

Engendering Electoral Politics in Northeast India: Challenges and Prospects among Nagas of Manipur

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Abstract:

Women's political participation and representation vary dramatically within and between the country and each province. This article examines the discretionary framework for gender responses in voting, political rallies, and representation of women in the legislative bodies. It addressed the populist perspective of Naga society, the respect of voters for male and female candidates and the patriarchal tribal structures that ruined women's representation. This study divulges how the social environment influences the impact of constitutive issues on the political inclusion of marginalised groups (women) in the decision-making bodies. While the outcome of the revised scenario on gender discretionary legislative issues is pre-empted with great hope, it is pertinent to note that election to the Manipur legislative assembly remains a distant dream for Naga women. This paper critically demonstrates the roles of women in Naga society, as well as an understanding of the existing dichotomy of egalitarian values and democratic representation.

Key Word: Women; Marginalised; Naga; Women participation; Representation

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I. Introduction

Modern democratic traditions, values and concepts from 'the West' were covalently grafted into the land of Manipur with no preparation for this new arrangement (Horam 1988: 96). Nonetheless, while the western system of democratic governance was equipped with the philosophy of individual autonomy, self-assertiveness, and personal freedom, the larger goals of achieving the capitalist market economy and liberal society (Macpherson 1976: 1-45), traditional values underlie Naga society, which is rooted in communitarian ethics. The Naga society's communitarian ethos evocatively defined by tribes, villages, and clans' affiliations and loyalties with rigorous compartmentalization of gender roles privileges males in the public and political realms. Traditional gender division among the Nagas has resulted in the marginalization of women in the modern democratic arena, preventing them from stepping into the highest decision-making body.

Although liberal democracies, elections, and electioneering processes reflect modernity and rationalisation, legislators in Manipur are generally elected based on traditional practices, ideas, and values (Wouters 2014). Even an expeditious perusal of Manipur's democracy suggests an unbalanced presence of women at the helm of decision-making. Even if Manipur's democracy is not a "democracy devoid of women" with disproportionate representation, the pertinent question underscores genderization in the decision-making. This masculine zeal in the state legislature and parliament is not a coincidence, but rather a mirror of a sexist system. Traditional male-chauvinist institutions and practises get ameliorated and morphed into the current democratic stage, resulting in a generation of 'Naga minds,' denizens who adhere to these traditions without questioning them. In these conditions, traditional ideas and practices dominate electoral politics in Manipur, defined by implicit laws that are male-ascendancy in form and substance.

In recent decades, there has been an outpouring of theories attempting to communicate to society what has long been suppressed by giving voice to those voices that are frequently ignored; in this case, the voices of women in the framework of democracy and elections. The pertinent question that arises, "Is Naga women's silence an internalised acceptance of a system that disadvantages them?" Is it possible that they are being denied and subjugated without their knowledge? 'Are they encircled "in their immediate surroundings" by active institutions and practises that favour male dominance?' Along these lines, we look at the ostensible clash between democratic ethos, principles, and values of Naga women who contested elections in the past, situating a larger debate in a broader Naga context by looking at women's roles in traditional and modern society, as well as their relative underrepresentation in elections. This article calls for a critical examination of women's roles in

Naga society, as well as an understanding of the existing dichotomy of egalitarian values and democratic representation.

II. Women and Customary Laws In Naga Society

The term Naga refers to a group of more than thirty tribes who live not just in Nagaland but also in the sizeable highland regions of Manipur, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh. They are traditionally an oral society and speak various "Tibeto-Burman" languages, adhering to strict patriarchal structures, which allow men monopolise all decisions. Their society is comprised upon tribal laws, known as Naga customary laws, which evolved in tandem with their way of life. It is important to note that each tribe has its own effective system of self-government. Since the customs and traditions of different tribes are framed to sustain the particular laws and practices of those tribes, it is impossible to formulate common Naga laws and customs. While the so-called laws give the Naga a great deal of freedom and authority in decision-making, the same laws being immaterial and restrictive is particularly visible when Naga women appears.

