

Chapter - IV

Political Participation of Women in Manipur

The meaning and concept of participation differs from situation to situation, from place to place and among different people with different attitudes and cultures. The plurality of the concept of participation in a modern society is a viable theory of democracy.¹ Participation is an essential and a necessary ingredient of every democratic political system. Political participation does not mean franchise only but it also means their active involvement in the decision making activities. In the traditional society government and politics are concerns of narrow elite. Democracy provides for the maximum scope of participation by the citizens.

In India, there is still a great hiatus between constitutional guarantees and the actual representation and participation of women in different decision-making bodies. Despite constitutional and legal provisions, women are not adequately and proportionately represented in the Parliament or state Assemblies of the state.

In actual practice, women, in general, have not been able to participate in the decision-making process and sharing of power at the grass-root levels and in the State Assemblies or, at Parliament. Women are found to participate marginally and not adequately in the decision-making process both at the national and state levels.

In view of all this an assessment of women's involvement in decision-making process becomes highly necessary. This current chapter aims at studying the same in the context of Manipur. As just the empirical observation of the existing environment of political participation may not be enough to understand the dynamics of women's political participation, the chapter begins by questioning the traditional conceptual framework of political participation and work out an entirely new discourse on political participation in broader

¹ Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, London, 1970, p.1.

context of the status of women. This is essential since women's involvement in politics can not be explored in isolation. Further, it is significant in view of the fact that although women's representation and participation in formal political process and institutions has been marginal, their participation in non-institutional, unstructured and informal process has been quite confirmatory.

4.1 Women and Politics in Manipur: Extract from the History

The collective participation of Manipuri women in such movements shows that women were always on guard to protect the political rights of the people. When Manipur was under the monarchical system, particularly during the rule of Pakhangba in 33 A.D., women actively participated in the administration and state policies. Queen Laisana, wife of Pakhangba, was the head of the 'Kuchu' an administrative body. She along with 9 (nine) women took responsibility of many of the administrative affairs. They were known as Laishra Pham. The Kuchu was again divided into two i.e. Lakhong and Laton. The members of the Lakhong were the mothers of the king and the queen and other older women. Another group of fifteen women known as 'Achanbi' assisted them. Every morning they discussed the internal matters of the palace. It had the power even to punish the king if the latter did not follow the rules prescribed by the Lakhong.²

Laton is also known as Leimakhubi Phamlup which consist of 12 (twelve) women members under the leadership of Leimakhubi. Pakhangba had 6 (six) wives and the sixth one was known as Leimakhubi. Leimakhubi Phamlup discussed the matters of the palace and the state. It mainly concerned with finance, conditions of food grains, cloth and infantry etc.³ Thus women were directly involved in the administration of the country in the olden days.

² Th. Ibemhal, *'Manipurda Yelhoungeidagi Khundarakliba Kangbu: Meitei Nupi'*, Macha Leima, XIV. Issue, Imphal, Dec. 2001, p. 10.

³ *Ibid.*

During this period, there was also a separate court known as 'Pacha' consisting of women only. The strength of the court were 11 (eleven) including the chief queen who was the President of the court. The chief queen Laisana was the President of the court. It tried all the cases related to women such as hearing, divorce, assaulting of wife, etc. Manjusri Sircar expressed her view, 'Meitei women are not only major contributors and they also have a considerable voice in the political sphere too. Until colonial period, there were a separate women's court with formal jurally authority vested to women'.⁴ Laisana was also a member of council of ministers of the king. Women's participation in the Council of Ministers and having separate women's department shows that King Pakhangba and others recognized the importance of women's participation in the administration and the state politics. The significant departments were controlled by women. It may be the reason that women are generally alert and politically conscious. Thus, women enjoyed a high position and participated actively in the administration of the court.

The political situation was changed to some extent in the 18th century. During this period, the society was under the strict control of the king and a rigidly structured social system, based on the pattern of adjustment between the old social systems, provided by Meiteism or, Sanamahi religion and Vaisnavite Hinduism which existed since 15th century. Women in between the two social systems prescribed by the two religions had to observe the prevailing social norms and principles. The strict norms and systems of Hinduism relating to women could not fully penetrate into the Manipuri society especially in the valley. As a result, Manipuri women were comparatively free to work outside the family dealing in trade and commerce. They usually gathered at a suitable place to conduct their business of selling and buying of commodities produced in their lands. It was at such places that women exchanged their views and ideas in social, economic and

⁴ Manjusri Chakki Sircar, *Faminism in traditional Society*, Shakti Books, Delhi, 1890, pp.7-8.

political matters. Women were quite conscious of the political issues and trends in Manipur from time to time. They also played an important role in shaping the policies and programmes of the state in their individual and collective capacity.

Even in the 18th century women remained politically active. Kuranganayani, a princess of Manipur and daughter of Gourashyam, was married to Ahom King Rajeshwar of Assam. After the death of King Rajeshwar, Lakshmi, younger brother of the King became the King of Ahom. During his time, Moyamariya revolted against king Lakshmi and captured. Kuranganayani adopted a political strategy and killed Raghob Borbaruah, the leader of the Moyamariya revolt, in 1769, and saved the throne. Another woman who played important political role was Maharani Kumudini who after the death of her husband King Gambhir Singh in 1834 pursued a policy to protect her minor son, Chandrakirti from the royal intrigues to capture the throne of Manipur. With the advice of his mother, Chandrakirti (1750-1836) run the administration smoothly.⁵ There was another Manipuri princess called 'Induprabha' who got married to King Govindachandra of Cachar, an independent state before the coming of the British. She ruled Cachar efficiently and successfully after the death of her husband Govindachandra. She was the Maharani of Cachar from 1804-1931. She is still remembered as an efficient and successful ruler in the political history of Cachar.

