CHAPTER V: Strategies Adopted for Women’s Political Participation and its Relevance to Tangkhul Women.

V.1. Introduction:

Women constitute slightly more than half of the world population. Their contribution to the social and economic development of societies is also more as compared with men by virtue of their dual roles in the productive and reproductive spheres. Yet their participation in formal political structures and processes remain low. Till 2005, women’s representation in legislatures around the world was 15% only.¹ In spite of the declared commitment of the international community to gender equality and to bridging the gender gap in the formal political arena, reinforced by the ‘Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)’ and the ‘Beijing platform of Action,’ there are only twelve countries where women hold 33% or more seats in their respective legislative assemblies.² With an increasing recognition among international community of women’s exclusion from structures of power, a global commitment has been made to redress gender imbalance in politics. Women’s enhanced participation in governance structures is viewed as the key to redress gender equalities in societies.

The denial of equality to women is not a modern phenomenon. It has been there since ancient times. For instance in ancient Greece, a philosophy of public-private dichotomy prevailed and women were excluded from citizenship.³ From there emerged various philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle,

² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
and later the likes of Rousseau, John Locke, Thomas Hobbes and Hegel who considered women only for domestic roles in the private sphere and maintained that there was no place for women in politics because of their suitability in caring roles as mothers and wives. Aristotle in his Politics excluded women from citizens. In modern times also when Democracy was ushered in most of the Western and European countries in the 19th Century, women were excluded from voting rights. In this way, the ancient and modern democracies failed to recognize women as citizens. It was mainly the liberal political philosophy of the 19th century that promoted the idea of “free and rational individual which was used by suffragists to demand for the right to vote”. In modern times to end such sidelining of women and to bring them in parallel with men, various steps have been taken up at the global, national and local levels.

V.2. International instruments:

To bring women in the mainstream of politics, various international laws, declarations, and conventions, as well as national laws have been adopted. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) encourages parliaments and their members to take the necessary measures for states to become parties without reservation to international conventions concerning women and those concerning human rights. It also encourages them to see to it that national legislation is harmonized with the provisions of those international aimed at the overall uplift of women. Some of the declarations, conventions, international laws, etc. where efforts of the international community to promote the interests of women could be seen most significantly are as follows:

i. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, (1948)

ii. Convention on the Political Rights of Women, (1952)

iii. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)

\[4\text{ Ibid.}


v. Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, (1967)


ix. Inter-American Convention for the Prevention, Punishment and Elimination of Violence Against Women, (1955)

x. Universal Declaration on Democracy, (1997)


Of the above mentioned declarations and conventions concerning women, the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, is the most significant document which contains provisions regarding the political rights of women. It was adopted by the General Assembly on 20 December 1952 and entered into force on 7 July, 1954. The Convention contains 11 Articles which elaborates the political rights of women and the guidelines for the contracting parties to the Convention. It contains the following political rights for the women:

1. The right to vote: Article 1 of the Convention lays down that “Women shall be entitled to vote in all elections on equal terms with men, without any discrimination”.  

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6 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
2. Eligibility for election: Article 2 of the Convention provides that "Women shall be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies, established by national law, on equal terms with men, without any discrimination".9

3. The right to hold public office: Article 3 says "Women shall be entitled to hold public office and to exercise all public functions, established by national law, on equal terms with men, without any discrimination".10

In addition, the "Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women" which was adopted unanimously by the General Assembly on 7 November, 1967 contains specifically two Articles which are very significant for women. They are Article 4 and 5 of it. Article 4 says that "the existing laws, customs, regulations and practices which are discriminatory against women must be abolished ....".11 Article 5 also says that "there is need to educate public opinion and to direct national aspirations towards the eradication of prejudice and the abolition of customary and all other practices which are based on the ideal of the inferiority of women".12 Article 6 of the Convention also talks of political rights of women and it says that "all appropriate measures shall be taken to ensure to women, on equal terms with men and without distinction, the right to vote in all elections and be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies and the right to hold public office and exercise all public functions".13

It may be noted here that Article 4 and 5 of the above Declaration has special significance in the context of the Naga women in general and that of the Tangkhul women in Manipur in particular as there exist many customs and practices which are discriminatory to women and which are still being

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9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
practiced even today. In these societies, the customary laws are still strictly observed and it is because of this that women were denied access in the village administration. In Tangkhul society, there exist various customary laws which are discriminatory. Property rights, law of inheritance, denial of access in the village council are only some of the examples. On the top of this, due to customary laws, women are being denied representation at present in apex Tangkhul civil organizations like the "Tangkhul Naga Long".

