

CHAPTER VII

MAJOR FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Major findings of the present study are as follows:

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 2008, not a single women has made it to the state legislature. Starting from the first election in 1964 to the latest one in 2008 there has been only 12 women candidates. This accounts for a mere 0.6 percent of the total candidature.

An analysis of the comparative performance of the women candidates with regard to the votes secured in the elections suggests indirectly the attitude of the Naga electorate towards women as not favourable (See table 4.3).

Coming to the question of voting, the study reveals that women actively participated with their men in the political process to vote. According to the 2008 election statistical report reveals that women voter's turnout in the whole of Nagaland (M- 85.98%, F- 86. 39%), Kohima district (M-81%, F- 82%)and Kohima town (M-71%, F-76%) outnumbered the male voters. The present study reveals that 92.3% women are aware of their voting rights and the rest 7.7 % women were ignorant. A high percentage, 87% of women voters said they have exercised their franchise while only

13% said that they are yet to exercise their franchise. Women voter's preference in choosing a candidate reveals that 72% of the respondents show a high preference for the personal merits of a candidate rather than party affiliations. Participation of women voters as against the number of men voters in the last five Assembly Elections indicates that Naga women are very active voters.

The pattern of candidature of the women candidates in Nagaland indicates that political parties of the state are not in favour of fielding women as their candidates. For instance, a look at their candidature from 1969 to 2008 shows that out of the 12 women contestants, 6 of them contested as Independent candidates, which highlights the reluctance of political parties to sponsor women as their candidates.

The attitude of Naga women towards politics is one of distrust (*bisas nai*) and disgust (*khin-laki*). A high percentage of respondents 70% regarded politics as unsuitable for women (*maiki/sowali karoni nohoi*), and dirty game (*ganda khil*) to get involve in. A general opinion among the local populace is that *politics do maki mano laka jaka mohoi* (politics is not women's realm). Majority of the respondents came to this conclusion due to the fact that politicians do not keep their words, nor do they work for the upliftment of the society after getting elected and they see politics as an activity full of bargain, compromise and vested self interest. There was on the other hand a fraction (30%) of the respondents who feel that it is not politics itself but the people aspiring or holding political offices (politicians) that give politics a bad image. It is not surprising as such, that the bulk that is 75% of women tended to show no interest in politics while very small number (25%) of them showed interest. What has been observed is that it is the unmarried (28.18%), age

group of 18-28 years (31.11%), highly educated (55.31%), government employed (29%), middle-income group (30.50%), that tended to show more interest than the rest. In general, a low percentage of women seems to have very little interest, married women showed lesser interest than those who are not married, the reason being that, *“with a family to look after where is the time to spare for politics and for that matter even take part in it”*. There is also a small percentage (25 %) of women who discussed politics in work place, with friends and at home. The lack of interest and limited knowledge of politics are the most immediate reasons. Those who showed tendency to discuss politics are mostly the educated (27.66%), in their early fifties (39%), government servants (32.35%) and middle income group women (22.25%). But in conclusion what can be observed is that women in general, irrespective of their marital status, age, education, occupation or income do not show much interest in politics nor do they discuss politics on a regular basis.

Though women in general tended to show dislike for politics, many are in favour of seeing women taking part in politics (78.2%). The data in the present study suggest that outlook towards politics are softening and younger women in particular unmarried girls (61% as compared to 49% to married women) are of the opinion that women should take active part in politics. The Naga women, tend to regard women as being more honest, hardworking, and more approachable and of better understanding and as such a high percentage, i.e., 71% are of the opinion that women certainly would make good and capable leaders. But among them, few of them (18%) agree with the view that a woman is capable enough to handle the complexity of political activities. Even as women respondents agree to the need for greater women’s participation and believe that women would make good political leaders

but these respondents are themselves reluctant to join active politics if given an opportunity to do so. A very high percentage 85.6% of respondents said that even if they were given a chance to start a political career they would not. What can be concluded here is that women are still reluctant to step into a role dominated by the men and seem to be more or less comfortable with the way things are. Irrespective of marital status, age, educational qualifications, occupations or income, respondents are of view that women should take part in politics (78.2%), feel that women would make good political leaders (71%) and vote for women candidate if they proof themselves to be capable leaders (64%).

Thus responds were contradicting in regard to their perception and the probable answer lies in the nature of the political environment of Nagaland. Over the years, electoral competition has deteriorated in terms of ethics and values and often accompanied by violence, corruption, and manipulation. These phenomena persist as a reminder of the continuing discrepancy of democracy in Nagaland for women. Another factor is that, Naga society recognises and advocates the desirability of giving equal opportunities to women in the present political arena. But the social mind set regarding women's role still remains traditional and the inflexible traditional tenets further discourages their involvement. The contradictions are real as their desire and desperation to alter the situation and also disappointments over the circumstances that brought along by the traditional tenets and present political situation reflects in their responds.