The Manipuri women inherited an established tradition of movement for social reforms and justice, administrative oppressions and misrule of the state authority. The methods used by the women had been characterized by the following features: (1) Non-violent or, peaceful methods like rallies, demonstration etc.; (2) pursuing the authorities to concede to their demands in the interest of the people etc. Thus, Manipuri women especially of the Meeteis always adopted

⁵ 'Maharani Kumudini', Shaknaibi Nupishing, Social Welfare Department, Imphal, 1979, p.89.

peaceful means in their movements. On the other hand, the men-folks of Manipur, sometimes, adopted violent means to achieve their demands. It is a common story that whenever injustice was done by the king and the officials, a group of women went to the palace and protested against the injustice. The mistake was ordinarily corrected.⁶

This tradition continued for many centuries. In 15th century A.D. many Queens or, Maharanis involved and played significant role in the administration of the state. Queen Linthoingambi, wife of King Ningthoukhomba (1432-1467) of Manipur, fought very often against the enemies in the absence of the king and saved the throne. She also administered well with the courtiers in the absence of the King.

4.2 Manipuri Women as a Collective Force

Manipuri women, as a group, very often asserted and participated in political or, social movements in Manipur. Manipur was under the Burmese political control for seven years. The period is known as 'Chahi Taret Khuntakpa' (Seven Years Devastation).

During the Chahi Taret Khuntakpa (1819-1826), women actively participated in extorting the Burmese from Manipur. They rendered immense and valuable help to the princess and freedom fighters of Manipur in their struggle to liberate Manipur from the hands of the Burmese.

Women, as a collective force, also corrected the injustice done by the king or by any official in the administration of the state. If any official committed any mistake, the matter was reported to the king. The king after listening to the womenfolk summoned the concerned officials and asked him to correct his mistake in the interest of the general public. Women were also able to assert the right of the people even against the authority of the king. If any policy or, programme of the king affects the general interest of the people, women, as a group,

⁶ L. Ibungohal, *An introduction to Manipur*, S. Babudhon, Imphal, 1960, pp.34.

directly went to the king and requested him to change or, cancel his policy or, programme. This was evidently proved when Maharaj Chandrakirti (1750-1836) postponed the hunting of elephant or, Samutanba programme up to the end of harvest when the women as a group requested him to do so.⁷ Thus, researcher have seen that though the common women in Manipur did not take part directly in the administration or, decision-making process they indirectly participated in the political process of the state. This again shows that women of Manipur especially in the valley were politically alert and conscious of the then prevailing political situation and they had no hesitation in coming out voluntarily to act in the interest of the people.

4.3 Political Participation of Women during British Period

History reveals that women in Manipur were always in the forefront of every movement in Manipur. Manipur came under the British rule after the Anglo-Manipuri war, 1891. The women of Manipur emerged as a strong political force in collective capacity during the British period. The British authority started to interfere in the internal administration of the state which was solely under the jurisdiction of the Maharaja, the native ruler of Manipur. The people of Manipur observed the policies of the British authority with a critical eye. The people due to the suppressive policies of the British authority suffered a lot in their social and economic life. As a result, some people of the valley mainly of Imphal area burnt down the Bungalows of Captain Nattal and Dulop on 15th July 1904. The British authority ordered the male folks of Manipur, valley especially Imphal area, to bring teakwood from Kabow⁸ and rebuild the Bungalow. It was considered a kind of forced labour imposed by the British authority to the male

⁷ Ksh Bimola, 'Manipuri women- A study Manipuri Past and Present, N. Sanajaoba (Ed.), 1988, p. 123.

⁸ Kabow is a border area in between Manipur and Burma. Once it was a part of Manipur.

members of Manipuri. Therefore, women came forward and agitated against the British authority and demanded to cancel the order. Women organized peaceful demonstrations in the main road of Imphal demanding the withdrawal of the order. The movement was so forceful that the British could not insist the males to obey the order. The movement was a successful one. It paved the way for the future anti-imperialist movement in the state.

In 1925 and 1932 there were other movements against increasing of the water tax. The tax was increased to Rs. 2/- per annum which was a burden to the people. Therefore, people demanded to remit the tax but those who failed to pay the tax were sent to jail. As a result, people agitated this act. Women were in full support and participated actively in the movement.

The year 1939 has been regarded as a very important year in the history of women's movement in Manipur. It was in this year that the famous Second Nupilan (Women's movement) broke out due to the colonial policy of the British rule in Manipur. The immediate cause of the movement was the scarcity of rice especially in the Khwairamband Bajar, the main market of Manipur. Women dealing with small trade and business of selling and buying of rice in the Bajar were greatly affected by the British policy of export of rice outside Manipur. Manipur had also poor production of rice in 1939. So this resulted in the scarcity of rice in the Khwairamband Bajar. The huge quantity of export of rice caused serious economics effect on the normal life of the common people and it was fast approaching near famine. Another deep rooted caused of the movement was directly related to the irregularities and malpractices in the administration of the state.

It was on 12th December 1939 that when some women went to buy rice in the Bajar, they could not get rice from any women vendor or from any other shop of Khwairamband Bajar. The women market dealing with the selling and buying of commodities especially rice immediately organized other women of the market and made them

aware of the problem such as non-availability of rice in the market. It was spontaneous in the sense that very little time was taken in building up the movement. All the women of the Khwairamband Bajar dealing in different trades joined the movement and started to demand the stoppage of the export of rice and the working of the rice mills in Manipur. The women organized demonstrations shouting slogans to stop rice export from Manipur before the session of the durbar. The movement went on forcefully for about 45 days. The immediate cause was economic in nature but the aftermath movement in the latter phase had provided for a political change.