The "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women" is also one of the important covenants dealing with the political rights of the women. Article 7 of the Convention says that, "State parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right to vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies".\(^\text{14}\)

Article 27 requires the "State parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in political and public life of the country and to ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right to participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government"\(^\text{15}\) and "to participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country".\(^\text{16}\)

Apart from these International Declarations and Conventions, the United Nations (UN) also undertook various other initiatives for the enhancement of women's political status. The UN set up the "Commission on the Status of Women" in June 1946. The other initiatives of the UN include observing the International Women's Year (1975), and the UN Decade for Women 1975-

\(^{14}\) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Article 7.
\(^{15}\) Ibid., Article 27.
\(^{16}\) Ibid.
1985 which was observed with the theme “Equality, Development and Peace”. It also conducted World Conferences on Women which were held at Mexico (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995). The UN Mexico World Plan of Action (1975) also says that greater and equal participation of women at all levels of decision-making would decisively contribute to accelerating the pace of development and the maintenance of peace. The Fourth World Conference on Women 1995 affirmed the significance of democratic political participation in order to ensure access for all women to resources, opportunities and public opinion. Another important work of UN which is worth mentioning is the shift in focus of the UN initiatives in the last three decades. It has moved from a needs assessment through country wide status reports in the 1970’s to economic development for women in the 1980’s and finally to empowerment, social, economic and political, of women in the 1990’s.18

V.3. Initiatives taken in India for women’s political participation:

In India also, various initiatives have been taken up for the empowerment of women in the political field. This includes the Constitutional Rights for women, safeguards in the form of national laws, signing of international treaties and conventions, etc. The Constitution of India guarantees equality of sex and in fact grants special favors to women. These can be found in three articles of the Constitution. Article 14 says that the state shall not deny to any person equality before law or the equal protection of the laws.19 Article 15 also provides that state shall not discriminate against any citizen on the ground of sex.20 Further, Article 15 (3) makes a special provision enabling the

20 Ibid.
state to make affirmative discriminations in favor of women.\textsuperscript{21} Article 16 also guarantees that no citizen shall be discriminated against in matters of public employment on the grounds of sex.\textsuperscript{22}

Some of the important political rights that women enjoy under the Constitution of India are as follows:

i) Civil and Political Rights: Article 326 of the Constitution guarantees political equality to women and provides for the right to vote to all its citizens. Further, Article 325 prohibits exclusion from the electoral rolls on the basis of sex, caste, religion, etc.

ii) Right to contest elections: Articles 14, 15, 16 and 19 of the Constitution of India and the Representation of Peoples Act, 1951 provides for equal participation of women in political process.

iii) Reservation for women: Article 243 (D) and 243 (T) of the Constitution provides for 33 percent reservation for women in Panchayats and Municipalities. The 73\textsuperscript{rd} Constitutional Amendment provided for the increased participation of women in political institution at the village, taluka, and district level, while the 74\textsuperscript{th} Constitutional Amendment provides for increased participation of women in urban local self governing bodies like the Municipalities. These Acts further provide for one-third reservation of post for President and Vice-Presidents in these political institutions. This reservation is implemented through a process of rotation, by identifying different constituencies as a reserved constituency for each election term.

iv) Right to Association: Article 9 (1c) of the Constitution guarantees to all citizens the right to form associations or unions.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., p.92.
v) Right to political and public life at the international level: In India, there is no legislation which prohibits or restricts women from participating in the political and public life at the international level.\textsuperscript{23}

Apart from the above mentioned Constitutional Rights, India is also a signatory to several International Treaties and Conventions which intend to better safeguard the interests of women. She has ratified the "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women" (CEDAW) 1967 in the year 1993.\textsuperscript{24}

V.4. Initiatives taken by the political parties for the political empowerment of women in India:

Most of the political parties in India at present, in order encourage women's political participation have their own women's wing. In the beginning, it was parties like Indian National Congress and Communist Party of India, which formed women's front within the party organization. Later on other political parties also adopted the same system and formed women's wings. Some of the activities and works that the political parties took up for the political participation of women have been as follows:

1. Mobilization of women voters at the time of elections on some popularly attractive electoral promises and slogans, relating to the socio-economic uplift of women.

2. Mobilization of women activists and other common women citizens belonging to different occupations and pockets in rallies, demonstrations and campaigns.

