

WOMEN AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN MEGHALAYA

Ms. E. Plieladdalin Nongsiej*

The Convention on the Political Rights of Women was approved by the United Nations General Assembly on December 20, 1952 and adopted on March 3, 1953. The Preamble of the Convention reiterates the principle set out in articles 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which declares that all people have the rights to participate in the government of their country and to access public service. Moreover, the first three articles of the Convention assert the rights of women to vote, to be eligible for election and to hold public office with each article ending with the specification on equal terms with men, without discrimination. However, despite the pronounced commitment of the International community to gender equality and bridging the gender gap in the formal political arena women were not able to get a rightful because no serious attempt were made for women's political participation.

Political participation has been defined in various ways. Political participation means not only exercising the right to vote, but also power sharing, co- decision making, co- policy making at all levels of government of government of the State. Political participation has been generally defined as a process through which an individual performs a role in the political life of the social order, has the occasion of deciding what the common aim of the society are and the most excellent ways of achieving these goals. It generally refers to those voluntary activities by which members of a society shares in the selection of rulers and formulation of public policy. Thus, by the process of political participation, people actually take part in the political activities of the state. Voting is one among the political activities exercised by people worldwide. However,

* **Research Scholar, Dept. Political science, NEHU, Shillong-22**

besides voting there are a wide range of activities like membership of political party, electoral campaign, attending party meetings, contacting of public officials, making financial contribution to a party etc. This paper seeks to examine political participation of women in Meghalaya.

Meghalaya the literal meaning of which is the 'abode of clouds' is inhabited by the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo tribes. The most unique and distinctive feature of Meghalaya in general and khasi society in particular is its matrilineal system in which lineage and inheritance are traced from women. Perhaps in few societies are women as fortunate as the khasi women in a matrilineal society. This is so because in the khasi society women are free from many of the social restraints of the larger Indian society. In the khasi society there is no caste system, untouchability, bride burning, female infanticides and social inequality. The concept of matriliney being followed by the khasi society may very often leads to the assumption that the system yields absolute power to women when compared to other societies. However, like women in other societies, Khasi women too are not free from discrimination and violence.

Women Participation in the Local Council (Dorbar)

Women of the Khasi society though occupying a distinctively higher status in the socio-economic and educational spheres are subject to certain restriction so far as participation in political affairs is concerned. Traditionally, in political matters, a woman does not have any role to play and she is barred from participating in political decision making process. Women are not allowed to attend any *dorbar* council unless specifically called for a specific purpose. They are denied the right to speak or attend any public meeting which concerned the political affairs of either a village or *elaka* or *hima*(state). It is a taboo to see a woman in a political platform. According to traditional custom, they are not given the right to vote in any election to the office of the traditional chiefs. As a result we often come across many tennets which speaks about the misfortune or bad days waiting ahead if a woman takes part in any form of social activity. However, at present there has been a perceptible change in this rigidity of debarment to *dorbars* or councils for we now see women taking part in the affairs of traditional political institutions though only at the village level. Women in some localities in Shillong attend *dorbar* or council and are also included in the executive committees of the *dorbar* or council. For example - Laitumkhrah, Nongrim Hills and Lachumieredorbars include women in their executive

committees. There are also some women organizations like *KaSengLongkmie* (Mother's Association) *Laitumkrah and SengKynthei* (Women's Organisation) Nongrim Hills, which send two representatives to the executive committee of the local councils. The representatives sent are usually the president and the general secretary of these women organizations. The Lachumiere local dorbar had a lady treasurer in the executive committee. Another locality, Nongrim Hills, has a woman executive member. Yet this is just a tiny drop in the ocean of women's participation in traditional political bodies. There are still many *dorbars* which do not allow women to participate in the meetings.

Women Representation in the Legislative Assembly of Meghalaya

In the pre-independence period women were not given any role to play in the traditional political institutions. But changes were seen when new types of administration were introduced, firstly under the British, and secondly under the Indian Constitution, thereby initiating the participation of women in politics at the non-traditional levels. Under the government of India Act 1935, women were given the right to vote, but it was very much restricted in nature. The Act provided for the representation of women by the reservation of seats from the Shillong constituency in the then Assam Legislative assembly. This was known as Shillong Women Seat. The Act permitted women to contest for general seats. As a result in the 1937 election, two women-BerlinaDiengdoh and Mavis Dunn Lyngdoh contested in the reserved seats. The latter was elected and for the first time a woman became a member of the Assembly. Being included in the Muhammad Saadulla's ministry in 1939 till 1941 she was the first Khasi lady to become a Cabinet Minister in the North-Eastern states. In 1946, four more women contested in the election. They were Mrs. BonnielyKhongmen, T.W. Shadap, BerlinaDiengdoh and Miss Mavis Dunn Lyngdoh. Amongst them Mrs. BonnielyKhongmen was elected from the Shillong Women Seat.