It may be remembered that some leaders of the Second Nupilan, 1939 movement R.K. Sanatombi, Thangapat, Konung, A.Rajani, Tera, Shabi, Ningthem Pukhri Mapal etc. were already the members of the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha, a social organization established under the leadership of Hijam Irabot Singh. It was the first social organization of its type in Manipuri with sole objective of promoting welfare and social justice to the people.

During this period women also fought against the anti-social activities of the king such as purity and impurity i.e. Sengba and Mangba, Chandan Senkhai etc. under the leadership of Hijam Irabot. If a person was announced that he is impure (Mangba) by the king or, Brahmasabha then the particular person was boycotted by all. No one could perform any social rites for him. If he wanted to be pure, he had to pay some amount which differs according to Brahmasabha. The king also took Chandan Senkhai i.e. tax for putting Chandan mark (Tikkaa) on the face which had been a custom for every Hindu vaisnavite. It may be noted that the British authorities controlled the income generating departments. So the king had collected all these taxes as his source of income.

Rani Gaidinliu was another brave and courageous woman of Manipur who fought against the mighty British authority. After the

death of Jadonang,⁹ she took the leadership of the Zeliangrong people in fighting against the oppressive policies of the British. She was successful in uniting Zeliangrong people trying to develop a common traditional religion called 'Harka'. She, very successfully, was able to block the advance of Christianity in the hill areas of Manipur, especially in the Tamenglong area.

Another brave woman of Manipur was Oinam Ningol Keina of Oinam, Manipur. She joined the Indian National Army (INA) of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose in fighting against the British for attaining Indian Independence.

Thus, the women of Manipur were socially and politically very alert in protecting the social and political right of the people. Their consciousness and alertness was more visible during the British period i.e. from 1891 to 1947. Their movement had given the right political direction to the people of Manipur demanding the introduction of democratic Government in Manipur.

4.4 Political Participation in the Post-Independence Period

With the passing of the Indian Independence Act, 1947, the paramountcy of the British over Manipur as a Princely state lapsed on 15th August 1947. In response to the popular demand for the introduction of democratic Government in Manipur, the Maharaja framed the Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947. Popular Ministry was formed in 1948 after general elections were held under the provision of Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947. But this ministry could not last long as Manipur got merged into Indian Union on 15th October 1949 after signing the Merger Agreement, 1949, between the then Indian Government and the Maharaja of Manipur, Maharaja Bodhachandra. With the enforcement of the Constitution of India on

⁹ Jadonang tried to unite Zemei, Liangmei and Rongmei tribes of Tamenglong. He aimed to establish a kingdom of his own tribes. He fought against the British authority.

26th January 1950, Manipur was placed as a Part-C State. An advisory Council was constituted with the advisors appointed by the President of India in consultation with the Chief Commissioner of Manipur. But the Advisory Council did not possess the law making, the financial and judicial powers. Only normal administration functions were discharged by the council. The real power was concentrated mainly in the hands of the chief Commissioner and the Central Government. Being dissatisfied with political status given to Manipur and the working of the Advisory Council, the people started demanding for the restoration of the responsible Government in 1948.

The movement for the restoration of the Democratic Government in 1948 was spearheaded by the Socialist Party of Manipur. The movement became very strong in 1954-1955 in which there were active participation of women, especially women vendors of Khwairamband Bajar, Imphal and college going girls in the urban areas of Manipur. In response to the movement, Manipur was granted the status of a Union Territory having a Territorial Council, consisting of 30 elected and 2 nominated members. But the people of Manipur were not satisfied with the working of the Territorial Council. The people with full vigour demanded the introduction of full responsible Government in Manipur. Women also participated in large numbers. In 1960, women formed Women's Assembly Demand Committee to press the Central Government to grant Responsible Form of Government in Manipur.¹⁰

In one memorandum to the Chief Commissioner the Committee wrote thus, 'We can not remain passive and silent on the day to day happenings and events having a direct bearing on our happiness and sorrow as well as future welfare. We are very much perturbed by the Government's apathy and indifference towards the present Satyagraha movement launched by the Responsible Government in Manipur.'¹¹

¹⁰ Ksh. Bimola, *op. cit.* p. 169.

¹¹ Y.Joykumar, Assembly Demand Co-ordinating Committee, Why responsible Government of Manipur, Imphal, 1960, p. 61.

It was in July 1963 that the Territorial Council was upgraded into Territorial Assembly having the law making power. But the people of Manipur started another movement for granting full fledged status to Manipur, especially after the granting of statehood to Nagaland in 1963. In the statehood movement of late 1960s, women's share of participation was very great. Women in groups representing all sections of the society demanded the granting of full fledged political status to Manipur. Finally, the political aspirations of the long cherished demand of the people of Manipur was achieved on 21st January 1972 when the state was inaugurated as full fledged state by the then Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi.

The first Assembly elections for electing 60 members of the legislature in Manipur were held in February, 1972. No political party could secure majority to form government. Accordingly a coalition government led by the Manipur People Party (Regional Political Party) was formed with Md. Alimuddin as the Chief Minister. But this government was toppled in 1973 as some MLAs belonging to Manipur People Party changed sides. Hundreds of women, especially women vendors of Khwairamband Bazar demonstrated protesting the defection of the MLAs. They even went to the house of the MLA defectors shouting anti-defection slogans. They expressed their desires to have a stable popular ministry for the development of the state.

Majority of the women who had participated in the anti-defection movement were mainly from Imphal, the capital of the state. It was quite natural that the women of the urban areas were in constant touch with the political change and activities of the state. The process of political socialization was at a higher degree than that of the rural areas.

