

WOMEN IN NAGA POLITICS:
A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY

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submitted in :- fulfilment of the requirement of the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology
of
North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Women constitute almost one half of the world's population, but their social, economic and political status is still lower than that of men in almost all countries. Of course, women do enjoy relatively a better status in several societies than in that of India. Social values of the people change with changes in the economic structure and ideology. The Committee on the Status of Women in India observes, "Patterns of women activity are greatly affected by social attitudes and institutions, which stem from the social ideology, concerning basic components of status in any given period."¹

In India, the rate of infant mortality is considerably higher among the females than that among the males. In the USA and UK literacy among the males and the females is almost equal in all the cases. But in India the gap between the two is striking. Women constitute a sizable portion of the total working population of Russia. They are now an essential part of the working world. Very few women occupy top political positions in the USA and England. In India also though Mrs Indira Gandhi occupied the Prime Minister's position for more than 12 years women do not share power equally with men in various legislative bodies and executives.

In social sphere, the condition of women is much worse. Cases of rape have steadily increased and the police have failed to provide adequate protection to women. According to the survey conducted in 1975 by the Institute of

Criminology and Forensic Science, the rate of suicide in India has increased more among the females than the males.² One reads about several cases in the newspapers that daughters-in-law are burnt alive by their in-laws and husbands for want of dowry and or because of prejudice against them.

Mahatma Gandhi took a serious view of the women's problems. He strongly criticized excessive subordination of women to the husband. He said that women should enjoy equal status with men. He raised his voice against customs and pleaded for women's education outside their home. He emphasized that women's primary function is to look after the home but he also mobilized women for participation in the public life.³ Gandhi approved of the women who voluntarily work outside their home. According to K C Vidya, "When women achieve equal share of political power, many things besides politics will change profoundly. Some further breaking down of the barriers that constraint the development of individual talents and restricts the range of human resources available to meet societies needs will have to take place. In this respect, women's increasing political participation is both a source and signal of social change. As a global trend, rising numbers of women in politics will indicate that human beings are making progress towards a more human world not because women are necessarily more human than men, but because any society that categorically excludes half its members from the processes by which it rules itself will be ruled in a way that is less than fully human".⁴

Until the dawn of the Industrial Revolution in 1868, the status of women was almost the same throughout the world. It was the Greek philosopher Plato who said that there should be complete equality between the sexes. To understand the status of women in a society an examination of their political status is necessary. It is now generally agreed that the women's right to vote and freedom to occupy positions are fundamental to women's status.

Earlier women were not allowed to participate in the political process of the country. Later, demand for political equality of women started in the 18th century. In Western Europe and North America, where the idea of equality of the sexes first took root, a change in status preceded legislation and with the important exception of suffrage, was often not dependent on law.⁵ New Zealand was the first country to enfranchise women in 1893 and Australia and Canada in 1908. In Britain, attempts to enfranchise women before World War I were unsuccessful, but during the war women did responsible work in such a variety of fields that all women over the age of 21 years were enfranchised by 1929. In many countries like USA and France women had to wage relentless struggles for equal political rights. In USA, women suffrage was secured in 1920 and in France in 1944. In Western Europe, after the World War II, many other countries enacted legislation enfranchising women, these included Greece, Italy and France. In Germany women were enfranchised by the Weimer Constitution of 1919. In Norway in 1913, Danish women got it in 1915 and in Switzerland women were enfranchised in 1971. In Burma, female enfranchisement was

achieved in 1935 and Thailand in 1932. Chinese women received the vote in 1947 and Japan also in 1947.

All the states of Latin America have universal suffrage. In Africa, women acquired the suffrage by the 1960, Liberia in 1947, Eastern and Western regions of Nigeria in 1960, Uganda in 1958 and Botswana and Lesotho in 1966.

In India the Indian National Congress from its inception in the 19th century has included women in its organization and in 1917 even elected women President, Annie Besant. Madras was the first province to grant limited franchise to women in 1921. The Government of India Act of 1935 extended the franchise further. Only after independence and under the Constitution of 1950, all the women above 21 years of age were given right to vote and the Constitution clearly stated that “the state shall not discriminate against any citizens on grounds only of religion, race, sex, place of birth or any of them.” In India, women’s franchise has been described as “easy victory.” The framers of the Constitution in granting women’s franchise were more influenced by the world history and the Gandhian Philosophy, rather than of any wider spread demand from Indian women.⁶

1.1 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Hartsock argued that epistemologies grow out of differing material circumstances.⁷ We must, then, distinguish between theories of power which may

include the subjugation of women as yet another variable to be considered, and theories of power which begin from the experience and point of view of the dominated. Such theories would give attention not only to the ways women are dominated, but also to their capacities, abilities and strengths. In particular, such theories would use these capacities as guide for a potential transformation of power relationships. That is, for the empowerment of women we should add as a qualification that refers to the empowerment of women as a group, not simply a few women "making it". One might make similar case for other marginalized groups.

But to mention the power of women leads immediately to the problem of what is meant by "women". The problem of differences among women has been very prominent in the United States in recent years. We face the task of developing our understanding of difference as part of the theoretical task of developing a theory of power for women. Issues of difference reminds us as well that many of the factors, which divide women also, unite some women with men – factors such as racial or cultural differences. We need to develop our understanding of difference by creating a situation in which hitherto marginalized groups can name themselves, speak for themselves, and participate in defining the terms of interaction, a situation in which we can construct an understanding of the world that is sensitive to difference.

How does such a theory look like? Can we develop a general theory, or should we abandon the search for such a theory in favour of making space for a

number of heterogeneous voices to be heard? What kinds of common claims can be made about the situations of women and men of colour? About those of white women and women and men of colour? About the situations of western peoples and those they have colonized? For example, is it ever legitimate to say "Women" without qualification? These kinds of questions make it apparent that the situation we face involves not only substantive claims about the world, but also raises questions what claim for our theories and ultimately about who "We" are.