From the time of their progenitors, Nagas claim to have exercised rudimentary homespun democratic governance in villages. Several colonial administrators (Hutton, 1922, Mills, 1926) and early anthropologists (Haimendorf, 1937) characterized Naga traditional political system as purely 'egalitarian' and implicitly 'democratic'. However, the pristine Naga form of governance was predominantly male-dominated with few or, if any, women who took part in decision-making as mere spectators. 'His (Naga) government is incredibly 'patriarchal', Latham wrote of the Naga village administration (cited in Elwin 1969:97). As a result, Naga democracy was traditionally a male-centric democratic village polity that obstruct women to participate in public and political life.

Naga women enjoy certain entitlements compared to their mainland counterparts, as they are not required to adhere to specific rigid customs and practices. The extent of Naga women's freedom is not all-encompassing as it does not take into account their options beyond a few spaces (mostly domestic space), while mainland women suffer from problems such as dowry practices, female infanticide, domestic violence, and the caste system. Tribal or Naga women are marginalized politically and economically through exclusion from accessing resources provided by the governments, traditionally controlled by men. The status of Naga women and their counterparts exhibits that democracy in its truest form influence and affects just one sex. Changkija's remark contemplates the peculiarity of the democratic ideal existing in Naga society:

Colonial and Naga scholars eulogize Nagas' purest form of democracy "in sovereign villages and republics" and compare it to the "democracy" of the Greek city-states. The fact is this "democracy" is pertinent only to the rulers; only males have the right to land and ownership; only males can participate in the village parliament.¹

Although the image of Naga society as egalitarian remains evocative, in practice, socio-cultural patterns exclude women from the mainstream and thus from equal participation in the political sphere. This is done systematically by repudiating their opportunities predicated on the empowered traditional values of patriarchy, which sanctioned men to be chiefs and members of village councils based on patrilineal clanship (Jamir, 2009:19). Naga society is well established in patriarchal structures and integrates values that reproduce gender inequalities. This division of labour, among many other alternatives, leads to hierarchies because men's and women's work is not valued or rewarded equally (Bhasin 2003: 35). This statement, among other things, show the Naga woman as both secondary and apolitical (Kyung Ae-Park 1999, Khiamniungan 2013).

Naga patriarchal practices were validated as an "unambiguous system" that was "neither permitted nor enforced by the patriarchal community" and "allows women to optimise their skills and engage in socio-cultural and economic realms" (Shimray 2002: 377). On the other hand, it was perceived that in traditional village structures, males travelled outdoors while keeping their women restricted to the domestic realm, absorbing the socio-cultural and economic system of the period. Traditional Naga customs involving administration, religion, and rituals, feasts of merits and social status, as well as the former presence of a "vassalage system," demonstrate considerable exclusion with unequal distributions of "power, prestige, and privileges" (Ovung 2012: 23). Analogous to any patriarchal society, a Naga woman's role is veritably limited, and thus her space is limited to the domestic sphere. Shimray (2002:3) claims that Naga society is casteless and classless, the claims of egalitarianism, freedom and non-discrimination as emblems of Naga society are at odds with the arising class division and current gender division of labour that continue to relegate Naga and other indigenous women to subordinate positions in society (Hausing, 2015).

¹ Changkija, 'Equality's time has come,' The Indian express, February 7, 2017, accessed on March 3, 2022, 11.30. AM

Although Naga women participate in elections, their voting department is still mainly male-oriented and they most often vote on the advice of their male relatives. The village councils' discretion always favoured male candidates, as it went against the traditional preference for females in the political arena. Additionally, lived realities actualise that culture makes things work differently for Naga women, thus placing them in a disadvantaged position in electoral politics. This is true, where the traditional Naga value of attachment to one's village comes into play, as demonstrated by village councils' decision to opt for a 'consensus candidate' rather than allow villagers to cast their votes individually and autonomously under their free will.