In 1980 women as a collective force emerged known as Meira Paibi (Torch Bearer). These Meira Paibis always participated in every political and social activity in the state. The women of Manipur in large numbers participated in a massive rallies on 4th August 1997

organized by All Manipur United Clubs Organization (AMUCO) and on 28th September 2000, organized by women's organization called Apunba Manipur Kanba Ima Lup (AMKIL) and National Identity Protection Committee (NIPCO) to preserve the unity and territorial integrity of Manipur. The Meira Paibis and other women took active role in the anti-cease-fire Extension to Manipur.

After the Naga Movement led by Zapu Phizo under the umbrella union of Naga National Council, 1946, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) under the leadership of Isak Chishi Swu, (Executive Chairman), Thuingaleng Muivah, (General Secretary) and S.S. Khaplang; (Vice Chairman) came into existence on January 31 1980. Later, on April 30, 1988 NSCN split into two following severe inter-factional clashes, one faction led by Khaplang (NSCN-K) and the other Isak Swu and Th. Muivah (NSCN-IM). To end the Naga problem, the Government of India and the NSCN signed the Cease-fire Agreement as a temporary period of truce on 1st August 1997 during the Prime Ministership of I.K. Gujral. In continuation of the Cease-fire Agreement between the two contracting parties, another agreement on 14th June 2001 was signed in Bangkok between K. Padmabhaiah, representation the Government of India and NSCN-IM by Th. Muivah. The agreement consisted 5 (five) points and the first point mention that 'The cease-fire agreement is between the Government of India and the NSCN as two entities without territorial limits'. The NSCN had been putting pressures on the Government of India for quite a long time to extend the area of cease-fire coverage in the Naga dominated areas of North East region affecting the territorial boundaries of Manipur, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh. However, the NSCN's demand was fiercely opposed by these States particularly in Manipur. Finally, the Government of India succumbed to the demands of the Naga outfit, without even consulting the respective State Governments whose territorial integrity would be affected. That means the Government of India finally conceded the demand of NSCN-IM by using the terminology 'Without territorial limit'.

The strong resentment of the people of Manipur against the extension of cease-fire to Manipur, under the Bangkok agreement Of 14 June 2001, is based on the long drawn historical experiences and sentiments of Manipur in their fight to protect the territorial integrity and plural ethos of the state of Manipur. Many battles and wars have been fought by the rulers of Manipur to save Manipur from the hands of foreign powers and many times the hills and valleys have stood together to face onslaughts on her territory and society. Despite repeated assurances and categorical commitment made by the Prime Minister, the Home Minister and other dignitaries agreed to the effect that the area of cease-fire shall be confined to the territories of Nagaland and shall not be extended to the territories of the adjoining states. The agreement has fully contradicted their earlier commitments and also forfeited people's confidence.

Stung by the betrayal of the Government of India, People of Manipur rose against the decision of the Government of India not to extend the cease-fire between the Government of India and NSCN (IM) to Manipur. To oppose and retaliate against the cease-fire extension to Manipur on 15th June 2001 the Manipuri Students Federation (MSF) locked up political parties offices. All Manipur Club Organization (AMUCO) called 66-hr General strike from the midnight of 16th June against the cease-fire extension to Manipur. Effigies of Prime Minister, Home Minister, and NSCN (IM) leaders – Th. Muivaih, Isak Swu, Government Emissary – K. Padmanabhaiah, Home Secretary Kamal Pandey, and the tricolor flag of India were burnt down at different places by protestors. On the 3rd day of the strike i.e. 18th June 2001, protestors from all directions gather spontaneously in front of Raj Bhavan after overcoming security barricades amidst the lathi charge, tear gas shells demanding to withdraw the extension of cease-fire from Manipur. Hundreds of women irrespective of age came out and participated. The Manipur Assembly Secretariat, Political Party Offices, MLA quarters including Chief Ministers office burnt down into ashes by the protestors. 54 vehicles were also destroyed and burnt. In

the uprising of June 18, fourteen precious lives were lost and many people were injured including 19 (nineteen) women and many were admitted in the hospitals. Women organization Apunba Manipur Kanba Ima Lup (AMKIL) with some other organizations, gave an ultimatum to all the MLAs and MPs to resign by 6 p.m. of 19 June, 2001. They also boycotted all the 60 MLAs. TO control and suppress the movement indefinite curfew was imposed from 18th June by the Government.¹²

To protest against the cease-fire extension to Manipur, rallies, sit-in-protest etc. were organized by different Meira Paibi groups, clubs, organizations, student bodies, Government employees etc. Manipuri women played active role in the agitation. Women of all sections irrespective of their class and status participated in relay hunger strike in different localities as a part of the agitation. On 3rd July, eminent personalities Padmashree M.K. Binodini Devi along with Padmashree Ratan Thiyam decided to disown Padmashree titles in support of the anti-cess-fire extension to Manipur. Likewise, Arjun Awardee Kunjarani, Weight-lifter extension and other sports women like L.Anita, Bimolata decided to disown their awards and medals if the decision of cease-fire extension is not withdrawn.

