

How to Cite:

Chakma, M., & Pandey, N. (2022). Women identity crisis in Northeast India: With special reference to village council of Mizoram, Nagaland and Meghalaya. *International Journal of Health Sciences*, 6(S5), 6094–6104. <https://doi.org/10.53730/ijhs.v6nS5.10192>

Women identity crisis in Northeast India: With special reference to village council of Mizoram, Nagaland and Meghalaya

Monalisha Chakma

PhD Research Scholar, Department of Political Science & Public administration, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar Tamil Nadu India- 608802
Corresponding author email: lisamona78628@gmail.com

Dr Neelam Pandey

Research Supervisor, Associate Professor Department of Department of Political Science & Public administration, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar, Tamil Nadu India-608002

Abstract--Women are essential to the advancement and development of society, and there is no development tool more effective than the empowerment of women. Despite this, the world continues to waste a precious resource due to the hysterical underrepresentation of women in leadership roles, which frequently results in the exclusion of women's talents and skills in political life. Even though they have made outstanding progress in many fields and are frequently considered to be more privileged than other Indian states, Nagaland, Meghalaya, and Mizoram are marginalized in the most crucial areas of life because their absence is considered in state-building processes like decision- and policy-making in government since the States' formation. Social identities and human rights violations are brought on by gender exclusion. The marginalized group, which includes minorities, women, and children, is largely excluded, which is regrettably a multifaceted phrase that encompasses social, economic, political, and cultural sectors. This paper is to examine the identity crisis of women as political leaders, policy makers in Village Councils of Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram particularly in Autonomous District Councils which is identified as part of the local governance in some States of Northeast India and it also seeks to find out the impact of no reservation seats and less reservation seats for women and reason which are binding them from achieving higher position and their equal rights in decision-making process. This paper is also to highlight the struggle of the women for their rights in patriarchal society at grassroots level as true democracy can be achieved with equal opportunity and by sanitizing in rural roots as well as to classify the implications and approaches, which would be beneficial and

bridge the gap for women in achieving their basic Constitutional rights, equality and justification.

Keywords--Women Marginalized, reservation, Gender exclusion, Equality, Decision-Making.

1. Introduction

In the political and legal spheres, there is significant disagreement over women's rights. One of the unpleasant events that has badly harmed contemporary civilizations is the identity crisis of women and other marginalized group. In order to address women's issues and promote universal equality, integration in the social, economic, and political spheres, as well as sustaining peace on the global stage, women organized programmes with the assistance of the United Nations. However, discrimination and marginalisation of women continue to exist in various fields, causing identity crises, despite the fact that local governments have been called upon to reform many approaches and policies to encourage the equal participation of women as decision makers. Political participation has not yet been recognised as a priority for women in many parts of the world, particularly in India's northeast. In the conversation about global development, gender equity and equality have become key issues. There can't be any genuine advancement. The advancement of democracy and women's fight against marginalisation, defamation and oppression depend on their involvement in political processes as the rise of women as a powerful group would alter political conventions as well. By providing 1/3rd reservations seats for women in Local Government and Panchayats, which have increased to 50% in many Indian states, as well as 1/3rd reservations for women as chairpersons in governmental offices, the constitutional provision 73rd Amendment has created a scope for achieving development with social justice and opening the door for the emergence of an alternative leadership for women. However, local civic bodies and village councils have been established in several Northeast Indian states where Panchayati Raj is not yet widely practiced, specifically in the form of Autonomous District Councils.

Northeast India is made up of the "Seven States" of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, Manipur, and Sikkim, which was most recently added to the list as one brother. This region is geographically isolated from the rest of India and shares a border with China, Myanmar, Bhutan, Nepal, and Bangladesh. There are states in Northeast India where Panchayati Raj has not yet been implemented, Local Civic Bodies, and Village Councils in autonomous district councils serve as local governments, and in these states, women have very limited power. This is case in Mizoram, where only one seat is reserved for women, and in some districts of Mizoram, like Lawngtlai, where the number of women serving as Village Council Presidents is very low and, in some blocks, there has not been a single Women President in Village Council. Therefore, this article focuses on the injustices, struggles, and difficulties women experience in upholding their status quo and fighting for their rights and inclusion in society as policymakers alongside men, not simply as business owners, office employees, and homemakers. It also serves to highlight the identity

crisis of women in politics and the decision-making process for the welfare state in Nagaland, Meghalaya, and Mizoram, despite the fact that women in these states have more access to opportunities in business, education, and women's organisation activities than their counterparts from the rest of the nation and the reason for their failure to secure significant representative seats which reflects the ongoing struggle for women's equality in patriarchal society.

