

# *Abstract*

## **Political Participation of Women in the Northeast: A Comparative Study of Manipur & Meghalaya**

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## **I.1 Political Participation: An Introduction**

The term political participation generally refers to those voluntary activities of members of a society, in the selection of rulers and formation of public policy. Since popular sovereignty is one of the inseparable attributes of democracy, the right to participate is an important aspect of modern democratic government and an inherent right in a democratic process. Political participation is a basic ingredient of every political system. Participation helps the individual to be effective and associates him with the political system. Higher the rate and levels, the more is the varied forms of political participation. As suggested, it is vital to the proper functioning of a democratic polity.

Political Participation may also be defined as those actions of citizen to influence or support government and politics. It includes not only active roles of people to pursue political outcomes but also ceremonial and support activities. There are a number of definitions of political participation. For instance, according to Almond and Powel, "political participation is the involvement of the members of the society in the decision making process of the system". (G.A. Almond, G. P. 1975) Mc Closky defines "political participation implies those voluntary activities by which members of a society share in the selection of rulers and directly or indirectly, in the formulation of public policy". (Closky, H. M.1968) Verba and Pye define it "Those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing selection of governmental personnel and the actions they take". (Sidney Verba, N. H.,1972).

The above definitions indicate that a process of influence to the 'authoritative allocation of values' is the hallmark of a democratic set up. Thus, it also claimed that success and effectiveness of democracy largely depend on the equal and actual participation by its citizens. Therefore, participation in politics becomes an ingredient to strengthen the democratic structure of the state. It is the fact that political culture of a society greatly influences the political participation.

However, cultural limitations are still haunting our society. Therefore, most of us thought that citizen are spectators rather than agent or actor in politics. Thus, if there is actually participation particularly in a democratic state, people should directly or indirectly participate in the decision-making process. In a democratic state like India, the opportunities for political participation are given to the citizen without differentiation in terms of sex, caste, religion. However, since time immemorial governance and decision making was the responsibility of men. This signifies not only dominant role of men but also provides restrictions or least participation of women in politics.

Women's participation in Political activity can manifest many things. First and foremost is the social status of women. Another important implication of women's participation in political activity is due to the fact that explanations for the very slow progress women have made in gaining political office around the world have been multi-causal, including their lack of time for politics due to their domestic obligations, their lack of socialization for politics, their lower social capital and weakest base than men owing to discrimination in schools and in the market, their under representation in the jobs that favor political careers, their marginalization within male-dominated parties, their inability to overcome male and incumbent bias in certain types of electoral systems.

Even in North East India this gender gap in political participation is pervasive. Women of Manipur and Meghalaya have traditionally been enjoying a respectable status in their respective societies. Women enjoyed high degree of freedom in public life and in the family as well. They are also observed to enjoy certain liberty in choosing profession or occupation. However, women's Political participation is not so high in these two states too. Still, there is limited numbers of women in Politics. Sectoral distribution shows that, 76.5% of female workers in Manipur and 83.7% in Meghalaya are engaged in Primary sector of the economy. Only a small fraction of workers, that is 14.1% and 9.4% are engaged in Secondary and Tertiary sector in Manipur. The corresponding figure for Meghalaya is 1.5%

and 14.7% respectively. Some argue that female's involvement in Political activism in general and their occupational distribution is, thus, an outcome of various socio-economic cultural demographic and political condition of a place. (Baite T., 1999, p.18 (5)) It is this theory that the current research seeks to study in the context of Manipur and Meghalaya.

## **I.2 Statement of the problem**

The limited nature of women's participation in national decision-making institutions has an important consequence for women and for the legitimacy of the institutions. Where, women constitute half the population in a political system which supports equality and where both women and men are legally eligible for political office, women's participation should be equal to that of men. If this is not the case, it signifies deep-flaws within the political system.

Explanations for the very slow progress women have made in gaining political office around the world have been multi-causal, including their lack of time for politics due to their domestic obligations, their lack of socialization for politics, their lower social capital and weakest base than men owing to discrimination in schools and in the market, their under representation in the jobs that favour political careers, their marginalization within male-dominated parties, their inability to overcome male and incumbent bias in certain types of electoral systems. Representation is not only a means of ensuring individual participation. It is also the responsibility of the representative to act on behalf of the people, including women, who elected them and reflect their ideas and aspirations.

Women's disproportionate absence from the political process would mean that the concerns of half the population cannot be sufficiently attended to or acted upon as it denies their view points along with sufficient opportunity to be integrated in the political system. As against, in case at the general level the problem for women is more serious for several reasons:

1. While in many other countries women are inching forward bit by bit, in India the participation of women in politics has actually declined since the days of freedom movement, both in quantity and quality.
2. Government and politics are more important factors in the economic, social, and power structures in India than in most other countries with stronger civil societies, and so, the effect of women's marginalization in politics is even more detrimental (harmful) here.
3. The increasing violence, sexual harassment and victimization of women at the ground level in many of our political parties have made their participation extremely unfavorable now. Above all, the multiple discriminations feature arising from the entrenched (deep rooted) caste hierarchy, chronic poverty and patriarchy etc.

### **I.3 Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study are as follows:-

1. To study the patterns of women's political participation in North-East India.
2. To study the factors determining the women's political participation.
3. To study the challenges faced by the women of Manipur and Meghalaya in political participation.
4. To study the "gender gaps" in the political participation.

### **I.4 Research Questions**

The research questions are as follows:-

1. Whether women's activeness in social and economic fields necessarily leads to higher political participation of women?
2. What are the challenges faced by women of Manipur and Meghalaya in the political participation?
3. What is the nature of women's political participation in Manipur and in a matrilineal society like Khasi society?

