

INTRODUCTION:

The political status of women can be defined as the degree of equality and freedom enjoyed by women in the shaping and sharing of political power and in the value given by society to this role of women (Vats, 2004:6). The recognition of women's political equality in the Indian Constitution was a radical departure not only from the inherited norms of traditional Indian society, but also from the political norms of most advanced countries at that time.

The early 20th century saw the birth of women's organization and the beginning of the demand for political rights. In 1930 a variety of representatives of women's organizations demanded immediate acceptance of adult franchise without sex discrimination. In the case of India though this demand was rejected by the government, the Karachi Session of the Indian National Congress in 1931 accepted the demand and committed itself to women's political equality regardless of their status and qualification. This promise was redeemed after independence when the Constitution pledged the nation to the principles of equality and dignity of the individual and proclaimed the fundamental right of women to political and legal equality and guaranteed non-discrimination in employment in office under the state. But the voice is actually a poor yardstick to judge the emancipation of women. In order to provide greater opportunities to women to actively participate in the decision making process at the grass-root level, the Government passed the 73rd Amendment act which provided 33% reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Political participation varies from country to country and state to state. Political participation means the involvement of individual and the groups in the

political activities such as casting votes or participating in the election processes. It also implies people's action which directly and indirectly influences governmental machinery (Nie and Verba 1975). There has been a general agreement that at the more effective levels of political activity women have participated less than men. This disparity is visible in all type of societies and economic and political system. Social scientist in the 1950s and 1960s who drew attention to this phenomenon attempted to explain it in terms of psychological assumptions. Women were said to be more traditional and conservative, to be temperamentally unsuited to masculine style of political activity, to adopt unquestioningly their husband's political allegiances, to be more swayed by candidates than issues, to be more moralistic, more emotional and less politically aware and interested than men (Joni and Jill 1981).

In the present time in many countries there is an increase political awareness among women, but their participation in the political process is restricted. In most societies there are widely held belief that women lack intelligence, are psychologically weak, emotionally unbalance, illogical and unreliable. Cultural prejudices besides structural impediments have also been seen to be limiting factors for women's participation in politics. Factors such as lack of education, lack of time for politics after performing other responsibilities as housewives and wage-earners, were seen to exemplify these impediments.

Coming to the question of women and their involvement in politics, scholars on Nagas like Hutton(1921a, 1921b), Mills(1922, 1926, 1937), Furer-Haimendorf (1939) and other scholars like Yonuo (1974), Singh (1981), Horam (1975), Zehol (1998) notes that Naga women traditionally had no direct role at all to play in political matters. They were not even allowed to attend meetings of village

councils nor could they address and even stand before the village crowd in any kind of meetings.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

Looking back at the last four decades of Nagaland General Assembly elections held so far since the attainment of statehood as the 16th state of India in December 1, 1963, Nagaland has not seen women candidate elected for Legislative Assembly in Nagaland. In 1977 Nagaland sent a woman, Mrs Rano Shaiza, to the 6th Lok Sabha to represent the state and subsequently in the 7th in 1980. Since then, no women have represented the state in either House of parliament and even in state legislative assembly. Even in the last 2008 election, four (4) women candidates contested and none of them won the seat. In Nagaland, women constitute almost half of the total electorate of around 2 million voters (Total 1,980,602, M- 1,025,707, F- 954,895 -2011 census), one is left to wonder as to why after four decade of freedom to vote on an equal basis with men besides having equal opportunities to stand for office, the Naga women are still struggling for space in the political world. The need of the hour, as such is to get a better understanding of political participation, aspirations, perceptions and outlook among Naga women. A need to understand and document Naga women's real ideas, view and feelings towards politics and all that has to do with its various activities and to understand men's approach towards women's involvement and their effort in political sphere, apart from the stereotypical conception of society which is patriarchal in nature.

BRIEF REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

The study of women from a political perspective is gaining attention in the present times. There have been a number of studies conducted on women to understand them as political actors. In anthropology, early ethnographic studies do not elaborate much on the political status of women except for passing comment and references made that women do not play an active political role. Such references can be found in the book edited by Malinowski (1972). With the beginning of study of gender roles carried out by Mead (1935), culture and not biology, was seen to be responsible for gender roles, be it political role of women or a more submissive and domestic role of women. In some African societies, women belong to the family of chief were seen to hold prestigious political position, as can be seen from the work of Richard (1940) and Abraham (1967). As more attention began to be paid towards women's studies basically women as political actors, the works of Tapper (1976), Rappoport (1981), Rose (1986), Nelson et al (1994), Short (1996), Kaushik (1997), Verma (1997), Kumari (1998), Jharta (1996), Panda (2002), Heilman et al. (2001 and 2004), Heilman and Okimoto (2007) Bowles et al. (2008), Amanatullah et al (2008), Tinsley et al (2010) to mention a few, reveals that women faced not only cultural restrictions when it comes to politics, but also faced social, economic as well as psychological restrictions. Besides a number of factors were seen to influence the participation of women in political activities such as education, the family, the socialization process, and the most important factor, the attitudes of women towards political activities and men's attitude towards women's involvement in politics.