A Committee called United Committee Manipur (UCM) consisting All Manipur Students' Union (AMSU), All Manipur United Clubs' Organization (AMUCO), AMKIL, National Identity Potential Committee (NIPCO), International Peace and Social Advancement (IPSA), United Peoples Front (UPF) was formed on 3 July and under this umbrella organization, all the clubs, organizations agitated against the cease-fire extension. Among the women organizations Macha Leima, All Manipur Women's Social Lup, Leima Lamjingkon Lup etc. took a leading role in the movement. In the hills, Kuki Mothers' Association, Kuki Women Union played vital role in the movement. Individual women of all sections educated, working

¹² Sangai Express, Local Daily Newspaper, Imphal, 19 June 2001, p.1.

women, market women, illiterate, old and young came out voluntarily and joined in sit-in-protest, dharnas, rallies etc. On 5th July, lacs of women protesters defying curfew at night took out torch rallies in both in the east and west districts of Imphal. Tear gas and rubber bullets shot but it could not resist the rallies that rocked Imphal city. A woman called Smt. Ningthemchamayum Tamphasana (51) of Kwakeithel Moirang Pural collapsed during the police crack down and died and many women were injured.¹³ Dharnas, rallies, burning of effigies, road blockades continued in every nook and corner of Manipur. 13 students including girl students of Praja Higher Secondary School started fast unto death as a part of the agitation. On 20th July, thousands of students from different parts of Manipur came out to surrender their texts books to Governor Ved Marwah. The situation was disbursed by resorting to lathi charge and propelling tear gas shells, rubber bullets and live bullets. Many students were injured and one into jail. On 27 July, Manipur Keithel Nupi Marup called a Bajar Bandh against the cease-fire extension to Manipur.¹⁴

Representatives from all sections met Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and urged to revoke the decision taken by the centre. After consulting the report of Shri I-D Swamy, Union Minister of State (Home) and his team who had visited Manipur on 5 July 2001 to assess the situation, the Government of India announced on 27th July 2001 that the last three words 'Without Territorial Limits' of the agreement between the centre and NSCN (IM) would be deleted. Thus, the normal life of the people restored. In this agitation, people fought for their territorial integrity in a peaceful and democratic way. They want no bloodshed between brother and brother, they want no more ethnic crisis in the state. Manipuris are peace loving and wanted to solve every problem peacefully. Women played vital roles. Manipuri women always stood in the forefront in every movement. In this movement, altogether 269 women were injured, 93 were admitted in

¹³ Sangai Express, Local Daily Paper, Imphal, 6th June, 2001, p.1.

¹⁴ Poknapham, Local Daily paper, Imphal, 21st July, 2001, p.1.

RIMS Hospital, 15 women in Imphal Hospital, 161 in JN Hospital, Imphal.¹⁵ Altogether 18 precious lives, including one women were lost for the territorial integrity of Manipur.

The extension of cease-fire to Manipur has shown the seed of hatred and bitterness amongst the people of Manipur. It has unleashed a feeling of mutual mistrust among the people of different communities. The long established polity of Manipur based on pluralism, democracy and secularism is under direct threat by this extension of cease-fire. It has been criticized as the divide and rule policy of the centre. But the people of Manipur showed their political and social maturity in the agitations. The ugly faces of communalism, or ethnic clashes could not be seen in the whole episode. Manipuri women who pledged to carry on the agitation peacefully took an active role in maintaining communal harmony by organizing peace rallies, meetings etc. in different parts of Manipur.

Thus, women of Manipur always played a vital role in politics indirectly. They always work for the maintenance of communal harmony and peaceful co-existence of different groups in the State.

4.5 Women Participation in Electoral Politics

The women of Manipur enjoyed Universal adult franchise for the first time in 1948. In the pre-independence days, there was a strong demand from the people of Manipur to introduce democratic form of Government in Manipur. In response to the demand of the people, the Maharaja of Manipur framed the Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947 after independence. It was under this Constitution that elections granting adult franchise were held in 1948. Women who had attained the age of 21 years exercised their franchise in electing the members of the Manipur State Assembly. It was an important landmark in the political history of Manipur where women were granted adult

¹⁵ Reports published by UCM, Manipur.

franchise without any struggle unlike in other parts of the world especially western democratic countries like UK etc.

4.6 Participation of Women as Voters

Manipuri women have been participating in the political process of the state as voters in every election since 1952 held under the Constitution of India. And women voters always outnumbered the men voters in every election held up to 2012. But out of 60 Assembly Constituency, as much as 46 constituencies had large number of female voters as compared to that of male voters in 2012. According to the available records, researcher may examine the percentage of female voters in comparison with that of the male voters from 1972.

Table 4.1 Percentages of distribution of male and female voters from 1972 to 2012 General Assembly elections.

Year	Male electors who voted	Female electors who voted	Percentage of Electors who voted	Total number of electors
1972	49.9	50.1	78.3	588962
1980	49.4	50.6	82.9	909262
1984	49.1	50.9	87.2	1013678
2000	48.7	51.3	90.6	1447772
2002	48.7	51.3	90.2	1418636
2007	48.03	51.65	86.73	1707204
2012	47.65	52.34	79.19	1748399

Sources: Election Report, Legislative Assembly Election, 2012

4.7 Participation of Women as a Candidate

Manipuri Women for the first time participated in the electoral politics of the state as candidates in the 1948 Assembly Elections, before the merger of the state into Indian Union. In the Parliamentary and Electoral College elections in 1952, Ishwari Devi, wife of late Maharaja Bodhachandra Singh contested election from the Inner Manipur

Parliamentary Constituency as an independent candidate. And MK. Binodini Devi contested from Khurai constituency in the Electoral College elections as an All Manipur National Union (AMNU) candidate and got elected defeating three rival candidates. But Ishwari Devi could not get herself elected.

In 1957, in the Territorial Council elections, another woman called Smt. Shabi Devi who played a very active role in the Women's movement of 1939, contested as a communist candidate from Wangkhei Kongba constituency, but she was defeated. There were female members in the Territorial Council from 1957 to 1963 and in the Territorial Assembly from 1963 to 1969 of Manipur by means of nomination. They were Smt. R.K. Mukra Devi, Smt. Akim Angnal, and Smt. Lhingjaneng Gangte and Smt. A. Bimola Devi. The number of women candidates contesting in the Assembly elections had increased after Manipur attained its full fledged statehood in 1972.