\textsuperscript{23} "Baseline Report: Women and Political Participation in India", op.cit., p.80.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., p.1
3. Mobilization of women activists and party workers in organizing conferences focused on women specific themes.

4. Imparting specific training programs for active members of the women’s wing of the parties in order to sustain their commitment to the party ideology and programs besides keeping them informed of future courses of action.\(^{25}\)

The Mahila Morcha of Indian National Congress became an active agency under the leadership of Smt. Kumudben Joshi’s Presidency. She helped in bringing out an Action Plan which was carried out during May-December 1990 for the District and Block Mahila Congress office-bearers. The Mahila Congress had also seized the initiative to nominate women candidates for the elections in 1991 for the Parliamentary and State Assemblies. On top of this, in order to encourage women workers, following steps were also taken:

1. Awards were given to those states which would enroll the maximum number of women members.

2. Women members who could enroll 100 or more women members were given separate identity cards.\(^{26}\)

The B.J.P Mahila Morcha has 20 states units. The main objectives of this Mahila Morcha are as follows:

1. To raise social awareness among women and strengthen their sense of national duty.

2. To struggle against economic, social and political injustice.

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\(^{26}\) Ibid., p.29
3. To build a free new society based on social equality and justice.

4. To revive India’s ancient civilization and traditional values.

5. To apply scientific ways in life.27

Women were poorly represented in the C.P.I (M) and their women’s representation in Parliament or State Legislatures were low. However, in the recent times, there has been a radical shift and now women’s issues have taken an important place in the party’s agenda.

V.5. The Women’s Reservation Bill (WRB):

The 81st Constitutional Amendment Bill or the Women’s Reservation Bill (WRB) was first introduced as the Constitution Amendment (81st) Bill on 12th September 1996, by the United Front Government after the effective implementation of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment. The Bill envisaged the following:

a) As nearly as maybe one-third of all seats in Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies shall be reserved for women.

b) Reservation shall apply in case of seats reserved for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Schedule Tribes (STs) as well.

c) Seats to be reserved in rotation will be determined by draw of lots in such a way that a seat shall be reserved only once in three consecutive general elections.

The BJP led National Democratic Alliance government (NDA) and the Congress led United Progressive Alliance government (UPA) tried to pass the

27 Ibid., p.57.
bill which was introduced by the United Front government, but was not successful because of opposition to the bill by some section of the people.

The DMK, AIADMK, Telegu Desam, Trinamol Congress, Biju Janata Dal, National Conference, etc. claim that they are in favor of reservation. If the Congress and BJP were sincere, they could have pushed the Bill together as they have the required numbers.²⁸

Prior to the 73rd and 74th Amendments, only the state of Karnataka had reservation for women in institutions of local self-governance. The Janata party government in Karnataka in 1991 passed a Bill to implement 25 percent reservation for women in local elections. This heralded a national debate on the issue of reservation for women in several other states. For example, Sharad Pawar (Congress-I) announced 30 percent of seats in Municipal Corporations and the Panchayati Raj Institutions to be reserved for women in Maharashtra. Following these initiatives, the 73rd and 74th Amendments were passed.

In 1996 election, manifestoes of almost all major political parties promised for 30 percent reservation for women in Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. The most recent dialogue regarding reservation for women has also been suggesting an amendment to the People's Representation Act. The new formula suggests reservation of 33% of tickets for women. This could be achieved by an amendment to the People's Representation Act, making it compulsory for the political parties to allocate 33% of the tickets to women candidates.

Access 20/05/08
V.6. Strategies adopted for women political participation and its relevance to Tangkhul women:

The framers of the Constitution perhaps believed that law would lead to social change and bring about equality between the genders. Yet, inequality and discrimination continues to persist in all spheres of public and private life. This is quite evident from the fact that the participation of women in politics and in other decision making bodies is very limited. Many international declarations, international covenants, treaties, and national laws has been adopted and ratified for the uplift of women’s socio-political status. But when one look at the political participation of women in India in general and Tangkhul women in particular, the declared and adopted strategies in the form of conventions, declarations, laws etc. have not succeeded in creating a positive and congenial environment to accelerate women’s political participation.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has granted equal rights to both men and women. But in Tangkhul society, the social reality is something different. Majority of women especially in rural areas and villages still continue to remain in a sub-ordinate and inferior position in the patriarchal society. In Manipur, even though women play a significant role in the socio-economic life of the society, and enjoy a higher status than most of her counterparts in other parts of India, there are certain social restrictions, deforming her social jurisdiction. For example, in Meetei society, women are not allowed to eat the things which were offered to family god at the time of ‘Apokpa Khurumba’ (worship of the family deity). In Tangkhul society, the customary laws permit only the male to inherit property. Females have no right to inherit property. They have been entitled to inherit only certain things like furniture, beds, etc.

