

Political Representation of Women in Aizawl Municipal Corporation: An Analytical Observation

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The Mizo society is a patriarchal society whereby women are having lower status than men in social, economic, religious and political aspects. In the pre-colonial period, Mizo women could not participate in any process of social and cultural administration. However, the post-colonial period shows greater participation of women in the society. Several non-governmental organizations like the Mizo HmeichheInsuihkhawm Pawl (M.H.I.P), Evangelical Nurses' Fellowship (1975), Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA in 1985), Mizoram Hmeithai Association (1987) and United Mizoram Grassroot Women (2000) all contributed for the empowerment of Mizo women. Despite the absence of women discrimination in Mizoram, women are not in equal footing with men in politics and in administrative works. At present, women begin to play influential role in politics because of the intensified campaign for women empowerment.

The Constitution (73rd and 74th Amendment) Acts, 1992 introduced Local Self Government in India both in rural and urban areas. The government of Mizoram passed the Mizoram Municipalities Act and an Amendment to the Act in 2010 gave birth of the Aizawl Municipal Council. The Aizawl Municipal Corporation (formerly Council) started functioning from July 1, 2008. Under the Act, not less than one-third of the total number of seats shall be reserved for women belonging to the scheduled castes or as the case may be, the scheduled tribes.

The paper aims to study political representation of women in Mizo society by analyzing the elections of Aizawl Municipal Corporation; whether the grassroot decentralization of power and reservation of seats for women has help in women's political empowerment in the state of Mizoram.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The term 'Political participation' has a very wide meaning, it is not only related to 'Right to vote', but relates to participation in: decision making process, political activism, political consciousness etc.¹ Political participation simply means that a person is participating in the political process by making his or her opinion and belief known to the others. In the social sciences, the term 'political participation' is often used to describe an action taken by a citizen to influence the outcome of a political issue. It is also termed as public involvement in political issue. Political participation should involve everyone. For example, even though a person must be eighteen years old to vote or serve on a jury, people under the age of eighteen are still able to participate in protests, be a part of town hall meetings, or express their political beliefs in the hope that they might influence others.²

National Profile of Women status:

The women's movement in India in the field of political and social sphere become intensified from the 1970s when the Indian women take up certain social and environmental issues such as anti-price rise movements in Maharashtra and Gujarat in 1972 and 1973, the anti- alcohol agitation in western India, the Chipko movement in Himachal in the early 1970s³ are an important movements that transformed women's politics and women's issues came to be fore-grounded. Women's issues and their political participations are important election agendas for political parties; the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment of 1992 introduced 33% of seats reserved for women at the local governance in rural and urban areas.

Profile of Mizoram:

¹Susheela Kaushik (1993), *Women's Participation in Politics*, p.47.

²ibid.,51.

³Radhika Kumar (2015), "The Women's Movement in India" in Abhay Prasad Singh (ed), *Development Process & Social Movements in Contemporary India*, p. 176.

Mizoram shares geographical boundaries with three states Tripura, Assam and Manipur, also sharing 722 kms international border with Bangladesh in the west and Myanmar in the east and the south. Mizoram covers an area of 21,087 square kilometers. The Mizoram State legislative Assembly has 40 members and there are 11 districts in Mizoram. The present state of Mizoram came under the political jurisdiction of Assam Legislature on 1st April, 1898 and was categorized as 'Excluded Area'⁴. After independence, it remained as Lushai Hills district under Assam and changed the name to Mizo District in September 1954. The Mizos were dissatisfied with the then Assam government's inadequate response to 1959- 1960 Mautam famine. A social organization the Mizo Famine Front, later on transformed into a political party named the Mizo National Front (MNF) took armed insurgency and fought for independence of Mizoram from 1966.

Following the State Re- Organizational Act of 1971, the District Council of the Mizo Hills attained the status of Union Territory by dissolving the District Council and the Legislative Assembly of the Union Territory of Mizoram was constituted along with three autonomous district councils. Under the provisions of the Assam Reorganization and the North- Eastern Area (Reorganization) Act 1971, there emerged five states: Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura and two Union Territories, now states Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh.⁵ Along with this, the North- Eastern Council (NEC) was created in 1972 to co- ordinate and speed up development activities in the entire region of the north east states. Mizo Peace Accord was signed between the Indian Government and the underground MNF on 30th June, 1986 led to the full-fledged state of India in 1987. According to 2011 census, population of Mizoram is over 10.91 lakhs; about 5.52 lakhs are males and 5.38 lakhs are females.

