

Chapter - V

Political Participation of Women in Meghalaya

5.1 Introduction

The chapter aims at studying the same in the context of Meghalaya. This chapter will highlight the traditional institution and existing political system of Meghalaya. But this observation may be enough about the nature and level of political system in Meghalaya. However, to highlight in proper perspective, the chapter will start with the traditional to the present outlook of women's political participation. This will help in understanding the prevailing women's political participation in the region in proper perspective.

5.2 Meghalaya

Long before the advent of the British, the indigenous people in the hills of North East India had organized themselves under the political systems of their own which had been the natural outcome of their social evolution. Two distinctly different types of system of governance had been evolved in the hills, i.e., democratic system in the clan-based village societies controlled by the village councils and village headmen, and autocratic system of chieftainship controlled by the clan or village chiefs. The extent of power and authority of these traditional political institutions in relation to their people used to vary from tribe to tribe. While in certain communities these traditional institutions were well organized and well-structured and even, in few cases, they led to the formation of miniature states, in some communities these institutions were loosely organized without any central authority.

Unlike other hill tribes, the Khasis evolved a unique three tier democratic system of governance with villages at the bottom, Raids at the middle and Syiemships at the top. The Jaintias in the hills, though ruled by the Dolois, had a titular king who actively ruled the plains portion from Jaintiapur, the capital of his Kingdom. Unlike the

Khasis and Jaintias, the traditional political system of the Garos was not institutionalized beyond the village boundaries. However, the Garos system of governance of clan based village community seemed to be much immature compared to that of the Khasis and Jaintias.

It may be noted that no written records pertaining to the functioning of these traditional political institutions were maintained by the indigenous people. And except a few casual references in the chronicle of neighbouring Kingdoms like Assam and Cachar,¹ no written documents were available on the traditional tribal system of governance prior to the advent of the British in the hills of North East India. In fact, it was the British who first studied the traditional political institutions of the hills for their administrative interest. Based on the various reports and other writings of the British administrators associated with the administering of the hill tribes of North East India, in post-independent India the models of age old traditional political systems that had hitherto been existing among the different tribal communities prior to the colonial intervention was still prevailing.

It may also be noted that neither the Khasis nor the Goros could evolve any uniform pattern of administration under a common supreme authority. In fact, there were twenty five petty Khasis states before the advent of the British. Fifteen of them under the Syiems, one was a confederacy jointly administered by Wahadadars, five were under the Sardars and the rest four under the Lyngdohs.²

In view of the above facts, it may, however, be noted that no uniform system of governance was there in any of these three tribal communities. However, in spite of the local specificities, broad structural as well as functional similarities between the different units of administration within a particular tribe provide the scope for tribe specific generalization of the traditional political system. No doubt

¹ I.M. Simon, (ed.), *Meghalaya District Gazetteers: Khasi Hills District*, 1991, Government of Meghalaya, Shillong, p. 208.

² *Ibid.*

that such generalization represents the dominant trend and hence an obvious approximation to the actual situation.

5.3 Political Participation of Women during the British-rule and Post-independence period

Politics is considered as a male prerogative, very few women came forward to contest in the election, as a result of which the decision making and administration is concentrated in the hands of men. Under the British rule, the Government of India Act 1935, women were given the right to vote, but very much restricted or limited. The Act provided for the representation of women by the reservation of a seat from the Shillong Constituency in the Assam Legislative Assembly. The Act also permitted women to contest not only from the reserved seats but also from the general seats. In 1937, two women contested the reserved seat, Berlina Diengdoh and Mavis Dunn Lyngdoh. The latter was elected and it was for the first time that a woman became a member of the Legislative Assembly. Mavis Dunn Lyngdoh was the first lady to become a Cabinet Minister in the North East. In 1946, five women contested in the elections, they were Bonneily Khongmen, T.W. Shadap, Berlina Diengdoh, Padma Kumari Gohain and Mavis Dunn Lyndoh. Except B. Khongmen who was a Congress nominee, all four ladies contested as independents. Padma K. Gohain contested in the general seat, others in the Shillong women seat, B. Khongmen was elected.

There were six women who filed their nomination in the first general elections in 1952. Of these, four women were from the plain districts of Assam and two from the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. In 1952, there was no reservation of seats for women, they could contest in general seat. Mavis Dunn Lyndoh and Manorama Mehta contested in the Shillong seat against J.J.M. Nicholas Roy, both were defeated.³

³ Rao, V.V. and Hazarika, N. *"A century of Government and Politics in North East India, Vol.I (Assam)"*, New Delhi, 1993, pp. 171-178.

In the Lok Sabha election, Bonniely Khongmen was nominated by the Congress for the seat reserved for the hill tribals. She had to contest against two male rivals, Donaldson Basan and Wilson Reade. B. Khongmen was elected and became the first and only woman M.P. from Assam in the Lok Sabha. B. Khongmen was a member of the Assam Legislative Assembly from 1946-52, and was elected Deputy Speaker in 1952. In 1957, she returned to State politics but was defeated. In 1962 and 1967, no women contested the election to the Assam Legislative Assembly. The other areas where women participated and involved themselves could be seen during the Hill State movement and their involvement in enrolling themselves as members of different political parties both national and regional. Some of these political parties have even set-up separate women's wings. This is recognition of the important role that women played in political affairs.