In our efforts to find ways to include the voices of marginalized groups, one might expect helpful guidance from those who have argued against totalizing and universalistic theories such as those of the Enlightenment. Many radical intellectuals have been attracted to compilation of diverse writings ranging from literary criticism to the social sciences, generally termed post-modern. The writers, among them such as Foucault, Derrida, Rorty, and Lyotard argue against the faith in a universal reason we have inherited from Enlightenment European philosophy. They reject stories that claim to encompass all of human history. As Lyotard put it, "let us wage war on totality".⁸ In its place they propose a social criticism that is ad hoc, contextual, plural, and limited. However, a number of feminist theorists have joined in the criticism of modernity put forward by these writers.

They have endorsed their claims about what can and cannot be known or said or read into/ from text. Thus, post-modernism, despite its stated efforts to

avoid the problems of European modernism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, at best manages to criticize these theories without putting anything in their place. For those of us who want to understand the world systematically in order to change it, post-modern theories at their best give little guidance. Those of us who are not part of the ruling race, class, or gender, not a part of the minority, which controls our world, need to know how it works. Why we are systematically excluded and marginalized? What systematic changes would be required to create a more just society? At worst, post-modernist theories can recapitulate the effects of Enlightenment theories, which deny the right to participate in defining the terms of interaction. Thus, we contend, in broad terms, that post-modernism represents a dangerous approach for any marginalized group to adopt.

Women who constitute almost half of the world's population play subordinate and marginal role in the politics of most of the countries. The problem of how to increase their political participation remains unsolved in most of modern political systems and is a matter of continuing concern.

A pioneering Soviet study on women's participation had documented that in socialist countries women had succeeded in substantially improving their political status. The study shows that women had acquired a significant position in the USSR and their political participation in legislative bodies had increased over the year. This study also recorded that the position of women had shown remarkable improvement in the National Assemblies of other socialist countries

like Bulgaria, Hungary, German Democratic Republic, Poland, Romania, Mongolia and Vietnam. In the developed countries, on the other hand, according to this study, women have failed to acquire equal political status but have suffered a steady decline in their political position. It states that in all capitalist countries there is a gap between the formal recognition of the rights of women to participate in social and political activity and its implementation. Women do not participate in the state administration on a broad basis. Only a small number of them, mainly those coming from propertied classes are appointed to government and administrative posts. These views are substantially supported by the other empirical evidences concerning the political status of women in France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, Belgium and USA.

Thus, the diversities in the patterns of women's political participation in the socialist, developed capitalist, and the developing countries in general and India in particular lead us to the following pertinent questions. How did or why did women succeed in acquiring a significant share in the legislative bodies or decision-making institutions in USSR and other socialist countries? Why have they failed to achieve adequate representation in the developed capitalist countries? Why has their representation declined or dwindled in those countries? Why have women in developing countries in general and India in particular failed to obtain their due share in political power?

Marxists hold that only in a society in which there is no private ownership of the means of production and no exploitation of one class by another and in

which the social equality of all people, both *de-jure* and *de facto*, has been achieved, will women really become emancipated and be able to participate, in all spheres of material and spiritual life, at par with men. This idea can be traced throughout many works of Marx, Engels and Lenin. These scholars, however, overlooked the fact that the empirical evidence regarding the participation of women in politics of developed capitalist countries contradicts their thesis. The status of women offers serious obstacles in their acting as spokesmen for women's rights and opportunities.

Iqbal Narain has attributed this phenomenon to Indian political culture and the force of tradition that has been particularly against participation of women in politics. He argues that the problem of improvement in political status is an integral aspect of the over all problem of socio-economic change and broadening the political elite structure.⁹

1.2 UNDERSTANDING FEMINISM

Social scientists and women activists both accept the main postulate that women are not biologically inferior and her lower status to that of men is socially constructed. However, their differences in approaches which have resulted in the formulation of different theories to explain how women's position was relegated to a lower status in the course of development of civilization. Broadly speaking, there are three theories (1) Moderate or Women's Right Feminism (2) Radical

Feminism, and (3) Socialist Feminism. They all maintain that the social inequalities between men and women are a creation of the socio-cultural milieu.

1.2.1 Moderate or Women's Right Feminism:

The inferior position of women, according to supporters of this theory, is due to the cultural and psychological factors. According to Mills, the subjection of women was the product of age-long custom and was not the proof of any inherent inferiority in them. The subordination of one sex over other, he historically analyses, arose "simply from the fact that from the very earliest twilights of human society, every woman, owing to the value attached to her by men, continued with her inferiority in physical strength was found in a state of bondage to man"¹⁰ and this physical fact, according to him, was converted into a legal right. He contended that distinctions between men and women that went to show inferiority of women in the domains of mental and intellectual productions were not natural but artificial. That is, the distinctions were a product of a subjecting environment. He believed that what was needed was "enlightened womanhood." Women's dignity would rise in her own estimation, and she would come to realize that she was not created merely to satisfy the physical cravings of man, but had an independent life of her own which she could enrich and fulfil as much as man. The position of women Mill has further been analysed in these words:

of her: "A mere consciousness a woman would have of being, like any other, entitled to choose for pursuits, urged or incited by the same inducements as any one else, to interests herself in whatever is interesting to human beings, entitled to the share of influence on all human concerns which belong to an individual opinion.... This alone would affect an immense expansion of the faculties of their moral sentiments." ¹¹

Mills believed that man and woman have their peculiar abilities. These abilities are not superior or inferior but they are "reciprocal". Mills wrote to his friend "we are almost as much the natural complement of one another as man and woman are: we are far stronger together than separately, whatever both of us agree in, has a very good chance, I think of being true". ¹² Though he believed in equality, he assigned a certain role to woman which suited her more than man. In 1832 he wrote to Harriet that "The great occupation of woman should be to beautify life: to cultivate, for her own sake and that of those who surround her, all her faculties of mind, soul, and body, all her powers of enjoyment and powers of giving enjoyment; to diffuse beauty, elegance, grace everywhere." ¹³

roles to them

accept Moderate feminists believe that sexism does not help anyone. Sex discrimination keeps half the population unproductive. They do not benefit males. Therefore, women should be brought out from the four walls of the house. In the feminine mystique Betty Friedman, one of the founders of the moderate wing of the post-war women's liberation movement in USA analyses the cost of maintaining the traditional male-female discussion of labour. Women spend most

of her time in unproductive housework. She does not face challenging life, "yet women have been taught that true self-fulfilment lies in being wife and other exclusively. When women do not realize the promised self-fulfilment and, in fact, become miserably unhappy, they blame themselves, not their situation".¹⁴ The solution of this situation is education and women's right to take up any profession they choose.