2. Research Objectives

- 1) To examine the role of women in politics through Local Governance.
- 2) To examine the causes responsible for Women Identity crisis in politics.
- 3) To understand the difference measures of each States on women empowerment in Local Government

3. Materials And Method

The research is based on qualitative method. The study is based on secondary sources, which has been collected from journals, books, newspapers and internet sources, previous research papers, news outlets to study and highlights the unrepresented status of women in northeast states of India specifically in local bodies.

4. Discussion And Result

Local civic body and local village council of Mizoram, Nagaland and Meghalaya

According to the sixth schedule of the Indian Constitution, which certain states have recommended under the Community Participation Law (CPL), Local Council, Local Civic body, and Village Council are special institutions that operate at the local level in various parts of Northeast India. In states like Nagaland and Meghalaya, where women are completely barred from local bodies and where local civic bodies are predominately made up of male members and village headmen as its most likely known as Traditional Council rather than village Council in Meghalaya, the issue of women's reservation of seats in local civic has been an argumentative topic and discussion. Whereas, one female seat per five local council members is reserved for women in Mizoram, however this does not mean that women are limited to running for those seats. They can also contest in the unreserved seats along with other contestants. In Mizoram, there are eight more local council members than the required number of reserved seats.

The Village Council Act was passed in Nagaland in 1967. The Village Council's primary goal is to manage the village's development efforts. Through Village Development Boards (VDB), which were established primarily to oversee development initiatives, it ensures a district's relationship with the general public. The existing government structure in Nagaland is seen to be significantly influenced by Village Councils. According to the Nagaland and Area Council Act of 1978, everyone is required to abide by local customary laws of Nagaland, although village to village the functions are different, Village Councils serve as the highest authorities' body at the Local Governance System of Nagaland.

In Mizoram, the Village Council Act was passed in 1953 under the Lushai Hills District before its trifurcation to replace the traditional political institution. It was amended in 2014 to endow with new powers and duties, such as to formulate village development strategies. In Mizoram, the Village Council are formed in three autonomous district council, such as the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC), Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC), and Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC) under the Finance Commission.

Meghalaya has different form of Village Councils which function as local body of the State such as it is known as Village Durburs, rather than Village Council, a traditional institution at the local level that was established in Meghalaya in 2014 and serves as the village council, are responsible for development work and for resolving social issues.

Women identity crisis in local civic body of Nagaland

In Nagaland, Northeast India, there has been persistent opposition to the 33 percent reservation for women's involvement in public office and elections, which has prevented women from having a meaningful voice in the decision-making process and from speaking out in public. Since its inception as a federal unit within the Republic of India in 1963, Nagaland, a state in Northeast India with a population of 1.9 million, has managed its own civil and judicial issues. The Indian Constitution's Article 371(A) guaranteed the protection of Naga culture and customs, land ownership, as well as the maintenance of regional, social, and religious rituals, endowing male tribal councils and groups in Nagaland with tremendous influence. Long-standing marginalization of the gender justice and rights of women in Naga society has given rise to an ongoing discussion of women's rights. A stagnant and Patriarchal Naga culture has resulted from the repeated denial of 33 percent of the reservation. They have argued that traditional laws and customs that continue to bar women from positions of authority cannot be upheld as legal tools and institutions. The argument that Naga women peacefully hold key positions in nearly every field, including administration, medicine, engineering, academia, and successful entrepreneurship, is still under discussion. This is despite the fact that women are not allowed to participate in governing bodies or the state-building process. This reasoning explains why some political activists limit women's access and participation in decision-making labelled Naga women's calls for gender justice as "anti-Naga" moves. Additionally, tribal bodies and customary institutions claimed that supporting the 33 percent reservation for women was "anti-Naga" that defined the prevalent practice of tribal male bodies as an integral part of Naga culture. The cruel status quo of Nagaland is reflected in the fact that women are denied the authority and power to become decision-makers and are not recognized as equal members in traditional assembly and customary courts.

As Naga women suffered from starvation, misery, and humiliation since the 1950s, they aired their opinions and demanded justice and equality. Even though women and men both struggled for freedom during the insurgency, women were excluded as pioneer fighters, highlighting the stark gendered political divisions that have developed over the past ten years.