Women's Political Participation & AMC Elections:

The Constitution (73rd and 74th Amendment) Acts, 1992 introduced Local Self Government in rural and urban areas in India. The government of Mizoram passed the Mizoram Municipalities Act and an Amendment to the Act in 2010 gave birth of the Aizawl Municipal Council. The Aizawl Municipal Corporation (formerly Council) started functioning from July 1, 2008. The Mizoram Municipalities Act was legislated in 2007 did not provide provision for reservation for women. Therefore, the Core Committee Panchayat MahilaShakiAbhiyaan (PMSA) demanded reservation clause to be inserted by amending the Act. Accordingly, Review Committee was set up by the Government of Mizoram. On the basis of the recommendations of the Review Committee, the Mizoram State Legislative Assembly amended the Act and clearly inserted the Reservation Clause of Article 243T provided by the 74th CAA⁶. Under the Act, not less than one-third of the total number of seats shall be reserved for women belonging to the scheduled castes or as the case may be, the scheduled tribes⁷.

First Election of the AMC 2010

The Aizawl Municipal Corporation (AMC) consists of 19 elected members representing 19 wards of the city of Aizawl and other 12 members (11 MLA's and 1 Lok Sabha MP) appointed by the Governor of Mizoram. Roughly one-thirds (i.e. 6) of the total membership is reserved for women, these six seats shall be rotated after every five years. The tenure of the Corporation is five years. On 3rd November 2010, the first election was held in 174 polling stations across Aizawl. Out of the 19 wards in the AMC, six have been reserved for women as per the 74th Constitutional Amendment. The election result was the Indian National Congress (INC) and Zoram Nationalist Party (ZNP) alliance forming the council (INC=5, ZNP=5). The opposition alliance the Mizo National Front (MNF) and the Mizoram People Conference (MPC) trailing by just one seat (MNF=5, MPC=4). In the first election of Aizawl Municipal Corporation for 19 wards, there were 38 candidates.

Table No.1 contains the detail results of Aizawl Municipal Corporation election, 2010:

Results of General Election to Aizawl Municipal Corporation 2010			
Ward No.	Name of the elected candidate	Party Affiliation	Total vote polled
I	Lalrinenga Sailo	MNF	3552
II (Women)	Hmingthanzami	ZNP	3124
III	Lalthanliana	MPC	3315
IV (Women)	Lalmalsawmi	MNF	3486
V	Rosiamngheta	MPC	2513
VI (Women)	Zamanthangi	MNF	2178
VII	Zarzoliana	ZNP	3192

⁴ J. V. Hluna (1985), *Church and Political Upheaval in Mizoram*, p. 9.

⁵ Rajesh Dev (2005), "Ethnic Self- Determination and Electoral Politics in Nagaland", in Apurba K. Baruah and Rajesh Dev (eds.), *Ethnic Identities and Democracy: Electoral Politics in North East India*, p. 70.

⁶ Lalneihzovi (2014), "Political Empowerment of Women in Mizoram" in *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, p. 656.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 656.

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VIII	P.C. Lalhmingthanga	MNF	2078
IX	P.C.Lalruatsanga	MPC	2859
X	Lalzirliana	INC	2350
XI (Women)	Lalchhuanmawii	ZNP	2918
XII (Women)	Laldinsangi	INC	3187
XIII	W.Chhuanawma	ZNP	2090
XIV	Lal Rimawia	ZNP	3283
XV	CT Zakhuma	INC	2854
XVI	C.Lalsawivunga	MPC	3412
XVII (Women)	F. Lalhuthangi	INC	2825
XVIII	Biakthansanga	MNF	4351
XIX	Ramhlunsanga	INC	3069

Source: Election Result of Aizawl Municipal Corporation, 2010⁸.

The election is remarkable as it is the first time 33% of the seats are reserved for women. In the first election of Aizawl Municipal Corporation 2010, out of 19 wards, 6 wards are reserved for women as such in wards II, IV, VI, XI, XII and XVII. MNF and MPC shared an alliance in the election whereas Congress and ZNP contest the election on a joint platform. MNF and MPC alliance have six women candidates and even the alliance Congress and ZNP have the same number candidates of women. Thus, 12 women participated in the election and out of it, six candidates were elected. Out of these six elected candidates, the alliance of the Congress and ZNP had four candidates while the MNF and MPC combine had only two candidates. There were no independent candidates in this election.