30 Zehoi, Lucy. “Women in Naga Society” (VI), (eds.) Regency Publications, New Delhi, p.22.
for their use at the time of their marriage. This is a serious discrimination women have been subjected to in the Tangkhul society. These have reduced the social position of women to a sub-ordinate one vis-à-vis that of the men in their society. In such a social environment mere legislations of various kinds for women political uplift will not serve the purpose of women’s empowerment unless there is a change in the mindset of the society in general and the men in particular.

Article 51 (A) (e) of the Constitution of India and Article 5 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) deals with the elimination of prejudices against women. However the state has practically done nothing to achieve these principles. In Tangkhul society, there are several ways in which the structures of the family and in the society, and inequitable social customs and practices serve to deprive women of these rights. In particular, discrimination occurs within the family. A preference to boys or male members is given in the family. Women cannot take a decision of their own within the family. Besides, as already mentioned, they are not entitled to inheritance of immovable property as well as they are customarily barred from becoming members of different decision making bodies of the village like the traditional village council as well as the contemporary Village Authorities. They are also not allowed to be members of contemporary apex Tangkhul organizations like the Tangkhul Naga Long, the highest judicial organization in the Tangkhul society. In case of the death of her husband, she is not entitled to inherit his properties or in case of divorce, the custody of their children is always with the husband and the wife cannot claim them.\textsuperscript{31} The birth of a boy is more preferred than the birth of a girl child because it is believed that in the family usually a boy has more capability of increasing the wealth of the family.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
custom it is the boys who have to look after the aged parents. In case of the parent’s death, it is again the boys who perform the burial rites of their death parents.\textsuperscript{33} The clan is preserved generation to generation by the male member of the family as women change their clan to that of their husband’s once they got married.\textsuperscript{34} Because of all these reasons, the birth of the boys is preferred more in the Tangkhul society.

A clear case of contemporary Tangkhul women suffering discriminations because of their customs took place in the year 2000. In one of the Eastern Tangkhul villages called Punge Village under Phungyar Sub-Division, one lady Mrs. S. Zingthanla, W/O Mr. S. Elizeh was appointed as one of the members of the Village Authority. But the Tangkhul Naga Zingsho Longphang (Eastern Tangkhul Naga Council) in its letter dated 23/07/00 issued to the Headman of Punge, called for the immediate removal of Mrs. S. Zingthanla from the membership of the Village Authority saying that according to the Art. III, Section 6 of the Constitution of the Tangkhul Naga Long, only the eldest of the clans has to be a member of the Village Council and it does not apply to women.\textsuperscript{35} This clearly shows the firm grip which the discriminating customary laws has in the management of village administration at present thereby effectively blocking participation of women in the management of village affairs. In this way, though the Indian Constitution and other international conventions talk of elimination of prejudices against women, in actual practice the state can hardly do anything against such practices prevailing in the Tangkhul Society. This in return does not help in bringing a positive and encouraging atmosphere for their political participation. The continued exclusion of Naga women from traditional seats of decision-making can be considered as denial of their basic human rights.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{35} Letter issued to the Headman, Punge Village by Tangkhul Naga Zingsho Longphang, Ukhrul on 23/07/00.
The Constitution of India no doubt guaranteed Universal adult franchise and has empowered women to participate in the electoral process as voters and elected representatives. However, in reality again, in Tangkhul society, the right to vote is usually dictated and controlled by men usually the father or husband or sons or male members of the family or sometimes by the influential male leaders of the village. As such, women are not independent voters. Just before the polling day, the head of the family will instruct all the members of the family whom to vote and all the family members will cast accordingly.