Unlike Gandhi, moderate feminists in the West do not believe in strict segregation of the roles between men and women. Betty Friedman opines that as long as women are relegated to being mothers and mothers only, motherhood is a bane and a curse".¹⁵ The oppressive function of the present day family can be removed when women develop as equal human beings. This is possible only when other life-style is made available to women.

Moderates also advocate granting professional role to women. But this role does not replace the role of the housewife and child-rearer. One wonders, whether the traditional roles are kept undisturbed, the possibility of assigning new roles to them will help liberate women and make them equal to men. They further accept the philosophy of liberal ideology. According to them, in a pluralist society, no one group dominates and determines government policy. "Organized women can get into the game and, like other groups, can expect to have their demands met, if they put on enough pressure".¹⁶ Women have to work as a pressure group in the pluralist society. They have to pressurize the government to enact laws granting equal rights to women in the field of education and

employment. They should demand legal protection against sex discrimination. At the same time, they should fight against the prevalent attitude and values, and unjust social customs which are against women.

1.2.2 Radical Feminism:

Radical feminism is an offshoot of moderate feminism. According to the radical feminists, the biological differentiation of women and the institutions of marriage and family were seen to perpetuate masculine control over female fertility and thereby help in the preservation and perpetuation of a patriarchal system. Unlike the Marxists, the radical feminists believe that society is primarily divided on the basis of sex rather than on class. "Male supremacy is the oldest, most basic form of domination. All other forms of exploitation and oppression (racism, capitalism, imperialism etc.) are extensions of male supremacy; men dominate women, a few women dominate the rest".¹⁷ Adherents of radical feminist theory argue that history of the world was not the struggle of classes, but it was the struggle between the sexes. The battle lines are drawn between men and women, rather than between the bourgeois and the proletariat, and the determining relations are the relations of reproduction not production. Shulamith Firestone argues, "Unlike economic class, sex class sprang directly from a biological reality; men and women were created different and not equally privileged".¹⁸

Biological limitation is not insurmountable, technological developments-reliable birth control and, in future, artificial reproduction (i.e., test tube babies), - offer the promise of freeing women from these limitations. In addition to the expropriation of these upper-limits offered by the technological progress until reliable birth control methods became available, women were “at a continual mercy of their biology.”¹⁹ Biology made women dependent on males for their physical survival. Thus, in the biological family an inherently unequal power distribution is found.

The radical feminists plead for sex revolution, which would result in the destruction of the present day male dominated institutions and values. They are in favour of eradicating sexual division in society. This, according to them, is the only way to liberate women. The end goal of feminist revolution must be not just the elimination of male privilege but sex distinction itself. Genital difference between human beings would no longer matter culturally.²⁰

A few radical feminists advocate matriarchy. According to them, a woman is biologically superior to men. Ashley Montague argues that historical insistence on women’s inferiority and their subsequent subjection is caused by men’s envy of women’s capacity to give birth to children, the great creative act. The feminist revolution “must be an affirmation of the power of female consciousness, of the mother.”²¹

between The two different approaches of the radical feminists mentioned here are in a way contradictory. The former favours the eradication of supremacy on the basis of sex division. The champions of this approach ignore economic exploitation both of man and woman. They also do not take into account women's position in the economic structure of a given society. Though sex oppression is important, it does not give convincing explanation of economic exploitation, which involves both men and women as either exploiters or as the exploited. It should be noted that all women do not experience oppression equally. In fact, some women also exploited other women when they belong to two different classes, the exploiting and the exploited. It is true that technology is a key to women's liberation. Contraception has freed women in important ways. But technology is not neutral. It is linked with the economic and political structure of a society. Einstein Zillah rightly argues, whether birth control, abortion rights and so on, will ever be allowed to develop to the degree that would allow women's role as re-producer to become irrelevant to her social position.²² Firestone's analysis loses its plausibility when we understand that technology is an intrinsic dimension of a society's power structure. Male-ruling class needs define technological developments; without a change of those in power, technology is an unlikely liberation.²³

1.2.3 Socialist Feminism:

Another approach to feminist issues is historical materialism or socialist feminism. Like others, the adherents of this school believe that dichotomy



between men and women's role in society is artificial and is meant to keep women subjected to men. According to this approach, the root cause of the lower status of human lies in the family. The family is the result of the private property in the means of production. ²⁴ Therefore, complete equality of women is possible, when private property in the means of production is abolished.

This viewpoint holds that housework produces only use value and not exchange value. The original relations between the sexes were one of mutual dependence and the principle of "mother right" existed only so far as there was a tie between the mother and children. The state of this equality between sexes and their work, according to Engels, first underwent transformation to that of inequality and subjugation of women, when development of productive forces began to change the material base of the society. Engels was the first to advance historical explanation of the dialectical relationship between the developments in means of procuring food, the rise of private property in them, the evolution of monogamy and the subjection of woman. In his work, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* Engels believed that the economic independence of women would free them from male dominance within the family.

(3) Now the question is, if she was once free and man's equal how did her fall come about? The latter half of barbarism had converted cattle from communal to private property of individual heads of families. How and when did common property become private? "We do not know to this day," says Engels. The concept of private property brought a basic change in the family. Engels

elaborates, "Division of labour in the family had regulated the distribution of property between man and wife. The division remained unchanged and yet it now put the former domestic relationship topsy-turvy simply because the division of labour outside the family had changed. The very cause that had formerly made the women supreme in the house, her being confined to domestic work, now assured supremacy in the house for the man: the woman's house work lost its significance compared with the man's work in obtaining a livelihood."²⁵

Thus, the root cause of lower status of woman is the private ownership of the means of production. Those who believe in this view advocate class struggle, which will lead to the abolition of private property. They are against separate women's movement. According to them, women also represent either the proletariat or the bourgeois class. According to this theory, women cannot be seen in isolation from the class struggle. However, three questions arise:

- (1) Would the status of woman improve by just abolishing private property?
- (2) Is it possible to abolish the institution of the family, its structure and norms, which are several centuries old, and which existed in slave, feudal, capitalist and post capitalist societies?
- (3) Is private ownership in the means of production and patriarchal system synonymous? Will the patriarchal system be abolished with the abolition of private property?