Second Election of the AMC 2015

The second election to the 19 seat Aizawl Municipal Corporation was held on 26th November 2015 with a voter turnout of 63.55%. Out of the 19wards, six wards were reserved for women and triangular contest was witnessed in 15 seats while it was a straight contest between the ruling Congress and the Mizoram People’s Conference (MPC) combine and the opposition Mizo National Front (MNF) and the alliance of Zoram Nationalist Party (ZNP) and Bharatya Janata Party (BJP). Here in the second election, the MNF swept the elections to the Aizawl Municipal Corporation, bagging 11 of the 19 wards. The ruling Congress- backed candidates managed to win in 7 wards while the Mizoram People’s Conference (MPC) won in 1 ward. The Congress contested the poll, forming an electoral alliance with the MPC, while the MNF went alone. But despite all their efforts, both the BJP and ZNP failed to make any mark in the poll results. There were 54 candidates in the fray for the civic polls.Among 6 women candidates of the Congress, 5 women candidates won the election. There were no independent candidates in this election.

The election results of 2015 Aizawl Municipal Corporation are shown in table No.2:

RESULTOFGENERALELECTIONTOAIZAWLMUNICIPALCORPORATION2015			
WardNo.	Nameoftheelectedcandidate	PartyAffiliation	TotalVotePolled
I (Women)	R. Zomuanpuui	INC	3492
II	Lalringliana	MNF	3749
III	K. Romawia	MNF	3182
IV	Laltlanzovakhiangte	MNF	3386
V	Rosiamngheta	INC	3051
VI	C. Lalmuanpuia	MNF	2585
VII (Women)	K. Lalhmingliani	INC	3861
VIII	P.C. Lalhmingthanga	MNF	2451
IX (Women)	B. Lalawmpuui	MNF	3466
X	R. Lalbiakthanga	MNF	2872
XI	H. Zonunsanga	MNF	2739
XII	R. Thanglura	MNF	3701
XIII (Women)	Zonunsangi	INC	2410
XIV	Lalhmingmawia	MNF	3256
XV (Women)	Zodingpuui	INC	2706
XVI	C. Lalsawivunga	MPC	2651
XVII	H. Vanlalruata	INC	2515

⁸Aizawl Municipal Corporation, Government of Mizoram. <https://amc.mizoram.gov.in/>. (accessed on July 24, 2016)

XVIII (Women)	M. Zohmingthangi	INC	4790
XIX	C.Lalthansanga	MNF	3435

Source: Results of General Election to Aizawl Municipal Corporation, 2015⁹.

In the second election of AMC, Congress and MPC alliance have 6 women candidates, MNF stood on its own having six women candidates and even ZNP and BJP have the same number of women candidates. Totally 18 women contested in the second election of Aizawl Municipal Corporation. As per the 74th Amendment Act stated that the reservation seats of women shall be rotated in every election, women seats have been reserved in ward I, VII, IX, XIII, XV, XVIII. Out of these six seats, the Congress and MPC combine women candidates bagged five reserved seats while only one MNF women candidate was elected.

II. OBSERVATIONS

Education plays an important role in Mizo society. However, in the political scenario, educational qualification does not have much impact on the people in electing their representatives and it is mostly based on party politics and a candidate's personality i.e., his/her impact in the society especially in the local churches and in the NGOs. These statements can be supported by the Aizawl Municipal Corporation (AMC) Election that took place in 2010 where we witnessed the least educated candidate beat the better educated candidate in AMC Ward - XVII. The MNF party confidently brought forward their candidate Ms. Rita Lalnunsangi who is holding Master's degree to her credits; on the other hand, the Indian National Congress (INC) party put Ms. F. Lalhuthangi to the frontline in the election having just her High School Leaving Certificate (HSLC). When the vote was counted the INC Ms. F. Lalhuthangi beat the MNF candidate Ms. Rita Lalnunsangi by obtaining the total votes of 2825.

The Aizawl Municipal Corporation (AMC) Election 2015 gave us another remarkable insight that brought up the notion of 'importance of social status in winning the election'. This can be supported by analysing AMC Ward – XIII, where the candidates were both well-educated. Representing the MNF was Ms. Saithantluangi who has Doctorate Degree in Life Science (Botany) on one side and Ms. Zonunsangi representing the Indian National Congress party with her master's degree in arts. At the end of the contest Ms. Zonunsangi won the election by obtaining total votes of 2410 in AMC Ward XIII. The two candidates possessed above average degree in the educational aspect, but the winning result of the Congress party might be attributed by the high social status kept by the candidate Ms. Zonunsangi who is a TV Reporter for one of the biggest Cable Network in the state, ZONET and apart from which she is a social activist.

