

**WOMEN AND POLITICS IN NAGALAND: A GEOGRAPHICAL
PERSPECTIVE****Nazim Nazir¹ & Uttam Namdeo Gadhe²***Research scholar, University of Mumbai, Kalina, Santacruz Mumbai.**Assistant Professor & Head, Department of Geography,**K.M.C college Khopoli Dist- Raigad (MS)**Corresponding Author: Uttam Namdeo Gadhe***DOI - 10.5281/zenodo.14375259****ABSTRACT:**

Politics in India is predominantly perceived as a male-dominated sphere where women have a limited role to play. Despite the Indian constitution guaranteeing equal rights for both genders, women remain significantly underrepresented in the country's political landscape. In Nagaland, women constitute nearly half of the electorate; however, entrenched patriarchal socio-cultural values and practices have resulted in their exclusion from political representation. The present paper attempts to examine the twin role of women in Nagaland electoral politics, encompassing their roles as both voters and representatives. The secondary data source was utilized in present study, which was analyzed and interpreted using different statistical and cartographic techniques. Findings reveal that, despite a higher voter turnout rate among women in the state assembly elections, there has been no female representation in electoral matters since independence, until two women made history by becoming the first MLAs in Nagaland's legislative assembly in 2023. Relative to the national average, Nagaland exhibits a more favourable gender balance in voter turnout, with an average of 80.15% female participation in assembly elections. This paper recommends that the government should take proactive initiatives and develop realistic policy measures for the Implementation of the Women's Representation Bill to encourage the active participation of women in political institutions, particularly at the grassroots level- an urgent necessity for Nagaland's political landscape.

Keywords: *Women Politics, Voter Turnout, Gender Equality, Representation, Women's Reservation.*

INTRODUCTION:

Democracy is said to be a form of political equality in which all voices are heard. The true meaning of Democracy could be attributed only when women are uniformly treated in political affairs of the country as representatives. But less we see this

trend as in most countries of the world in contrast to men, women are typically seen as diplomat in the national-level parliaments. They have emerged as the highest vote bank in general and state assembly elections, yet they play a marginal role in the decision-making process of a country. The Constitution

of India guarantees sisterhood to women in the country's administrative setup under the article 14, 15, 15 (3), 16, 39 (a), 39 (b), 39 (c) and 42 (Kumar, 2022). Despite constitutional efforts to ensure the rights of women in the public domain, including electoral affairs, their representation in the decision-making process remains backward even after 78 years of independence. As of 2024, according to IPU (Inter-Parliamentary Union) data, the global average of women in parliaments is 27%. But while analyzing the position of India in terms of women representation, currently only 13.6% of Lok Sabha MPs and 13% of Rajya Sabha MPs are women's.

The present study is confined to the participation of women's in the political arena of Nagaland. In the Naga community, women enjoy a comfortable status as they are cherished with respect and dignity in many aspects of life. Nagaland performs better among other Indian states in terms of increased literacy, low crime and domestic violence against women. But when examining the political arena of naga women, there is a minimal role for them in the administrative and other decision-making power of the state. Despite making up 48% of Nagaland's population and 50% of the registered voters, the condition of women in the state's political arena is worrying as historically women have not held a

single seat in the state's legislative assembly (Pengon, 2022). In Naga communities, gender stereotyping is largely constrained by social norms as they believe women should be confined to household activities. (Amer, 2014) has examined that although in Nagaland women constitute almost half of the registered voters of the state, they have been able to manage their political supremacy only as voters not as representatives. In the political history of Nagaland, not even a single woman has been designated as a member of the state legislature. This is due to Naga's traditional culture which hinders them from joining the mainstream.

In contemporary politics, voter turnout analysis is often overshadowed by the study of public perceptions and voting behaviour. Voting behaviour is an important aspect that determines the perceptions of people against any individual or political party. In Nagaland, this behaviour is heavily influenced by patriarchal values and traditional customs. Toshimenla Jamir (2012) asserts that Naga women lack independence even in their voting choices. Their preferences for candidates or parties are shaped by patriarchal social norms, as well as by personal, kinship relations, economic factors and family pressure. Ojha (2014) points out that despite a high turnout of female voters, the socio-cultural context in Nagaland effectively excludes women from decision-making roles, limiting

their political engagement. They generally believe that woman is restricted to household entities such as family responsibilities, and domestic chores and thus have no role in politics. This patriarchal mindset not only undermines women's confidence but also acts as a barrier to their representation in the Legislative Assembly, perpetuating the notion that electoral politics in Nagaland will remain male-dominated. Historically, no woman has ever won a seat in the Nagaland state assembly, although Salhoutuonuo Kruse and Hekani Jakhalu made history in 2023 by becoming the first female candidates elected as MLAs, both representing the Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP).