Russian experience suggests that domestic labour or market labour cannot substantially change women's status so long as patriarchal social system continues. And patriarchal system cannot vanish by merely abolishing private property. Thus, women's struggle for their emancipation has to be both against private property as well as against the patriarchal social system. Therefore, class struggle by the working class is not a substitute for women's struggle. Women have to develop their class, but have to wage their particular struggle independent of the working class. A struggle against patriarchal system is a struggle against present structure of the family and the system of man-dominated social values, which prevail in working class trade unions and left political parties as well. Thus, without a change in the relations of production, women's liberation would remain an ideal. And without a change in the patriarchal social system and all the values that go with them, the liberation of women would not be complete.

1.3 FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE: THE INDIAN SCENARIO

In India too, there has been considerable hesitation to use the term 'Feminist' or 'Feminism'. There is also very often a confusion as to whom one can describe as a 'feminist'. We will examine the issue in its different dimensions.

According to Kamla Bhasin and Mighat Said Khan, a broad definition of feminism could be "An awareness of women's oppression and exploitation in society, at work and within the family and men to change this situation."

According to this definition, "Anyone who recognizes the existence of sexism, (discrimination on the basis of gender) male dominance and patriarchy and who takes some action against it, is a feminist."²⁶ Kumari Jayawardane also defines feminism in a similar spirit. "Feminism is an awareness of patriarchal control, exploitation and oppression at the material and ideological level, over women's labour, fertility and sexuality, within the family, at the work place and in society in general and conscious action to transform society."²⁷ Thus, what is very significant in the South Asian perception of feminism is that it is not very different from the definitions provided by the western scholars.

For changing social reality in the present context, gender subordination, the need to change consciousness is recognized as a prime necessity. In fact, consciousness of women about their unequal status rights and social spaces has been one of the important items in feminist activism. There is an underlying presumption that feminist consciousness has to be generated by argument, dialogue, experience, exposure etc.

Today, when we talk of women's movement or need for removal of gender subordination in other socio-political movements, we recognize the need to develop feminist or pro-women's issue. It is problematic whether feminist consciousness presupposes awareness of self, personhood and experiencing discrimination. There cannot be uniform experiences of discrimination. What is important for us in the present context is to know that awareness to gender subordination can be experienced borne or movement borne or both.

1.4 PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN POLITICS

Political participation may be broadly defined as the activities by which members of a society share in the selection of rulers and directly and indirectly in the formation of public policy. The participation of women in active politics, which will be discussed here, is related to their economic, social and domestic status.

The lag in participation of women in politics is not surprising given the nearly total exclusion of women from political practice until the early twentieth century. "The great tradition of political philosophy consists, generally speaking of writings by men, for men and about men." ²⁸ Theorists like Aristotle, Rousseau and Mills who talked about the issue of citizen participation in political life either ignored women or gave them a very limited role. Theory paralleled practice and no nation recognized women as political beings until the last decade of the nineteenth century (when only New Zealand enfranchised women in 1893). ²⁹ The bulk of women's enfranchisement took place in the twentieth century, so that today, most countries have universal suffrage.

There are two main problems with this kind of theorizing. The first concerns the notion of politics or the political—a notion that is either ill defined or used quite loosely. After all, *what is politics?* Traditionally, politics has been equated with 'government' an equation that persists today amongst academicians and in the common man's perception. This definition would be discarded by the

feminist writers as being too narrow for them politics is about power, the relationship of domination and subordination between men and women. While this is a power relationship is it a political relationship? Perhaps, some definitions of politics as power may clarify this point. For, Max Weber, the initiator of the power politics school, 'politics' is striving to share power or striving to influence the distribution of power either among states or among groups within a state.³⁰ In his 'theories of the political system' Bluhm writes, "reduced to its universal elements, then, politics is a social process characterized by activity involving rivalry and cooperation in the exercise of power and culminating in the making of decision for a group."³¹ In both definitions we see that political power is a social not an individual unit. Women's struggle against male oppression becomes political when they emerge as a group that tries to influence the social distribution of power. Every power relationship in society is not a political relationship: Politics is about "authorities' allocation of values"³² and when women try to influence.

This allocation at the level of the group, one can call it a political effort. Therefore, within a family, a wife may influence her husband in many ways, may even have the power of decision-making, but as long as this does not become a practice applicable to a majority of women, one cannot call it a political effort as it has left the social distribution of power untouched. When women's efforts influence the distribution of power we can call their action 'political' otherwise not.

The second problem concerns women's participation in politics. Why should women affect decisions through male kin? Why should women's participation be vicarious? By doing this they are subscribing to an overall social ideology that sees men as powerful and women powerless. That is, formal power will always be in the hands of men and women can only influence their decisions. Moreover, in the modern age of domestic equality this kind of participation is limited to elite women only. It is also against the notion of equality, as women should assert themselves as individual citizens, on their own rather than through someone.

Therefore, the fact that there is a division between private domestic lives of women and public political lives of men is undeniable. For "as long as the domestic sphere remains female, women's societies, however powerful, will never be the political equivalents of men's, and as in the past, sovereignty can be a metaphor for only a female elite."³³ This can and should be changed. "If the public world is to open its doors to more than the elite among women, the nature of work itself will have to be altered and the asymmetry between work and the home reduced. For this we must ... bring men into the sphere of domestic concerns and responsibilities."³⁴

In recent decades, the notion of political participation has been expanded to include unconventional forms of political activity like protests, movements, revolutions, and the like. Therefore, amongst their modes of political participation, Verba and Nie include cooperative activity, which involves group

of organizational activity to deal with social and political problems.³⁵ This activity “is initiated by private citizens, may take place at any time and in relation to any types of issue or problem of concern to the group. It may involve activity within formal organization as well as informal cooperation among citizen.”³⁶

In essence, therefore, political participation includes all those activities by private citizens that seek to influence or to support government and politics, including the selection of government personnel and /or the actions they take. Political participation will be seen as attempts by individuals or groups to influence governmental decisions, to influence the power structure from within and without. This excludes participation in non-governmental spheres like family, school, workplace and the like. But it includes activities that are related to elections like organizing, and participating in, a protest rally or demonstration, membership of political parties, etc.