There also has emerged another trend in the electoral politics of the Nagas in general and that of the Tangkhuls in particular since the NSCN (IM) has entered into a cease fire agreement with the Government of India in course of the present ongoing peace talks between the two. The trend is that at present, in every election, for the state legislative assembly as well as for the Lok Sabha, the common people are increasingly facing constraints on the free exercise of their voting rights. Apex Naga organizations like the UNC, the All Naga Students’ Association Manipur (ANSAM), etc. have started issuing dictates which adversely affects the free exercise of their voting rights. For instance, during the time of the 2002 State Assembly Elections, they urged the people to vote for those candidates who could work for an amicable solution of the vexed Naga issues. The UNC sponsored a ‘declaration’ which was made to sign by the forty four Naga candidates of the Manipur Assembly election that was held in the year 2002. The UNC made the candidates to sign a declaration stating that they would support the Naga issue. More crucial has been the interference during the 2007 State Assembly Elections. As the elections approached, the UNC on January 11 directed all the Naga political leaders and functionaries to resign from national and regional parties within

36 Basu, op.cit., p.23.
37 Interview with Mrs. Elasing Shaiza, Missionary wife, Kumram Village 12/05/2009.
38 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
two days in the interest of the Naga people. The UNC further directed all intending candidates to attend a meeting on 16 January at Senapati along with their family members and chief election agents. In the meeting, 60 intending candidates signed an Eight-point Declaration. According to this Declaration, the signatories agreed to accept those persons “determined by the Naga people as represented by the UNC as the consensus candidate”. The signatories also agreed that they will steadfastly defend the interest of the Naga people for integration/unification of the Naga areas and that they “will resign from the legislature if called upon to do so by the Naga people as represented by the UNC”. All these steps were taken up with a view to uphold the Naga people for integration of all Naga areas under one administration. The UNC even appealed to other Naga candidates to withdraw their candidature or retire from the elections in the interest of the Naga people and extend support to the consensus candidates as decided by it. Altogether the UNC sponsored eleven candidates. However, only six of the candidates were elected.\(^{41}\) Under such circumstances, when the election is dictated by some organizations, the right to vote could not be exercised independently by one’s own choice, which is a great contradiction to the ideals of voting rights enshrined in the constitution.\(^{42}\) Such trends make the women more vulnerable and voiceless in time of elections. They have always been the most vulnerable victims under such circumstances as they have not been daring enough to stand up and voice their opinion as some of the men do.

The Committee on the Status of Women in India in its report ‘Towards Equality’ (1974) recommended 30 percent reservation for women in decision making bodies. Acknowledging the need to increase the number of women in decision-making process at all levels, the Government of India in 1993 provided for 33% reservation for women in institutions of local governance

\(^{41}\) Ibid.
\(^{42}\) Interview with S. Ningshen Social worker, 12/07/2008. Ningchou Village.
through the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments. It also provided for 33% of the posts of President and Vice President of these institutions to be reserved for women. In this way, the government succeeded in facilitating women’s participation by providing for reservation at the lowest levels of governance. As a result of this, women have gained a sense of empowerment and their perceptions about things have changed. They have started asserting control over resources and officers. Being a part of the Panchayati Raj system has also given many women a greater understanding of the working of politics. However, these benefits have not reached the Tangkhul women, because in Ukhrul District, like in the rest of the other hill areas of the state, there is no system of Panchayati Raj Institutions at the village level. Instead there are the Village Authorities Act and there is no reservation for women in this system of Village Authorities. At the District level also, there was no reservation for women in the Autonomous District Council (ADC) which was there prior to 1988. The Autonomous District Councils has also been dissolved since 1988. The dissolution of the ADCs has deprived all the hill people including women a great opportunity to involve in the management of their local affairs on lines of democratic constitutionalism. At present, elections for Autonomous District Council in accordance with a new Autonomous District Council Act is about to be held. However, the sad part is that even in this new Act which came long after the passing of the 73rd and 74th Amendments, there is no provision of reservations for women in it. Lack of space for participation in decision making bodies has not only resulted in the presence of women in meager numbers in these bodies but also has resulted in the neglect of their issues and experiences in policy making.

Articles 325 and 326 of the Indian Constitution guarantee political equality to all. Yet, Tangkhul women have not benefited from this either. The political climate as it exists today continues to be male centered and is therefore perceived to be conducive to male participation. This is evident by
the number of women fielded so far in the elections that have conducted. From among the Tangkhul women, Mrs Hangmila Shaiza was fielded in the 1990 Assembly election in the Ukhrul Constituency by the Janata Party. She was followed by Mrs. Grace Shatsang who was fielded in the 2000 Assembly election in Chingai Constituency by the Indian National Congress. Lastly, Mrs. Valleyrose Hungyo contested the 2007 State Assembly Elections from the Phunyar constituency as a candidate of the Naga Nationalist Party (NNP). She had also contested the 1989 Lok Sabha Elections as Janata Dal candidate and the 1996 Lok Sabha elections as Samata Party candidate. She was defeated in all the elections. It is disgracing that so far only three Tangkhul women have came out to contest the elections - Lok Sabha as well as State Assembly elections, held inside the state. Out of these only one woman got elected as a member of the Manipur Legislative Assembly from Ukhrul District in the year 1991. Thus, in this way, one cannot say that Tangkhul women enjoy political equality even though the Constitution guarantees political equality to all without discrimination based on sex.