III. Women and Democratic Politics

Since 1967, Manipur has wafted through twelve state assembly elections, which were hotly contested and participatory. People's active engagement in elections is appraised as proof of citizens' faith in democratic institutions as well as a sign of their political awakening, maturity, and acceptance of the state as an intrinsic part of their lives (Datta 1988:18). Benerjee (2011:94) states that Indian citizens enthusiastically participate in elections because it provides them with a liminal period of egalitarianism in which each vote has equal value, which contrasts sharply with the everyday hierarchical setup of Indian society in terms of caste, class, and gender.

In contrast to this view, the rationale for large-scale voting among Manipur Nagas may be quite different, since they are an expression of local conflicts represented through "bonds of kinship, historical narratives, village and clan affiliations, and money offers" (Wouters 2015a:130). This is proficiently utilised, as Naga, women's votes do not necessarily represent their autonomy in choosing for whom they voted. It is a fact that women are often pressured to vote per the wishes of male-dominated customary bodies or male family members. The patriarchal settings make men insecure if women obtain the liberty to broach into the public domain and even complain they are too loud and vocal when allowed to express ideas. In all the Naga villages, women are systematically omitted from the decision-making, as they are not taught the art of governance. The archaic notion that women's phrenic capabilities were inferior compared to men is implicated to succour their thought.

A look at the social and political standing of Naga women reveals an even more glaring difference in terms of gender privilege. Notably, despite the various social issues affecting mainland women, they have managed to secure a place for themselves in terms of their participation in legislative and executive bodies. Although women in Bihar suffer from low socio-economic and educational statuses, a spiralled outcome of social malaise, historical, economic, and political nature, (Sinha 2007: 238) it holds the distinction of electing a significant number of women to its assembly. For instance, in Bihar's 2015 assembly election, 28 women were elected out of 243 seats, representing 11.52 per cent. Despite the loss of two female legislators, Bihar still elected 10.70 per cent of women in the 2020 assembly election. Albeit claiming absolute egalitarianism, it is a stretch to foresee major political parties condoning pro-women and gender equality pledges during election campaigns. This comment makes it even more important to consider what prevents Naga women from entering politics.

In spite of the existing literatures, stemming Naga society to be egalitarian, gender equality remains a mirage. Scholars countered that women themselves are accountable for their current condition; they refused to voice when opportunities arose. Naga women remain 'nonvocal' or are hesitant to make their feelings known in public. Feminists contended that allowing Naga women to participate in decision-making bodies would trivialise men's dominance and oppressive rule over women. To recapitulate, 'there are too many; reasons and barriers; women cannot have this, cannot go there; women should keep their traps shut.' It is hard to comprehend women vying for a seat in the state legislature if freedom to venture even in their courtyard is restricted.

Naga women now hold major and senior positions in the educational and professional fields. In comparison to many of their contemporaries in various states across India, their social advancement is quite favourable; however, when it comes to political representation and status, there is a façade. Manipur Naga is at the bottom of this realm.

The conception that men perform harder activities requiring physical vigour, while women perform lighter chores, exemplifies this compartmentalization of gender roles. Many Naga males believe that it is done out of affection and consideration for women's perceived 'impotent build.' Of course, this 'commiserate gesture' is appreciated on one level. This 'solicitous' approach, on the other hand, facilely twirls into a paternalistic posture and is enheartened to support women's exclusion from the public arena. The 'despotic subordination' in normative and practice upon Naga women, disdaining them as 'subjugated beings' is an intrinsic cultural thought process among the Nagas inherited since antiquity.