4. What are the factors that determine women's political participation?
5. Why there have been "gender gaps" in political participation?

### **I.5 Literature Review**

Utpal Kumar De and Bhola Nath Ghosh<sup>1</sup> discussed at various levels to find out the solution to age old problems of gender discrimination, exploitation of women and to uplift their status and position in the society. Both, also examine most of the tribal societies even if poor, women always have an instilled special position and roles they play in different spheres with great responsibility vis-a-vis their counterpart men. The book also put that the Khasi society of Meghalaya is such a society, commonly known as matrilineal where authority, title, inheritance, residence after marriage and succession are traced through female line. So, they presumed that they do not require any special effort to make them aware and get social, economic, political or psychological understanding and knowledge to establish their rights along with men in their society as they are automatically placed on an esteemed level. Both, also says that, they are presumed to have access to education, ownership of property, authority in their family and society; they are the heads of their families and decide what to be done or not etc. Utpal Kumar De and Bhola Nath Ghosh's recent survey in the rural areas of Meghalaya shows that about one-third of the families are headed by the male. Both, also mentioned, many of the families are headed by females who are either widow or deserted. Also in the political sphere, hardly anybody is there who is female and even in the Dorbar; females are not allowed to take part in the meeting or decision making. But in most of the socio-economic activities, still now dominance of female is observed even though they are assumed to be physically weak. Utpal Kumar De and Bhola Nath Ghosh also say, even though some families are headed by males it may be that they are just to carry out activities with the guidance of their female counterpart

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<sup>1</sup> Utpal Kumar De and Bhola Nath Ghosh, *Status of Women in the Rural Khasi Society of Meghalaya*, Department of Economics, North eastern Hill University, Shillong, Meghalaya, 2003.

who has better control over assets and therefore no fear of losing anything even if they are deserted by their husbands. Therefore, a question arises whether in Khasi tribe the status of women is ascribed or prescribed by the society. Also, it is pertinent to enquire about the direction to which the position and status of women are moving with the development of the society.

In the book,<sup>2</sup> it is noted that levels of participation in India are low. The 73d amendment gave them new opportunities. Many women are, however, still not aware of the reservations made for them in local elections. While a woman's socio-economic status has a bearing on her interest in politics and political activity the impact of a woman's position in the household cannot be denied. Whether a woman can negotiate space for herself independent of the household is an important determinant of whether she is an active participant in politics or not. This claim highlights the fact that political participation is a public act and that for women to be equal participants in the public arena they need to be able to step outside the household – a sphere of male dominance in many parts of the world. What determines which women can make independent space for themselves is beyond the scope of this book and is a task left for future research?

The book<sup>3</sup> stress that like the equal right to vote, participation and representation in legislative bodies may not in itself be enough for women's political empowerment or to remedy the problems of discrimination faced by women in Indian society. Equality with equity is a goal which may not easily be achieved only by high representation of women in legislatures and other public bodies but has to be buttressed by other supportive measures. Even so, the demand for reservation of seats for women in political bodies to rectify the imbalance has gained strength in India in the light of persisting gender gaps in the various spheres of development. In the absence of any serious political self-correction so far, the demand for reservation of seats in

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<sup>2</sup> Pradeep Chhibber, *Why some Women are politically Active: The Household, Public Space, and Political Participation in India*, Berkeley, 2002, University of California.

<sup>3</sup> Malathi Subramanian, *Political participation and representation of women in Indian Politics*, University of Delhi, 2008, Delhi.

legislatures and party structures has been stressed in India aiming at such an equitable representation. While the steady increase in the electoral participation and mobilization of women in India has increased the visibility of women in the legislative politics this has not happened in the exercise of executive and judicial power due to their lack of presence in the decision making structures. From this perspective, the important question is what the benefits of democracy are for women. Electoral participation and quotas through affirmative action alone are not enough to result in gender equity.

The book<sup>4</sup> demonstrates the importance of social and political participation at local, national, and international levels, to make the world a better place for ourselves and for our children. To do this he has tried to demystify the meaning of social and political participation, and convince you that political participation does not need to be initiated formally, or at official levels by high ranking individuals, or justified with cumbersome words. Raising our voices about issues of concern; about injustices; about things we feel are wrong in our society, can be realized through the simple act of writing a letter to a local newspaper or to the local Member of Parliament, or in actions as innocuous as sending flowers, as the women of Tehran did in support of their imprisoned mayor. These forms of participation are the bases for the creation and promotion of a lasting civil society. Governments, politicians, and elites often create the false impression that only they are qualified for political and social participation, and that ordinary people have little to contribute. Such attitudes have silenced many voices from expressing concern. This silence is often presented by despotic rulers as proof that “their people are not ready for democracy and political participation.” But ordinary people interested in their communities, along with grassroots activists and intellectuals, are working together to change and expand the conventional understanding of political participation. Refusing to accept injustice against us and others, even when injustice is legitimized under banners of culture and tradition, is an important form of social participation. We hope we demonstrated that in

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<sup>4</sup> Homa Hoodfar and Nelofer Pazira, *Building Civil Societies: A Guide for Social and Political Activism*, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, 2000, Concordia University.



our interconnected world we do not have to stand in despair as international events unfold. We can, through local actions, take part in building a better world of communities.