Several socio-cultural aspects are considered while selecting women candidates as representatives. (Kenworthy & Malami, 1999) has examined that besides political, socioeconomic, and cultural factors, structure of the electoral system in the country, left party government, women's share in professional occupations, and cultural attitudes toward the role of women in politics, all contribute to gender discrimination in political representation around the world. The same is true in the Naga community, where women often lack support and sympathy from Political parties which tend to prioritize male candidates due to cultural and hereditary barriers.

Naga women perform better in other spheres, but when pertaining to politics, they largely remain invisible. Despite their involvement in elections as a representative, they still remain underrepresented in legislative bodies at both the national and state levels. This marginalized situation among women is prevalent in the Parliamentary elections too. Since the State's formation in 1963, only one woman, Rano M Shaiza, served in Parliament in the year 1977 (Sharma, 2022). However, in 2022 Phangnon Konyak made history by becoming the first woman to represent Nagaland in the Rajya Sabha. (Christina Rame and Bhat, 2024) have investigated the trend of women's involvement in Nagaland elections, revealing a conflict between two constitutional provisions: Article 371A and Articles 243D and 243T. Article 371A grants Nagaland special status to preserve its tribal culture, while Articles 243D and 243T mandate a 33% reservation for women in panchayats and municipalities nationwide. She concluded that these contradicting constitutional laws contribute to the absence of female representatives in Nagaland. (Das and Chubatila, 2022) further emphasize that not only the Nagaland people should be blamed for all this, but the constitutional and state governmental laws, particularly the Village Council Act of 1978, that hinder women's political representation.

Contemporary politics at the global level acknowledges the need of increasing women's engagement in politics to eradicate gender disparity in the policy-making process of the country. The essence of fostering women's participation as a representative is to make women independent and empower them. Not only at the world level but also in India, reservations and Gender quotas have significantly improved women's political representation. (Jan, 2024) notes that the introduction of reservation policies has led to a marked rise in female candidates as representatives at the state level. Parween (2014) has highlighted the triumph of the women's reservation bill in the Panchayati Raj institutions of the country. Women have achieved notable success in Bihar's Panchayat holding 54% of Panchayat seats, and are doing phenomenally well in states like Sikkim, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan. The paper suggests that the government should take proactive initiatives and create effective policy measures to implement the Women Representation Bill, which aims to reserve 33% of seats for women—an urgent necessity for Nagaland's political landscape.

STUDY AREA:

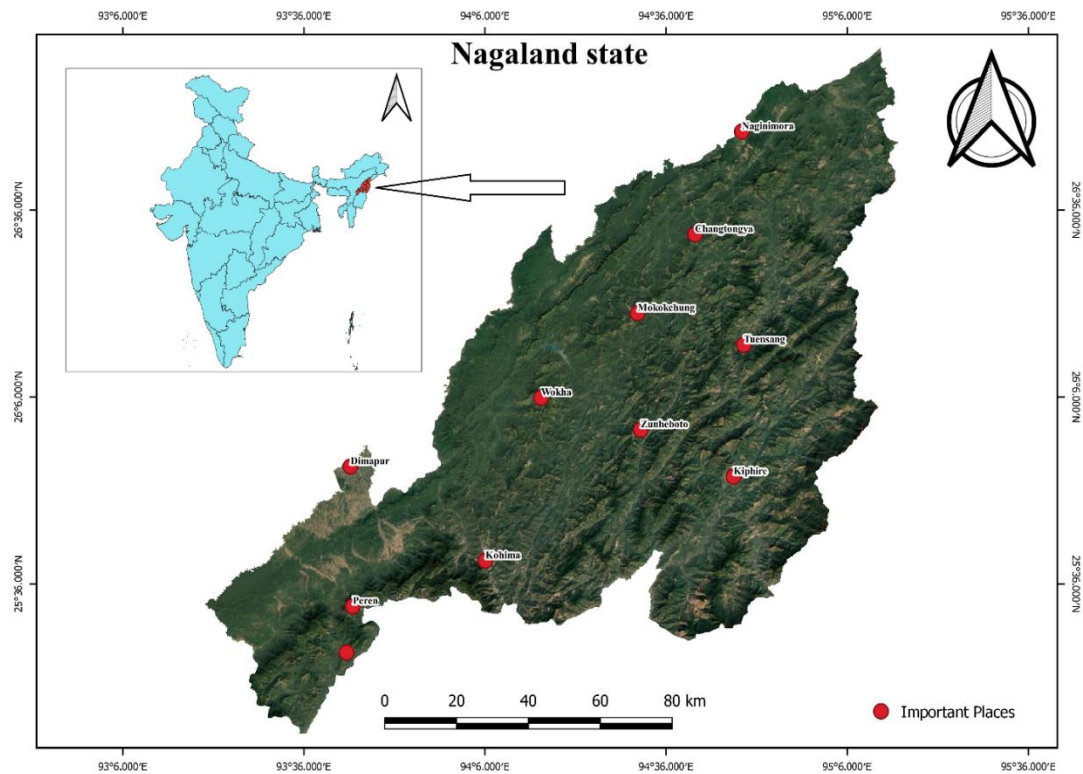
Nagaland, one of the seven sisterly states in the north-eastern region of India has been selected as the