Due to the outbreak of the Second World War, the Second General Election could not be held in 1942. It was held in 1946 with five women contestant. Again in this election the seat from Shillong-Women was contested by four women candidates-Mrs. BonnielyKhongmen, T.W.Shadap, BerlinaDiengdoh, and Miss Mavis Dunn Lyngdoh. Padma K.Gohain contested from the general seat while B. Khongmen of the Congress was elected in the Shillong- women seat.

The First General Elections under the auspices of the Indian Constitution was held in 1952. In this election Garo Hills was allotted four seats and the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills was allotted five seats. There were no women candidates from the Tura seat. For the Khasi-Jaintia Hills seat, altogether there were eleven candidates out of which two candidates were women. Unfortunately, both the candidates forfeited their security deposits. The Second General Election was held in 1957. From the Tura seat, there were no women candidates. Out of the five seats from Khasi-Jaintia Hills, there was one woman candidate of the Congress. She was defeated. In the Third and Fourth General Election held in 1962 and 1967 there were no women candidates from both Garo and Khasi-Jaintia Hills.

In 1970, the Autonomous State of Meghalaya was formed with a legislature of its own. The election to the Provisional Legislative Assembly of Meghalaya was indirect. Members of the existing District Councils were constituted as Electoral College and they elected members to the Meghalaya Autonomous State Legislative Assembly. The total strength of the House was 41, of whom 18 were from Khasi Hills, 4 from Jaintia Hills, 16 from Garo Hills and 3 nominated to represent minorities (Bengali, Assamese and Nepali). There were no women contestants in this election too. In 1971, Garo Hills became a part of the Autonomous State of Meghalaya. Meanwhile the Autonomous State of Meghalaya was upgraded into a full-fledged statehood, separately from the state of Assam, with a Legislative Assembly of its own under the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganization) Act, 1971. After Meghalaya became a full-fledged state, there were 60 seats out of which 24 seats was allotted to Garo Hills.

Table 1- Names of Women Candidates contested in the State Legislative Assembly election during the year 1972 to 2013.

	NAMES	PARTY	CONSTITUENCY	STATUS
1972	SILVERINE SWER	INDEPENDENT	MAWKHAR	LOSS
	MURIEL SELMA DUNN	NDEPENDENT	LABAN	LOSS
	PLISSIBON	INDEPENDENT	NONGTHYMMAI	LOSS
	MRBANIANG			
	RESIDA SOHTUN	INDEPENDENT	NONGKREM	LOSS

	MAYSALIN WAR	APHLC	MAWTHENGKUT	LOSS
	LUCIABROSILLA LAMIN	INDEPENENT	NONGSHKEN	LOSS
1978	NEENA RYNJAH	INC (I)	LABAN	LOSS
1983	IVORYNA SHYLLA	PDC	NONGBAH WAHIAJER	LOSS
	EVANDALYNE MASSAR	INDEPENDT	PYNTHORUMKHRAH	LOSS
	MAYA R. KYNDIAH	AHL	JIAIW	LOSS
	NARAMAI LANGSTIEH	INC	SOHRYNGKHAM	LOSS
	LUISA BROSLLA LAMIN	INDEPENDENT	NONGSHKEN	LOSS
	MAYSALIN WAR	AHL	MAWTHENGKUT	LOSS
1988	NILL			
1993	IVORYNA SHYLLA	BJP	LAITUMKHRAH	LOSS
	MAYA RANI KYNDIAH	INC	JIAIW	LOSS
	JUSNA KURBAH	INC	MAWPREM	LOSS
	ROSHAN WARJRI	HPU	MAWKHAT	ELECTED
	MAYSALIN WAR	INC	MAETHENGKUT	LOSS
1998	LUCIA MALNGIANG	BJP	MALKI NONGTHYMMAI	LOSS
	NARAMAI LANGSTIEH	HSPDP	LAITUMKHRAH	LOSS
	ROSHAN WARJRI	UDP	MAWKHAR	LOSS
	MAYA RANI KYNDIAH	INDEPENDENT	JIAIW	LOSS
	AMANDA PATHAW	INC	MAWLAI	LOSS
	SIMIL GURY	PDM	SOHRA	LOSS