The book<sup>5</sup> sets out to review evidence about the relationship between women's education and political participation, with a view to assessing whether more education for women can be seen as an impetus to shift their levels of engagement in politics. Ideally, higher levels of political participation by greater numbers of women should result in more attention to gender-equity in social and economic policy, and thus promote better lives for women generally. Given the evidence above, it is difficult to assert conclusively that more and better education makes women more active in politics. Indeed, in some countries the very opposite has been found, where educated, affluent women show indifference to politics or a high degree of cynicism as to the effectiveness of any kind of political engagement (CENWOR, 1994, cited in Jayaweera, 1997:421). In some contexts neo-literate women have had a significant impact on politics, as in the case of women in the anti-arrack movement in Andhra Pradesh in the 1990s. In other contexts with fairly extensive female educational participation, such as the state of Kerala in India, observers have noted a 'gender paradox': women's social status is high, but their political participation is exceptionally low. Compared with other Indian states with much lower human development achievements on the part of women, Kerala has a very weak autonomous women's movement and very low numbers of women in office, even when the Left Front is in power. (Kumar, 1994)

The book<sup>6</sup> studies the Indian patriarchal society that dominates the social, political and economic life of people in the country has never encouraged its women in any field, except kitchen! Indian women are relatively disempowered and they enjoy lower status than that of men from time immemorial. Gender gap exists regarding access to education and employment. It is found that acceptance of unequal gender norms by

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<sup>5</sup> Anne Marie Goetz, *Women's education and political participation*, 2003, UNESCO.

<sup>6</sup> Dr.K.Vidyasagar Reddy, *Women Empowerment in India: A Case of Political Reservations*, Centre for Women Development, Osmania University, 2011, Hyderabad.

women are still prevalent in the society. Fewer women have final say on how to spend their own earnings. Control over cash earnings increases with age, education, status and place of residence. Women's exposure to media is also fewer than that of men. Less said the better with regard to their political participation.

Of course, the principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Empowerment is one of the key factors in determining their success. Their development, status and position would elevate women in the society. Empowering women must be a united approach, a genuine cause that requires continued attention and recognition by all. Women are considered to be more honest, meticulous, and efficient and thus more and more companies prefer hiring them for better performance. But still, the state and society seem to be lacking behind in offering them political reservations that were long overdue.

Historically, Women's Reservation Bill's supporters say, women are deprived of their natural rights in India. Increased political participation of women will help them fight the abuse, discrimination, and inequality they suffer from. Its promoters say that the Bill was essential for active political participation of women. They also said that it would lead to gender equality in Parliament, resulting in the political empowerment of women as a whole. However, the opponents argue that the reservation would only help women of elitist nature. They gain political power, aggravating the plight of the poor and marginalized sections.

Of late, the Women's Reservation Bill has been a political ball for nearly a decade and half. It has always triggered heated debates within Parliament and outside. The proposed legislation to reserve 33.3 percent seats in the Parliament and state legislatures for women was drafted first by the H D Deve Gowda-led United Front government. The Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha on September 12, 1996. Although it has been introduced

in Parliament several times, the Bill could not be passed because of lack of political consensus.

Once the Bill is passed, one-third of the total available seats would be reserved for women in national and state legislatures, as is implemented in some of the local governments. Yes, 33.3 per cent seats in Panchayati elections have already been reserved for women. According to several studies, experience of women's reservation at that level has been very encouraging. More than a million women are being periodically elected to the Panchayati in the country. This is the largest mobilization of women in public life in the world, indeed!

The book<sup>7</sup> identifies some of the most promising directions for the future research agenda. The standard view in social psychology which developed during the 1960s and the 1970s emphasized several interrelated sets of factors to explain why individual citizens participate in different modes of politics. The early work of Verba and his colleagues emphasized the influence of prior *structural resources* which people bring to politics, notably their educational qualifications, occupational status, and income, which are closely related to their ethnicity and sex, all of which facilitate participation. Education, for example, furnishes analytical skills which are useful for making sense of political issues and policy making processes, while household income is directly relevant for the capacity to make political donations. The 'baseline' resource model added *cultural attitudes*, exemplified by a sense of internal efficacy (confidence in the ability to influence public affairs), external efficacy (a sense of the system's responsiveness), civic knowledge, and political interest (such as following events in the news), which are commonly closely related to the propensity to become active. These factors remain important; indeed they continue to be included in standard accounts of participation.

In this context his continue to expand. The emphasis has become less the psychological capacities and qualities inherent in individual citizens,

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<sup>7</sup> Pippa Norris, Carles Boix and Susan Stokes, *Political activism: New challenges, new opportunities*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005.

derived from socialization processes in early childhood, than upon the contextual factors found within particular communities, states, elections, or countries which trigger or depress these propensities.

According to this book<sup>8</sup> Gender concerns were missing from early growth strategies since these generally did not consider the human factors in development. Even the first Human Development Report (HDR) of the UNDP in 1990 barely touches the gender issues. It was the HDR 1995 that focused on gender inequality to tie in with the UN Fourth World conference on Women in Beijing. It offered a much more elaborate analysis of gender issues and stated the purpose of elaborate analysis of gender in the context of Human Development.

Mythology and tradition still carry the memory of the days when women were accorded a high position in the family and the community. It is not known when the sequence of civilization underwent an aberration and women were removed from a place of prominence in society to its shadows. Men declared themselves superior to women. Women accepted their secondary Status without opposition. Today women are burdened with cumulative inequalities of centuries caused by social and cultural discrimination and injustice in a large part of known human history. Women are not given the same opportunities that men enjoy in personal growth and social development in education to higher levels and are more likely to be found concentrated in female occupations like teaching, nursing, social work, etc., all of which are of low status and low in remuneration jobs.

However, at every turn in history, there were efforts to restore women to their due position. Thinkers and intellectuals launched several campaigns, which declared that men and women were equals. In recent times, the United Nations has taken the initiatives to address issues concerning women in the international level.

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<sup>8</sup> Meghalaya Human Development Report, *Women's Empowerment in Meghalaya*, Shillong, Meghalaya, 2008.