In the Assembly elections held in 1972, there were three women candidates contesting from Keishamthong, Henglep, and Heingang constituencies. They were Smt. R.K. Mukhra Devi, put up by the Indian National Congress from Keishamthong constituency, Smt. Lhingjaneng Gangte, Congress candidate from Henglep constituency and Smt. A. Bimola of Heingang constituency as an Independent candidate as shown in the table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Women candidates in the Assembly Elections, 1972

Sl.no.	Name	Party	Constituency
1.	R.K. Mukhra Devi	Indian National Congress	Keishamthong
2.	Lhingjaneng Gangte	Indian National Congress	Henglep
3.	A. Bimola	Independent	Heingang

Source: Election Result, 1972

In the mid-term Assembly elections in 1974, there were again three women candidates. They were Smt. Lhingjaneng Gangte nominated by Congress in Saikot constituency, Smt. Aribam Bimola Devi, Manipur Peoples Party candidate from Heingang constituency

and Smt. T. Kholly, an Independent candidate in Saikot constituency. But these women candidates could not get themselves elected.

Table 4.3 Women candidates in the Assembly Elections, 1974

Sl.no.	Name	Party	Constituency
1.	Lhingjaneng Gangte	Indian National Congress	Saikot
2.	Smt. Aribam Bimola Devi	Manipur People Party	Heingang
3.	T. Kholly	Independent	Saikot

Source: Election Result, 1974

The number of women candidates increased in 1980 Assembly elections. There were eight women candidates in both the valley and Hill constituencies. They were Tikolly, Independent candidates in Saikot constituency, S. Radhapriya was nominated by the NCP from Naoriya Pakhangba constituency, Athing Lhingjaneng was nominated by the Janata Party from Saikot constituency, A. Bimola was nominated by the Janata Party from Heingang constituency, R.K. Mukhra was nominated by the Congress from Keishamthong constituency, Kh. Bilashini was nominated by the Communist Party of India from Bishnupur constituency, A. Puinabati was nominated by the Congress (U) from Thangmeiband constituency, W. Joymati was nominated by the Congress (U) from Sagolband constituency.

Table 4.4 Women candidates in the Assembly Elections, 1980

Sl.no.	Name	Party	Constituency
1.	Tikolly	Independent	Saikot
2.	S. Radhapriya	NCP	Naoriya Pakhanglakpa
3.	Athing Lhingjaneng	Janata Party	Saikot
4.	A. Bimola	Janata Party	Heingang
5.	R.K. Mukhra	Congress	Keishamthong
6.	Kh. Bilashini	Communist Party of India	Bishnupur
7.	A. Puinabati	Congress (U)	Thangmeiband
8.	W. Joymati	Congress (U)	Sagolband

Source: Election Result, 1980

The percentage of votes secured by the women candidates was not very high in both the Valley and the Hills.

In 1984 Assembly Elections, the number of women candidates was reduced to five.

Table 4.5 Women candidates in the Assembly Elections, 1984

Sl. No.	Name	Party	Constituency
1	Aribam Bimola	Independent	Heingang
2	Ningthoujam Shyama	Independent	Lamlai
3	W. Joymati	Congress	Sagolband
4	Ngaina Vaiphei	Independent	Jiribam
5	Manleinuing	Independent	Churachandpur

Sources: Election Result 1984

It seems that the political parties had no confidence in the women candidates for winning the elections as there was only one women candidate put up by the Congress. The remaining four women candidates were all independent candidates. All the four women candidates lost their security deposits. We may assume that though the female voters outnumbered the male voters, the female voters didn't cast their vote in favour of the women candidates.

In 1990 Assembly elections, there were seven women candidates contesting in both the Hills and Valley constituencies.

Table 4.6 Women candidates in the Assembly Elements 1990

Sl. No.	Name	Party	Constituency
1	R.K Mukhra	Congress	Keishamthong
2	Ph. Ishwari	Janata Dal	Wangkhei
3	M. Sahadev Devi	Bharatya Janata Party	Khurai
4	T. Ibemhal	Communist Party of Manipur	Heingang
5	Hathoi Buansing	Congress	Churachandpur
6	Bk. Rose	Independent	Thanlon
7	Hangmila Shaiza	Congress	Ukhrul

Sources: Election Result 1990

According to 1990 election report, three women candidates were put up by the Congress and other women candidates were put up by different political parties. The electoral performance of the women candidates were improved as three candidates could secure more votes though not elected. Only three women candidates lost their security deposits and one woman Hangmila Shaiza (Wife of former CM. Yangmasho Shaiza) was elected from Ukhrul Constituency on Janata Dal ticket by defeating her four rivals. She was the first woman to be elected to the Legislative Assembly after Manipur attained statehood in 1972.

In the by-election held in 1992 from the Oinam Constituency, after the death of the sitting MLA K. Bira Singh, his wife K. Apabi Devi was elected on the Congress ticket. Thus, the number of women members in the Legislative Assembly of Manipur had increased to two.

In 1995 Assembly election, there were eleven women candidates contesting in both the Hill and Valley constituencies. Five women candidates were in the hill and six women candidates were in the valley.