study region of the present study. It is surrounded by Manipur to the south, Assam to the west, Arunachal Pradesh to the north, and Myanmar (Burma) to the east with Kohima being the capital of the state. The latitudinal and longitudinal extents of the state lie between 93°20'E to 95°15' E and 25°6' and 27°4' N respectively. On December 1, 1963, it was formally established as the 16th state of the Indian Union. The state is renowned for its biodiversity and rich cultural legacy, and it is distinguished by its rugged topography. It constitutes 16 administrative districts and 60 Legislative assembly constituencies. The state's most well-known attractions are the Hornbill Festival and the Japfu Peak, which receive the most visitors each year.

With pleasant climate throughout the year, the climate of the state, in general, is controlled by its terrain features possessing subtropical to sub-temperate type of climate. Temperatures usually range from 21 to 40°C throughout the year. In winter, temperatures do not generally drop below 4°C (39°F), but frost is common at high elevations. The average rainfall of the state varies between 1,800–2,500 millimetres with greater concentration from May to September. Talking about the social and demographic aspects, Nagaland has an agrarian economy with about 70% of the population depending on it in terms of occupation. The state's population according to the census

2011 is 19.79 lakhs, making it one of the least populated states in the country. As per the census of 2011, the average literacy rate of Nagaland (79.55%) was greater than the national average

(72.98%). In fact, Nagaland performs better than the national average among all domains i.e. male, female and average literacy rates.



Source: Generated by author.

METHODOLOGY:

The research also aims to examine the twin-fold attributes of Nagaland’s women in the state legislative assembly i.e. as a voter and representatives. Based on the research objectives of the current study, secondary data was collected from the website of the Election Commission of India, New Delhi. Besides data was also gathered from various articles, websites, journals, publications and books. The collected data was analyzed and interpreted using statistical methods

and then presented through cartographic techniques. The scope of the present study is confined only to Nagaland state. However, one may follow the present methodology to investigate the political prominence of women in other regions.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To analyze the women voter turnout in the Nagaland state assembly elections.
2. To investigate the political arena of Nagaland women in politics.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS:

Voter Turnout in the State Assembly Elections (1964-2023):

Women’s active involvement in the electoral affairs of a country is a strong sign of the efficacious growth of democracy. Voter turnout is simply the measure of the percentage of registered voters who actually exercised their voting rights during an election period. However, higher voter turnout is usually perceived as a sign of people’s willingness to take active participation in the electoral affairs of the state, while low turnout can be attributed to

mistrust and non-willingness of the people with the political setup.

In Nagaland, although Women actively participate in electoral politics, their representation in various democratic institutions of the state has been historically meagre. Assembly election data of Nagaland from 1962 to 2023 have been conferred below which indicate that usually in other states of the country domination of men in the total electorate compared to women can be perceived but in Nagaland assembly elections, the opposite is true.

Table 1: Nagaland state assembly election and Voter turnout from 1964-2023.