When justice, equality, and freedom in Naga society have endured in a small space where society as a democratic form becomes a question, equality as a fundamental pillar appears as unformulated. As of now, Ms. Rano Shazia is the only female delegate chosen by councils and ancient customs. Orphans, widows, young people without jobs, senior citizens, and a sizable portion of the population who are oppressed are among the marginalized groups who are unable to participate in discussions about the welfare of society. Like any other culture in the globe, Naga society has been stereotyped as being more characterized by patriarchy, economic injustice and gender violence. Women have to ask the male members for permission before speaking about gender justice, objectifying Naga women as solely housewives, and indicating that they would never be accepted as political figures to sit in on tribal councils or use customary courts. Naga women are still viewed as unfit to hold a position in the tribal assembly and are only used as a prop in photographs taken after public sessions.

Nagaland women excel in all areas, but they are underrepresented in politics, most specifically in local bodies due to customary and traditional laws, due to which gender equality appears to be waning. This is unexpected in a state where women's employment engagement is seen both in rural and urban areas. Nagaland has one of the lowest rates of crime against women nationwide and greater than the national average is the literacy rate for women. According to the National Family Health Survey-5, women in Nagaland have complete freedom to make their own decisions regarding their health, social lives. In addition, to the state government's economics and statistics department's annual administrative report for 2019–2020, Nagaland has a high proportion of women working in the public sector—30.35 percent. However, despite these figures on gender equality, women have not been given more political clout. This is largely due to the Naga society's continued adherence to traditional norms that firmly define gender roles. Domestic issues, such as those involving the family, are primarily a woman's responsibility. The larger positions in Village Administration are typically given to men though 25% of the seats are set aside for women in the village development boards, a Nagaland-specific statutory body that reports to the Village Council, the traditional village government, they are still adhere to report to male leaders and members. Therefore, the reservation for women seems vague and more of a symbolic and existence only in writing. Male rationale for the gender prejudice' pervasiveness is that women are not very open to participating in politics as pointed by HK Zimomi, president of the Naga Hoho, the apex body of the Naga tribes. “It is not that the tribal bodies are against women’s participation in politics. They themselves are generally reluctant to take leadership roles”

Blockage to Naga women rights in 2017

When the then-Nagaland government intended to reserve 33% of the seats in urban local bodies for women, the state erupted in violent protests in 2017. The male-dominated tribal bodies raised the most complaints, claiming that the reservation would violate the customary laws. The state government had to reverse its decision as a result of the demonstrations. However, recently on April 2022, there has been discussion on seat reservation for women in civic bodies as it has approved during a consultative meeting between the state government and the tribal groups in beginning of 2022, there was a new glimmer of optimism for

women, though it's still not implemented yet. Therefore, the path to political emancipation for women in Nagaland will not be easy despite the developments. The state government has already been asked to reconsider its decision to reserve seats in the ULBs for women by the joint coordination committee, an umbrella group of many tribal organisations that led the 2017 uprising against the reservation.

Women representation and their identity crisis in village council of Mizoram

In Mizoram, women's organizations served as a food and medical supply chain and cared for the families of MNF fighters throughout the insurgency, which were times of social and political upheaval. In order to give women, the chance to lead community organizations and civil society organizations and change the state by promoting equality, humanity, and women's empowerment, especially in the political and religious spheres, political parties and church bodies carefully considered the 33 percent seat reservation for women in political parties and churches. However, there has been a misperception that women cannot occupy a position in ruling the state because they are regarded to be weak and sensitive individuals, and little-known women in Mizoram are regularly condemned by the public if they agitate for their political rights. As a result, Mizoram, the second state in northeast India to undergo a women's identity crisis after Nagaland, is less ideal as a democratic state.

Women in Mizoram have been voting in the Village Council (VC) elections proactively and as a result, many of them demonstrate their aptitude and leadership in running the affairs of society. In Mizoram, there are 5,38,675 more females than males, yet as of now, there is just one MP from the female population. The majority of shops in streets and on the sides of the road are run by women in Mizoram, despite the fact that women have the opportunity to enjoy their independence and individuality as masters of not only household tasks but also outdoor economic activities. However, despite having this opportunity, women lack political participation as significant representatives, making it seem as though there is no place for women in Mizoram Governance in terms of decision and policy makers as only a small number of women in politics have been nominated from grass roots level. In terms of electoral law, Mizoram has a better situation for women than Nagaland since they took the effort to elect a small number of women to various levels of government and ensured that they were treated with respect by their male counterparts in those roles. Because of their inferiority complex outside of the home and the patriarchal nature of Mizoram, women are reluctant to get involved in politics. The majority of women are happy to vote during elections, outnumbering their male counterparts, but they are unaware that their participation goes beyond voting. Instead of just participating in elections, they are not ready and unempowered to build a society, institutions with solid walls in equal participation with men in main arena of democracy. Limiting themselves to become political leaders who develop state policy for decentralisation and engage actively in politics due to lack of confidence and academic qualification.