With the emergence of Meghalaya in 1972, a number of women came forward to contest in the first election to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly. Of these, Miss Silverine Swer, Mrs. Muriel S. Dunn, Mrs. P.S. Marbaniang, Maysalin War, Louisiana Brosila Lamin contested from the Khasi Hills but none of them were elected. In Garo Hills a number of women contested the election; these were Miriam D. Shira, Percylina Marak and H.B. Sangma. Only Percylina Marak was elected from the Garo Hills and none from the Khasi Hills.

In 1978, Mrs. Neena Rynjah, Maysalin War, Drosila Mukhim and Usha Bhattacharjee contested the election from the Khasi Hills but again none of them were elected. Miriam D. Shira, Percylina Marak and Frieda Marak contested the election from Garo Hills. Only Miriam D. Shira from Garo Hills came out successful.

In 1983, there were seven women contestants viz., Ivoryna Shylla, Tiplut Nongbri, Naramai Langstieh, Evandalyne Massar, Maya R. Kyndiah, Louisiana Brosila Lamin and Maysalin War from Khasi Hills and Miriam D. Shira from Garo Hills. In this election no lady was

elected and the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly was hundred percent male dominated.

In 1988 a number of women contested, some of them were Maya R. Kyndiah, Maysalin War and Ivoryna Shylla. Only Maysalin War was elected from Mawthengkut Constituency and she rose to ministerial berth.

In 1993, Roshan Warjri was elected from the prestigious Mawkhar Constituency. She is the only woman legislator in the then Meghalaya Legislative Assembly. Being the only woman, she took up the challenge to give her best, and performed very well. She contested the election in 1993 on public demand although she had earlier declined to contest. After that the next Meghalaya Assembly saw another woman Jopsimon Phanbuh, who represented the prestigious Laban Constituency after winning the 2005 by-election as the seat fell vacant after the untimely death of her husband T.H. Rangad. Again, in 2008, M. Ampareen from Laitumkharah constituency was the only woman candidate who won the election. But, in 2013 Assembly election, M. Ampareen Lyngdoh from East Shillong constituency, Roshan Warjri from North Shillong Constituency, Deborah C. Marak from William Nagar, Dikkanchi D. Shira from Mahendraganj constituency contested for the election. This indicated the improvement when compared to the previous Assembly Elections.

In the Autonomous District Councils, there were a number of women representatives who were either elected or nominated. Lariam Shullai was nominated to the first Khasi and Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council in 1952-57. Dr. K. Rymbai was nominated to the Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council. Louisiana Brosila Lamin and Etris Syiem contested and won the election in 1972. In 1984, Maysalin War contested and won the election in the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council from the Congress-I ticket. In 1972, Mr. L.G. Shullai was elected as the Chief Executive Member of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council

(KHADC). He selected L. Brosila Lamin as one of the executive members. The inclusion of a woman as an executive member was very significant as the KHADC was the first of all the District Councils in the North East to have a lady as the executive member for a brief period in 1977.⁴

In the first election to the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council in 1952, there were two women members in the house of twenty four, Mrs. Sujomoti W. Momin who was elected as an independent candidate and Mrs. Roneswari Marak who was nominated by the governor. In 1957, Mrs. Sujomoti W. Momin contested against two male candidates and polled an absolute majority. In 1962, the election was not held due to the Chinese aggression, it was held in 1964. Only one female member Mrs. Ewinel Marak contested against three male rivals and was defeated. As there were no woman members, a lady Bisadini Sangma was nominated by the Governor to represent women. In 1972, only one woman candidate Evangeline Shira contested as an independent, but was defeated. However two lady members Alleswary Momin and Janje Marak were nominated. There was no female member in 1978- 1983. In 1983, two women, Enilla D. Shira and Reboti Burman were elected. In 1989 election there was only one female member Mrs. Reboti Burman who was elected. In 1994, there was no female member in the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council.⁵

On examining the statistics given of the women representation in the Parliament, State Legislative and District Councils, their participation is negligible. It is surprising those women who play an active role in the socio-economic field, only few among them come forward to contest in the election. It is surprising that women who

⁴ Information provided by Mr. W. Kharkrang, Secretary, Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council.

⁵ Information provided by the Secretary, Garo Hills Autonomous District Council, Tura.

play active role in the socio-economic field are found to be few in number when it comes to contesting in elections.

Women do participate actively in political parties both National and regional level. During election, 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. Some women political workers hold important and big posts in the 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 Districts Councils, that would deprive them of being involved in the policy making level.

When P.A. Sangma was the Chief Minister of Meghalaya, he came out with the idea and suggestion that there should be a serious debate on the new role of women in Meghalaya. He further went on to suggest whether women should be allowed to attend and participate in the local Durbars. Subsequently, this issue was actually put into practice by some localities in Shillong where women are allowed to attend and participate in the local Durbars. In some local Durbars women organizations (Seng Kynthei/Seng Longkmie) were set up and in certain localities of Shillong they even elected women as members of the Executive Committee of the Durbar.⁶

A perusal of the statistics of the women representation in the Parliament, State Legislature and Districts Councils, showed that their participation is negligible.

Besides the women in politics, the Khasi and Jaintia women 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

⁶ L.S. Gassah, *Women: Their Participation and Role in Meghalaya Politics*, NEIHA Proceedings, XVI Session, Shillong, 1966, pp. 299-306.

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 women in the various fields in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills. The Khasi-Jaintia 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 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.

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, 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, working 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.

