



Women in Electoral Politics in Nagaland, India

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Abstract

The Nagaland is one of the smallest state of India which belong to the north eastern region. Nagaland Lok Sabha constituency is the only Lok Sabha parliamentary constituency in Nagaland state in North east India and covers the entire area of the state. It participated in its first general election in 1967 after joining the Union in 1963. The Indian National Congress (INC) and the Nagaland People's Front (NPP) are the major political parties of the state. Some other political parties that are making their presence felt include the AITC, the JD(S), and the independents. The total number of voters in Nagaland is 11,74,633, of which 5,94,572 are male and 5,80,091 are female. One of the most trying issues in electoral studies in Nagaland is the discourse of women's exclusion from the electoral process. There is a visible trend of men dominating the political terrain across the board, whereas the participation and representation of women in politics is invisible. This result in women being outside the centers of decision-making in terms of influence and status that is available to men. Women in Nagaland have been able to strengthen their political visibility only as voters. Indian constitution grants women full political rights, equal to those of men. Women can vote, run for office and hold ministerial and higher positions. According to the Reports of the Committee on Status of Women, three main indicators can be used to assess political status of women, viz., (i) participation in the political process as voters and candidates in elections; (ii) political attitudes such as awareness, commitment and involvement in politics and autonomy in political action and behaviour; and (iii) their impact on the political process. Naga women have successfully pushed for increased participation in many fields of activities. However, one area where their participation is conspicuously missing is in the political arena. The context of their political status remains an open question. Relative to their share in the population, they remain outsiders in politics. Even after more than four decades of statehood, Nagaland is the only state which has never had a woman MLA. This reinforces the perception that electoral politics in Nagaland continue to be dominated by men. A domination that should not really be, because of the almost equal proportion of the two genders in the population. If half of the states enfranchised population is kept out of the political structures of the state, one cannot talk of democracy. This paper contextualizes debates over the political status of women within the complex political and cultural space in Nagaland. The structural, institutional and situational barriers in the context of women's political participation and representation are discussed.

Keywords: Nagaland, naga women, politics, domination, political participation.

Introduction

In Nagaland, we will find women running commercial establishments, teaching in university, campaigning against alcohol abuse and toiling on terraced farms. We will even spot them sporting hard hats and shoveling gravel next to a road-roller repairing roads. The only place where we won't find a woman is the State Assembly.

On International Women's Day, it is a poignant reminder of how women are still struggling to gain a toehold in the State's political arena. Not a single woman has been elected to the Assembly in the State's nearly 50-year-old history. In the just-concluded elections, there were two women contestants but both of them lost. The only occasion when Nagaland elected a woman legislator was during the 1977 Lok Sabha elections in which Rano M. Shaiza won the sole seat from the State.

Nagaland has 16 major tribes each having its distinct culture and traditions. In spite of the diversities of culture and traditions, the various Naga tribes has a common feature and that, is patriarchal where male dominated the society. Indian constitution granted equal status of man and women, but the later continued to lag behind in politics.

Education enabled women to advance and acquire economics stability and social status. There are high ranking women officers managing offices, institutions, heading district administration etc. Though women contributed to socio economics spheres of life, the dominant patriarchy in Nagaland denied women equal status and opportunities in electoral politics. Women are basically independent and free and there role in the community and family are considerably recognized, when compared to its counterpart to the rest of the country, but politics is still elusive for women.

Nagaland attained statehood with the enactment of the state of Nagaland act in 1962 by the parliament and formally inaugurating it on 1st December 1963 by the President of India Dr. Radhakrishnan with Kohima as its capital. The first Legislative assembly election was held in 1964 and till the last election in March 2013, a total number of 15 women candidates contested. Nagaland is soon to celebrate her fiftieth year anniversary but till date no woman has been elected. Although none were elected to the Legislative Assembly, RanoShaiza, a Naga Women was once elected as MP in Lok Sabha election in 1977. The reason for her success was, "When the menfolk had either been taken away for questioning or had gone underground"¹. Thus, she filled the vacuum which was created by the absence of the men.

Why women participation in politics in needed

There can be not true democracy or proper participation in governance and development unless there is equal contribution of both the gender in all spheres of life and at different levels of decision making. Political empowerment of women through participation will encourage women in to achieve liberty with men and may help in reducing the gender gap.

To tackle the problem of socio-economic change of Naga society and to broaden the political elite structure, the political status of women has to be improved. If electoral politics continued to be dominated by men depriving half of the state enfranchised population, keeping them out of the political structures of the state, one cannot talk of democracy.

