even after elections, the majority of candidates rely on their parties. Political parties frequently decide who will be nominated to run for office, what positions candidates will be given on the party lists, and who will receive support during the election and in the days after it. In deciding the chances of women running for public office, the political party's involvement is consequently crucial. In actuality, political parties play a very significant role in the political engagement of women because they are widely regarded as the primary method for increasing women's mobilisation and as crucial instruments for their political empowerment. The most usual route to elected office for any aspiring candidate, whether a man or a

woman, was through political parties. Entering politics without the support of a political party can be extremely difficult, especially for women. So, if a woman wants to run for office, she must be a member of one or the other party. Political parties differ substantially in their efforts to advance women into leadership roles, to enlist women as party candidates, and in how much they focus on social, political, and economic problems that are particularly important to women. Women in Nagaland continue to have a very low political participation rate. According to a research on women in public life conducted by the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), only a critical mass of women may enable female politicians to infuse public life with distinct values. Even though the political parties in Nagaland may advocate for women in their manifestos, party tickets consistently appeared to be handed primarily to men during elections due to the lack of female representation in the party hierarchy. In the State, political parties choose candidates based more on their likelihood of winning than on their contributions to the constituency, which were allegedly made primarily by women activists. The majority of political parties refuse Naga women candidates their tickets due to their 'non-win ability', effectively ensuring male patriarchal dominance in the state's political sphere.

• **Voting patterns and political engagement of Naga women**

In a democracy, political involvement must be considered in terms of the acquisition and use of power as well as the exercise of citizenship rights. As a result, voting is recognised as the normative manifestation of political engagement. The voting pattern is an expression of the authority to which a person is entitled within the constitutional framework. Voting can be a stimulus for change in the political and social environment. An examination of voter turnout in Nagaland's four assembly elections, held in 1987, 1989, 1993, and 2003, provides a quantitative indicator of Naga women's political engagement. According to the records, women voters in the State surpassed men voters in 1987 and 1989 for two years in a row, receiving 85.9% of the vote compared to 83.2 and 85.3 percent of votes from men, respectively. This revealed a larger margin of 2.7% and 0.7% voters in favour of female voters. It is very obvious that, in terms of voting, there is no appreciable gender discrepancy between men and women. The performance of female candidates in the same elections must be taken into consideration while analysing this element. Because, in spite of the high number of women voters, none of the female candidates succeeded in winning office. According to election records, women did make up the majority of voters on various occasions, but the results of the election clearly show that the majority of them did not support the female candidates. According to the patriarchal social structure and traditions that prevailed in Naga society, women typically lacked the autonomy to make decisions on their own about the candidates they would vote for. Kinship ties also played a significant role in how Naga women voted. Clans are the fundamental and original kinship units in Naga society. Among the Nagas, clan devotion frequently supersedes other familial and affine ties. Thus, kinship was an important factor in determining a Naga's voting behaviour. For most Nagas, party identification became less important during elections as familial ties took centre stage. Decisions within the clan were almost always decided by the male members, leaving the women with no choice but to comply or risk being reprimanded by her clansmen. Another custom that was common among Naga voters was voting along traditional party lines. This suggested that, regardless of the qualifications of the candidates or the causes the party supported, a specific family would often extend support to and vote for that party. Because they have always done so, they support that particular party. In this case as well, the family patriarch nearly invariably determined which party to join. Similar to the aforementioned situations, this behaviour also has a negative impact on women's candidacies. The extensive use of money and force to influence votes was a very negative aspect of electoral procedures in Nagaland. Money was often used to gain votes in favour of a candidate's or party's position. Some women who were engaged in grassroots politics made the observation that no candidate in the State could ever have a chance of winning an election without a generous quantity of funding being distributed. Another negative aspect that disadvantages the women candidates in the State that ought to be mentioned is the widespread usage of 'muscle power' in the Nagaland electoral process. An analysis of the factors influencing the voting patterns of the Naga electorate in general and women in particular reveals that the current trend in Nagaland's electoral processes was marked by a very limited awareness of democratic ideals and values. The electoral process in Nagaland was marked by 'money