1.4.1 Factors Affecting Political Participation:

Keeping such ideas in mind a brief review of some of the findings in western democracies would be important. Political scientists have tried to discover the reasons for citizen’s participation/ non- participation in politics and have come up with three main correlates of political participation, social, psychological and political.³⁷

women Regarding social factors research findings show that (a) individuals who are highly educated are often more politically active than those with less educated, (b) individuals who are upwardly mobile in their society and who are attempting to improve their class standing may become active politically as part of their effort to move upward; and (c) an individual's age has some relationship to the levels of same types of political activity.

It is possible :
issues It is a common feeling in our country that social work and politics are wholly independent spheres of activity and these would remain so separated forever. Further, it is widely held that social work is nobles than politics hence honest persons, particularly must keep away from the political fields, if one is to preserve one's clean image. It is imperative to grasp the truth that all social problems finally are inevitably linked to political decisions of the powers that be; be it the question of passing legislation to curb atrocities on women or statutes or introducing reforms in child education or for eradicating the tradition of child-marriage or for that matter the question of introducing common civil code in this country. All these questions depend heavily for their solution on the political decisions of the rulers in this country whosoever they may be.

of the Chipko m
Uttar Gandhiji laboured restlessly for attracting the country's attention to problems of women and to secure for them a place of honour in society. He could enlist thereby the participation of women in distant villages in the national movement side by side with their educated counterparts in urban India. It is unfortunately true that Gandhiji did not succeed in equal measure in involving the

women folk of the socially backward communities in his national campaigns because of Ambedkar's unquestioned sway over their minds. Nonetheless the participation of this section of women in the various movements launched by Ambedkar is notable. Ambedkar's movement subsequently suffered a number of fissures within its ranks.

It is possible to cite many more agitations which took place on various issues in the post independence era in this country. The agitation for Samuyukta Maharashtra during 1956-60 is one of such example. The share of women in the numerous meetings, morchas and satyagrahas organized during this agitation was sizable and it changed the entire face of the movement. This spectacle was repeated during the Nav Nirman Agitation in Gujarat, which invented entirely new forms of Gandhian non-violent resistance. No wonder that their examples generated a new awakening in the length and breadth of Gujarat. The anti-corruption movement in 1974 in Bihar under Jayaprakash Narayan's leadership also saw growing participation of the women and generated a hitherto unknown wave of enthusiasm in the otherwise socially backward and uneducated women folk in Bihar. It is necessary in this connection to mention the glorious example of the 'Chipko movement' in 1980s, in the mountainous Tehri Garhwal district of Uttar Pradesh, launched by the noted Gandhian Shri Sunderlal Bahuguna against the wanton destruction of valuable forest in this region being carried on by the vested commercial interests. The women were simultaneously demonstrating their indomitable love for the green foliage and also their unmatched

organizational capabilities. The resolve shown by these unlettered women, never even remotely associated with the so-called 'politics' was astonishing.

In the early eighties, the Assamese women also showed their vigour in the Assam Movement in a similar fashion. Historically speaking, in the NorthEastern region of India, the Naga and Mizo women have always shown more social consciousness and activity. Thousands of housewives squatting in the streets for endless hours in the Assam Movement and braving the shower of police lathis and bullets was no ordinary event. This defiance had been the backbone of the relentless agitation carried on by the Assamese students for long. A number of instances can be found to prove that massive women participation in struggles against injustices is possible if the struggles are based on the Gandhian non-violent techniques.

The sense of efficacy develops with opportunities for participation. Democratic systems provide opportunities for participation. Effective participation of the people is an indicator of true democracy. Therefore, the institutional set up plays a major role in developing the sense of efficacy. The family, peer group, membership of various associations and political parties help in developing the sense of efficacy. As the institutional and associational affiliation help in developing the sense of efficacy, the absence of these may also retard it. But whatever may be the system, educated persons, being more efficacious, feel that have the capacity to mould the environment. Hence, irrespective of autocratic or democratic socialization experiences, the well-

educated person feels more politically competent than the less educated individual.

One important factor relating to women's participation and involvement in politics, which weakens the cultural barriers, is the socio-economic status. If the socio-economic status of the parents will be high the children get encouragement to be aware of the external environment, which creates interests in public and political activity. If the parents are active in politics the children get an opportunity to be exposed to the political environment. "The greater personal resources afforded by the higher income and educational attainment might be thought necessary if women have to overcome barriers, presumably created by sex role typing in the society."³⁸

Political communication and information are also indispensable for participation in politics. Political information is obtained through exposure to the outside world. Women's activity has been mostly confined to the domestic sphere where there is less or no chance of getting information. Therefore, women who rarely move out, do not attend educational institutions and do not have occupation outside may not get information. Lack of information will not provide stimulus for participation. Gender differences in participation may be attributed to this factor. Men even if uneducated or not having high socio-economic status has better chances to move outside. Educated and high status women, who have access to information, overcome this barrier. For those who have occupation outside, the access to information is still more. High status, education,

information, political discussions and interest of the parents are important factors for participation and involvement in politics. But in the case of women it is more important because of the cultural barriers in the society. An exposition of the background of women who participated in the freedom movement in India and those who are represented in the Parliament and State Legislatures would reveal that majority of them were from high status families having good education. Report on the Status of Women 1975 states that "majority of women candidates come from relatively well-to-do families with a sprinkling of members from old princely houses."³⁹

The second set of factors responsible for participation is purely political. The political environment of the country provides opportunities for coming out of the narrow domestic circle and participation in the larger public and political sphere. In the case of India, the interest to participate and involve intensively in the affairs of the state was created during the independence movement. It was during this period that a large number of people participated in support of a common cause i.e., the independence of the country. Women's participation in the movement was due to the efforts of Gandhi. The involvement of women in the pre-independence period led to the enactment of a series of legislations, which raised the status of women in the society. But the women who participated in the political process were mainly from high status families where the male members were active in the movement.