The author analyses the role of women in the political process of the state. The book<sup>9</sup> deals mainly the political history of Manipur highlighting the working of the governments in this part of Asia from time to time which once reigned as a sovereign Kingdom. It will not be an easy task to record all the events occurred in this part of the globe, because they are varied and multifarious and need to assess and re-assess in the context of her changing political scenario. Yet, the book attempts briefly to give a political picture of Manipur, which may benefit both the students, research scholars and the interested persons in the area. Ashangba communication, Imphal thought it proper to publish such a book in addition to other books mostly centered on literature and culture.

The book<sup>10</sup> stress on the women's low rate of participation at the highest levels of politics as is an enduring problem in gender stratification. Previous cross-national research on women in national legislatures has stressed three explanations for differences in women's political representation: social structure, politics, and ideology. Despite strong theory suggesting the importance of ideology, it has not found support in previous cross-national statistical studies. But ideology has not been as well measured as structural and political factors. In this article, he demonstrates that gender ideology strongly affects the number of women in national legislatures. He does so by introducing an available measure of national gender ideology into a cross- national model of women in legislatures. He demonstrates that ideology, when measured more precisely, strongly predicts differences in women's political representation.

In almost all the books written on issues concerning political participation in North East India the issue of socio-economic activeness vis-a-vis political participation of women is hardly analyzed. Particularly a systematic comparative study of women's political participation between matrilineal and patrilineal society in specific contexts has not been

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<sup>9</sup> Ksh. Bimola Devi's, *Government and Politics in Manipur*, Lamyamba Printers, Konung Lampak, Imphal, Manipur, 1982.

<sup>10</sup> Pamela Paxton and Sheri Kunovich, *Women's Political Representation: The Importance of Ideology*, Ohio State University, Pamela Paxton, Department of Sociology, Ohio State University, 300 Bricker Hall, 190 North Oval Mall, Columbus, 2011.

adequately done. The present work in the form of a PhD thesis exactly aims at studying what is left out in the study of women's political participation so far by taking the particular cases of Manipur and Meghalaya. It will concentrate on two issues namely socio-economic activeness vis-a-vis political participation and difference of women's political participation in Matrilineal and Patrilineal societies.

This book<sup>11</sup> intended to be a case study of political participation of tribal women in the hills of Manipur and attempts to study political participation of the Tangkhul Naga women. It starts with a premise that the rigid and discriminating customary laws of the Tangkhuls on the one hand and the failure to provide for reservation of women in the local self-governing bodies of the hills has led to dismal level of political participation of the Tangkhul Naga women in Manipur.

This book<sup>12</sup> starts with hindsight on the political history of Manipur. It went on to critically analyze the elections in Manipur in order to understand the extent to which elections in Manipur were conducted in a free and fair manner. It also examines the repercussion of the economic blockades in the national highways of the State, the bands, strikes, rallies and demonstrations in Manipur. It also brings to light how media in the state functioned with lots of pressure as they have been targeted both by the Government as well as by the insurgent organizations. It also briefly discusses the insurgency scenario which according to the author is the most critical issue in the state. It concludes by conspicuously stating that here is no democracy in Manipur in the true sense of the term as open, free and fair elections, freedom of speech and expression, rule of law, protection and upholding of human rights, etc. are as good as non-existent in the state.

The above review of literature reveals that a number of studies have been undertaken on the issue of the women political participation and gender inequality at the national and global level but no such serious

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<sup>11</sup> Aheibam Koireng and Dr. Ruolhumzo, *State of Democracy in Manipur*, Sunmarg Publishers and Distributors, Maiden Garhi, New Delhi, 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

attempt has been made in case of north-east India. The present thesis in this regard is a humble attempt to bridge the research gap.

## **I.6 Research Methodology**

The study follows both explorative and descriptive method. The research covers Imphal east and Imphal west districts of Manipur, and East Khasi Hills and West Khasi Hills of Meghalaya. Primary data were mainly collected through 'participant observation'. Documents published on the Khasi and Manipuri socio-economic and political participation were also consulted. The major impacts regarding the socio-economic and political participation of the states are taken into account. Besides, extensive field works were conducted and data collected through interviews and personal interaction with various persons. This was supported by relevant sources.

Selection of Districts and villages was based on purposive sampling considering the factor of conveniences, such as accessibility and communication, security, expenditure involved in survey etc. The families were then stratified according to the characteristics of sex of family head, caste, occupation, education etc. For this purpose a sample size of 117 men and 183 of women was taken from each of the four districts in the two states. Thus, the total sample size was 1200. On the basis of incidental sampling respondents were finally selected and data have been collected by framing questionnaire and interview on different aspects like family size, sex, education, caste, occupation, income and expenditure, mode of expenditure and also on their attitude towards social, cultural, economical, political, religious and psychological aspects of the heads as well as other members of the families from the respective districts of the two states. The unit of sample was the two states. Finally, the data collected from different sources is tabulated and analyzed. The sample size is given follows:

**Table 1.1 The Unit of Samples: Manipur and Meghalaya**

<b>Sl. No</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Imphal (East)</b>	117	183	300
<b>2</b>	<b>Imphal (West)</b>	117	183	300
<b>3</b>	<b>East Khasi Hills</b>	117	183	300
<b>4</b>	<b>West Khasi Hills</b>	117	183	300
<b>5</b>	<b>Total</b>	468	732	1200

Source:-Survey Report.

### **I.6 (a) Primary sources**

- i. Proceedings and annual reports (unpublished) of various departments, Statistical department, Social welfare department, Public health department etc. along with Gazetteers.
- ii. Questionnaire, personal-interviews were used for collecting information. Some of the information collected through the above mentioned strategies was authenticated by personal observation on many aspects of family, social and political culture in the selected field areas.