5.4 Participation of Women as a Candidate

Meghalaya women for the first time participated in the electoral politics of the state as candidates in the 1972 Assembly Elections, after the state of Meghalaya was born. In the Assembly Elections held in 1972, there were nine (9) women candidates contesting out of 198 numbers of contestants. But none of them were elected. They were Silverine Swer, Muriel S. Dunn, P.S. Marbaniang, Maysalin War, Luisa Brosila Lamin contested from the Khasi Hills but none of them were elected. In Garo Hills a number of women contested the election; these were Miriam D. Shira, Percylina Marak and H.B. Sangma. Only Percylina Marak was elected from the Garo Hills and none from the Khasi Hills.

In the 2nd Assembly elections in 1978, there were again seven (7) women candidates. They were Neena Rynjah, Maysalin War, Drosila Mukhim and Usha Bhattacharjee who contested the election. Out of these one candidate got elected from the Songsak Constituency. The number of women candidates decreased in 1978 Assembly elections.

Table 5.1 Women candidates in the Assembly Elections, 1978

Sl. No.	Name	Party	Constituency
1.	Drosily Mukhim	IND	Malki-Nongthymmai(ST)
2.	Usha Bhattacharjee	INC (I)	Laitumkharah (ST)
3.	Neena Rynjah	INC (I)	Laban
4.	Maysalin War	AHL	Mawthengkut (ST)
5.	Miriam D. Shira	IND	Songsak (ST)
6.	Percylina R. Marak	INC	Rongram (ST)
7.	Fridina Marak	IND	Tura (ST)

Source: Election Result, 1978

The percentage of votes secured by the women candidates was not very high in Meghalaya. It seems that the political parties had no confidence in the women candidates for winning the elections as there was only one women candidate who got elected by contesting as Independent. The remaining six women candidates were Indian National Congress, Indian National Congress (I), All Party Hill Leader's Conference and independent candidates. Three 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 favor of the women candidates.

In the 3rd Assembly Elections 1983, the number of women candidates was increased to eight.

Table 5.2 Women candidates in the Assembly Elections, 1983

Sl. No.	Name	Party	Constituency
1	Ivoryna Shylla	PDC	Nongbah- Wahiajer (ST)
2	Tiplut Nongbri	INC	Laitumkharah (ST)
3	Evandalyne Massar	IND	Pynthorumkhrah
4	Maya R. Kyndiah	INC	Jaiaw (ST)
5	Naramai Langstieh	INC	Sohryngkham (ST)
6	Luisa Brosila Lamin	IND	Nongshken (ST)
7	Maysalin War	AHL	Mawthengkut (ST)
8	Miriam D. Shira	AHL	Songsak (ST)

Sources: Election Result 1983

This time not a single woman candidates was got elected out of eight candidates. Half of the women candidate forfeited their security deposits in the election. And also men voters outnumbered women voters. The election as there was only one woman candidate put up by the PDC (Public Demands Implementation Convention), which was then a newly formed state party. The remaining four women candidates were all independent candidates, All Party Hill Leader's Conference and Indian National Congress.

In the 4th Assembly elections 1988, there were three women candidates contesting in Meghalaya.

Table 5.3 Women candidates in the Assembly Elements 1988

Sl. No.	Name	Party	Constituency
1	Maysalin War	INC	Mawthengkut (ST)
2	Miriam D. Shira	IND	Rajabala (ST)
3	Findina K. Marak	AHL (A)	Rangsakona (ST)

Sources: Election Result 1988

According to 1988 election report, there are three women candidates, one woman candidate was put up by the Indian National Congress, and one woman candidate was put up by the All Party Hill

Leaders Conference (Armison Marak GRC) and one candidate as Independent. The electoral performance of the women candidates was improved as two candidates were elected. Only one woman candidate lost her security deposits.

In the 5th Assembly election 1993, there were seven (7) women candidates contesting in Meghalaya.

Table 5.4 Women Candidates in Assembly Elections, 1993

Sl. No.	Name	Party	Constituency
1	Ivoryna Shylla	BJP	Laitumkharah (ST)
2	Maya Rani Kyndiah	INC	Jaiaw (ST)
3	Roshan Warjri	HPU	Mawkhar (ST)
4	Jusna Kurbeh	IND	Mawprem
5	Maysalin War	INC	Mawthengkut (ST)
6	Miriam Shira	IND	Rajabala (ST)
7	Enila Shira	BJP	Tura (ST)

Sources: Election Result 1993

Two women candidates were put up Indian National Congress (INC), two candidates were put up by the Bharatiya Janata Party and other two candidates were put up by Independents. But only one of them got elected and three of them lost their security deposits.

In the 6th Assembly election which was held in 1998, 15 women candidates contested the elections.