IV. Electoral Politics in Context

Despite significant female literacy, their political representation is minuscule. For example, Nagaland still lacks female representation in the state legislature and is the only Indian state without a female legislator (MLA). Men's dominance is more obvious and expressed in the past and present, and it is more widespread. Consequently, women's participation in politics, and especially their representation in politics, remains low, leaving them out of the decision-making process in terms of influence and prestige (Amer, 2013).

Table 1: Gender disparity among Naga candidates in Manipur Legislative Assembly elections, 1967-2022²

Year	No. of men	No. of women	% of male candidates	% of female candidates
1967	17	--	100	00
1972	44	--	100	00
1974	36	--	100	00
1980	47	--	100	00
1984	49	--	100	00
1990	40	01	97.5	2.5
1995	47	--	100	00
2000	57	05	91.23	8.77
2002	50	00	100	00
2007	45	01	97.78	2.22
2012	37	03	91.90	8.10
2017	47	02	95.75	4.25
2022	44	01	97.70	2.30
Total	560	13	97.73	2.27

Source: General Elections to the Manipur Legislative Assembly 1967-2022, Government of Manipur

The most perplexing element of democratic representation among Nagas is women's consummate omission from decision-making. Manipur's Nagas elected only two women to the state legislative assembly until the recently concluded 2022 assembly elections. Since the commencement of electoral politics in Manipur, 560 Naga male candidates have contested from the 10 Naga-dominated constituencies, accounting for 97.73 per cent of all candidates. On the other hand, only 13 women contested out of 573 candidates, constituting a difficult 2.27 per cent contributing to an agonizing male-to-female ratio of 44:1. Consequently, it would not be rhetorical to state that those female electorates collectively elected male politicians.

Although women make a sizeable portion of the electorates, but represented inadequately, the standard of democracy among Nagas in Manipur is compromised, hampered, and undermined. Therefore, fundamental research, in its dual role of achieving gender parity in representation and buttressing democracy, on the other hand, is required for perspicacious and deliberative discourse to construe the underlying elements of this situation and what measures to alleviate the current snag. On this account for democracy to become more inclusive, the archaic orthodox attitude that selectively excludes women from active political involvement should be reframed and declared illegal.

Comparing and analysing the Naga-dominated constituencies, it is pellucid that the number of women voters and their participation in electoral politics is incrementing, notwithstanding their lack of representation. The fascinating authenticity is that if all female voters voted for female candidates, more women would be elected. Women's participation in elections is increasing as their educational levels improve. They have gained a better understanding of their constitutional rights and have used the platform to elect their candidates. The sizeable and voluminous participation of female voters raises the more immensely colossal question of whether women are utilising their fundamental right to vote individually and liberatingly (Wouters & Tunyi 2014).

Skewed gendered representation among the Nagas, according to political scientists (Amer, 2013, Wouters & Tunyi, 2014), is the synthesis of a shortage of female aspirants and political elites' predilection for male over female candidates. Political parties deny women equal rights by limiting the number of women who can run for office. In Naga society, women are disparaged as non-entities, and men dominate all aspects of life, including administration. The dominant elements of Naga politics are money and muscular power, resulting in minimal participation by women in state politics and elections. Above all the political leadership of men manifests a profound inequality vis-à-vis gender equality. During elections, patriarchal socialisation by

² General Elections to the Manipur Legislative Assembly 1967-2022, Government of Manipur

clansmen, kinfolk, and, above all, conventional laws to vote for a specific candidate or a particular party unsuitable for her choice, screw women voters forcefully. The soi-disant “consensus candidate” is voted for without any further comprehensible questioning.

Candidates' typical perception among Nagas, as well as in many tribal societies, is that once the male head of the family is inveigled, the female votes are ascertained by default. A more conservative tradition argues that the voice of a woman is mundane in tribal civilizations. This convincing rationale encouraged political parties to focus on male voters and ignore female voters during elections. Therefore, the justification for women's enfranchisement does not meet the concept of individual equality of votes. Casting a vote is not sufficient to provide political fairness to women without their representation in the political arena. Disregarding women's permission in this narrative not only jeopardises fundamental notions of political equality but also calls into question liberal democratic ideals of acting in one's conscience for the common good. If political equality is to be ensured and nurtured, women's freedom to elect a candidate of their choice must become an intrinsic primary good.