### **I.6 (b) Secondary sources**

All the related articles, books, Newspapers and journals were consulted.

## **I.7 Some Common Concepts used in the Thesis**

### **Political Participation**

Participation refers to the act of taking part with others in some activity. This can be in social, economic or the political spheres of life. Political participation, therefore, in this thesis refers to engagement in Political activities and action. It is the involvement of women in political affairs of the country ranging from taking active part in political conferences, voter registration, elections, election campaigns, to their active involvement in the legislative debates. Political participation of women will be said to have succeeded if the women attain freedom of speech, if they are listened to and are kept informed and if the women are given power to make (real) decisions



about themselves and the at large. Thus in the thesis political awareness is considered as an important factor for political participation.

### **Representation**

Representation here means a situation of one or few individuals being chosen to speak deliberate and make decision on behalf of other. The mandate is given by the thesis and is recognized as binding. The mandate is given through elections, appointment or nomination to a position of authority.

### **Gender-gap**

The socio-cultural phenomenon of the division of people into various categories such as “male” and “female”, with each is having associated clothing, roles, stereotypes, etc.

### **Patriarchal system/Patrilineal system**

According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Patriarchal system is defined as “social organization marked by the supremacy of the father in the clan or family, the legal dependence of wives and children, and the reckoning of descent and inheritance in the male line”; such system is run by males rather than females. Similarly, Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines patrilineal system as, “relating to, based on, or tracing descent through the paternal line”. In other words, in this system a descent or lineage is traced from the father or Pertaining to descent through males lines. Though there are certain unique characteristics attached to these terms, just to avoid confusions. In this thesis, they are used interchangeably.

### **Matriarchal system/Matrilineal system**

Merriam-Webster dictionary defines matriarchal system as, “a system of social organization in which descent and inheritance are traced through the female line”. On the other hand, matrilineal system is defined by the same dictionary as, “Relating to, based on, or tracing descent through the maternal line”. In other words, Matriarchal system is type of system which is Governed by females, rather than by males/Governed by (or as if by) a matriarch. Whereas, matrilineal system is that type of system in which

descent or lineage is traced from the mother or Children take the family name of the mother or right to inheritance of family property goes to the daughters or residence after marriage is uxorilocal or tracing descent only through female lines. In this case too, both the terms are used interchangeably in the thesis.

## **I.8 Chapterization**

The study is organized into seven chapters which include 5 (five) main chapters. It starts with a separate chapter on introduction and concludes with another separate chapter on conclusion. The main highlights of each chapter are given below.

### **I.8 (a) Chapter 1: Introduction**

The first chapter discusses the problem on which the study is conducted and sets out the objective of the study. This chapter also discusses the necessities and the importance of the study, and methodology adopted for the purpose. The reviews of important literatures are also discussed in this chapter.

### **I.8 (b) Chapter 2: Political Participation of Women in North-East India**

The second chapter presents a scenario of the political participation of women in North-East India. Political participation is considered as one of the most important elements of democracy, which was denied to women for many years. Women in different parts of the North-East had to struggle hard for getting this right. Once they started enjoying this crucial political right, their participation in the different political activities of their respective states got facilitated to a far greater extent. Not only they participated in elections but their involvement in various other socio-political problems affecting the society also got increased.

In the larger Indian context, though there were some women who were concerned with women's suffrage, their efforts did not so much result in an intense movement. Their involvement in political activities was mainly in the national movement for independence, particularly under the leadership of

Mahatma Gandhi. After independence, the women of India have come to enjoy political rights and liberties at par with their male counterparts under the provisions of the Constitution. This has given tremendous impetus to women's political participation not only in terms of their participation in electoral politics but also in terms of their involvement in the social, economic and political affairs of the country.

In the case of the North East, Women have always been playing a very significant role in the socio-economic life of the society. Politically also, history of the state is replete with instances of women playing a significant role in the political affairs of the state. During the British period, they not only launched agitations against the British successfully but also participated in the socio-economic and political reform movements against the state before and after the independence. With the adoption of the Indian Constitution Act, 1947, they enjoyed all the political rights and liberties which men had and there was no bar on their participation in elections for the state legislative assembly either as voters or candidates.

However, women around the North-East often face daunting social, economic and political challenges. For democratic governments to deliver to their constituents, they must be truly representative, and that women must be equal partners in the process of democratic development. As activists, elected officials and constituents, their contributions are crucial to building a strong and vibrant society. It is therefore essential to support women around the North-East because women are highly committed to promote national and local policies that address the political challenges facing women, children and disadvantaged groups.

Women are particularly effective in promoting honest government. States where women are supported as leaders have a correspondingly low level of corruption.<sup>13</sup> Women are strongly committed to peace building, as they often disproportionately suffer the consequences of armed conflict. Reconstruction and reconciliation efforts take root more quickly and are

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<sup>13</sup>Devi, Prof. Ksh. Bimola, *Government and Politics in Manipur*, Ashangba Communication, Wangkhei, Ashangbam leikai, Imphal, Manipur, 2010, p.350.

more sustainable when women are involved. By helping women become participating members of a democracy, one can look to mitigate conflicts or stop conflicts before they begin.

They are strongly linked to positive developments in education, infrastructure and health standards at the local level. Where rates of gender development and empowerment are higher, human rates of development and standards of living are also higher. These facts help with women, who have a profound positive democratic impact on communities, legislatures and the lives of citizens. This thing is all same in the North-East perspectives.

### **I.8 (c) Chapter 3: Socio-economic and Political Background of the Sample Women: Manipur and Meghalaya**

This chapter brings out the socio-economic and political background of the sampled women of Manipur and Meghalaya and also it is interpreted with the help of appropriate tools (statistical tools, diagram and qualitative approach).