Table 5.5 Women Candidates in the Assembly Elections, 1998

Sl. No.	Name	Party	Constituency
1	Lucia Malngiang	BJP	Malki-Nongthymmai (ST)
2	Margaret Rose Mawlong	UDP	Laitumkhrah (ST)
3	Naramai langstieh	HSPDP	Laitumkhrah (ST)
4	Meena Kharkongor	SP	Pynthorumkhrah (ST)
5	Maya R. Kyndiah	INC	Jaiaw (ST)
6	Roshan Warjri	UDP	Mawkhar (ST)
7	Amanda Pathaw	INC	Mawlai (ST)
8	Victory Kharsyntiew	IND	Nongkrem (ST)
9	Simil Gury Kharhujon	PDM	Sohra (ST)
10	Jahannara B. Kharbhih	IND	Mawsynram (ST)
11	Queentina Diengdoh	UDP	Pariong (ST)
12	Maysalin War	HSPDP	Mawthengkut (ST)
13	Debora C. Marak	INC	Rongrenggiri (ST)
14	Miriam D. Shira	IND	Songsak (ST)
15	Bijeta Daring	IND	Rajabala (ST)

Sources: Election Result 1998

In this election, four (4) women candidates contested as Independent, three (3) women candidates were put up by Indian National Congress, three (3) women candidates were put up by United Democratic Party (UDP), 2 candidates were put up by Hill State People's Democratic (HPDP) Party, one (1) candidate was put up by People's Democratic Movement (PDM), one (1) candidate was put up by Bharatiya Janata Party, one (1) candidate was put up by Samajwadi Party.

But only three women candidates were got elected, they were, Maya R. Kyndiah, Amanda Pathaw, and Debora C. Marak. Others defeated. Some lost their security deposits.

In the 7th Assembly election, 2003, 14 women candidates contested the elections.

Table 5.6 Women Candidates in the Assembly Elections, 2003

Sl. No.	Name	Party	Constituency
1	Smti. H. Marina Dkhar	HPDP	War-Jaintia (ST)
2	Smti. Rita M.V. Lyngdoh	INC	Raliang (ST)
3	Smti. Phidalia Toi	NCP	Jowai (ST)
4	Smti. Larisha Kurkalang	HPDP	Mylliem (ST)
5	Smt. Maya R. Kyndiah	UDP	Jaiaw (ST)
6	Smti. Amanda Pathaw	INC	Mawlai (ST)
7	Smti. Syrpai Khonglah	MDP	Lyngkyrdem (ST)
8	Smti. Veronica Marbanianc	IND	Lyngkyrdem (ST)
9	Smti. Irin Lyngdoh	INC	Pariong (ST)
10	Smti. Maysalin War	NCP	Mawthengkut (ST)
11	Smti. Debora C. Marak	INC	Rongrenggiri (ST)
12	Smti. Bindu Momin	BJP	Rongjeng (ST)
13	Smti. Anilla D. Shira	BJP	Songsak (ST)
14	Smti. Stella Marie A. Sangma	IND	Rangsakona (ST)

Sources: Election Result, 2003

The 7th Assembly elections in 2003 witnessed fifteen (15) women candidates in the electoral fray. Smti. Irin Lyngdoh, Indian national Congress (INC) candidates from Pariong (ST) constituency and Smti. Debora C. Marak, Indian National Congress (INC) candidates, from Rongrenggiri constituency were elected. Others were defeated. The entire women candidate was lost their security deposits, except, Smti. Syrpai Khonglah did not lose their security deposits. And also women voters outnumbered men voters in the 7th Assembly election, 2003.

In the 8th Assembly election, 2008, 21 women candidates contested the elections.

Table 5.7 Women Candidates in the Assembly Elections, 2008

Sl. No.	Name	Party	Constituency
1	Rita M. V. Lyngdoh	MDP	Raliang (ST)
2	Dr. Bibilyngda Wahlang	NCP	Mairang (ST)
3	Aidalis Ranee	LJP	Nongspung (ST)
4	Pretty Kharpyngrope	MDP	Malki- Nongthymmai (ST)
5	M. Ampareen Lyngdoh	UDP	Laitumkharah (ST)
6	Meristella Wahlang	LJP	Pynthorunkhrah (ST)
7	Irene Patricia Hujon	LJP	Laban
8	Celestina Lamin	NCP	Mawlai (ST)
9	Manosha warjri	BJP	Sohryngkham (ST)
10	Christina Majaw	LJP	Lyngkyrdem (ST)
11	Irin Lyngdoh	INC	Pariong (ST)
12	Mehallin S. Marak	IND	Mawthengkut (ST)
13	Serimina D. Marak	IND	Mawthengkut (ST)
14	Maysalin War	IND	Mawthengkut (ST)
15	Florence Sangma	UDP	Baghmara (ST)
16	Gentillar R. Marak	IND	Baghmara (ST)
17	Smt. Debora C. Marak	INC	Rongrenggiri (ST)
18	Smt. Lenitha Sangma	MDP	Rongrenggiri (ST)
19	Jahannara B. Kharbhih	UDP	Rajabala (ST)
20	Arlene N. Sangma	UDP	Chokpot (ST)
21	Sophie Bensida Marak	INC	Chokpot (ST)

Sources: Election Result of India, 2008

In the 8th Assembly election in 2008; there was an increase in the number of women contestants. This time only one candidate got successful. However, out the twenty one candidates, four candidates did not forfeit their deposits. Those four candidates were Irin Lyngdoh, Smt. Debora C. Marak, Arlene N. Sangma, and M. Ampareen Lyngdoh. Among these four candidates M. Ampareen was the only woman candidates who won the election. In the 8th Assembly election, 2008, women voters outnumbered men voters. The percentage of the women voters rose up to 89.36 percent.

In the 9th Assembly election, 2013, twenty five (25) women candidate contestants contested out of three hundred and twenty (320) numbers of contestants.