This trend has continued to prevail in the post- independent era. This is because of the continuing importance of kinship factors. The latter play an important role in getting into politics. The strong kinship factor makes it obvious that women political actors are related as daughter, sister, wife or widow or some other relation that makes their chances better for entry into politics and involve effectively. This is true also in case of men.⁴⁰

1.4.2 Determinants of Political Participation:

Political behaviour is an outcome of an individual's total personality. The external social environment provides the stimuli. An individual responds to such stimuli but his political attitude is an outcome of total personality and "his political opinions reflect the characteristic modes of his adjustment to life." *footnote?*

Democratic participation necessitates confidence in one's ability, a feeling of self-esteem, and efficacy. These psychological traits develop through participation. Political scientists have investigated in the course of their study the sources, distribution and effects of psychological characteristics like efficacy trust and interest. These characteristics serve as motivations to participate. They help in understanding 'personality traits for interest or disinterest in political participation. These traits develop as a result of participation in democratic institutions. The skills are learnt through participation. Sidney Verba, Norman Nie and Kim have stated that psychological resources of political involvement may be brought to bear on or be converted into political activity.

Political rights conferred by democratic systems serve as opportunities for the citizen to participate in politics. But if there are significant differences in resources and motivation, opportunities for participation can mean more inequality in participation. People with the resource and motivation skilfully use the opportunities available to them. Hence opportunities provided by the system may not enable all the groups to participate at the same level.

However, in order to understand 'why' and 'how' people get involved in politics, the approach should be (i) to know the characteristics of the political system and its effect on citizen's participation; and (ii) how citizen's participation affects the political system. Citizen's involvement in political activity is, therefore, an outcome of both the psychological and sociological factors.

1.4.3 Attitude towards Women's Participation in Politics:

Political participation determines the shape of political life. It is also a means for development and an indicator of development. The idea of democracy would flourish only when genuine and effective participation materializes. Attention to the problem of participation of women has become crucial in the light of, the present global situation, where an increasing awareness to do away with inequality, to bring about gender equality, to provide equal opportunity, irrespective of gender, in the sharing of resources and in the rule-making process has become the urgent demand of the day.

It has been observed that in almost all countries the removal of legal barriers to political participation failed to result in equality between the sexes in the political arena. In order to examine why removal of legal barriers failed to eradicate inequality one has to look at the existing social hurdles and the societal attitude towards participation of women in politics. Society in general, including women themselves, even politicians and political parties, create hurdles that prevent women from taking a more active and equal role in the political process.⁴¹

Actually, a negative cultural attitude towards women emerges as an important obstruction towards the participation of women in politics and it is considered mostly that politics is a 'man's job'. Indeed, the study of women's political participation will remain incomplete without an analysis of the attitudinal pattern of the society towards women's participation in politics.

Different researchers have sought to define 'attitude' in different ways.⁴² It has been observed that attitudes pertain to an internal state which affects an individual's choice of action towards some objectives, person or event.⁴³ All report points out that an attitude is a mental and neutral state of readiness organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related.⁴⁴ An attitude is not a behaviour by itself. Still, attitudes, especially feelings of party identification and feelings of political effectiveness, do appear to influence

behaviour. Moreover, attitudes affect the individual's acquisition of knowledge by influencing his selection of information.

In India we do not find any systematic study of societal attitude towards women's political participation. But very recently some empirical studies have been conducted on the political participation of women in India. One such investigative report was found in the article '*Women and Political Participation*'.

⁴⁵ The study seeks to examine the level of representation in legislatures and the extent and nature of their participation in polity. It has been observed in another case-study⁴⁶ that most of the rural and even many urban women do not have any idea of the existence of various laws and provisions which safeguard their rights. And the attitude of men in this respect has also not been changed. Except a few men from urban areas men are still reluctant to approve of equal rights for women. In fact, "Indian society in the later half of the twentieth century, does not look upon women's participation with sympathy and understanding".⁴⁷

It has been noted that this difference is due to the fact that political socialization of men is a continuing process, whilst most women, for a crucial period of their lives, roughly between eighteen and thirty-five years of age, operate in a more apolitical environment.⁴⁸ It is generally expected that younger people would have more positive attitude as far as women's participation is concerned. This pattern appears to hold good in most of the cases. All the men in the 18-20 age group do have a highly positive attitude towards participation of women in politics. Discrimination on the ground of sex is morally, legally and

democratically wrong and unwise. But sex equality can come about only when women make use of the full array of political weapons available to them to achieve it, that is political activity is essential to the struggle for women's liberation.⁴⁹

Political participation is a process of growth of citizenship. The main thrust in women's participation is how far they have assumed the role of citizens beyond their traditional roles and to what extent such a role has been legitimized to the political structure. Participation of women in politics is so important that modern western movements for women's rights started with the demand for "votes for women". This right is considered to be an essential precondition for entering the male-dominated world of political decision-making. The right of vote provides an individual with an important indirect opportunity to be the ruler of his own fate.

In India, the nationalist movement itself had a deep influence on women's participation. The roles of Mahatma Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu and Annie Besant are worth mentioning in this context. They all put emphasis on bringing women from household bondage to active politics. Gandhi declared himself to be 'uncompromising' on the question of women's rights. Sarojini Naidu urged women to utilize their housekeeping skills to put the 'national house' in order.

A change in the structures of society and the status of its political institutions affects involvement in political activity. In the present century a

number of states have attained self-rule and more and more people have become aware and assertive. Modernization means the industrial penetration in traditional societies (nations) with concomitant changes in their socio-political structures and cultural values. The predominance of primary institutions (family, village), give way to secondary institutions (voluntary organizations, unions, parties, state structures), face-to-face communications give way to mass communication, local autonomy to interdependence, tribal loyalties to national loyalties and so on. One of the consequences of modernization is an increase in the level of political awareness and political participation. The process of modernization itself creates conditions for increased political participation. Political modernization leads to democratic structures where the legitimacy leads to democratic structures.