	KHARHUJON			
	QUEENTINA DIENGDOH	UDP	PARIONG	LOSS
	MAYSALIN WAR	HSPDP	MAWTHENGKUT	ELECTED
2003	H. MARINA DKHAR	HSPDP	WAR JAINTIA	LOSS
	RITA M. V. LYNGDOH	INC	RALIANG	LOSS
	PHIDALIA TOI	NCP	JOWAI	LOSS
	LARISHA KURKALANG	HSPDP	MYLLIEM	LOSS
	MAYA RANI KYNDIAH	UDP	JIAIW	LOSS
	AMANDA PATHAW	INC	MAWLAI	LOSS
	SYRPAI KHONGLAH	MDP	LYNGKYRDEM	LOSS
	VERONICA MARBANIANG	INDEPENDENT	LYNGKYRDEM	ELECTED
	IRIN LYNGDOH	INC	PARIONG	LOSS
	MAYSALIN WAR	NCP	MAWTHENGKUT	LOSS
2008	RITA M.V. LYNGDOH	MDP	RALIANG	LOSS
	DR. BIBILYNDA WAHLANG	NCP	MAIRANG	LOSS
	AIDALIS RANEE	LJP	NONGSPUNG	LOSS
	PREETY KHAR PYNGROPE	MDP	MALKI NONGTHYMMAI	LOSS
	AMPAREEN LYNGDOH	UDP	LAITUMKHRAH	ELECTED
	MERISTELLA WAHLANG	LJP	PYNTHORUMKHRAH	LOSS
	MANOSHA WARJRI	BJP	SOHRYNGKHSM	LOSS
	CHRISTINE MAJAW IRIN LYNGDOH	LJP INC	LYNGKYRDEM PARIONG	LOSS LOSS

	MAYSALIN WAR	INDEPENDENT	MAWTHENGKUT	LOSS
	IRENE PATRICIA HUJON	LJP	LABAN	LOSS
	JAHAMARA R, KHARBHIH	UDP	RAJABALA	LOSS
2013	VEECARE NICIA LAMARE	BJP		LOSS
	M. AMPAREEN LYNGDOH	BJP	EAST SHILLONG	ELECTED
	IBARILIN KHARSATI	UDP	EAST SHILLONG	LOSS
	ROSHAN WARJRI	INC	NORTH SHILLONG	ELECTED
	ROONA KHYMDEIT	UDP	NONGPOH	LOSS
	PHILOMATH PASSAH	NNP	NORTH SHILLONG	LOSS
	TEILINIA THANGKHIEW	INDEPRNDENT	MYLLIEM	LOSS
	MANOSHA WARJRI	KHNAM	NONGTHYMMAI	LOSS
	GRACE MARY KHARPURI	INDEPENDENT	SHELLA	LOSS
	BANALARI KHONGWAR	UDP	PYNYRSLA	LOSS
	EUREKA F. P. LYNGDOH	INC	MAIRANG	LOSS
	FENELA LYNGDOH NONGLAIT	HSPDP	MATHADRAISHAN	LOSS
	IRIN LYNGDOH	INDEPENDENT	MATHADRAISHAN	LOSS
PELCY SNAITANG	INDEPENDENT	MAWSHYNRUT	LOSS	

Table above shows that after independence particularly after attainment of statehood of Meghalaya, many new changes have taken place in Khasi Hills. Women have come forward and take active part in politics. The figures in the table presented above show the numbers of Khasi women who had contested for election since the year 1972 till 2013. The First General Election

to the new 60-member Meghalaya Legislative Assembly was held on March 9, 1972. In this election, out of the 60 seats, there were nine women contestants. They were Silverline Swer, Muriel Salena Dunn, Plissibon Marbaniang, Rosida Sohtun, Maysalin War and Luisa Brosila Lamin from the Khasi hills and Miriam D. Shira, Percylina R. Marak and Herilla B. Sangma from Garo Hills. There were no women candidates from the Jaintia Hills. Percylina R. Marak, (contested on an APHLC ticket) from the Garo Hills was the only woman who came out successfully. There was a bye-election on 22.05.1973 in Mawthengkut (ST) constituency. The contest was between Raison Mawsor and Maysalin War. Maysalin War lost to Raison Mawsor. There was a bye-election in 1975 in Songsak (ST) constituency. Two women candidates contested wherein Miriam D. Shira, who had contested the previous year, won the seat.