Table 5.8 Women Candidates in the Assembly Elections, 2013

Sl. No.	Name	Party	Constituency
1	Veecare Nicia Lamare	BJP	Nartiang (ST)
2	Rona Khymdeit	UDP	Nongpoh (ST)
3	Mazel Ampareen Lyngdoh	INC	East Shillong(ST)
4	Roshan Warjri	INC	North Shillong (ST)
5	Ibarilin Kharsati	UDP	North Shillong (ST)
6	Teilinia S. Thangkhiew	IND	Mylliem (ST)
7	Manosha warjri	KHNAM	Nongthymmai (ST)
8	Grace Mary Kharpuri	IND	Shella (ST)
9	Banalari Khongwar	UDP	Pynursla (ST)
10	Eureka F. P. Lyngdoh	INC	Mairang (ST)
11	Fenella Lyngdoh	HSPDP	Mawthadraishan (ST)
12	Irin Lyngdoh	IND	Mawthadraishan (ST)
13	Jova Marak	UDP	Rambrai Jyrngam (ST)
14	Pelcy Snaitang	IND	Mawshynrut (ST)
15	Fardina C. Marak	IND	Songsak (ST)
16	Sabina D. Sangma	IND	Rongjeng (ST)
17	Deborah C. Marak	INC	William Nagar (ST)
18	Susana D. Sangma	UDP	Phulbari
19	Aderina K. Sangma	IND	South Tura (ST)
20	Mulaiswori Hajong	RsSC	Rangsakona (ST)
21	Dikkanchi D. Shira	INC	Mahendraganj (ST)
22	Silme Ch. Marak	IND	Mahendraganj (ST)
23	Mafiara T. Sangma	NCP	Mahendraganj (ST)
24	Bluebell R. Sangma	NCP	Chokpot (ST)
25	Arlene M. N. Sangma	INC	Chokpot (ST)

Sources: Election Result of India, 2013.

In the 9th Assembly election, 2013, there were twenty five (25) women candidate's contestants out of 320 number of contestants and four (4) women got elected; M. Ampareen Lyngdoh from East Shillong constituency, Roshan Warjri from North Shillong Constituency, Deborah C. Marak from William Nagar, Dikkanchi D. Shira from

Mahendraganj constituency. That too, in spite of women voters outnumbering their male counterparts and many women actively canvasses for every political party during election time. Yes, comparing to the last general elections where only one out of the 21 (twenty one) women candidates in the fray got elected. But, in the 9th Assembly election, four women candidates elected out of 25 women candidates.

From the above Assembly election reports we 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 only those who have the political background could get 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.

5.5 Local Self-Governance and Participation in Meghalaya

Democratic decentralization of authority and the participation of people in the lower units of administration are considered essential for the development of the country. Democratic decentralization involves the transfer of power and function to lower units of government comprising of members directly elected by the people. The main premise of democratic governance is that it brings popular participation and accountability to local governance and therefore makes it more responsive to citizen's desires and more effective in delivering services (Blair, 2000).

Right from the period when the country was under the British rule, the administration of the tribal inhabited hills areas in the NER

was different from that prevailing in the rest of the country. In the period before India gained its Independence, the tribal areas of North East India, which were then known as the 'Backward tracts' were separated from the general administrative and constitutional set up prevailing in the rest of the country. When the country gained Independence in August 1947, the founding fathers of the constitution recognized the uniqueness of the certain traditional and customary institutions of the tribal areas in the region such as the village administration. Accordingly, the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution was incorporated in the Indian Constitutions, according to which the Autonomous District Councils were established in the tribal areas of North East Region. Thus, in Meghalaya, Mizoram and some areas of Assam and Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) came to exist below the state government.

5.6 The Autonomous District Councils (ADCs)

The entire state of Meghalaya is covered under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. Accordingly, there are three Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) in the state:

- (i) Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) comprising of the districts of the East Khasi Hills, West Khasi Hills and Ri Bhoi.
- (ii) Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council (JHADC) comprising of the district of Jaintia Hills.
- (iii) Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC) comprising of the district of the East Garo Hills, West Garo Hills, South Garo Hills.

The district council system of governance was created over the traditional institutions of governance in the north-eastern states by the British. In Independent India, these were formalized in 1952 to govern the tribal areas in the composite state of Assam. They are vested with executive, financial, legislative, and judicial powers and functions under their jurisdiction. Each ADC consists of up to 30 members who form the legislature. A Chief Executive Member (CEM)

is elected by the council members from among themselves by majority voting. The Chief Executive Member (CEM) then appoints (by selection) other members to the executive committee, up to a maximum of 10 members. The state legislature could include a minister in charge of the welfare of the autonomous districts.

The ADCs are given authority over the traditional institutions in matters related with the appointment and succession of chiefs and headmen, and other similar matters. The Sixth Schedule allows for the creation of autonomous regions if there are different scheduled tribes in an autonomous district. It provides for the constitution of district and regional councils for each autonomous district and region.

There is also a provision to establish district (and regional) funds that are to be credited with collections from land revenue, taxes on land and buildings, toll on residents, other taxes, and shares of royalties from licenses or leases for the extraction of minerals. The ADCs may further make regulations to control money lending and trading by non-tribal.

5.7 Powers and Functions of ADCs

The three ADCs are vested with legislative, executive, judicial and financial powers and functions in areas under their jurisdiction. This include the power to make laws in respect to allotment and use of land, management of forests, establishment and management of village and town, regulation of shifting cultivation and irrigation, appointment and removal of chiefs and village headmen, inheritance of poverty and social customs. Additionally, the ADCs have power to regulate and control money lending and trading by non-tribal within the autonomous council. ADCs are also empowered to constitute village and district council in the autonomous areas of trails and suits and cases in which all the parties are members of the scheduled tribes.