In the literature on political development it is commonplace to speak of changing participatory patterns in the new nations. Myron Weiner says, "The process of modernization itself creates conditions for increased political participation, and if modernization continues to take place in the developing areas, we can expect both authoritarian regimes and representative governments to be challenged by new participants who want to share power."⁵⁰

Lerner distinguishes traditional societies from modern societies on the basis of participation.⁵¹ Almond and Verba declare that the New World political culture will be a political culture of participation.⁵²

Today, women's role outside the home is increasingly recognized. However, there still remains a conflict between the traditional family-oriented role and the modern participatory social or political role of the women. The major findings over the years have been that women participate less in political activities than do men. The question therefore, remains to find out the factors that prohibited or inhibited women from participating in politics. One of the important explanations offered by the scholars is that women have special family responsibilities that prevent their full participation in politics. It is a common assumption that the domestic duties of women, rearing of children and care of the household successfully compete with public affairs, interests and activity. Therefore, women whose domestic functions are greatest probably would be least motivated to participate in politics.

6.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In the present study an attempt has been to study the role of women in Naga politics. Politics is considered important for increased equality between the sexes. However, politics is neither the only source of discrimination against women nor the only source of potential power for achieving more equality. Nevertheless, it is the most important source of current discrimination and a potential avenue for dealing with many forms of gender discrimination.

Politics at every level of participation is considered to be the province of men. Women have not been regarded as part of the political arena and until recently it was considered to be quite normal. The reason offered for this phenomenon by the social scientists and by popular cultures is the women's disinterest in politics, originating in their early socialization, their incapability to assume political leadership role and their family responsibilities, which precluded political activity. This view overlooks the fact that women all over the world have now got the right to vote and also participate as workers in political movements.

Gender equality is a pre-requisite for effective participation of women in strengthening the institutional structure of democracy. The number of leadership positions at the local, regional and national level does not commensurate with their numbers in society. The inferior status of women in political institutions also results from the underlying biologism of male gendered policies for gender equality. The omission of women in positions of power seriously affects the

ability to challenge the subordination of women in all its manifestations. Women have to be in politics of power both to participate as women and to change the very nature of that power which serves to preclude women.

Women's participation in politics is very much related to certain important aspects of women's life such as marriage, family and employment. Needless to say, that there is no country in the world today, where women have equal status with men in all the major areas of life, family, health, reproduction, education, work, government and cultural expression. Although the opportunity for women to be politically active may differ across countries and societies the cause for active participation are often similar. The major obstacle to women's full participation in politics, education, employment and other important life activities is almost universal societal attitudes that value the domesticity of women.

Contrary to the belief that women participate less than men in political life, there is a greater pool of interested and qualified women who, if given the right opportunity, are capable of taking up more political responsibilities. Political subjugation is more due to the combination of prejudice against leadership role and the differential placement in the tracking system which makes it difficult for women to embark upon political careers. Further, their disadvantage in competing for power and prestige is least in those political systems where leadership rests on ability and where there is little separation between the domestic and public sphere.

In India broad based political participation of women has been severely limited due to varying traditional factors like the domination of Indian politics by considerations of caste, class, religion, feudal and family status, etc. all of which are essentially patriarchal and work in favour of men against women.

The present study, therefore, has attempted to study the role of women in Naga politics. The study has examined the participatory role of women in the ongoing Naga movement during a particular phase of its growth. In this sense, this is not the study of the status of women *per se* but their participatory role in Naga politics. The term Naga politics has been used here in the context of the Naga movement launched by the Naga National Council against the Indian State for achieving its political goal. In the process of the movement the Naga women were also organized under a group called the Naga Women Society within the organizational framework of the NNC. The Naga Women Society was quite active till the signing of the Shillong Accord of the 1975, which is considered to be a landmark in the history of Naga struggle. Given this broader outline the specific objectives of this study have been to trace historically the time and context of the participation of Naga women in politics, to understand the nature and extent of participation and commitment of women to Naga politics, and to assess the role played by the Naga Women Society in the Naga political movement.

The data for the present inquiry have been collected through primary and secondary sources. The primary data were collected through the interview schedule administered on those women who were part of the Naga Women Society and engaged in political activities up to 1975. The secondary data were collected from books, journals, newspaper articles and other relevant sources.

A sample of 100 women was drawn from the field to analyze the level of their political consciousness and participation in the Naga movement. Two broader categories of women were included in the sample. While 50 respondents were selected from among the members of the Naga National Council Women Society, another 50 respondents were activists of the NNC. The primary difference between these two categories of respondents is that the members of the NNC Women Society acted mainly as facilitators and served as a link between overground and underground activists. The women activists, on the other hand, were actually the participants in the underground struggles carried by the underground fighters. Thus it may be said that both categories of women were associated with the NNC political struggles but there was difference among them in the nature and extent of their participation in the struggle. The major issues emanating from the present study are listed below.

The present inquiry shows that the majority of the respondents are aged and belong to the age group of 61-70 years. It is further obvious that the number of women in the younger age group is relatively less. It may be because of the fact that the nature of movement itself started changing in subsequent phases. On

the whole, it is apparent that the association of women with the Naga National Movement is not only old but has also continued for long.

It has to be kept in mind that although Naga as such is considered a common category but practically it includes a large number of tribes. The individual tribal identity is so strong that a Naga identifies himself always in terms of his/her own distinct tribal group. Given the scenario it is clear that even in the present sample as many as thirteen tribes are represented. Our data support the general contention that six major Naga groups have played very dominant role in the Naga movement. They are Angami, Ao, Chakhesang, Sema, Lotha and Mao. Demographically, also these tribes have been dominant communities.

The movement has been quite widespread which is evident from the fact that a number of communities, which are located in different parts of the Naga territory, have also participated in the movement. For example, numerically Rengmas, Sangtams, Phoms, Yimjunger, Khianmongons are relatively smaller communities but they have also participated actively in the movement.

The educational pattern as reflected in our sample corresponds with the educational scenario in the present day Nagaland. The levels of literacy and educational attainments have been very low in Nagaland till recently. In fact, in the initial phase of the Naga National Movement in early 50s there were very small group of people who could get formal education. Naturally most of our respondents are illiterates or just literate. Regarding occupational background of

the families of the respondents it is evident that most of them came from the agricultural background.

The patterns of recruitment to the movement show that the younger people came to the movement primarily due to the persuasion of the community. It is a known fact that community and kinship relationship continues to be very strong in tribal society. Individuals are constantly under the influence of the latter. Sometimes the common members of the community even operate against their own wishes. They have to abide by the wishes of the community. In addition of this, the Naga National Council had floated several front organizations such as the Women Society, Youth Movement, Safe Guard, Home Guard, Naga army, etc. The NNC Movement assumed the militant character from the very beginning but most of the women joined the Women Society that worked overground and functioned as facilitators.