The Second General Election to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly was held on February 25, 1978. Out of the 60 seats, there were seven women contestants-Neena Rynjah Maysalin War, Drosily Mukhim, Miriam D. Shira, Percylina R. Marak and Fridina Marak, and one Assamese lady, Usha Bhattacharjee. Mrs. Miriam D. Shira, an independent candidate from the Garo was declared the winner.

The Third General Election to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly was held on February 17, 1983. Out of the 60 seats, there were seven women contestants. They were Ivoryna Shylla, Tiplut Nongbri, Evandalyne Massar, Maya R. Kyndiah, Naramai Langstieh, Luisa Brosila Lamin, Maysalin War and Miriam D. Shira. This time none of the women contestants was elected.

The Fourth General Election to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly was held on February 2, 1988. Out of the 60 seats, there were only three women contestants of which two women contestants; Miriam D. Shira from Rajabala (ST) constituency and Maysalin War from Mawthengkut (ST) constituency were elected. There was a bye-election in 1989, 1990 and 1991 in some of the constituencies. There were no women contestants in these elections.

The Fifth General Election to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly was held on February 15, 1993. Out of the 60 seats, there were seven women contestants of which only one candidate, RoshanWarjri from Mawkhar (ST) constituency was elected. There was bye-election in 1996 and 1997. In the 1996 bye-election there was one woman candidate who lost the election. In the 1997 bye-election, there was no woman candidate.

The Sixth General Election to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly was held on February 16, 1998. Out of the 60 seats, there were twelve women contestants of which three were elected; RoshanWarjri from Mawkhar (ST), Maysalin War from Mawthengkut (ST) and Debora C. Marak from Rongrenggiri (ST) constituencies. There was bye-election on 26.5.2000 in Mairang constituency.

The Seventh General Election to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly was held on February 26, 2003. In this election, there were twelve women contestants of which only two candidates were elected; IrinLyngdoh from Pariong (ST) and Debora C. Marak from Rongrenggiri (ST) constituencies. There was bye-election on 26.9.2003 in Laban (GEN) constituency. There were thirteen contestants of which two were women. One woman lost the election and one was elected. Again there were bye-elections on 23.2.2005 and 4.12.2006 in some of the constituencies. However, in both these elections, there were no women candidates.

The Eighth General Election to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly held on March 3, 2008 saw an increase in women contestants. This year twenty women stood for election of which only one candidate, M. AmpareenLyngdoh from Laitumkhrah (ST) constituency was elected. There was bye-election on 26.2.2009 in Umroi (ST) constituency. There were four candidates of which only one was woman. She lost the election. There was bye-election on 18.8.2009 in Laitumkhrah (ST) constituency. There were six candidates of which one was a woman candidate- M. AmpareenLyngdoh won the election.

The Ninth General Election to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly was held on February 23, 2013. This election saw an increasing number of women candidates who came forward to contest. There were as many as 25 women contestants of which four candidates; RoshanWarjri

from North Shillong (ST), M. AmpareenLyngdoh from East Shillong (ST), Debora C. Marak from Williamnagar (ST) and Dikkanchi D. Shira from Mahendraganj (ST) constituencies were elected.

In the seven general elections (1972, 1978, 1983, 1988, 1993, 1998, and 2003) held so far, a total of only 65 women have contested in these elections out of a grand total of 1985 contestants. Out of the total of these 65 women who had contested in the elections, only 12 of them have been elected so far. It is also seen that women participation in the political affairs of the state is promising with each passing years. Starting with only 6 candidates in 1972 the numbers has increased to 14 in 2013. However, the number of winning candidates is still very less with only 1 or 2 candidates elected during each election.