Assembly election	Total votes	% age of total voter turnout	Total male voters	Total female voters	Male Who voted	Female Who voted	Difference in turnout
1964	124166	50.51	-----	-----	41331	21388	-----
1969	176931	78.37	93829	83102	71751 (74.47%)	66907 (80.51%)	-6.01
1974	2400322	74.35	224166	176156	161166 (71.90%)	136464 (77.47%)	-5.57
1977	398035	83.26	214812	183223	176606 (82.21%)	154795 (84.48%)	-2.27
1982	596453	74.44	330290	266163	240272 (72.75%)	203700 (76.53%)	-3.78
1987	581953	84.53	319379	262574	266023 (83.29%)	225878 (86.02%)	-2.73
1989	582416	85.65	320611	261805	273654 (85.35%)	225168 (86.01%)	-0.66
1993	802911	91.53	421250	381661	387446 (91.98%)	347489 (91.05%)	0.93
1998	926569	22.21	487721	438848	110462 (22.65%)	110462 (21.72%)	0.93
2003	1014841	87.85	529477	485364	474181 (89.56%)	417316 (85.98%)	3.58
2008	1302266	86.19	666391	635875	573021 (85.99%)	549362 (86.39%)	-0.4
2013	1198449	90.19	608299	590150	541919 (89.09%)	538968 (91.33%)	-2.24
2018	1176432	83.84	597281	579151	487832 (81.67%)	498561 (86.08%)	-4.41
2023	1305339	88.09	655355	649984	554485 (84.60%)	570972 (87.84%)	-3.24

Source: Chief Electoral officer, Nagaland: Kohima.
 (-) sign indicates women voters outnumbered men.

Naga women have played a key role as voters since the first state assembly election. Compared to their male counterparts, a greater concentration of women in the state are casting their ballots more frequently. One can comprehensibly see from the table above that women are more likely to pursue their right to vote in state assembly elections. More participation in electoral politics may be as a result of the higher literacy rate among females. The data reveals that almost in all the state elections of Nagaland women voters outnumbered men. A look at the average voter turnout percentage figures reveals that the voter turnout in state assembly elections of Nagaland has remained at 77.21 %. When computing for average male and

female turnout it remained at 78.11% and 80.15% respectively.

It is interesting to note here that, except for the year 1998 when female voter turnout remained below 22 %, the same remained above 70 % during the rest of the state assembly elections. This low voter turnout in the 1998 Nagaland Legislative Assembly elections can be ascribed to disillusionment with the democratic process that discouraged voters from participating, which was due to several factors, including ethnic issues, the influence of insurgency, voter apathy, and the boycott of the polls by The [National Socialist Council of Nagaland](#) and the Naga Hoho, (a tribal body).

Figure 1.1: voter turnout in state assembly elections of Nagaland (1964-2023).