Moreover, there seems to be much lesser voluntary participation of women in the state politics of Mizoram compared to men. Women's success in the election is not necessary because of the higher educational background; deeper studies on few successful women in the AMC election show that woman having better social status and impact are likely to have more advantages in the election provided above average educational qualification will surely help in putting more weight to the candidates. The elections of the AMC indicate that the reservation for women in Municipal Corporation are well maintained which is indeed a step forward in the participation of women in politics. However, women influence in the Mizo society cannot be compared to men and if such reservations do not exist, it can be strongly opined that women candidate will have no chance in winning an election till date. Political party leaders stated that even among the active members of women, they hesitant to participate and compete with men in the elections without the status of reservation. The elections without the status of reservation.

John Siamkunga, Ex MLA and General Secretary of the MPCC claimed that the Congress as a party wholeheartedly supported the reservation of seats for women, and this is shown in 10 seats within the executive committee of MPCC in already reserved for women out of 60 seats.¹⁰ He claimed that the government is more effective when the involvement of women is higher in politics, but sadly, women involvement at the party level is low. Regarding the selection of the candidates at the AMC elections, female candidates are not necessarily selected from the party member. Those who have the capacity to win the elections are officially invited by the party leaders to be their candidates.

Chalthansanga (Chatea), who was then Vice President of Mizoram People's Conference (MPC) Party stated "Despite the necessity for greater participation of women in politics, there is no sufficient efforts from the women's side to participate in politics". Further, he added that women are often led by their emotions rather than rational thinking, which is a great setback for decision making in politics.¹¹ On the issue of selection of

⁹State Election Commission, Mizoram. <https://sec.mizoram.gov.in/page/amc-2015-results-menu.html> (accessed on March 24, 2017).

¹⁰John Siamkunga, interviewed by F. Lalramhluni on 6th September, 2019.

¹¹Chalthansanga, interviewed by F. Lalramhluni on 6th September, 2019

female candidates for AMC elections, the selection is purely based on chance of winning, rather than party affiliation.

MS Dawngliana, General Secretary, MNF party stated that the party accepted the reservation of seats for women in principle, but as seen from the State Assembly Election 2018, there is neither political effort nor willingness from the party to find suitable candidates at the state level politics. Like other political parties, the MNF too select their women candidates on the basis of social reputation and involvement in religion activities, rather than party affiliation.¹²

Zonunsangi, Counsellor from Congress Party has stress upon the equal status and equality in decision making along with their male counterparts. She alleged that in all decision making and deliberations, the voices of the women representatives are never suppressed by the male counsellors.¹³ B. Lalawmpuii, the lone women Counsellor from MNF party also stated the equal role and status in decision making with the male counsellor in AMC.¹⁴ As she being the sole women representative from the party in the municipal, her voices and opinions matter a lot.

On the other hand, by analyzing the manifestos of the candidates, all political parties incorporate development works of public amenities, youth empowerment etc but they failed to include women development schemes or protection of women even women participation in their manifestos. This raised important questions i) empowerment of women is neglected by every political parties and ii) that the Mizo society as a whole, feels that women enjoy equal rights with men and that women need no reservation or empowerment. Decision-making and power centres are not adequate match for women's representation. The reality of women to women acceptance in political realm is also absent among the Mizos.

III. CONCLUSION

Reservation policies have a strong impact on women's representation in politics. On the other hand, educated women felt the need for larger participation of women in politics and opined that the reservation for women in election must increase. Article 243T (1) of the Constitution states that not less than one third (including the seats reserved for women belonging to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every municipality shall be reserved for women. This means that, there is a room to increase the number of seats in the AMC Election contrary to the present situation in which the seat reservation for women is just one third of the total available seats or slightly lesser than what is mentioned in the above Article 243T (1). Thus, there is constitutional right that backed up the women in availing more number of seats rather than letting them enjoy the minimal quota given to them.

Women's equal participation in the decision-making process, policy-making, planning and administration is important to ensure equality and justice in the democratic process. The current politics in Mizoram is dominated by men, and reservation does not alone ensure equality and equal status between men and women in political, social and economic spheres of life. Although women constitute half of the population in Mizoram, their participation in political, social and economic life has been neglected all along that led to disturbance in power relations. The 33% seats reservation for women at the AMC at the grassroots level could not bring positive impact at the state level and national level elections. Therefore, women's involvement should be increased in the decision-making process at all levels.

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¹²M.S Dawngliana, interviewed by F. Lalramhluni on 6th September, 2019

¹³Zonunsangi, interviewed by F. Lalramhluni on 10th September, 2019.

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