Women respondents who are party members and activist expressed their dissatisfaction with the gender division of labour within party structure. The

activities of women in party organisations, they opined, are more or less restricted to supplementary and support role. They expressed the view that besides casting their vote, their electoral activities are just confine to preparing tea/meals for the party workers and engaged in home visitations, which in many cases, are to distribute material goods to prospective voters. Women's committees exist for the purported purpose of activating female voters, not for development of women political cadres.

Regarding the traditional political institution, 78.2% of the respondents feels strongly that it is time women too be given a chance to participate in political institutions. An interesting observation made here is that though respondents feel that women should be allowed to take part in the politics, a high majority 76 % of the respondents are not sure whether women should be village council chairman or headman and stated that tradition would not permit such a deviation. This shows that men and women are still influenced by traditional tenets. They have submitted and acclimatized themselves to this reality that they cannot visualized even in the near future as being the bearers of traditional political authority. In the present times though women's role outside the home is increasingly recognized, the role of looking after home has not changed. Majority i.e., 62% of the respondents feel that a women's first duty is her home, other interests follows thereafter. Though some respondents who feel that there should be a balance between the home and one's work/career.

The study also reveals that there are a small number of women (12) aspiring for a political career though none have actually made it. Some of the women candidates have lamented that among others, lack of support and favour from major political

parties played a major role in their failure. They also lamented that money plays an important role in one's success or failure. Besides, being women they had to work a lot harder to prove their leadership qualities and be accepted.

Women contestants like Chubalemla, Rakhila and Akheli strongly feel that there is no need for reservation policy for women. Instead they feel that more efforts should be put towards mobilising and motivating women electorate and retaining personal relationship with the electorates at the grass root level. For some, Women contestants like Rano and Kinghen feel that the only way to get more women into political arena is to implement the reservation policy for women. Reservation according to them can be done away with once the presence of more women politician visible or having that critical mass of women. From the study it has been observed that women, who are relatively free from the burden of having to look after minor children pursued their political aspirations. They are married, educated and economically stable. These women were either actively involved in social work or were widows of politician husbands before joining active politic. From among the general respondents 39% feel that it is justified to have reservation to accommodate Naga women in decision making level whereas 61% were apprehensive and were not in favour of reservation.

The study also reveals that the traditional political institution is still very much male dominated institution. Though there are a few village councils that do have women as members, the same cannot be generalized for a majority of the other village councils. An interview conducted with some village council members and town council members indicated that opinions are varied. It has been observed that the

opinion of those opposed to change and who strictly adhere by traditional tenets, is that since tradition does not encourage the participation of women in political matters even at the grassroots level. Further the fact that the state of Nagaland has special constitutional status- Article 371(A-ii) which allows special safeguards to the various Naga groups to follow their customary laws. The question of accommodating women does not arise. The moderate opinion on the other hand is that, if women can prove themselves then their entry stands unhindered.

Another oft repeated logic that education alone will bring transformation and greater participation has not borne desired result in the case of Nagaland which has a female literacy rate of 76.68% (2011 Census).

There are women NOGs like the well known Naga Mother's Association, in Kohima who have been able to organise the Naga women and take active part in the social and political activities of the society and state.

Comparing my study to that of Kezhaleno's study ("*Khasi women and electoral politics: a study of the greater Shillong area*") there seems to be more of similarity than differences between the Khasi and Naga women, both the studies show lack of interest in politics among women irrespective of their matrilineal and patrilineal background (58% and 54% respectively). In both the societies the ideal woman is one who is submissive, virtuous, honest and hard working and further whether one is employed or not, educated or not does not change the fact that a woman's first duty is the home and only other interest followed (64% and 62% respectively). Case

studies of women politicians in both the society essentially substantiate the position that though traditional ban on women's participation is lifted under the democratic parliamentary system, even those women who take the courage to participate in the electoral process face an uphill task with the added disadvantage of discouragement from their respective men folks.

In conclusion what can be said is that irrespective of whether one is married or not, educated or illiterate, employed or unemployed there are very few women opting for a political career. Women themselves seem to be comfortable with the way things are as they find political matter to be beyond their comprehension and interest. This is quite natural as women have been kept away from the political arena far too long. Naga women can never overcome barriers and the stereotypes on their own. There need to be a concerted effort at various levels and from different actors, such as the state, society, NGOs, media, etc., to bring positive change. Women themselves also need to go through a paradigm shift from their own deep beliefs in the traditional role assigned to them. Today with the political role of women gaining much attention it is important that women (rural and urban) themselves cultivate a favourable attitude towards politics. Women's equal participation in decision making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but a necessary pre-condition for women's interest to be taken into account.

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