power' and 'muscle power,' which were frequently abused and frequently relegated to a secondary position. On election day in Nagaland, it was not uncommon for powerful political parties to carry out electoral coups, which frequently turned the State's elections into a parody of democracy. Until now, no political party has ever appointed a woman as a polling agent on the poll day. Due to a variety of sociocultural constraints, the voting dynamics of the female electorate revealed that, in general, they did not exercise independent voting. The electoral behaviour of Naga women voters further suggests that they had not yet overcome the mental barrier of voting for a man merely because of their mindset that was so accustomed to seeing men in the driver's seat of policy making. As a result, the lack of political articulation that could take precedence over social, personal, and kinship relationships as well as economic concerns continued to be the defining feature of the electoral system in Nagaland. Women themselves needed to understand their rights and obligations in order for democracy to reach its full potential. They also needed to be competent and informed enough to cast legally valid ballots and engage actively in the voting process. This might be done by using 'Voter Education' and 'Civic Education,' terms that were commonly used to describe the spreading of information, resources, and programmes aimed to enlighten voters about the intricacies and mechanics of the voting process for a specific election. Voter and civic education can be essential in boosting women's election participation, especially in a society like the Nagas' where women have not historically played a significant role in the electoral process. Another significant indicator of political participation is running in campaigns. Political campaigns may be a highly powerful tool for democratic expression when conducted in the appropriate way. It can be claimed that there are various stages of campaigning in Nagaland. In the State, the majority of women stay out of political campaigns. For instance, just 10% of the respondents ever admitted to participating in campaign activities. The society's unfavourable attitude toward politics in general and opposition to women's political participation in particular was one of the main reasons why Naga women participated in political campaigns to a lesser extent.

• **Issues Naga women face while leading and participating in politics**

Due to causes such as contemporary education, media and IT exposure, the process of globalisation, westernisation connected with Christianity, among others, women in Naga culture are becoming exposed to modern ideas and concepts more frequently. But the conventional ways of thinking based on a rigid patriarchal value system that had been passed down through the generations continued to limit their social realities. Because they were supposed to be the guardians of traditional values and customs, women were expected to uphold them and pass them on to new generations. Women were often believed to have a poor interest in politics, rarely identify with any political party, and had a low feeling of political efficacy as a result of the idea that women belong in the domestic realm. Women don't have independent, well-defined opinions on politics and public affairs as a result of all these contributing elements. It is a common assumption that women lack the capacity to have any political opinions or to evaluate their own government or system. Given that Naga women were systematically excluded from the traditional government of society and were thus a politically disenfranchised group, emphasis is currently placed in particular on gender awareness among women in Naga society as a component of political consciousness. This effectively kept many women in the dark about their own society's political systems. One important factor that improves political engagement is political efficacy. Given the importance of political efficacy, it was a source of great concern to learn that women in Naga society had a very low sense of political efficacy. Given that Naga women participate in the political process of the State at an exceedingly low rate, their low political efficacy must be taken into account. Thus, civic education and conscious political socialisation are essential to address the issue of Naga women's low political efficacy. The clear absence of political aspiration to run for public office among Naga women, along with low political efficacy, is a crucial indicator of the manner of political engagement of Naga women. In solving immediate difficulties, women are more pragmatic and prefer to work together rather than engage in conflict. In Nagaland, the political system in general and electoral procedures in particular have developed a particularly bad reputation over time. It is important to mention that the negative connotations of politics were a major role in preventing Naga women from entering politics. There will likely be a good change in how people perceive political

activities once there are more capable women legislators in the legislature. The Naga women's strong thoughts on increased political engagement for women were a reflection of their aspiration to be regarded as autonomous individuals and their developing understanding of their human rights. The desire for Naga women to be recognised as individuals with equal capabilities to any men in their community is becoming more apparent nowadays. Despite the progressive and forward-thinking attitudes of many Naga women, certain conservative members of the community still believed that politics belonged to males and should be left to them. When one encounters the old political structure of administration that still functions well today, one sees patriarchy in Naga society at its most extreme form. Depending on the society, several issues may arise with women's political participation. In the Naga community and among its women, what is true for women elsewhere in the nation and outside may not always be the case. In any case, one can look to the cultural, socioeconomic, and political reality of women to understand why there is a lack of female political participation. The predominant cause of women's poor political engagement in Naga society is the male dominance of that society. In addition to male dominance, nearly a quarter of the women listed the demands of household responsibilities as the cause of Naga women's poor political participation. Even now, in spite of Naga women's growing participation in a variety of fields, they are still primarily responsible for taking care of the household. Despite having one of the highest rates of literacy in the nation, Naga women lacked the political education that is such a crucial component of socialisation. Women were almost always socialised and groomed to assume the role of mistress of the house and the corresponding domestic tasks. Women were never taken into account in political conversations in the home or in public. They were successfully socialised into the stereotypical gender role, which kept them out of politics. Women in Naga society were not included in traditional policy-making processes, therefore they were ignorant of many crucial issues relating to social governance. Additionally, based on their voting patterns, women consistently supported the choices of their male family members, which was detrimental to the candidacies of women. The frequent defeats of the female candidates had, in fact, been extremely demoralising for women generally and, in particular, had dissuaded many aspirant women who, otherwise, had a healthy interest in politics.