Women Representation in the Autonomous District Council

Table-2 Names of women Candidates elected to the Autonomous District Council during the year 1952 to 2014

S.no	Year	Names	
1	1952- 57	Mrs. LariamShullai	Nominated
2	1972- 78	Mrs. EtriceSyiem Mrs. Lucia BrosillsLamin	
3	1984- 88	Mrs. M. War	Elected
4	2004-2009	Mrs. IrinLyngdoh	Elected
5	2009-2014 2009-2014 2009-2014	Mrs, IrinLyngdoh Grace Mary Kharpuri Mrs. TeiliniaThangkhiew	Elected
6	2014-2018 2014-18 2014-18	Mrs. TeiliniaThangkhiew Mrs. Grace Mary Kharpuri Mrs. Rona Khyndeit	Elected

Coming to the elections of the Autonomous District Councils (KHADC), there were a number of women representatives who were either elected or nominated. The table above shows the number of women candidates winning the KHADC elections since its inception till 2014. In the first election to the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council held in the year

1952, a lady, Mrs.LariarnShullai, was nominated as a member. The next election held in the year 1972 saw two women, Mrs. LouisiniaBrosilaLarnin and Mrs. EtrisSyiern, contesting and winning the election. In 1972, the Chief Executive member of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council, Mr.L.G.Shullai, selected Mrs.L.BrosilaLarnin as one of the executive members making her the first lady executive member in all District Councils in the North East. Another woman, Mrs.E.Syiern also served briefly as an executive member in 1977. Maysalin War who was a member of the Provisional Assembly in 1970 contested in 1984 and was elected to the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council. The 2004 election has only one woman, Mrs. IrinLyngdoh as the elected candidate. The 2009 election saw three women elected as member of KHADC—Mrs, IrinLyngdoh, Mrs. Grace Mary Kharpuri and Mrs. TeiliniaThangkhiew. In the most recent election held in 2014, three women were elected. They are Mrs. TeiliniaThangkhiew, Mrs. Grace Mary Kharpuri and Mrs. Rona Khymdeit. The figure shows that the number of women representation in the KHADC is as poor as that in the State Legislative Assembly. This gives us an impression that women are poorly represented in the political affairs of the state. Though there are few women who came forward to contest in the election the figures shows that very few are elected.

Thus, it can be said Khasi women continues to suffer discrimination in the field of politics as well as in decision- making and occupy a lower status as compared to men. Women's equal participation in the decision- making process, policy- making, planning and administration is extremely important to ensure their equality while participating in the development process. It facilitates women's direct engagement in public decision making and is a means of ensuring better accountability to women.

Concluding Observations

In Meghalaya, right from the grassroots level (local council) women were denied the right to participate in the political affairs of the state. Thus, it seems that the traditional feeling that politics is considered as a male prerogative is still very strong. As such deliberation and decisions, planning and administration and policy framing and the burden of management are still considered as men's tasks. It is therefore necessary that women should be enlightened on the importance of their involvement in the political life of the state. It is also very important that the

society understands that women are equally capable as men in this arena and therefore opportunities should also be given to them. It has been observed that women in Meghalaya are actively involved as active members in the women's wings of different political parties but have not emerged as leader at party level. Political parties should therefore encourage women to come forward by allotting them with party tickets. Countries with increased women's participation and leadership in political activities of the state tend to be more inclusive, responsive, egalitarian and democratic. Thus women's meaningful participation in the political life of the state needs to be encouraged in order to promote peace and development.

References

1. *Meghalaya Election Handbooks (1972-2008)*.
2. *Information Book on Meghalaya Elections (1972-2009)*.
3. *Statistical Reports on General Elections to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly (1972-2008)*.
4. *Convention on The Political Rights of Women*, (1953), New York: United Nations
5. Bhalla, R. P., *Elections in India 1950-1972*, (1973), New Delhi: S. Chand Publications.
6. Bhandari, K., *India: Electoral Reforms*, (1988), New Delhi: Shiv Lal for the Election Archives
7. Chaube, S. K., (1973), *Hill Politics in North East India*, Calcutta: Orient Longman Publications
8. Chaube, S. K., (1985), *Electoral Politics in North East India*, Madras: University Press Publications
9. Cherif, Feryal M., (2015), *Myths about Women's Rights: Where and Why Rights Advanced*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
10. Lyngdoh, R. S., (1996), *Government and Politics in Meghalaya*, New Delhi: Sanchar Publications
11. Pakem, B., (1999), *Coalition Politics in North East India*, New Delhi: Regency Publications
12. Rao, V. V., B. Pakem and N. Hazarika, (eds.), (1984), *A Century of Government and Politics in North East India: Volume-II Meghalaya (1874-1983)*, New Delhi: S. Chand Publications
13. Robert E. Dowse, (1972), *Political Sociology*, London: John Wiley and Sons