Women in the Village Councils of the three Autonomous District Councils have gradually, but with too little participation, entered the formal decision-making

bodies where patriarchy still dominates people's lives across the district council. One seat is set aside for women in Village Council, a form of local government in the State run by the Finance Commission. However, additional seats may be acquired without regard to the seat reservation. Major focus area for the study is The Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC) and the Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) two autonomous district councils in the Lawngtlai district, which is divided into four rural development blocks. Chawngte has 84 village councils, Bungtlang S has 39 village councils, Lawngtlai has 27 village councils, and Sangau has 19 village councils. There are only a few female village council presidents in each district and block. For example, in the Chakma Autonomous District Council, which has 87 village council members and 87 female members elected through a single seat reservation policy, there is currently no female Village Council President because the only female President was ousted by the ruling political party through a no-confidence vote. Women are underrepresented in Village Councils of Mizoram because the village president distributes most of the funds and oversees the main projects as women are still reluctant to serve as president owing to lack of confidence, knowledge, and insufficient training. Women are largely excluded from major developmental projects and frequently fall under the corruption of the ruling party as they "the ruling party" interfere in decision making while implementing any developmental work and distributing funds. The majority of village council members in the Lai District actively participate in the election process during the campaign as nominated members and as voters but refuse to hold the higher post due to pressure. Women, especially those from outlying areas, have trouble receiving their share of benefits and salaries due to difficulty in commutes to district's sub-headquarters while spending their own travel expenses falling into debt. Due to home responsibilities, lack of education, and lack of experience, women typically hesitant to take on such a significant role as Village President as the president is responsible for all office work, which requires a proper training, knowledge, awareness on basic rules and regulations of Village Council functionalities and duties, ability to read and write English, due to which women members feel not suitable to be a leader of the village to lead the society. Women in general, ask for nominee tickets in the region, specially in village council due to small amount of salary, lack of benefits, opportunity, women are demotivated to participate as member for second term.

In regards to State legislature, although in 1994, K. Zapari a MP made significant contributions to the development of her community after she was elected and even got re-nominated, she was unable to occupy the elected seat until Ms. H. Remhnuni came to the forefront in the 7th election, occupying one seat out of the total of five seats. Unfortunately, women were excluded from major elections in all autonomous district councils and in Mizoram in general. There is also lack of public trust in women and assumes they can never run for office or serve on a decision-making body, there are very few female candidates for Village Council President. Women never won an elected office or held the positions of CEM, EM, Chairman, or deputy chairman of LADC in any of the elections, which clearly shows that women are severely underrepresented in Lai District politics.

Women have historically been underrepresented in politics in the Mara Autonomous District Council and have continued to be so. However,

unexpectedly, only one woman won an elected position in the first election, and from the second to the fifth, there was a perceived lack of women in elected and nominated positions, while in the Chakma Autonomous District Council, only men served as representatives from its first election in 1972 until the sixth election, when two women, Ms. Snehadini Talukdar and Ms. Arati Chakma, were elected and nominated for the first time in history, respectively. It is believed that the majority of women who were elected or nominated for office had close ties to male positions, which gave them the chance to enter politics and reflect the region's male dominance and typical or, per se, patriarchy with conventional values and views.

Only one woman out of the 40 elected legislators who shape the future of the state were women in the 2018 election. In Mizoram, women are active and play a significant role in all aspects of daily life, including managing hotels and restaurants, operating companies of all sizes, operating vehicles and scooters, holding high official positions in both public and private agencies, and serving as homemakers, there is not a single prominent woman leader in Mizoram, they are still struggling to climb the political ladder because they are not given enough opportunities and exposure to rise with proper training, awareness programme and regular monitoring system at the village level to empower them to take part in responsibility. As a result, they are neglected in the State's largest decision-making body, both in the legislative assembly and at grassroots level of Local Government. Female who has become MDCs in the area claimed to be closely connected to male politicians, giving them the opportunity to enter politics through their influence.

The methodical mapping of discourses and descriptions of "inclusion" and "exclusion" at all levels, which are fully verbalized by people in power, is necessary to comprehend the intricate state-building process in Mizoram. In contrast to mainland India, this region's statecraft and policies show a detached narrative.