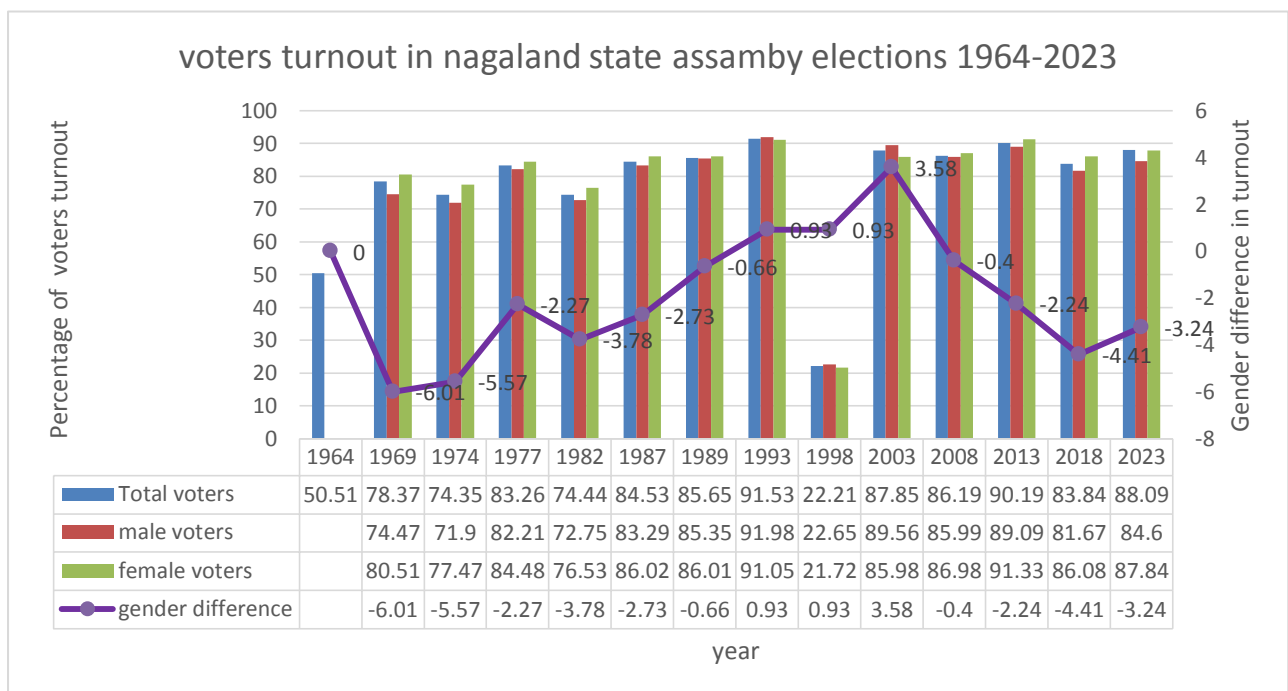


Figure 1.1, reveals that the participation rate among females in the 1964 state assembly election was 50.51% which substantially increased up to 87.84% in 2023. When analyzing the data of male voters during the same period, male turnout increased from 74.47% to 84.6%. In 2013 highest women's voter turnout of about 91.33% was recorded. In fact, the turnout rate among women's has remained high almost in all the elections except in the 1993, 1998 and 2003 elections. Compared to other parts of the country electoral participation among females especially in Nagaland state assembly elections has always remained high. On average female voter turnout during all the general elections remained at 80.15%, which is fairly impressive.

Similarly, while analyzing the gender differences in terms of voter turnout the data revealed that compared to the national average, gender differences in voter turnout were very low in the state. As compared to the male population, a greater number of female voters are casting their vote in the Nagaland state assembly elections. The negative (-) sign with the gender differences in the table represents the greater concentration of women voters who actively cast their vote, while the positive (+) sign indicates vice-versa. In 1969, the highest gender differences in terms of voter turnout was recorded (-6.01%) indicating more female electorates

casted their vote than male counterparts. Alternatively, the least gender differences were recorded in the year 2008 when it was only -0.4%. Thus, we can conclude that there is no appreciable gender disparity in voter turnout between males and females.

Representation of Women in the State Assembly Elections (1964-2023):

Indian politics is said to be gender biased due to the paucity of political voice and poor electoral representation of women in politics. (Agarwal 2006). Like India, Politics in the state of Nagaland has heavily remained male-dominant. Although female electoral voters represent almost 50% of registered voters, their representation is unsatisfactory in assembly elections of the state as they are under-represented. The total elected members of the Nagaland legislative assembly make up 60 seats, women representation has never reached greater than 4 per cent in the state's parliament. This clearly indicates that in Nagaland politics, women are usually seen as a voter and not as representatives. Since the formation of the state only two women's have been represented at parliament, one in 1977 when Rano M Shaiza, became a member of the Lok sabha Parliament and in 2022 when Phangnon Konyak created history by becoming the first woman of Nagaland to represent the parliament at the Rajya Sabha.

Table 2: Electoral representation of women in the Nagaland assembly elections from 1964-2023.

Year	Total Seats	Number Of Contestants			Elected Candidates		Percentage Of Elected Candidates	
		Male Candidates	Female Candidates	Total	Male	Female	Male	Female
1964	40	70	0	70	40	0	100	0
1969	40	142	2	144	40	0	100	0
1974	60	219	0	219	60	0	100	0
1977	60	204	0	204	60	0	100	0
1982	60	244	1	245	60	0	100	0
1987	60	211	3	214	60	0	100	0
1989	60	140	0	140	60	0	100	0
1993	60	177	1	178	60	0	100	0
1998	60	80	0	80	60	0	100	0
2003	60	222	3	225	60	0	100	0
2008	60	214	4	218	60	0	100	0
2013	60	185	2	187	60	0	100	0
2018	60	190	5	185	60	0	100	0
2023	60	180	4	184	58	2	96.66	3.33

Source: Chief Electoral officer, Nagaland: Kohima.

From Table: 2, it can be inferred that gender bias is prevalent in the Nagaland state assembly elections. Since the first state assembly election in 1964, only 25 women candidates have taken an active part in elections as contestants compared to 2478 male candidates. The table also highlights that the number of women candidates as a contestant has never reached more than five, which is considered far below the national average. It indicates that in the political affairs of Nagaland, women are inadequately represented which may be

due to the negative attitude of political parties towards women while choosing as a candidate. One can perceive that over the years politics in Nagaland has been dominated by male candidates as not a single woman was ever elected as a representative. It was only in the 2023 state assembly election that the state created history as for the first time two women MLAs were elected in the state legislative assembly. Out of four women's who submitted their candidature, only two were elected.