Table 2: Comparative table of Naga and Kuki Women candidates

Year	No. of Kuki Candidates	No. of Naga Candidates	% of Kuki candidates	% of Naga Candidates
1967	00	00	00	00
1972	00	00	00	00
1974	00	00	00	00
1980	02	00	100	00
1984	02	00	100	00
1990	02	01	66.66	33.33
1995	04	00	100	00
2000	02	05	28.57	71.42
2002	02	00	100	00
2007	03	01	75	25
2012	03	03	50	50
2017	02	02	50	50
2022	03	01	75	25
Total	25	13	65.78	34.22

Source: General Elections to the Manipur Legislative Assembly 1967-2022, Government of Manipur³

Note: Kim Gangte, a Kuki woman, was elected from the Outer Manipur Lok Sabha constituency in 1998 as a Manipur People's Party candidate.

The Kukis and the Nagas constitute the majority of Manipur's tribal ethnic population. Since the inception of Manipur's political politics, the Kukis and Nagas have vied for power in each assembly election. On the other hand, gender discrepancies in representation are evident at both extremes. Compared to the Nagas, the Kukis performed better. According to the election commission of India, 25 (66.7%) of the 38 tribal women candidates till the most recent state assembly election were Kukis, while just 13 (34.22%) were Nagas. Nemcha Kipgen is the only female legislator who held a ministerial position in the previous BJP-led government, who is a Kuki.

The founding of the Kuki Peoples' Alliance (KPA) just before 2022 elections, a political party dedicated to protect the interest of the Kukis, as well as the allocation of a party ticket to a female candidate, demonstrate the Kukis' assertion for gender parity. However, the Naga Peoples Front (NPF) has failed miserably to allocate party tickets to any Naga woman since its inception in Manipur electoral politics. It is notable that Nagaland has yet to elect a female representative, whereas Nagas in Manipur have only elected two women to the state assembly as of the just concluded assembly election. When Nagaland has failed miserably to elect a woman to the state Assembly, it is absurd to imagine the Naga People's Front (NPF), a regional party centred in Nagaland, welcoming women into the party in Manipur.

Do Naga electorates value women as more profound political competitors than they did previously, as seen by the increasing number of Naga women elected to the assembly, one of whom was elected after a twenty-two-year wait? The Nagas are more accepting than they have been in the past of more women participating in political activities as members of political parties. It demonstrated that their parties do not take them seriously, casting doubt on their potential to win elections, as well as their ability to demonstrate to their parties and the wider public that they are capable of doing so.

³ General Elections to the Manipur Legislative Assembly 1967-2022, Government of Manipur

The stereotype that Naga women, even if elected, would be figureheads; the assumption that particular rebel organisations were behind their victory; or that their victory was aided by their supposed relationship with a powerful politician or the wife of a powerful man, etc. Elected female candidates are openly accused of winning an election in a state with insurgent backing or with the assistance of a major politician.

When it comes to women's political representation, the political and cultural divide between the valley and hills of Manipur becomes even more ostensible. The implementation of the 73rd and the 74th constitutional amendments provisioning 33 per cent reservation for women deepened democracy at the grassroots level through the inclusive representation of women in the Panchayati Raj institutions (PRIs) and Urban local Bodies (ULBs). Women are represented to a certain extent in reserve politics, and this is visually perceived as a step forward (in the Valley) in reinforcing democracy through the perception and aegis of women's rights. Women's seclusion has yet to materialise in tribal areas under the jurisdiction of the autonomous district councils (ADCs). In the hills, the ADCs, with no provision for reservation, are just another body that exerts masculine ascendancy. The amendment of the Autonomous District Councils Act in the near future should provision at least 20-30 per cent of seats to make the body more inclusive.