The people in Manipur and Meghalaya belong to the same racial stock. Ethnologists trace a relationship existing between them and a certain group of people from South East Asia, the Chief Representative being the Mons or Talangs of Burma and the Khmer of Cambodia. Their nearest kinsmen are said to be the Palungs inhabiting the Shan state to the North-East of Mandalay. However, Meghalaya is the only state in the entire the North-East which follows matrilineal system drawing the lineage and taking the identity solely from the mother whereas in Manipur, true to the nature of patriarchal societies, the father is the head of the family, the ultimate authority, and the owner and administrator of the family and property.

The type of society or family can have a significant bearing on the status or position of women in society. In this chapter the researcher presents the relevant data on socio-economic and political background of the sampled women in both the states and analyzed it. The findings of the research show the differential standings of women in these two states. For

instances, in Manipur around only 3 percent of the female respondents say 'Agree' that they should remarry after divorce or death of their husband. Around 82 percent of the female respondents say 'Do not agree' on the same question around 15 percent of the female respondents say 'not sure' and 0 percent of the female say 'No comment'. In case of Meghalaya, 34 percent of the female say 'Agree' on the same question. 25 percent of the female respondents say 'Do not agree'. 32 percent of the female respondents say 'Not Sure' and around 8 percent of the female respondent's say 'No comment'.

Concerning economic background sector distribution shows that, 76.5 percent of women workers in Manipur and 83.7 percent in Meghalaya are engaged in Primary sector of the economy. Only a small fraction of workers, that is 14.1 percent and 9.4 percent are engaged in Secondary and Tertiary sector in Manipur. The corresponding figure for Meghalaya is 1.5 percent and 14.7 percent respectively. It is also observe that in Manipur about 36.33 per cent of the women respondents are dependent and around 63.66 per cent are earner. In case of the men respondents about 69 per cent of the men are earner and around 31 percent of the men are dependents. In case of Meghalaya about 92 per cent of men respondents are earner and in case of women respondents this percentage are about 79. And, about 21 per cent of the women are dependent and 8 percent of the men are dependent. This data highlight two; first it suggests the differential working composition of women in these states. Second, women in Meghalaya are more economically independent.

Regarding political participation, in Manipur, 87 percent of the male respondents say 'Yes' about the exercising of voting right and around 12 percent of the male respondents say 'No' about the exercising of voting right. Again 81 percent of the female respondents say 'Yes' about the exercising of voting right and 18 percent of the female respondents say 'No' about the exercising of voting right. But in case of Meghalaya, 87 percent of the male respondent say 'yes' and 12 percent says 'no' about the exercising of voting right. Again 86 percent of the female respondent says 'yes' and 13 percent

says 'no' about the exercising of voting right. Maximum individuals across the two states support women's participation in politics. In actuality, however, So far women's participation is limited to casting of votes and campaigning. Contesting election directly or winning is very minimal.

#### **I.8 (d) Chapter 4: Political Participation of women in Manipur**

This chapter focuses on the Political participation of women in Manipur. The political consciousness among the women in Manipur is comparatively high when compared with other states of India. Since, the ancient period women reacted against the authorities if the decision of the latter affected the interest of the people. Regarding the participation of women in politics women played significant role in a collective manner. Women of the royal family were found to be very active in the politics of the state. During the reign of King Pakhangba in 33 A.D. his queens led by Laisana participated in the administration, being important member of the decision-making body. Likewise, women like Linthoingambi, Tanjakhombi were active and also ran the administration and even fought against the rebellions during the absence of the King.

In the present day Manipuri society the male members occupy a prominent position in the families and localities. In the family, major decision is taken by the senior male members and women are associated in taking decisions of lesser importance. Women play marginal role in the decision-making process of the family. Till today only one women candidate namely Kim Gangte was elected in the Parliamentary elections held since 1952 and five women candidates namely Hangmila Shaiza, K. Apabi Devi, W. Leima, O. Landhoni, Ak. Mirabai were elected to the State Assembly Elections. In the local bodies like Panchayat and Municipality women hardly participated in the decision-making. It was only after the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendment Act, 1993 that women as elected representatives started to participate in the decision-making process in the local political institutions by enjoying 1/3<sup>rd</sup> (one by third) reservation of the total number of seats.

### **I.8 (e) Chapter 5: Political Participation of women in Meghalaya**

This chapter focuses about the Political participation of women in Meghalaya. A perusal of the statistics of women representation in the Parliament, State Legislature and Districts Councils, showed that their participation is negligible. It is women who play an active role in the social and economic field yet surprisingly very few come forward to contest in the election. Women do participate actively in electoral politics both in National and Regional levels. During elections they participate in political campaigns like processions, public meetings, giving public speeches and other works. Women turn out in large numbers to exercise their franchise and in some polling booths women voters exceed that of men.<sup>14</sup> Some women political workers hold important and big post in political parties. The question is, if women can take part in all political activities, why not contesting in the election? If women do not contest and get elected in the State Legislature and District Councils, that would deprive them of being involved in the policy making level.