Figure 2.1: number of contesting candidates in Nagaland state assembly elections 1964-2023.

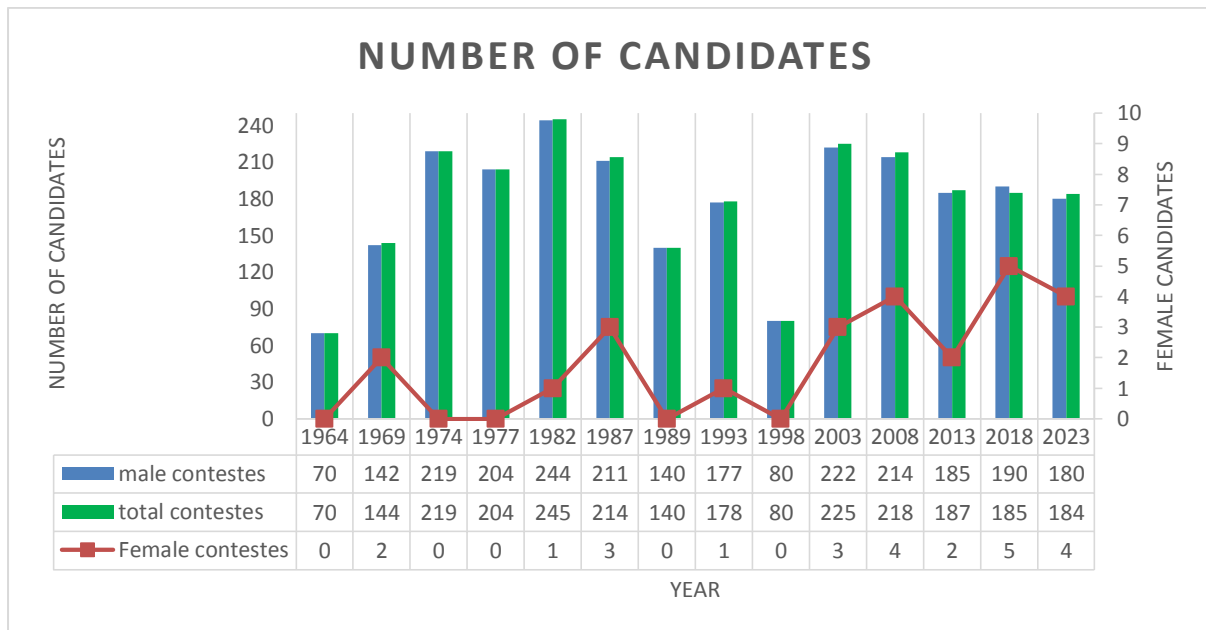


Figure 2.1, clearly depicts that compared to male candidates, the number of women who contested for the elections is much less. In the 1964 state assembly elections, not a single woman fielded for the election as seventy out of seventy contestants were male candidates. Over the years the number of male candidates contesting elections has been consistently increasing being highest in 1982, but when considering women's status, their numbers continue to be very low and have remained far below the national average. In the years 1964, 1974, 1977, and 1989, not a single woman contested for the election.

On average 0.96% of female candidates were fielded in the Nagaland state assembly elections compared to male candidates with 99.04%. This clearly reflects the poor percentage of

women candidates fielded during all the state assembly elections of Nagaland.

CONCLUSION:

Politics in India is predominantly perceived as a male-dominated sphere where women have a limited role to play. From the last 14 Nagaland state assembly elections, women have been under-represented despite higher turnout among females. Not a single woman contestant has managed to win a seat in the state assembly elections since independence. It was only in the election of 2023 that two women created history by becoming the first MLAs in the state legislative assembly of Nagaland. In the Naga community, Gender bias still prevails in political affairs. Socio-cultural norms of the people have restricted women to household activities as they hold the view that women are indecisive and

imprudent and, thus there is no role for them in politics. In every election of the state, the number of women voters has increased considerably. Compared to the national average, the state shows better gender parity in voter turnout rates as on average 80.15% of female voter turnout has been registered in state assembly elections.

Women play a crucial role in the development of the society. Increasing women's representation will address the unique needs of women and marginalized communities and will remove gender discrimination, which ultimately benefits society as a whole. The paper suggests that the government should take proactive initiatives and create effective policy measures to implement the Women Representation Bill, which aims to reserve 33% of seats for women—an urgent necessity for Nagaland's political landscape.

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