Traditionally, voters in Naga society viewed politics as "filthy", and when women entered politics, they typically perceived the posse of men as fighters willing to sacrifice for society and oppose politicians only from outside the political field. This phrase in letter and spirit is a recurrent tale within Naga society, resulting in the cocooning of women's representation in the public realm. The conception that Naga women would be figureheads even if elected, or that their win was aided by their supposed affiliation with a strong politician, or the wife of a puissant man, etc., is a recurring topic in Naga politics. Openly, female candidates are accused of acquiring electoral victory with insurgent support or with the help of male political leaders.

V. Women's Political Power

The disproportionate participation of women in Manipur's electoral politics, particularly among the Nagas, has been terrifying and outrageous. One of the most discerning features of political representation is the lack of women in public office. Even though women account for 50.37 per cent of the state's population (2011 census) and makeup a little more than half of the electorates, just five women were elected to legislative assembly in 2022. Despite high levels of literacy among women, democratic representation remains minuscule, and this trend can be seen practically in every state. For example, Nagaland has never had a woman MLA. As a result, one of the most important themes in the study of electoral politics among Manipur Nagas is the narrative of women's exclusion from electoral processes (Wouters & Tunyi, 2008, p.88). Thus, women's engagement and, more importantly, representation in politics remains low, leaving them out of the decision making process in terms of influence and prestige (Amer 2013).

Albeit the advent of modern democratic institutions through electoral reforms that enhance legal and constitutional rules, gender equality and women's political status remain hazy and disorganised. Women's political statuses are, for the most part, evasive and ambiguous. Of course, having the opportunity to vote and be elected to policy-making posts had little impact on their political standing. Consequently, it will be impossible to construct a truly democratic democracy without the substantial participation and representation of women in politics based on parity principles (Wouters & Tunyi, 2008, p.88).

Women's ability to participate in public life and have their voices heard in policymaking are crucial indicators of their advancement in modern politics. Women are invisible at all levels of the political system, from village councils to parliamentary elections. This precise rationale supports the notion that men hegemonized women's electorates in Naga-populated parts of Manipur and would continue to do so in the future. A true democratic spirit can only be perceived and experienced when half of the population that is excluded from representation is represented.

Patriarchal socialisation systems and cultural practices that favour men's interests above women regulate and administer social, cultural, and political relations in most male-dominated societies. Women are supposed to be traditional and conservative, temperamentally unsuitable for political action, undoubtedly assume their husband's political allegiances, be more affected by politicians than causes, and be less politically educated and interested than men (Joni and Jill, 1981). The fact that half of the Naga people are excluded from political events jeopardises, hinders, and degrades the standard of democracy among the Nagas. The demand for democratic representation, which assures that all individuals, regardless of caste, religion, or gender, have equal opportunity to engage in electoral politics, should be implemented in letter and spirit. In any democratic society, promoting proportionate representation necessitates inclusive representation as a corollary of justice and equality.

VI. Ballot Politics and Women

As previously mentioned, voting is the most basic form of political participation in modern liberal democratic system. Voting shapes an individual's and society's choices, allowing elected officials to rule over them but also holding them accountable for their decisions. It is a symbol of extraordinary democratic betrothal, the tiniest indication of a person's democratic participation as a responsible citizen, and a vital gauge of a democracy's health (Franklin, 2004, as cited in Wouters & Tunyi, 2008, p.89). Voting has an impact on democratic society's choice as it encourages the process of forming and defining consensus in a democratic community, where representatives are accountable to the people for their acts. Even though women's engagement in voting is widely recognised across the world, and this has a significant impact in neutralising and rallying them, voting alone is insufficient to achieve political equality (Mitra and James, 1992).