Women need to participate in politics because women know their own problems to bring out a solution. Women's involvement in development process and in political decision making will make a huge impact. And this could be achieved only through encouragement from the party leaders which are mostly dominated by male.

Participation of Women in Electoral Process

Women are moving ahead in terms of participation in electoral process. In spite of voter's intimidation, outbreak of violence in polling stations, official stations indicates an increase in the turnout of women voters. However, casting of votes alone is not a political progress or empowerment and neither the high participation in voting of women bring about their electing as peoples representatives.

Table-1 shows the percentage of men and women who voted at each of the Assembly Election that took place in a period of more than five decades (1964-2013). This shows that the women voters participate equally at the ballot box with men. This scenario positively encourages one to think that women in Nagaland are moving ahead in terms of participations in electoral process. The first and the ninth Assembly Election has been left out of the analysis due to non-availability of data by gender.

Women are also a strong force for election campaigning. Few numbers of women in politics are largely auxiliaries and support male leadership. They are mobilized by part men for support but few have contested in the State Legislative elections.

Table-1
Gender Difference in Voting (in %) in Nagaland, 1969-2013²

Year	Voters			Voters who voted			% of votes		Difference in votes polled by male and female
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	
1969	93829	83102	176931	72196	67132	139328	76.94	80.78	3.84
1974	221223	173847	395070	161164	136484	297648	72.85	78.50	5.65
1977	214812	183223	398035	176666	154795	331461	82.24	84.48	2.24
1982	330290	266163	596453	240422	203500	443922	72.79	76.45	3.66
1987	319529	262772	582301	266033	225891	491924	83.25	85.96	2.71
1988	320611	261805	582416	273574	225248	498822	85.32	86.03	0.71
1993	427450	387355	814805	387448	347494	734942	90.64	89.70	0.94
2003	529517	485363	1014880	474181	417316	891497	89.54	85.98	3.56
2008	666391	635875	1302266	573021	549362	1122383	85.98	86.93	0.41
2013				581782	579291	1171335	89.82	91.22	1.4

Source: report on the General Elections to Nagaland Legislative Assembly, 1969-2013.

Table-2
Male/ Female Contestants in State Assembly Elections, 1969-2013³

Year of Election	Total No of seats	Total No of contestants who contested election			Difference of % Male/Female
		Male	Female	No of woman elected	
1969	40	142	2	Nil	1.40
1974	60	219	—	—	—
1977	60	201	—	—	—
1982	60	245	—	—	—
1987	60	214	3	Nil	1.40
1988	60	140	—	—	—
1993	60	177	1	Nil	0.56
2003	60	222	3	Nil	1.35
2008	60	214	4	Nil	1.87
2013	60	186	2	Nil	1.07
Total	60	1960	15	Nil	0.76

Source: Report on the General Elections to Nagaland Legislative Assembly, 1969-2013

The state of women representation in the Nagaland State Legislative Assembly presents a dismal picture. Since the first election to the State Legislative Assembly conducted in 1964 to the latest one held in 2013, not a single woman has made it to the state legislature. As table 2 indicates, starting from the first election in 1964 to the latest one in 2013, there had been only fifteen women candidates (two of whom contested twice), out of a total of 1960 candidates. This accounts for a mere 0.76 per cent of the total candidature⁴.

Why electoral success elude women

Political parties in Nagaland accord low priorities to women candidates. Women often find their effort to break into politics marginalised by the failure of the parties to support their viability as candidates.

Though political parties have women wings, they are not recruited to run for elective offices.

Women aspirants are given party tickets only in constituencies where the party has less chance of winning. In Mokokchung Constituency Chubalemla had to contest against S.C. Jamir. The then Chief Minister of Nagaland women candidate as less qualified than men to run for public offices. Generally, it is considered that women's role should be in the household, whereas leadership role is for men. This prevailing attitude towards women contributes to the lack of confidence on women, thus, becoming a barrier to the election of women in Legislative assembly.

The important determinants of voting of the Nagas includes considerations of kinship ties, clans, economic considerations, and political affinity of family members, and not on the basis of political ideology or party principles. Often, their choice of candidate depends on the decision of the male members in the family. As most men in Naga society are yet to fully accept the

idea of having women in leadership roles, it adversely affects the outcome of the women candidates in the elections.

Political parties in Nagaland are male dominated. They have not genuinely taken up the issues of political participation by women either within the party as leaders or in fielding them as party candidates in election.