Besides, women in Meghalaya have come up in every field, in professional studies, in business and trade, in civil services and other fields. Some of the prominent ones were Rose Millian Bathew Kharbuli, formerly Chairman of the UPSC, Alvareen Dkhar, formerly Chairman MPSC, M.R. Mawlong, first lady Deputy Commissioner, Silverine Swer, E.N, Shullai, Queenie Rynjah, Patricia Mukhim, a noted journalist, are social workers and Padmashree awardees. Professor K.S. Lyndoh was Pro-Vice-Chancellor of North Eastern Hill University and a member of University Grants Commission, Professor Biloris Lyndem Laso is currently the Chairperson of State Women Commission, Meghalaya. This shows that there is no dearth of qualified women in the various fields in Meghalaya. The women did play an important role in trying to uplift the socio-economic conditions of women in particular and the society in general. In order to raise their voice for public consciousness of their problems, many women organizations were set up

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<sup>14</sup> Dianghunmon Rynjah, *Their changing Role and Status, in Khasi-Jaintia Women*, Mittal Publication, New Delhi, 2009, p.48.

like Ka Synjuk Kynthei (an Association of women) formed in 1947. Subsequently many other women organizations besides taking up socio-economic and cultural activities, have also taken into consideration political issues and problems facing their society. Women NGOs also organized Seminars Workshops from time to time to discuss about the general pressing issues of the society and women problems in particular. Besides secular and political activities, mention may also be made of the role and participation of women in various religious activities, where women's wings have been set-up by different Churches in the State. Women have therefore made an impressive impact even in religious matters.

After analyzing all the related issues the chapter concludes by highlighting that in Meghalaya the representation of women in the Legislative Assembly and Districts Councils is dismal. It appears that women themselves are not very aspirant or interested in contesting the election and may be the traditional feeling, is still strong. In spite of the rapid changes that are going on in the society, politics is still considered as a male prerogative. Women feel that their first priority is towards the family and that they are overburdened with family works, and they cannot undergo the stress and strain of political life. The women organizations do not enlighten the people on the importance of their representation in the decision and policy-making level. Most of the women organizations begin their constitution by mentioning that their organization is solely social and economic, little do they realize that their isolation and exclusion from this important area affects them. Therefore reservations of seat will be meaningless, if the women do not assert themselves. Women of Meghalaya are competitive, intelligent, practical, hardworking and very creative, and these values and qualities will be properly used in the decision-making level, if they are represented in the local, State and National politics. Women activist should come forward and enlighten the women folk on the importance of women participation in public life. The situation is thought grim, yet heading towards hopefulness.



## **I.8 (f) Chapter 6: Political Participation of women: Comparison between Manipur and Meghalaya**

This chapter presents a comparative study of political participation of women in Manipur and Meghalaya. From the comparison it comes to light that one of the most puzzling features of the depressed level of women's political representation in legislative bodies is that it seems to have no direct correlation with literacy and other related social and economic indicators. A comparison between the states of Manipur and Meghalaya, whose literacy rates are at opposite ends of the spectrum, demonstrates this clearly. In Manipur, the overall literacy rate is reportedly 90 percent, with 86 percent female literacy. By contrast, in Meghalaya, female literacy is a mere 20 percent and only 12 percent of females are literate in rural areas. Manipur has a patriarchal system. Women are controlled and supervised by the patriarchal structure of gender role. Women enjoy freedom and independence within the patriarchal structure, norms and practices.<sup>15</sup> This has resulted in the lack of political consciousness among the housewives and rural women. The educated women of course are aware of the political issues prevailing in the state from time to time, though small in the total women electorate of the state. Manipur's women also tend to marry at a much later age as compared to women in other states. Most women in Meghalaya live far more restricted lives in aggressively matriarchal communities that still practice. But the cultural and educational system that women in Meghalaya have, does not translate into higher political participation as compared to the rest of the country. The percentage of women in the legislative assemblies of both states is low.

On the other hand, Similarity of both the states (i.e., Manipur and Meghalaya), which have a tradition of women playing a dominant role in both the family and the community (again due to a matrilineal heritage), never produced a single woman legislator till 1990-when it elected its first. Manipur state which has less repressive cultures for women has similarly

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<sup>15</sup> For further discussion on the said above see, Devi Ksh. Bimola, *Manipuri Women – A study*, in Naorem Sanajaoba (ed.) *Manipur: Past and Present*, volume (I), Delhi, Mittal Publication, 1988 and *Government and Politics in Manipur, Imphal*, 2010.

low level of women's representation. Though these states are known for their high education levels and slight degree of restrictive cultural norms for women, they have not only sent a certain proportion of women to the Lok Sabha but have also elected some female MLAs.

### **I.8 (g) Chapter 7: Conclusion**

This chapter highlights the brief summary of the entire research along with findings of the research and suggestion and recommendations are arranged. Political participation is considered as one of the most important and indispensable elements of democracy. However, the space of political participation had been for century's male exclusive in the sense that women which comprise half of the population of the world have been deprived of political participation for centuries. Thus, they have been struggling hard for a long time for a meaningful political participation. This is evident from the movements of political rights entrance into the space of political participation started by women in different parts of the world.<sup>16</sup> Through these movements women have put up, demand for political participation especially during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in the western and European countries. But, these movements remained limited in scope as more or less they confined to demand for right to vote. Hardly there was any movement with the demand of right to take part in decision making bodies. However, in the continents of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, the pattern was different. As around the same period most of the countries here were colonies of European powers, women along with their male counterparts confronted the colonial powers in their fight for national right to self-determination. In most of the cases women participation in these freedom struggles were under male leadership. If not organized movement, there were strayed case of raising voice against non-participation of women in electoral affairs often led by some prominent women leaders. Thus in most of these countries voting rights of women came along with their

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<sup>16</sup> The social reform movement which began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century emphasized improvement of women's status through education, restriction of child marriage, improvement in the condition of widows and provision of property rights to Hindu Widows.

national independence. The women in India also had their own share of struggle during national movement.