Since the turn of the century, discussions and debates about voter participation have gained a lot of traction. According to several scholarly works, women may be the determining factor in elections that form the swing vote. Women's voter turnout appears to be higher than it has ever been. On the surface, it appears to be a positive trend; yet, one should consider whether the numbers reflect greater meaningful political participation.

Voter turnout is a sign that people are willing to engage in the electoral process when elections are held. Women have been actively participating in political politics as voters. There have been instances where women voters outnumbered men in general and legislative assemblies. As a result, it may be argued that women are more likely to participate and be represented as the other sex. In practicality, in all of Manipur's assembly elections, particularly in Naga constituencies, women voters voted at a higher rate than male voters did. In the 2017 assembly election, women outnumbered men in all constituencies in Tamenglong and Noney districts. For example, in the Tamei constituency, women accounted for 16,290 of the 32,173 valid votes cast, or 50.63 per cent. Similarly, women constitute 52.9 per cent of the votes cast, in Tamenglong Constituency, with 12,619 valid votes cast (excluding postal ballots). Likewise, women account for 51.19 per cent of the legitimate votes cast in Nungba constituency, out of a total 19,391 valid votes cast, discounting postal ballots⁴.

VII. Women's Politics: Obstacles to Participation

The reasons behind women's electoral marginalisation are complex and intertwined. These factors explain why women's participation in electoral campaigns is limited to the act of voting. To instinctively recognise and analyse the plethora of reasons that have culminated in women's exclusion, one needs to investigate Naga society's traditional socio-cultural features and forms. This demonstrates that, in many cases, a society's culture dictate the level of women's participation in the public realm (Inglehart and Norris, 2003).

The Naga society is structured by myths of praxis wisdom and norms, which are bolstered by traditional taboos, propitiously prohibiting women from active engagement in the public realm. Naga men dominate the society, and patriarchal norms are adamantly opposed to women's participation. As a result, power and capacity are conferred on men, who are assumed to manage decision-making because they inherit traditionally. The quandary with the Nagas is that, while society recognises the indispensability of cognizance and advocates an equal political platform for women, the gregarious psychology of women's obligation or component in society remains traditional. In many circumstances, the role of women and their Performa in electoral politics is 'categorized' as apathetical. Of course, many women are disinterested in politics, but those with the potential to stand out are scorned and overlooked. Regardless of their zeal to pursue politics, their gendered psychology takes precedence, relegating them to domestic obligations and family responsibilities.

Women are more likely to run for office in places that have a long history of electing women to legislatures, support women's engagement in public affairs, and do not have a history of sex discrimination in terms of income and educational performance (Hill, 1981). According to systematic cross-national studies (Norris and Inglehart, 2003), egalitarian sentiments about women as political leaders are substantially connected to the number of women elected to public office. Women's access to politics is hampered not by the electorate, but by the established societal norms and conventions that regulate the public sphere. In this aspect, a more equitable framework can persuade women to emerge from their cocoons and confidently enter the political arena with the credence that they can win.

The efficacious endeavour of women's negligence is evidenced by the fact that only two Naga women have been elected to the legislative assembly of Manipur from the Naga districts to date, despite women constituting a moiety of the voters in the region. The Manipur Naga Hills' electoral office is the ideal place to exercise masculine ascendancy. It attests that the policy-making component in the state and districts (Naga is visible at the edge of gender where women are disadvantaged). Because both sexes make up an equal fraction of the electorate, this ascendancy and ascendancy over women are illegitimate and immaterialized.

Understanding the effects of gender enculturation and cultural norms is critical to comprehending women's political marginalisation. It works to re-energize and spread gendered impulses in contemplating the

⁴ <https://eci-citizenservices.eci.nic.in/> accessed on 13 March, 2022, 12.00 AM

culturally congruous space for men and women in politics. There is no denying that men dominate societal hierarchies throughout the world. These gendered conventions support the notion of disuniting "women's space" from "masculine space." This conception condenses everything public in the masculine realm and 'private' in the female realm, which implicatively insinuates life around the hearth.