V.7. Factors hindering Tangkhul women’s political participation:

Tangkhul women’s participation in political process has been impeded due to various social, economic, historical, geographical, political and cultural factors, thereby resulting in their minimal participation and even their exclusion. The common pattern of women’s political exclusion stem from a) social and political discourse; b) political structures and institutions; and c) the socio-cultural and functional constraints that put limits on women’s individual and collective agency.\footnote{Farzana Bari, “Women’s Political Participation: Issues and Challenge”, op.cit.} Coming to that of the Tangkhul women, some of the important factors which have impeded their political participation are being discussed as follows:
i. Attitude of the patriarchal society:

From the earlier period till date the Tangkhul women have been enjoying a high degree of freedom to participate in all the socio-cultural events and activities of the village. In spite of this, there is one aspect in the mindset of the Tangkhul society which place women in a subordinate position to men. Women are considered as the one who has to look after the domestic chores. In an interview with one of the village chiefs, he said that the proper place for women is that of the confines of the four walls of the house. As the men folks were mostly away from home for various activities, and also as the responsibility for the safety and security of the family lies in their hands, women are expected to look after family, care for the children and other household activities.\textsuperscript{44} Withdrawing their attention from such a long established tradition to pursue a career in politics or to participate actively in politics will lead to the breaking down of the integrity of the family.\textsuperscript{45}

Besides, Politics is a profession where women may have to be away from home as and when required by the emergencies of time. It is also believed that this will reflect adversely on the character of the women.\textsuperscript{46} Such patriarchal attitudes serve as an obstacle in encouraging women for political participation. According to Mrs. B. Hongray, Principal, Mount Fort Elementary English School Ukhrul, though women have the potential of good leadership, in the absence of encouragement from the men in general and the family in particular, women by themselves cannot come out alone and join politics. This mindset which believes that the space of women is the domestic domain has to be rooted out first in order to enable and encourage women to join politics.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{44} Interview with one village Headman whose name is withheld on request. 22/05/08
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{47} Interview with Mrs. B. Hongray. Headmistress Mount Fort Elementary English School. Ukhrul 12/06/2009.
ii. Socio – cultural factor:

The subordinate status of women vis-à-vis men is a universal phenomenon, though with a difference in the nature and extent of subordination across the countries. The gender status quo is maintained through low resource allocation to women’s human development by the state, society and the family. In Tangkhul society, this is reflected in the social indicators which reveal varying degrees of gender disparities in education, health, employment, ownership of productive resources and politics.

According to 2001 census, the total number of main workers in Ukhrul District is 51,564. Out of these, 22,321 are female and 29,243 are male.\(^{48}\) The Marginal workers constitute 14,951 out of which 8,324 are female and 6,627 are male.\(^{49}\) Thus the employment data reveals that female worker is lesser than men, but women outnumber the male in the marginal work which indicates women in the District including Tangkhul women are engaged more in petty and menial work for the support of the family.

The male-female ratio in the District is another issue which is of great concern to the female health considerations as well as the general wellbeing of women in the District. There has been a very bid margin of difference in the ratio throughout the last four decades. This is in spite of the death of many youths (male) due to the problem of insurgency and drugs in the District. The following table shows the trend in the sex-ratio in Ukhrul District.

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\(^{49}\) Ibid.
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<td>1971</td>
<td>969</td>
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<td>1981</td>
<td>917</td>
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<td>1991</td>
<td>884</td>
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<td>2001</td>
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Source: Census Reports.

A huge majority of the Tangkhul women live in the remote rural villages where medical facilities are not available. Women usually give birth in a very risky way without any medical aid. There are many cases of child-birth related deaths. This may be one of the factors for the declining sex ratio in the Ukhrul District.\textsuperscript{50} This once again serves as an indicator of the disadvantaged status of women in the district. Such realities are not conducive for their uplift, social, economic or political.