Naga women are also partly responsible for their failure in entering politics. They don't want to come forward and many are of the view that it is better for the men to lead in politics and women in other spheres of life. Parents don't encourage their children to become politicians but to be doctors, engineers, teachers, administrator etc. Thus the traditional political system in the patriarchal Naga socio-cultural system is strongly imbibed even in the minds of the naga women which contribute for their exclusion from playing the role of decision making in politics.

Considering the growth of education amongst Naga women and their achievement in other areas besides politics, it is expected that a gender-sensitized re-structuring of the formal institutions in society, both traditional and modern, will alleviate the Naga women into positions of equal partnership with men in electoral politics to enable her participate in decision making at legislative levels.

Why Electoral Success Elude Women

Political parties in Nagaland are controlled by men who accord low priorities to women candidates. Though political parties have women wings and most of the ground works during the electioneering are done by the women, women often find their effort break into politics marginalized by the failure of the parties to support their viability as candidates. The political parties dominated by male have not genuinely taken up the issues of political participation by women either within the party as leaders or in fielding them as part candidates. Women who

have contested in the elections, majority of the candidates were independent candidates. This highlights the reluctance of the political parties in Nagaland to sponsor Women as candidates in the election. Without the backing of major political parties chances of winning in doubtful.

Women aspirants are given part tickets only in constituencies where the party has less chance of winning. For example, in Mole constituency(NPF) had to contest against SC.....the then CM of Nagaland. As a 3 time CM, and the incumbent of the Chief Ministerial Office, his influence and held on the Constituency (22) was unquestionable and therefore, his winning the election was forgone conclusion. Predictably, he won the election by a wide margin. Thus the role of political parties of Nagaland, which are all manned by male politicians, in fielding women candidates in questionable.

In spite of the high percentage of women-voters, the failure of women candidates in electoral politics can be analyzed against the backdrop of the Naga socio-cultural milieu. The reason for the lack of empathy for women candidates by the Naga electorate in general and the women voters in particular, lies in the determinants of their voting behaviour which are most often not politically motivated. The ...determinants of voting of the Nagas include considerations of kinship, lies, clans eco consideration and political affinity of family members and not on the basis of political ideology or party principles. Often their choice of candidates depends on the decision of the male members in the family. As most men in Naga society are yet to fully accept the idea of having women in leadership role it adversely affects the outcome of the women candidates in the elections. The votes of women are valued equally with those of men, but people are reluctant to select to candidates let alone elect then!

Another factor for the low political participations of Naga women can be associated with the traditional political system in the Patriarchal Naga socio-cultural system which excludes women from every decisions making institutions in society and relegates them in the domestic sphere. Generally, it is considered that woman's role should be in the household such as family responsibilities, child rearing, whereas leadership role is for man. This prevailing attitude towards women contributes to the lack of confidence on women, thus, becoming barrier to the election of women in Legislative Assembly.....Politics is viewed as an area where only men can exercise power authority and control. Hence, the male dominated tradition still keeps women in a 2nd Class Status in politics.

Inadequate fund is a big hindrance to effective female participation in electoral politics. Women are not financially strong compared to male counterparts.

Naga women are also partly responsible for their failure in enacting politics. They don't want to come forward and many

are of the new that it is better for the men to lead in politics and women in other spheres of life. They are apathetic about political matters.

Sometimes, the women who vie for public offices have to consider the risk of being labled 'loose' or 'unfit' as Mothers and wives and being socially stigmatized. Male politicians are rarely subjugated to scrutiny but not for women's case.⁵

When the name of any women as probable candidateup her 'moral' or 'character' are immediately subjugated to scrutiny.

Conclusion

Thus such negativity makes many capable women shy away from politics. Considering the growth of education amongst women and their achievement in other areas besides politics, it is expected that a gender-sensitised re-structuring of the formal in the society, both traditional and modern, will alleviate the Naga women into position of equal partnership with men in electoral politics to enable her participate in decision making at legislative level. Liberal democracy is founded on reason, law, and freedom of choice but the position of different social groups in the social and political space where power is located is not always equal in practice. This is particularly so in the case of women. The attitude of society or state has a greater impact on the extent and effectiveness of women's political presence and participation. Notions of democracy, governance and the state are often not gender neutral constructs but result from both historical factors and experiences. The state and its organizational entities reflect the same social forces as other social organizations. It is thus necessary to examine the gender balance in women's participation in the political process, decision making and policy formulation.

There are now Women in soil who can articulate their views and also voice their opinion. They should be encouraged, supported and given an opportunity to enter into this arena of decision-making at the Legislative Assembly.

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