Additionally, the ADCs can also establish, construct and manage primary schools, dispensaries, markets, roads, road transport and waterways, and fisheries. Further, the Governor may also entrust the ADCs with functions relating to rural development, community project and village planning.

Under the Sixth Schedule, the ADCs can levy and collect taxes on land revenue, lands and buildings, professionals, employments, animal's vehicles, boats, trades, callings and employments, entry of goods into markets for sale therein, and tolls on passengers and goods carried and ferried. Besides, the ADCs can also levy taxes for maintenance of school, dispensaries or roads. Under paragraph 9 of the Sixth Schedule, the royalty on the licenses or leases for the extraction of minerals in the autonomous districts goes to the District Council.

As pointed out above, under the Sixth Schedule of the constitution, the ADCs are empowered to undertake certain developmental activities. However, studies undertaken by Syiem (2005) and Stuligross (1999) on the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council reveal that the council has fared badly in carrying out development functions entrusted to it. Many have commented that in the very first place the ADCs, unlike the PRIs have not been designed as agents of economic development but rather are meant to provide autonomy in social and cultural spheres in areas dominated by tribal. Further, with the attainment of statehood and the limited resources available to ADCs the development functions are now carried out mainly by the state government. Most of the development activities undertaken by the council are minor project such as construction/maintenance of footpath, footbridge, drinking water well, community hall and improvement of market which poses a question on the impact they may have on the socio-economic well-being of the people. While the Panchayati Raj Institution has an explicit mandate to promote participatory planning for socio-economic benefits of the community,

no such direct provisions exist in the sixth schedule. However, paragraph 6 does state that the governor may entrust the district councils with:

“..... Functions in relation to agriculture, animal husbandry, community, community projects, co-operatives societies, social welfare, village planning or any other matter to which the executive power of the state”.

This provision of village planning could have been used to create a mechanism in which the ADCs involve the communities at the grassroots in the development of village plans. However, this option has not been exercised or tried by the ADCs or the state government. At present, the ADCs are focused solely in district areas in developing their own development activities.

As mentioned earlier, the ADCs were created in 1952 to assist the composite state of Assam in administration and governance. In fact, in their creation, the role of the traditional tribal institutions was overlooked. After the creation of the state of Meghalaya, the rationale for the continuation of these ADCs is limited, particularly as they do not have organic link with the traditional institutions and do not have much of an oversight role. Even in enacting laws, the track records of the ADCs are not strong. Over the years, while the Khasi Hills ADC has enacted some laws, the record of the Garo Hills AADC has been poor even in this regard. Synergizing local governance is possible only when the ADCs work in harmony with the traditional tribal institutions of governance, and acquire sufficient capability to function well and contribute to the development and welfare of people.

There have been some recent initiatives:

- i. To strengthen existing traditional grassroots institutions so as to qualify as Panchayati Raj Institutions; and
- ii. To endow and diversify the functions of town committees to bring them at par with municipalities (presumably as envisaged

in the 74th Amendment to the Constitution relating to urban local bodies). Six town committees have been formed to deal with civic amenities, sanitation, waste management, and other civic services in Nongstoin, Mawkyrwat, Mawlai, Nongpoh, Sohiong, and Mairang. The committees were formed under the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District (Establishment of Town Committee) Act 1960. The purpose and functions of the town committees are similar to that of a municipality. However, meager resources of the council and the absence of funds with committees have rendered the latter dysfunctional.

The Khasi Hills Autonomous District (Allotment, Occupation or Use of Setting Apart of Land) Regulation bill 2005 was passed by the Council and is awaiting the assent of the Governor. All schemes or projects implemented by the KHADC are participatory in nature and people-centric. These projects are mostly implemented by people (or the community), and are owned and maintained by them. To increase the financial capability of the KHADC, a bill has been prepared – the Khasi Hills Autonomous District (Constitution and Administration of Community Development Organization) Bill, 2006 – which is also awaiting the assent of the Governor. There are plans to provide all elakas with workable, modern offices. Plans are also afoot to set up District Council Courts in Ri-Bhoi and West Khasi Hills districts, in addition to the one presently in East Khasi Hills. Further, measures would be adopted to include all council courts within the present e-projects/scheme for an efficient justice delivery system.

The website of KHADC enlists 51 Acts and Rules that have received the Governor's assent or approval.⁷ Of these, 18 pertain to rulers and regulations, while the remaining 33 are acts of law. Of the 33 Acts, 23 pertain to the nomination, appointment, election, selection, succession, administration, defection, and so on of headmen/sirdars/syiem or to (some form of) compensation of council functionaries and 10 Acts are related to economic and social issues. This indicates the KHADC has made some progress in notifying rules apparently upholding the traditional institutions, a natural first step towards formalizing and activating the village level governance structure. This could serve as a role model for the other two ADCs. A cause for concern, however, is that these Acts do not foster democratization of grassroots institution of women, youth, and non-tribal's from the processes of election and selection in these areas.