Apart from this, Tangkhul women also find it hard to participate in politics due to limited time available to them because of their dual roles in the productive and reproductive spheres. With their primary roles as mothers and wives, and urgent and demanding domestic responsibilities and care work, they are left with little time to participate in politics. On top of this, the Tangkhul women in the remote villages have more responsibility as they have to work in the fields also. Politics requires exposure to interact with male and female constituents and address public meeting which is missing among the Tangkhul women because of the existing socio-cultural environment.

\textit{iii. Economic Factor:}

\textsuperscript{50} Interview with B. Hongray, op.cit.
In Tangkhul society, till about the 20th Century, the business transactions of the people were almost non-existent albeit occasional market days on festival days, but that too was on barter system and within the limits of the village only. Yet the people could maintain and afford to meet their requirements for their day-to-day subsistence and livelihood. Thus they were self-reliant and self-sufficient. But with the advent of modern civilization, they were suddenly exposed to capitalistic trend of fierce market competitions and urbanization. Their limited sources of income and resources could not meet both ends and sooner they were reduced to a people living below poverty line. Thus under this condition, most of the Tangkhul women had to struggle to meet both ends, and they are not economically independent.

Most of the Tangkhul women are engaged in the informal economy. Their main economic mainstay was the agrarian work. According to 2001 census, the total number of cultivators inclusive of main and marginal workers in Ukhrul District is 46,005, out of which 21,759 are male and 24,246 are female. The total female population of the district is 67313. Thus about 1/3 of the populations of women in the District are engaged in agricultural work for their livelihood. Apart from the agricultural work, when they have free time, they remain engaged either in animal husbandry or weaving. The income they earn out of their work, however meager, are still seen by them and their families as an income to be spent on the family. While interacting with a group of farmers in Phalang village of Ukhrul District, Mrs Ramyola Keishing narrated that she work in the paddy field and after she finish her work there, she will collect vegetables, fruits or whatever is saleable and will take it down to Imphal and sell it. The money that she got out of her earning will be spent

51 “Origins of the Tangkhul Nagas”, http://www.Tangkhul.com Access 02/05/08
52 Ibid.
for her son's education who is studying outside the state and also to meet other needs of the family.\textsuperscript{55} She further narrated that the money she earn from selling the vegetables or whatever is grown in her garden are the only source of her income If she rear pigs, she will get some extra money but whatever she get will again be used to meet the family's need and there is no money which she can call her own.\textsuperscript{56} Thus in this way majority of the women are too much preoccupied in their own work to meet the ends of the family. They work hard but they don't have money of their own. Therefore, though even some of them may want to be involved in the politics, the money that is required for political activities like election campaign expenditure, to attend meetings, to visit and interact with government officials, etc. become an additional burden that women can ill afford thereby imped ing prospects of their active involvement in politics. More significantly, they won't be able to contribute what they have been contributing to the family's income if they decide to join active politics.

In Tangkhul society, according to Mrs. Bryll Hongray, another factor which impedes women from being economically independent is that, women get entangled in the web of oppression right from the childhood. It is the girl child who is the first to be drawn out of the school (as education of the girl is not the priority when there are many siblings) to contribute to wage earning or to assist in sharing women's domestic chores in the household or to be surrogate mother to her siblings.\textsuperscript{57} This deprives her of the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills which would enable her to be economically independent. And when they are not economically independent, obviously there cannot be much time for them to direct their attention to political activities.

\textsuperscript{55} Interview with Ramyola Keishing, a farmer, Phalang Village. 20/04/08.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{57} Interview with B.Hongray, op.cit.
iv. Socio-Political factors:

The nature of politics is an important factor for the inclusion or exclusion of women in politics.⁵⁸ Male domination of politics, political parties and culture of formal political structures is another factor that hinders women’s political participation. Neither the Government nor political parties nor the other civil organizations existing within Ukhrul District are taking up any concrete plan for the political empowerment of women in general and the Tangkhul women in particular. This is reflected in the various Acts and laws that have been implemented in the State of Manipur. After Manipur was merged into the union of India in 1950, the first Act for the governance of hill areas of Manipur was introduced. It was popularly known as ‘The Manipur (Village Authorities in Hill Areas) Act, 1956’. This Act was implemented in Ukhrul District as well. Unfortunately, the Act did not contain any provision for the political empowerment of Tangkhul women in the sense that it did not provide for any reservation for women. Here it may once again be remember that in the traditional village councils that preceded the Village Authorities did not allow any women member to be there. In addition to this, in spite of the Village Authority Act, the traditional village council continues to hold its sway over the governance of the village as the state government lack the political will to implement the Village Authority Act in letter and spirit. In fact in most of the villages, the Village Authority elections were not held and the traditional village councils with eldest clan male members continue to function as earlier or on behalf of the Village Authority supposed to be established under the Act.