With the achievement of Independence and the subsequent adoption of the Constitution, women received equal rights with men. This is how women officially began to participate in the elections and electoral politics of the country. The issue of political participation in the North-East especially during the colonial period is almost the same with that of other parts of the country. That means women took part in political process only in terms of sharing freedom movement. However there are some distinctive features of women's movement in the North-east. For example, in Manipur, before their participation in the electoral politics of the state began; women in the valley were already involved in the socio-economic and political affairs of the state. The distinctiveness is that women did not participate in the movement under the recognized or popular male leaders. They took to the street directly by themselves and launched movements not only for their rights but for the community as a whole. It could be seen during the First and the Second Nupi-lal in 1904 and 1939 respectively.

In the post-independence period too, they came forward and participated in all the major socio-political movements inside the state such as movements during the 1950s and 1960s and other movements such as the Nisha Bandh during the 1970s, the Meira Paibi (a movement by the women to protect human rights of the people) from 1980s onwards and the movement against the abuse of drugs and other intoxicants, etc.<sup>17</sup> About the participation of Manipur women in democratic constitutional Politics (electoral politics), the journey began with the adoption of Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947. It was in this Act that the system of election based on universal adult franchise was introduced for the first time in Manipur.<sup>18</sup> Even though no women contested in the elections, they participated as voters. This was when Manipur was still under monarchical rule. After India's Independence, when Lok Sabha elections were held in the year 1951,

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<sup>17</sup> Dr. Ksh. Bimola Devi, "*Manipuri Women – A study*", in Naorem Sanajaoba (ed.) *Manipur: Past and Present*, volume one, Delhi, Mittal Publication, 1988, p.169.

<sup>18</sup> The exercise of the Political rights by the women in Manipur began before women in other parts of the country.

women in Manipur participated both as voters and as candidates like women in other parts of India. Since then, women have always participated in all the elections conducted under the provisions of the constitution. In addition to their participation in the Parliamentary elections, they also have participated in the State Assembly elections. However, their participation at the state level elections was seen in a meaningful form only after Manipur achieved statehood in the year 1972. Their participation and representation in the local self-governing bodies also became more pronounced in the valley as 33% reservation of seats for women which was effected in these bodies in accordance with the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments of the Constitutions.

In the case Meghalaya, the nature of the society, commonly known as matrilineal where authority, title, inheritance, residence after marriage and succession are traced through female line, it is presumed that they do not require any special effort to make them aware and get social, economic, political or psychological understanding and knowledge to establish their rights along with men in their society as they are automatically placed on an esteemed level. They are presumed to have access to education, ownership of property, authority in their family and society. Many of them are the heads of their families and decide what to be done or not etc. But a recent survey conducted by the Researcher in the rural areas of Meghalaya shows that about one-third of the families are headed by the male. Also many of the families are headed by females who are either widow or deserted. Similarly in the political sphere, women are hardly found active and even in the Dorbar females are not allowed to take part in the meeting or decision making. But in most of the socio-economic activities, still now, activeness of the women is observed (even though they are assumed to be physically weak). Also, even though some families are headed by males it may be that they are just to carry out activities with the guidance of their female counterparts who have better control over assets and therefore no fear of losing anything even if they are deserted by their husbands. Therefore, a question may arise whether in Khasi tribe the status of women is ascribed or prescribed by the society. Also it is pertinent to enquire about the direction to which the position and status of women are moving with the development of the society.

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### **Persons Interviewed**

(L) Kh. Bheigapati Devi- Former President (Meira Paibi) Khamnam Leirak.

About 400 voters on the eve of 1980 General Election.

Alvareen Dkhar – formerly Chairman MPSC.

B. Khongmen– Former MP.

Donaldson Basan –Former MP.

Golmei Leiren Kabui- Former Secretary Inpui (Kabui) Women’s Society.

K.Subadani-Former Secretary (Meira Paibi) Konthoujam.

Konjengbam Guni- Former General Secretary and Convenor, All Manipur  
Meira Paibi United Action Committee (Meira Paibi).

L. Brosila Lamin–Former executive members of ADC.

M.R. Mawlong – first lady Deputy Commissioner.

Mavis Dunn Lyngdoh– Former Cabinet Minister.

Maysalin War–Former ADC.

Maysalin War–Former Minister.

Patricia Mukhim –a noted journalist, are social workers and Padmashree  
awardees.

Prof. Amar Yumnam- Department of Economics Manipur University.

Prof. Kshetrimayum Bimola Devi- Former Head of the Political Science  
Department Manipur University.

R.K. Sana- Former Vice President Women’s Development

Rose Millian Bathew Kharbuli– formerly Chairman of the UPSC.

S. Memshakhi- Member Chanura Women’s Welfare Association

Shri. H. Nilamani Singh – Congress (U) President.



Shri. I.Tompok Singh – Former M.P., Former Minister.  
Shri. K.Jilla Singh – Former General Secy.,MPP  
Shri. Kh.Chaoba Singh – Former Minister.  
Shri. Kh.Jugeshore Singh – Former MLA.  
Shri. Kh.Nimaichand Singh – Former Minister  
Shri. Kh.Pishak Singh – Former MLA.  
Shri. Ksh.Irabot Singh – Former MLA.  
Shri. Ng.Mohendra Singh – Former MP.  
Shri. Ngurdinglein Singh – Former Minister.  
Shri. O.Joy Singh – Former Deputy Speaker.  
Shri. O.Natum Singh – Former Minister.  
Shri. S.Tombi Singh – Former Minister.  
Shri. T. Bokul Singh – Former Speaker, Manipur Legislative Assembly.  
Shri. Th. Iboyaima- Social Worker  
Shri. Th. Meghachandra Singh – Former Editor, Khollao.  
Shri. Yangmaso Singh – Former Chief Minister.  
Smt. Roshan Warjri– Former Chief Minister.  
Th. Rashi- Former President Mahila Mandal Mandal

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