5.8 Role and Functions of Durbars

Besides electoral and Syiem's Durbars, there were other publicly constituted Durbars which constituted the real forums. A full Syiemship Durbar, Ka Durbar Hima Pyllum was the most potential, to it came the delegates and debaters from all over the State. Ka Durbar ki shanong or a Durbar of village was also convened in which the legitimate officials and clansmen were represented. This Durbar assumed all vital affairs, determined foreign policy and decided questions of war and peace. It constituted itself a supreme court and the real Parliament. Then there was a Dorbar raid which represented a commune and which composition differed from place to place. A

⁷The website www.khadc.nic.in update downloads on 9th November 2010 shows a list of 55 such Acts, Regulations, Rules, and Bills. In the previous update downloaded on 3 November 2009, the 51st entry was titled, 'The KHAD (Electors from the Twenty Three Clans of Raid San Shnong of Myllem Syiemship) First Amendment) Act, 2007.' However, the 51st entry in the website update of 1 November 2010 downloaded on 9 November 2010 is titled 'The KHAD (Appointment and Succession of Syiem, Deputy Syiem and Electors of Myriaw Syiemship) Act, 2007. All the new Acts (since the last download) however, pertain to nomination, appointment, election, selection, succession, administration, defection, etc. of headmen/sirdars/syieims or to (son form of) compensation of council functionaries.

village had its own Durbar which held frequent sessions in which all male residents ought to attend. It thus imparted some training in the art of self-governance and creative citizenship and guided or directed the standards of public morality. It functioned also as the court of justice by taking civil cases and judicial disputes besides handling law and public administration. All these Durbars had their respective jurisdictions of subjects. The Syiem issued summons to convene such a Durbar through the special messengers who conveyed from him the tokens of message. They were relayed to the appropriate headmen. The village Durbar was convened by a Sangot (crier) who announced at the top of his voice, to the accompaniments of drumbeats that such a Durbar was to be held on the date scheduled and the appointed place and time and the people should make ready to attend and cancel their other business. Every one ought to contribute to the deliberations in the Durbar to ensure a success. According to the strict usages, absentees were fined or expelled from their inhabitations, strict rules were enforced. Omitments and commitments were severely penalized. The venue for the large Durbar was often an open ground. A smaller Syiem's Durbar of course could be held inside a Syiem's court. Women were not allowed to attend the Durbar. A local chief conducted the commune and the headman the village Durbar.

Strict rules of conduct were observed during the Durbars sessions. No loud demonstration and no unrelated expression were allowed. The contempt of Durbar amounted to the loss of citizenship and property. Insubordination to its decision led to excommunication from society and banishment. In such an atmosphere, no scathing criticism, no mockery and conspiracies could be fomented. Robinson, who observed its function in 1839, wrote thus: 'the proceedings were opened by a headman and witnesses raised and the chief at the close summarized the evidences of both sides and with the decision of the Durbar pronounced judgment'. Describing its sitting he noted that the Durbar was 'something probable after the fashion of the ancient

Druids, or as was the custom of the Greeks when the herald spoke; the aged judges sat on square stones in circles for debates'. The sovereignty of the state rested upon the State Durbar and the theory of popular sovereignty applied.

The full Syiemship Durbar was convened from time to time during a Syiem's term of office. It was necessary that its consent was obtained to pronounce judgment upon certain judicial cases, matters relating to extra-territorial rights, interstate relations, war and peace. It was also necessary that such a Durbar met to settle the intricate cases of successions in the event the Myntris and electors failed to reach a unanimous decision and in the event a rift occurred. It also met to discuss and settle down the question of trade and commerce with their neighbours. The Syiem neither declared war nor accepted defeat without its full backing nor could he initiate any change in the administration without its consent.

5.9 The Constitution 73rd Amendment Act and Meghalaya

The framers of the Constitution of India realized the necessity of a separate political and administrative structure for the hill areas of the erstwhile Province of Assam. Therefore, certain provisions were made under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution, to maintain the distinct culture of the hill people, to prevent them from socio-economic and political exploitation, and allow them to administer according to their own genius. In the States of North East India like Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya, the people have their own traditional system of self-government since time immemorial. In the areas covered by the Sixth Schedule, where the Autonomous District Councils have been established, the traditional system remains undisturbed.

The 73rd Amendment Act contains Article 243 M,⁸ which states that the Act is not applicable to the states of Nagaland, Meghalaya

⁸ The Constitution Seventy Third Amendment Act, 1992 on the Panchayats, Reprinted for circulation by Rajiv Gandhi Foundation New Delhi, n.d., pp. 9-10.

and Mizoram. The Act does not also extend to the District Council areas of Manipur and the areas covered by the Gorkha Hill Council in the Darjeeling District of West Bengal. It is not applicable to the Fifth Schedule areas in the country, and the Sixth Schedule districts and regions. The Parliament has been authorized by law to extend it to these two categories of areas, subject to such exceptions and modifications as may be specified. It has also been clarified that such law is not to be deemed as Amendment of the Constitution.

While enacting the Constitution 73rd Amendment Act, it appears that the Parliament decided deliberately that the provisions of the Act should not be imposed to the Fifth Schedule areas and the Sixth Schedule districts and region. The reason is that they that have their traditional system, similar to the Panchayati Raj, that must not be disturbed but require a carefully considered treatment.