Then came the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution of India. These Acts encourage political empowerment of women by providing for reservation of one-third of the seats of the local self governing bodies, both in rural and urban areas. However, as already mentioned, Tangkhul women has

⁵⁸ Farzana Bari, op. cit.
not benefited from this Act as none of the acts meant for local self governing bodies in the hills provide for the reservation of women so far. In addition to that, the Autonomous Districts Councils remained dissolved for more than two decades since 1988. All these meant that on the one hand the traditional institution of village administration deliberately barred women’s participation in the management of public affairs or the decision making process, and on the other, the new legislations meant to introduce new systems of local self governing bodies there also have not provided for any mechanism to facilitate women’s participation in the political decision making process at the village level.

Apart from this, political parties of Manipur are not taking up any specific steps for the political empowerment of women. There are very few women at the top decision making organs of the parties in Manipur. When it comes to Ukhrul District, in the year 1991, Mrs. Valley rose Hungyo became the first ever women to hold the post of President of a party at the district level when she became the president of the Janata Dal party of Ukhrul District. After that one cannot see any women leading any political party in the District.

The Tangkhuls at large are also apathetic toward women political empowerment. This is reflected in the way how the various organizations of the Tangkhuls are functioning. The ‘Tangkhul Naga Long’ is one of the leading socio-political organizations of the Tangkhuls at present. Yet, not only women are barred from becoming its members, its Shiyan-Tanza (constitution) does not contain any provision for political empowerment of Tangkhul women. Since its inception this organization is functioning as some sort of a parallel court to the constitutionally established ones like that of the courts of Sub-Deputy

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59 Shiyan Tanza was prepared by the Tangkhul Long (Tangkhul Tribal Council) based on the traditional laws of the Tangkhuls to settled their own disputes.
Collector, Sub-Divisional Officer and the Deputy Commissioner of Ukhrul District. Most of the appeals from the decisions of the Village Authority go to this court. Yet, sadly, the Tangkhul Naga Long does not permit any women to be its member and women are totally excluded from this apex Tangkhul organization. It is not only the Tangkhul Naga Long that prohibits women to be its member but another apex Naga civil body popularly known as ‘Naga Hoho’ (the apex traditional decision making body of the Nagas) also does not permit women to be its member. Apart from this, other important socio-political organizations of the Tangkhuls like the Tangkhul Katamnao Long (Tangkhul Student’s Organisation), Tangkhul Mayar Ngala Long (Tangkhul Youth’s Organisation), etc. have never seen woman getting elected as their President. In this way, Tangkhul women did not get any opportunities to train themselves for leadership and they are not getting any support from the government, political parties or the civil organizations to be empowered politically. All these have in one way or the other contributed to the low level of the Tangkhul women political participation. This is in addition to the fact that the customary laws of the Tangkhuls do not permit women to be a member of the Village Council or the Hangva. All these factors impede political participation of the Tangkhul women.

V.8. Conclusion:

Many international conventions, treaties as well as national laws for the political empowerment of women have been ratified and implemented in many countries. In India also, various initiatives have been taken up for the empowerment of women in the political field. This includes constitutional rights for women, safeguards in the form of national laws, signing of international treaties and conventions, etc. In addition, the political parties in

India have also taken up steps for the political empowerment of women, a most significant step being their having their own respective women’s wings.

The 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution further prove India’s commitment to the political empowerment of women, both in rural and urban areas by providing for reservation of one third of the seats in the local self governing bodies in these areas for women. The Women’s Reservation Bill or the 83rd Constitution Amendment Bill which envisages for reservation of one third of the seats in the Lok Sabha as well as in the State Legislative Assemblies is yet another major step towards further political empowerment of women. It has already been passed in the Rajya Sabha though it has yet to be passed by the Lok Sabha. In addition to these steps, prospects and possibilities of amending the People’s Representation Act so as to reserve 33% of the party tickets to be given in time of election for women is also being explored at present by the government. All these speak volumes about the commitment of the Central Government to the political empowerment of women in the country. Yet, in spite of all these efforts, political participation of the women in the hills of Manipur including Tangkhul women remains far from being ideal or satisfactory. This at length also impedes their political empowerment.