The categorisation and standardisation of women is portrayed by the fact that women's primary function is to nurture home activities, while males consolidate public space and political ascendancy. Men are responsible for leading and guiding women in politics. He is regarded as the tribal patriarch, sentinel, and advocate of societal values. The electorate believes that women are less capable and deserving of political office than men, so they consistently vote for male politicians. These inciting elements persuade the electorate that women lack conviction and are unethical, making it arduous for them to be elected to office. As a result, the few women who are fascinated with taking on the daunting task of fighting male ascendancy face insurmountable obstacles.

In matters of morals and ethics, competition has become stiffer, devalued, and worsened with each election. The most prized assets in victoriously triumphing in election are the free flow of money and the exhibition of muscle potency. Elections have become more costly, putting the affluent and potent in a better position. In short, it has devolved into a battle between the affluent and the potent, with the conception of democratic representation thrown into disarray. As a result, there is a perception that the impecunious, analphabetic, and marginalised groups, such as women, keep mute and suffer in silence because competing elections are beyond their reach. Insurgent groups directly involved in electoral politics squander opulence by promising to back a concrete candidate. These unlawful militants threaten local councils with ultimatums, instilling fear and discombobulation among the electorate. In this context, women are extemporaneous to participate in an election culture marked by violence and apprehension. Women oppose, separate, disengage, and sever their inclination to engage in brawny political strategy.

Elections are becoming increasingly extravagant, and female hopefuls are unable to raise the funds to run for office. With financial aid and donations drying up for women, it becomes a herculean challenge for them to contemplate contesting elections. Candidates are required to use their cash to provide money, food, and spotty developmental work in their area, as well as immensely colossal sums to their agents and village councils, to win people's hearts. Apart from 'buying' voters, she must also raise funds for election rallies, which involve campaign materials, as well as peregrinate to a remote community inside the constituency. These exorbitantly priced workouts are a substantial barrier for women, who are less liable to participate in them than males. For example, if a person decides to run for office, his clansmen rally to his needs, offering whatever assistance they can in the form of cash, kind, or any other gift to help him finance the election. To cover his expenses, he can sell his assets. Women, on the other hand, are unable to opt to sell their properties because their husbands control all assets.

Political elites recognise that women's participation in politics is undervalued and are taking steps to address it through equal opportunity and impartial nominations. Political parties, and appropriate representatives within political parties, need to enact new legislation that allocates a certain number of seats to nominated women. To address this gender gap in political representation, political parties must also overcome previous barriers that prevented women from actively participating in politics. Instead of accepting the status quo, women should insist that men consider them as equal partners in politics. Women with political leadership need to defend more representatives not only to fill the numbers but also to ensure that women are included in the structural transformation process.

VIII. Conclusion

Despite the establishment of equitable representation in India over the past seventy years and the provision of equality within the constitution, the political status of women among Manipur Nagas remains largely obscure and shrouded. Advocating for current democratic values empowers people from all walks of life, and it necessitates representation from all groups so that their concerns can be amplified and addressed. It recognises the desideratum for a dynamic engagement from a range of community members; so, it cannot thrive if women are disempowered. Men's convivial characteristics and conventional specialists connected to a slew of gregarious confinements play a key part in perplexing women's law predicated representation, and these implicitly well-arranged methodical noetic conceptions imbue long-standing trouble and enduring on Naga women. To alter this disheartening circumstance, the primary thing that needs amendment is the concept of equal humans, regardless of gender. Idealistic endeavours might act as a sea vicissitude in warding off convivial circumscriptions once this equitable framework is established. The need of the hour is to reduce our collective nescience of the authentic quandaries plaguing Naga society and to understand individual rights in a more intricate way. It is time for tribal laws and customs to become more conducive to all genders, to pave the way for a new narrative and new stories that are still mute and dissever.

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