Table 4.7 Women Candidates in Assembly Elections, 1995

Sl. No.	Name	Party	Constituency
1	Chingnou	Kuki National Assembly	Churachandpur
2	Hathoi Bauansing	Indian National Congress	Churachandpur
3	Bk. Rose	Federal Party of Manipur	Thanlon
4	T.Tolly	National Peoples Party	Saikot
5	T. Ngaizanem	Manipur Peoples Party	Singhat
6	R.K. Ongbi Sorojini	Indian National Congress	Sagolband
7	N. Manishang	Janata Dal	Konthoujam
8	T. Ibemhal	Communist Party of Manipur	Nambol
9	K. Apabi	Indian National Congress	Oinam
10	Y. Sakhitombi	Independent	Singjamei
11	M.Ruhini	Manipur Peoples Party	Lamshang

Sources: Election Result 1995

In the table shown above, three women candidates were put up by Indian National Congress (INC), two candidates were put up by the Manipur Peoples Party, one candidate by the Federal Party of Manipur, one candidate by the National Peoples Party, one candidate by the Kuki national Assembly, one candidate by the Janata Dal, one candidate by the Communist Party of India and other one candidate as Independent. But none of them got elected and some of them lost their security deposits.

In the Assembly election which was held in February 11, 2000 women contested the elections.

Table 4.8 Women Candidates in the Assembly Elections, 2000

Sl. No.	Name	Party	Constituency
1	Ratimanjuri	Nationalist Congress Party	Heingang
2	Y. Shkhitombi	Independent	Singjamei
3	Smt. Manishang	Bharatya Janata Party	Konthoujam
4	Ak. Mirabai	Indian National Congress	Patsoi
5	H. Mukhi	Bharatya Janata Party	Langthabal
6	W. Leima	Independent	Naoriya Pakhanglakpa
7	K. Apabi	Indian National Congress	Oinam
8	K. Damayanti	Manipur State Congress Pradesh (MSCP)	Wabagai
9	Grace T. Shatshang	Indian National Congress	Chingai
10	Hathoi Buansing	Federal Party of Manipur	Saikot
11	T. Ngaizanem	Samata Party	Singhat

Sources: Election Result 2000

In this election, 3 women candidates were put up by Indian National Congress, 2 candidates were put up by Bharatya Janata Party, another 2 candidates contested as Independent and the remaining 6 women candidates were put up by different political parties.

But all of them, except one independent candidate, were defeated. Some lost their security deposits. Smt. W. Leima Devi, wife

of W. Angou, sitting Member of Parliament was elected and was a Minister of Education (S) for a short period of time.

In the 8th Assembly election, 2002, February, 7 women contested elections.

Table 4.9 Women Candidates in the Assembly Elections, 2002

Sl. No.	Name	Party	Constituency
1	W. Leima	Independent	Naoriya Pakhanglakpa
2	Ak. Mirabai	Indian National Congress	Patsoi
3	Th. Manishang	Bharatya Janata Party	Konhoujam
4	O. Bimola	Democratic Revolutionary Peoples' Party	Oinam
5	T. Ngaizanem	Samata Party	Singhat
6	Jubilee Memoi	Manipur National Conference	Singhat
7	S. Radhapyari	Nationalist Congress Party	Naoriya Pakhanglakpa

Sources: Election Result, 2002

The 8th Assembly elections in 2002 witnessed seven women candidates in the electoral fray. There were five candidates in the valley and two in the hills. Wahengbam Leima Devi won the Naoriya Pakhanglakpa seat for the second consecutive time but under the Indian National Congress ticket this time. Only W. Leima, Former Minister of Education (S) won the election and others were defeated. Smt. W. Leima was again elected and became the Minister of Information & Public Relations, Loktak Development Authority.

In the 9th Assembly election, 2007, 2nd June, 12 women contested elections.

Table 4.10 Women Candidates in the Assembly Elections, 2007

Sl. No.	Name	Party	Constituency
1	M. Babita Devi	Manipur Peoples Party	Heingang
2	Ak. Mirabai	Indian National Congress	Patsoi
3	Rebika Naorem	Nationalist Congress Party	Langthabal
4	W. Leima Devi	Indian National Congress	Naoriya Pakhanglakpa
5	L. Sumatibala	Communist Party India	Keishamthong
6	Th. Manishang Devi	Bharatiya Janata Party	Konthoujam
7	L. Tilotama	Indian National Congress	Langthabal
8	M. Tombi Devi	Bharatiya Janata Party	Wangoi
9	Tinkhonei Haokip	Rashtriya Janata Dal	Henglep
10	Valley Rose Hungyo	Naga National Party	Phungyar
11	Rose Mangshi Haokip	Bharatiya Janata Party	Saitu
12	Kim Gangte	Communist Party of India	Henglep

Sources: Election Result of India, 2007

In the 9th Assembly election in 2007 the number of women contestants increased. This time none of them returned successful. However, out the eight candidates, four candidates did not forfeit their deposits. Among the Eight candidates, it is noted that Smt. O. Landhoni won the Khangabok by-election on 2nd June 2007.

In the 10th Assembly election, 2012, 16 women contested elections.