Women identity crisis in local village council of Meghalaya

Meghalaya is another state listed on the sixth schedule of the Indian Constitution. It contains three autonomous district councils, including the Garo Hills, Jaintia Hills, and Khasi Hills, all of which were established in 2014, There are no single women serving as the president or members in village council of the state, such as the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council, which has 30 constituency and no single women are still appointed as the traditional laws are still prevalent in the State, they don't consider the village council part of local government, rather they are more adherence to Traditional Council excluding women to participate in any form of the local government. The village assembly plays a crucial role in women's issues because the leader of the assembly has both legislative and judicial authority. The village assembly is the State's lowest tier of government. A male village headman is in charge of each village unit. He is chosen to serve on the village council, which is made of adult males from each household. The village headman is responsible for preserving tranquilly and harmony in his particular hamlet. He can summon defaulters and penalize them. He is the arbitrator in all disputes. The village council makes decisions and plans all of the village's

communal operations. Women in Meghalaya are thought to be more empowered and in better positions than women in the rest of the nation. By virtue of the matrilineal principle, women have authority over their offspring. Women have the right to own property and can actively or passively engage in social, religious, and political affairs through female-only offices. However, given the traditional structure of both Khasi and Garo civilizations, political and administrative concerns are regarded as men's domains.

Meghalaya's matrilineal society, women play no active roles in society. In the Garo Hills, women were not permitted to participate in any council meetings, whether they were at the village or state levels. They are forbidden from participating in or speaking at any public gathering those deals with local or national politics. A woman appearing on a political platform is frowned upon. They are not permitted to be nominee in any elections for the position of traditional chiefs, as per customary custom. In the Garo Hills and Khasi Hills is in discussions about seat reservations for women at the village level community foundations have arisen on rotational basis to by, Conrad K. Sangma in 2020 to empower women in enabling them as decision makers and bridging the gap of gender inequalities at grassroots level it was based on the result of the women's administration's remarkable progress in advancing society and sanitizing the villages through equal participation in decision-making processes regarding cleanliness, societal abuse issues, children's education, raising funds for socio-economic development, and maintaining democracy at the grassroots level through inclusive government. The Autonomous District Council of Meghalaya has various types of Village Councils that are enumerated with traditional rural roots and customary law as a result of which only men become the President and women have no place in politics despite being given equal opportunity to hold positions in government administration, be it public office, schools, colleges, etc. They are completely excluded from decision-making in society.

5. Conclusion

Nagaland, and Mizoram have male-dominated societies where it is challenging for women to hold influential positions in politics. This causes identity crises in women since they are unable to participate in the formulation of state policy and are frequently denied political space. Whereas in Meghalaya's distinctive matrilineal society, women still have very little influence and none at the local level of government because they are not eligible for seat reservations to run for office, a crucial component of achieving sustainable democracy at the local level. In all three states, women contribute significantly to society through their labour, but only a small number of them are given the opportunity to run for State democracy, such as in Mizoram through one seat reservation at the village level, limiting women power in politics, while in Nagaland and Meghalaya, male traditional and customary councils outright forbid them from holding elective office. They are thus prohibited from participating in power politics despite making substantial contributions to the state's economy and social life.

It has been noted that in Mizoram, political party members have reported that women rarely request tickets and that those who do are typically disqualified as candidates. Therefore, women must be encouraged through awareness,

empowered through providing recognition, and supported by being given liberty in a way that they can demand in order to become strong political and community leaders. Gender equality is very essential in every aspect to achieve global sustainability, development goals, and the true concept of democracy. In order to provide women in Nagaland with a fair opportunity, Nagaland should repeal Article 371(A) of the Constitution, which prevents them from holding political office, which is a crucial component of a state's decentralization. Researchers have shown that in order to achieve global development goals and create strong, sustainable democracies, women must be supported in becoming powerful political and community leaders. Though there is a significant change and improvement for women's participation and involvement in local government in all three States, yet there are many contradictions and inconsistency, restraining women to achieve their equality. Even while women in our culture are treated equally, they nevertheless require some assistance in areas like electoral politics where they haven't previously dabbled as benefits of having both men and women participate equally in positions of leadership and decision-making have been extensively demonstrated around the world with positive respondents. In all local government, Panchayat like principles should be adopted with 50% reservations seats with awareness programme of good leaderships, necessity, salary hike, regular monitoring system specifically in remote areas.

These local bodies need to be sanitized, and policies need to be reform in order to achieve a true democracy through formation of equal administrative system and for justifying basic human rights for women as decision makers as despite the fact that many women are recognized as political leaders around the world and for their good contributions to society, they are frequently ignored, let alone detested and excluded.

6. Conflict of interest and Funding: Nil

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