Coming closer home the earliest monographs on Nagas written by Hutton (1921a, 1921b), Mills (1922, 1926, and 1937) and Haimendorf (1939) focuses on women through their association with the patriarchal and patrilineal system. Various

studies of the Naga society portray the social and economic role of women. She more or less played an active part in social and economic activities but not in political activity. The general view implicit in the writings of local scholars like Horam (1975), Ruivah (1993), Zhimomi (1998), Aier (1998), Vitso (2003), Jamir and Ao(2005), Nshoga (2009), Zehol and Zehol (1998, 2009) is that Naga women do not take part in activities associated with politics as tradition did not encourage women's participation in these activities. In the present time though women's participation is not barred, they are yet to make their presence felt in this area of activity.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

Naga Society is patriarchal and patrilineal in form. Traditionally, women were debarred from taking part in the political administration. As the society goes through changes, tradition is also not left untouched. At present, women are taking part in political process at the state level though the same cannot be said of their participation at the local level i.e. at the village council which is the traditional political and decision making bodies existing in Naga society. Women till date are not still allowed to be members of the local village council. At the state level it cannot be said that women's participation is any better for women's representation has been abysmally low. Taking these points into view, the objectives of the study are;

1. To analyse the pattern of women's participation in the electoral politics.
2. To find out the major social determinants such as age, marital status, education, occupation, and income, which could influence women in their sphere of their Political participation.
3. To study the urban Naga women's awareness and involvement in electoral

Politics.

4. To examine the attitude of both male and female towards women's participation in electoral politics.

THE NAGAS:

Naga is a generic name for a cluster of tribal communities inhabiting Nagaland, Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh and the Somra tract of Myanmar of the 32 such tribes, 14 tribes are spread over Nagaland's 11 districts Angami, Ao, Sema, Lotha, Rengma, Chakhesang, Sangtam, Konyak, Phom, Chang, Yimchunger, Khiamniungan, Zeliang and Pochury. A definite origin of the term Naga is not known. Most explanations are mere conjecture: some think that the name was derived from the Sanskrit *nag*, meaning mountain; or, from the Ao *nok*, meaning warrior. The Naga themselves never had a common term for the different communities which occupied the hilly tracts. Some of these communities had different terms for themselves from those used for them by their neighbors. Today, the name Naga is used as a suffix after the individual name of the group, as for example, Ao Naga, Phom Naga, Konyak Naga, which asserts both the individual identity of the group and their collective ethnic identity. The main indigenous inhabitants of Kohima district are the Angamis, and the Rengmas. Today the town's population composes of all the 14 Naga tribes of Nagaland. The population of the Angamis and Aos are the largest in present day Kohima urban area.

METHODS:

The study is empirical and exploratory in nature. It aims to analyze the urban Naga women's perspective of politics and its various activities. For the purpose of the study, Kohima Town has been taken as the locale of the study due to the main reasons that all that comprise the Naga populace will be found here. It also happens to be the capital of Nagaland and the hub of almost all activities, be it educational, political and centre for all government offices both central and state.

The Constituencies in Kohima district are seven in numbers with 165 polling stations and Kohima town constituency is one of them, with 33 approved polling stations. Greater Kohima includes Kohima Village and Kohima Science College campus area in Jotsoma but the present study area covers only the town area which includes 27 colonies or localities. They are Kohima Town area, Krouliezou, Minister Hill (Old and New), Forest Colony, Jail Colony, Agri Colony, Para Medical, Hospital Colony, New Market, Naga Bazaar, Dak Lane, Choto Bosti, Seikhazou Colony, Bayavü Hill, Government High School Colony, Rokabozou, Keziekie, Porter Lane, Chandmari Colony (Upper and Lower), A.G. Colony (Upper and Lower), Lerie Colony, New Reserve Colony, Mohon Khola, BOC, Dzüvürü, P.R.Hill, Kenuozou Hill Colony (Upper and Lower).

The universe of the study comprises of the Naga women voters enlisted in the electoral roll within the Kohima town. The total women voters in the electoral role from the 2008 general election's voters list within the Kohima town are approximately 28807. It may be mentioned that it was almost impossible and very difficult to cover all the voters from 27 colonies therefore, a total of 400 samples were taken (Female- 240, Male-160). The respondents were classified according to

age group, marital status, educational background, occupational status and income group. Efforts were also made to represent all the major tribes of Nagaland. For the purpose of selecting respondents, Stratified Random Sampling was used. Data was collected with the help of interview schedule, questionnaires, case study and secondary sources. Views of both male and female electorates were taken. Besides, some women candidatures and leaders along with men political leaders that have stood for election were taken for an in-depth case study.

MAJOR FINDINGS:

Some of the major findings of the present study are as follows:

1. 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.

2. 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. Women not just losing the election but secure very low votes as seen in the two extreme cases of 1.38% and 1.52% only votes secured by two candidates, the figures clearly indicate the wide margins between the numbers of votes secured by the women candidates as against the winning candidates (men-60.16% and 59.75%) respectively.

3. Whereas coming to the question of voting, in fact, 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 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 male voters in the last five Assembly Elections indicates that Naga women are very active voters.

4. 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.

5. 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.

6. 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.

7. 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.

8. 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.

9. 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.

10. 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.

11. 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 proof themselves then their entry stands unhindered.

12. Another oft repeated logic that education done well brings 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).

13. 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.

14. 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 society the ideal women is one who is submissive, virtues, honest and hard working and further whether one is employed or not, educated or not does not change the fact that a women'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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