Conclusion

In the Naga Society, it is important to note that the cultural practise of gender exclusion from decision-making bodies has had a detrimental effect on the political socialisation of women. As a result, even after more than fifty years of a modern democratic electoral system, no woman has been successful in entering the State Assembly's hollowed portals. The aim still seems distant in the face of patriarchal barriers, despite the fact that modern education and related advancements are progressively fostering a feminism consciousness among many Naga women who are seeking to strive for significant change. There hasn't been a single woman elected to the assembly since Nagaland became a state in 1963. Only one woman, Rano M. Shaiza, has ever been elected to the Lok Sabha. In March 2022, Phangnon Konyak made history by becoming the second woman from the State to be elected to either House of the Parliament or the State Assembly and the first woman from Nagaland to be elected as a Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha. A closer look at this professed equality reveals a different reality despite the chants for the rights and freedom of women in Nagaland because women hardly ever participate in decision-making, whether at the village, district, or state levels, despite the appearance of egalitarianism. This includes the ideas that men and women in Nagaland are fundamentally different, that men and women play different roles, and that politics is the domain of Naga males rather than Naga women. A detailed examination of the pattern of women's political engagement in Naga culture reveals the sociological forces that deftly navigate the intricate spheres of their politically precarious existence. Instead of narrowing the gender gap in governance, the modern political system, particularly the electoral process, has contributed to further widen the bridge between men and women in Naga society, bringing to light the gender inequality that pervades the community. There isn't much that can be done to significantly improve the lives of the Naga people because of the myths, traditions, and values that determine their perspective of and attitude toward women. However, as a result of the women's movement and the literature and education that followed, women in Naga society are

beginning to realise that they have been denied their political rights for the entire time under the veil of tradition and custom. The perceptions of Naga women are changing favourably, and they are seen as having a politically concerned and aware mindset. However, the women's knowledge hasn't led to any political action on their behalf. Women candidates' lack of support and sympathy is not a reflection of their own abilities, but rather is a sign of other cultural barriers that prevent them from succeeding as candidates. A crucial aspect of political participation is involvement in electoral campaigns. The Naga women's participation in this area of political participation is remarkably low. Election campaigns in the state are frequently perceived negatively because to their criminalization, associated with easy money, and excessive alcohol consumption. Most women were discouraged from taking an intense interest in it by such considerations. The lack of democratic spirit and values in this area of political activity led to a relatively low degree of female participation. The lack of meaningful political engagement by Naga women persists after more than 50 years of the country's existence as a democratic state. Women in Nagaland appeared to only vote on issues when there is no gender disparity in their political participation. However, women's participation remains appallingly low and trails significantly behind men in terms of their ability to run for office, join political parties, and conduct electoral campaigns. As a result, the way Naga women participate in the state's electoral process might be considered a passive type of political involvement. As a result, politics in Nagaland continued to be dominated by men in terms of participation rates, party affiliation, position within the party structure, and influence within the State Legislature. In Nagaland, women have relatively little faith in their potential to affect the state's political system. Many are compelled to avoid politics due to their low political efficacy, which negatively impacts their political standing. However, the majority of Naga women, both political activists and laywomen, believed that increasing political participation by women would favourably improve women's status in Naga society despite their low political efficacy. As a means of ensuring that women's thoughts and viewpoints are taken into consideration when formulating policy, they supported more political participation by women. They believed that conventional rules that discriminated against women, such as those pertaining to property rights, marriage, and divorce, would only be reviewed and reformed in favour of women if women were represented in institutions of decision-making. Only then women would be in a position to take control of their own destiny and break free from the conventional dominance of male opinion and decision-making in all aspects of life. Naga women were unfairly denied the chance to participate to the fullest of their abilities and potential just because of their gender. Many women in the State expressed the opinion that stronger policies are required to truly put women on par with men. Women have felt alienated and unworthy due to generations of exclusion from decision-making, starting at the village level. In terms of political understanding or consciousness, Naga women do not lag behind, which adds to the myriad inconsistencies that define the nature of women's political engagement in the State. In reality, they are extremely informed and aware of issues, such as those involving the State government. Therefore, despite their minimal political participation in the State's electoral process, Naga women have relatively high levels of political consciousness. One of the ambivalences that characterise Naga women's current political status is their incapacity to transfer their political consciousness into political action. The political repercussions of Naga tradition and culture on women have been their near-total exclusion from institutions and entities that make decisions and decisions that are still being made now. Many Naga women have been prevented from learning the political information and skills necessary for active engagement in political processes. True democracy cannot be claimed when women are essentially excluded from positions of decision-making and authority since democracies require an equal representation of the sexes. By not recognising and utilising the potentialities of the feminine gender in the administration of Naga society for millennia, the traditional exclusion of Naga women from public life has taken a significant toll on the overall development of Naga civilization. There is no logical justification or explanation for maintaining the practise now, even though the conventional social structure may have been a reasonable and practical arrangement in the past. The current state of Naga civilization is a prime example of how traditions and rituals may continue even in the absence of the social and cultural setting from which they originally developed. Increasing merely women's social and political awareness won't be enough to change society for the better

because gender sensitization must take place in all facets of society, including among men. No societal development will be able to release women from their ingrained inhibitions unless there is a shift in the collective consciousness of society.

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