In Meghalaya the people have their own socio-political system since the earliest time. They have their self-governing institutions right from the grass-root at the village level, which function in a very democratic manner. In the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the traditional Chiefs are the Syiem, Lyngdoh, Sardar, Wahadadar, Doloi, Pator and the Rangbah Shnong or Village Headmen. They look after the administration of the Syiemship, elaka and villages according to customs and traditions. The will of the people and the Dorbar or traditional councils are supreme and they play a very important role in the administration and decision making.

In Garo Hills, the institution of Nokmaship and the Village Council are the two traditional institutions. However, the Nokma does not enjoy autocratic powers as all the decisions are taken at a joint assembly of the village elders. These traditional institutions play a very important role in the socio-economic and political life of the people of Meghalaya.

Under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution, the Autonomous District Councils have been established in the United Khasi and

Jaintia Hill in 1952. Later, the people of Jaintia Hills felt that a separate District Council was needed for the Jowai Sub-division. In 1963, the Jarman Commission was appointed in connection with bifurcation. The history of the United Khasi and Jainti Hills Autonomous District Council took a new turn when in 1966, the Commission recommended a separate Autonomous District Council for Jowai Sub-division, for administrative convenience and the first election was held in 1967. Thus Meghalaya has three Autonomous District Councils, one each in Khasi Hills, Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills. The District Councils play a supervisory role and act as guardians of the customs and traditions of the people. However, since independence, under the new administrative set up, the powers of the traditional heads have been reduced. The various acts enforced from time to time by the District Councils effect the appointment and succession of Chiefs and headmen in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. As a result there are misunderstandings between the Districts and the traditional headmen. There is no smooth sailing between the State Government and the District Councils, the latter are demanding direct funding, removing of para 12 A and other demands, so as to improve the functioning of the District Councils and to make them more effective to carry on their responsibilities.

5.10 The 73rd Amendment Act and Women

The participation of women in the Panchayati Raj institutions is considered essential, for their political participation in the democratic process and to ensure their overall development. The 73rd Amendment Act provides 30 percent (30%) reservation for women in the Panchayati Raj institutions. This constitutional innovation is a significant step towards empowerment of women by giving them a voice in the decision making process.

The 73rd constitution Amendment Act contains Article 243D

- (1) Seats shall be reserved for (a) the Scheduled Castes and (b) the Scheduled Tribes.
- (2) Not less than one third of the total number of seats reserved under Clause (I) shall be reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes or as the case may be the Scheduled Tribes.
- (3) Not less than one third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat.
- (4) The Offices of the Chairpersons in the Panchayats at the village or any other level shall be reserved for the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes and women in such manner as the legislature of a State may by law, provide.

It provided further, that not less than one-third of the total number of offices of Chairpersons in the Panchayats at each level shall be reserved for women. The 30 percent (30%) reservation for women is based on social justice and thus guaranteed the Constitutional rights of women.

5.11 Conclusion

In Meghalaya, in spite of the society being matriarchal, and the women enjoying social and economic freedom, yet when it comes to politics the long held traditions still prevail. Traditionally, women in Meghalaya do not have a role to play in political matters; they are not allowed to attend a Durbar. There is a common saying in Khasi, “haba la kynih ka iar kynthei la wai ka pyrthei”, meaning, when the hen crows, it will be the end of the world or the world will be in ruin. In Garo Hills too, women have no part at all in the administration, the

Nokma, Laskar and Sardar who administer justice like magistrates in rural areas are all men, and women can never be village headmen.

In early days, traditions tell us that there were female rulers which show that initially women were not debarred from participating in political matters. In the hima or state of Nobosohphoh, there was a female named Ka Lar, who became the ruler as there was total absence of male heirs.⁹

Now, women in Meghalaya have come up in every field, in professional studies, in business and trade, in civil services and other fields. Besides the women in politics, that researcher have referred earlier, there are other prominent women like Mrs. Rose Millian Bathew Kharbuli, chairman of the UPSC, Mrs Alvareen Dkhar, Chairman MPSC, Mrs, M.R. Mawlong, first lady Deputy Commissioner, Miss Silverine Swer and Mrs. E.N. Shullai, Padmashree awardees, Mrs. Queenie Rynjah, Mrs. Verna Ingty and other noted social workers. This shows that there is no dearth of women in the various fields in Meghalaya.

In Meghalaya, the representation of women in the Legislative Assembly and Districts Councils is dismal. It appears that women themselves are not very keen or interested in contesting the election, may be the traditional feeling, and is still strong. In spite of the rapid changes that are going on in the society, the 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 organization begin their constitution by mentioning that their organization is solely social and does not involve in politics, their struggle is mainly social and economic, and little do they realize that their isolation and exclusion from this important area affects them.

⁹ Lyndoh, H., *Ki Syiem Khasi bad Synteng*, Part IV, Introduction, Shillong, 1938.

Therefore, reservation of seats 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 activists should come forward and enlighten the women folk on the importance of women participation in public life. If there are wider entry of women into the Legislature and Councils, that would be of immense contribution to the State and the Country as a whole.

The Panchayati Raj envisaging power to the people has come into force throughout the country. An amendment to the Constitution was effected to enable the State Governments to pass legislations giving one third representations to women in all local self-government. In Meghalaya, neither the state government nor the District Councils are initiating the process of discussing the Constitution 73rd Amendment Act towards giving reservation to women and empowering them, or how the spirit of the Act will be enforced in Meghalaya. In the District Council election of 1994, there were no female members in the three District Councils. There is a provision for nomination. It is expected that prominent women in any field would be nominated, but it was not done.