Table 4.11 Women Candidates in the Assembly Elections, 2012

Sl. No.	Name	Party	Constituency
1	Naorem Ibema Devi	All India Trinamool Congress	Uripok
2	L. Kshetrani Devi	Inqalab Vikas Dal	Sagolband
3	Yumnam Romola Devi	Communist Party of India (Marxist)	Keishamthong
4	Maisnam Shakhi Devi	Communist Party of India	Konthoujam
5	Akoijam Mirabai Devi	Indian National Congress	Patsoi
6	Waikhom Shyama Devi	Indian National Congress	Langthabal
7	Thokchom Bindasakhi Devi	Shivasena	Bishnupur
8	Oinam Indira Devi	Bharatya Janata Party	Thoubal
9	Sumatibala Ningthoujam	Manipur State Congress Party	Heirok
10	Okram Landhoni Devi	Indian National Congress	Kangabok
11	S.S. Olish	Independent	Chandel
12	Bountia keishing	Manipur State Congress Party	Phungyar
13	Teresa Rimai	Shivasena	Phungyar
14	Mrs. Nemcha Kipgen	Manipur State Congress Party	Kangpokpi
15	Ngaineikim	Independent	Singhat

Sources: Election Result of India, 2012

But, in the 10th Assembly election, 2012, three women out of 15 were elected to the house of 60 members in the Manipur Legislative Assembly. That too, in spite of women voters outnumbering their male counterparts and many women actively canvasses for every political party during election time. Yet, it is a history in the political annals of Manipur. A classic case of irony! Yes, comparing to the last general elections where only one out of the 6 (six) women candidates in the fray got elected. It was definitely an impressive the fact that out of these three women MLAs, one of them has been inducted into the Ministry as the Minister in-charge of Social Welfare and Co-operation.

From the above analysis of the Assembly election, researcher may assumed that, till today only Six women candidates were elected

and these women are the wives of M.P., M.L.A. or Ministers. No other common woman was elected. It shows that those who have the political background only could get elected.

In the Parliamentary elections, there were altogether four women candidates contesting from outer Manipur and Inner Manipur Parliamentary constituencies. They were Iswari Devi- Inner Manipur Parliamentary Constituency in 1952 and Lhingjaneng Gangte, MPP, outer Manipur Parliamentary Constituency in 1984, Anne Mangshatabam Congress (I) Inner Manipur Parliamentary Constituency in 1996 and Kim Gangte, CPI- Outer Manipur Parliamentary Constituency in 1998. None of them could get elected except Kim Gangte. Kim Gangte came out successful and represented Manipur in the House of People in 1998.

Here, in the Parliamentary election also women hardly could get elected and join in the higher political decision making body.

In the local bodies, like Municipalities and Panchayats especially after the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts, 1992 and 1993, 33 percent of the total seats were kept reserved for women. There are 7 Municipal Councils and 27 Nagar Panchayats (Small Town Committee). In 1995 election for Municipality /Nagar Panchayats were held. According to the elections result of 1995, 40 women out of 90 were elected to the Municipality Councils and 66 women out of 190 were elected to the Nagar Panchayats.

These women were elected on the basis of reservation. Again in 1997 the Zilla Parishad and Gram Panchayat elections were held. 166 women were elected as Pradhan and 1557 as Gram Panchayat member and 16 as Zilla Parishad members were elected.

Thus, the electoral performance of the women candidates is not encouraging. It shows that women voters do not cast their vote in favour of women candidates. The reason may be the lack of confidence in women, lack of awareness of the importance of women's

participation in the decision-making process and due to traditional beliefs and norms etc.

4.8 Voting Behaviour

The term voting behaviour deals with the attitudes and voting choice behaviour which means self-assessment or, personnel consideration in selecting candidates of their choice. To examine the voting attitudes of the Manipuri women, some samples are collected and the respondents were asked that on what basis they have elected their representatives or cast their vote. 80 percent of the women (educated) exercised the voting right on their own choice on the basis of candidate's qualification, perception and party orientation. The remaining 20 (educated women) cast their vote on the decisions made by the head of the family. Then the illiterate women who consists majority of the women population also cast their vote on the decisions made by the head of the family. It means that more than half of the women voters do not exercise their voting right rightly. These women do not cast on their own choice.

With regards to the seats reservation in the Assembly and Parliament 70 percent of the respondent are against the reservation and the remaining 30 percent are in favour of the seats reservation. It shows that majority of the respondents wanted to compete the male candidates in the elections. But the voters, especially women voters are not fully aware of the necessity of having women representatives in the decision-making body of the state i.e. Legislative Assembly of Manipur and Parliament. It may be noted that in most of the elections from 1972 to 2012 the number of women voters who exercised their franchise was always greater than that of the men voters but women hardly could send their women representatives. The prevailing culture in politics is generally male-oriented and derives a Political Philosophy that confines women and women's concerns to the private sphere of domesticity. The ever growing division between private and public life,

as it becomes increasingly sectarian and hierarchical has become even more inimical to women. The conventional notion of politics projects the power-play as an exclusive 'male domain' where masculinity synonymous with violence, money and muscle power is cherished value. Thus political status of women remains low in spite of the participation of women in the local bodies as a result of the reservation provided by the 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts of the Constitution of India. An assessment of women's involvement in political and decision-making process must therefore begin by questioning this traditional conceptual framework of 'Political Participation' and work out an entirely new discourse on political participation which is both gender-sensitive and gender just. Moreover it attempts to situate such participation or lack of participation in a broader context of status of women. This is essential since women's involvement in politics cannot be explored in isolation. Further, it is significant to redefine 'political participation' in view of the fact although women's representation and participation in formal political processes and institution has been marginal; their participation in non-institutional, unstructured and informal processes has been quite confirmatory. It is also necessary to empower women so that their political status can be raised.

4.9 Conclusion

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 state affected the interest of the people. Regarding the participation of women in politics women played significant role in a collective manner. But, they were not associated with the decision-making process of the state. 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 an important member of the decision-making body. Likewise, women like Linthoingambi, Tanjakhombi were active and also run 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 in the State Assembly Elections. In the local bodies like Panchayat and Municipality women hardly participated in the decision-making. It was only after the 73rd and 74th Amendment Act, 1993 that women as elected representatives started to participate in the decision-making process in the local political institutions by enjoying 1/3rd (one by third) reservation of the total number of seats.