Another related question is the continuity of these members and activists in the movement. It is quite natural that the women activists could be actively involved for a limited period only due to their other family commitments. Of course, the age factor must also have been a constraint in continuing organizational activities for a longer period. The question of continuity with the NNC Organization is also reflected in the fact that whether they completely disassociated with them in subsequent phases or left it for good. Almost all the women have continued to be in the organization but only a few took active part

and most of them remained just members without actively participating in the day- to- day activities of the organization.

Arms training was not given regularly to women under the NNC dispensation. It is difficult to say whether it was some sort of discrimination between male and female members. But the pattern is quite visible in this regard. However, it is fascinating to note that in our sample there are a large number of women who were arrested by the Indian Army and Assam Police at different places in different times. They were sent to different jails and kept them shifting from one jail to another jail. They narrated numerous stories describing their plight in these jails.

The system of decision making in any organization under the situation of a movement is another important dimension to judge the role of various groups involved in it. However, this dimension was never a crucial point in the NNC movement since most of the participants of the movement were males. It is quite possible that the role of women in decision making in the movement must have been marginal. Nonetheless apart from the decision making, in rest of the political activities women played much better role than their counterparts. Women were not only facilitators but also the real mobilizers in the movement. In support of their argument regarding the active participation in political activities most of the respondents said that women formed the major force through which the problem could be attended to. The study further tried to find out whether women had experienced any difficulty in gaining access to the leadership role in

the movement. Many of them said that this question did not arise because women were not educated to assume such a role.

In order to find out whether there is any affect in the family with their active participation in the movement we specifically asked the respondents to narrate their experiences in this respect. We find interesting reasons and answers in this regard. It was important to find out whether the respondents had any other members in politics at different levels or the respondent herself was the first to enter the politics. They have given various answers about their entry in the politics. It is thus clear that most of the women joined the movement along with the other family members.

Attempt was also made to find out whether there was any separate demand concerning women issues. The study shows that the Movement never identified women's demands separately. The nature of equality between the male and female is an important aspect in any movement. The study shows that males were satisfied with the women's participation of in the movement. They considered them as equal partners in the movement.

The study further shows that funds for the movement were raised in different ways for supporting the activities of the movement. It is generally believed that in movements of this nature funds are always collected through illegal means. But our data contests such a contention.

We ascertained the names of some important women leaders of the Naga National Movement and details about profiles. Their names have been mentioned at the appropriate places.

Some of the open questions were also asked to find the individuals' opinion and attitude, concepts and notions about the problem being faced by the Naga society today and the Naga national movement. These issues are mentioned below:

Our respondents feel that the Naga Sovereignty should not yield to any other nations as we have declared independent one day prior to India's independence. We have adopted our own constitution and now we are waiting for the UNO decision. Every Naga should keep in mind the 16th May 1957 plebiscite and should not confuse with the Indian Constitutional framework, which is not a part of our country. The Naga issue of the political movement is not for the inclusion of Naga country in the Union of India. It is a free country since times immemorial and the Nagas are not Indians.

Regarding the conception of the Naga country the statements show that it is a "Free Country" outside the Indian Union we don't pay any tax to others. Naga political issues are quite different from other political issues in India. It has the people's mandate and our country has a clear geographical identity. It is also purely a country of the people, owned by the people, managed by the people. It was never ruled by any other sovereign nation. It was "Un-administered Territories" and "Excluded Area" in British India. Land belongs to the people, as

its neighbours never conquered private and personal property and Naga country.

Regarding the notion of individual liberty, the study clearly shows that an individual liberty is associated with the norms and values of society itself.

In this kind of movement one has to be very dynamic and intelligent to adopt different tactics. Our inquiry suggests that women are more competent to tackle the underground activities. But in certain kinds of underground activities both men and women have to play active role to tackle the situation successfully. In this sense they are interdependent. It is interesting to know whether any women had ever occupied high position in the organisation of the movement. Some respondents said that some women occupied high position in the intelligence wing of the organisation that is one of the topmost positions in the underground set-up.

A large number of women are still in the organization and some of them are just members as they have finished their terms while some of them discontinued due to family commitments while some of them became handicapped and aged. Thus even after such a long struggle in the Naga political movement women are still involved in the different activities at present. Apart from the problems that affect their day-to-day lives, it is also true that women have started taking interest in other public spheres. In this regard, respondents pointed out some of the major problems which the Naga society is facing today. They are- factional killings, extortions, tribalism, lack of unity among the leaders, and insecurity among the common people. These problems reduce the feeling of oneness among the people.

In conclusion, it may be stated that the Naga women participated actively in the movement, and did so not as women but as Nagas. They primarily identified themselves with the Naga national ideas and the gender dimension never assumed a crucial place in the politics. The commitment of the women towards the movement was basically determined by their ideas of political independence which had taken a definite shape during the course of the movement. It is because of this strong sense of attachment that Naga women continue to associate themselves with the Naga political struggle.

Further, it is pertinent to highlight that this study contests the prevailing understanding about the nature of women's full participation in politics. The study also indicates that women have actively participated in political activities inspite of gender inequalities. Thus, the study reveals that, although the path is never easy, with determination, perseverance and commitment women can work in partnership with men to achieve set goals.

While the present study has been one of the first few efforts towards understanding the Naga movement and the subsequent developments on the political arena, with special emphasis on the role of women, further research is required to examine the vexed Naga problem from other significant perspectives such as the role of women in the Naga peace process, or the role of Naga women towards reconciliation among the different factions involved in the Naga movement, to mention a few. The simple methodology adopted in the present study can be applied in such studies.

In final conclusion to the present study, it may be stated that a relevant dimension of the Naga movement and the degree of involvement of the Naga womenfolk has been highlighted. It is hoped that the present study will generate renewed interest and further research on the increasingly perplexing developments associated with the Naga movement. Indeed, the fact that further research on the contemporary Naga movement needs to be more responsive to ground realities cannot be overemphasised. Research on any aspect of the Naga movement presents a challenging area that is likely to remain so for quite some time.