

## Status of Gender Equity in Nagaland

This research article brings into light the plight of women living in Nagaland in different areas of the society, focusing mostly on politics and administration. This topic, though unexplored, deserves attention from different stratas of the society since there is much history hidden within the patriarchal walls of Naga society. This article attempts to explore the differences in gender equality in Nagaland and the rest of India caused by the conservative minds of Naga society. Though Naga women are well educated, they have no decision making power or hereditary rights. The practical application of their knowledge is limited to the walls of their household and the manual work of farming. The burning issue of gender pay gap adds to it. This shows that Nagaland struggles with gender equality. There are areas where Nagaland fares better than most of the states in India, such as crimes against women or domestic violence, however opportunities lack for women in Nagaland. Especially in the administrative area, the trend of women participation in Nagaland municipal elections is dismal. This article will further highlight how two constitutional laws clash with each other and the sentiments of the people; how the conviction of the Supreme Court clashes with the interests of the Government of Nagaland, resulting in obstruction in elections and violent protests. Further, we will try to explore the reasons for the minimal participation of women in administration and other working sectors. We find that Naga women have attempted to come together in the face of crisis and support other women in their fight for gender equality but are yet frowned upon for not following the conservative rules of the society. This article aims to understand the oppression of Naga women by the traditional minds of the state and bring the reader's attention to their untold stories.

### Introduction

The so-called matriarchal Naga society glorifies its women for carrying the burden of social and family issues and generating income through their significant yet invisible contribution to agriculture. Naga women are generally seen as highly literate and hardworking women who apply practical knowledge to their daily lives. They are seen as upholders of ethics and values in the Naga society and traditionally are highly respected and protected in their community, due to which crimes against women are at a lower rate in Nagaland as compared to most of the Indian states. Yet Naga women face injustice that this society does not know of.

Within the Naga societal traditions, there lies a hidden patriarchal system which holds back its women and disregards their capabilities. Though Naga women are well educated, they have no decision making power or hereditary rights. Moreover their voices are suppressed in the name of tradition and their participation in administration and societal matters are often frowned upon. Equality between the two genders is still lagging behind in Nagaland as compared to the rest of the country. However, with changing times Naga women have come together to bring into the light the issues they have long been facing. Various social organizations formed by Naga women are taking up the responsibility of raising awareness in their society, motivating women to enter into male dominated aspects of the

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society, highlighting their neglected problems and recognising their significant contribution. Though such women organizations have gained support over the years, they have faced more criticisms and barriers on their way. Entry of Naga women into the political or administrative body has faced many backlashes, however women have still come together to fight for their rights. Various steps have been taken in the past few years to change what Naga Women are denied in the name of tradition and though no huge development has been allowed by the primitive minds of Naga society, there has been a wave of protest and encouragement amidst Naga women to take up more active participation in the politics. Though such a wave has been previously quashed, their thirst for opportunity still exists.

### **Gender Equality in Nagaland**

The gender Equality ratio main goal is to end all discrimination against women and girls which is a basic human right and is a prerequisite for sustainable development. Along with it to end all forms of violence, trafficking and sexual exploitation of women. Furthermore, the key component is to recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work as the goal. One of the most important aspects covered is the importance of full and effective participation of women and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life for women.

To understand the performance of Nagaland in Gender equality we assess the situation under the indicators of SDG 5. Surprisingly, there are no women in the legislative assembly as per the SDG 5 report as the percentage of elected women over total seats in the state legislative assembly is 0 out of 50. The ratio of female to male Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) (15-59 years) is very low [0.31 out of 1]. The percentage of currently married women aged 15-49 years who have their demand for family planning satisfied by modern methods is only 43.5 out of 100. Operational land holding gender-wise (percentage of female operated operational holdings) is 9.85 whereas the target is 50. Positive aspect is that the crime rate against women per 1,00,000 female population is still lower than many states which are 4.1 whereas the target is 0. Another good aspect is that the ratio per lakh women who have experienced cruelty/physical violence by a husband or his relatives during the year is 0. Also, the proportion of women in managerial positions including women in board of directors, in listed companies (per 1,000 persons) is 167 when the target one is 245. The ratio of female to male average wage/salary earnings received among regular wage/ salaried employees is 0.86 out of 1

Nagaland has a total of 48 points and falls under the category of Aspirant. This shows that Nagaland is struggling with Gender equality and has to come a long way to achieve it.

### **Literacy Ratio in Nagaland**

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As per the census of 2011, the literacy rate of Nagaland women is 76.11% which is greater than the average literacy rate of 64.63% in India. Whereas, the male literacy rate is 82.75% which is more than Naga women.

	Nagaland	India
Female	76.11%	64.63%
Male	82.75%	80.88%
Total	79.55%	72.98%

### **Nagaland Sex Ratio - Census 2011**

[The average sex ratio is the number of females per 1000 males]

As per the Census of 2011, the average sex ratio of Nagaland is 931 which is greater than the national average of 943 females per 1000 males. Furthermore, the child sex ratio (age less than 6 years) of Nagaland is at 943 which is higher than 918 of India.

### **Nagaland Working Population - Census 2011**

In Nagaland, the percentage of the working male population is higher than women. However, the working percentage in some sectors like cultivators, household industries, marginal workers and non-working population, women workers are more than male. Furthermore, in cultivator and household

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industries the percentage is slightly higher than males but in sectors like marginal workers and non-working population, the difference between two gender is 22,637 and 49,796 respectively. Naga women sometimes enjoy a higher social status as compared to women in the rest of the country. This may be because the workforce participation rate for women in Nagaland is 44.7% as compared to approximately 21% in the rest of the country. Agriculture, which employs 70% of Nagaland's population, sees about 70% more involvement of women than men.

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
<b>Main Workers</b>	741,179	442,204	298,975
<b>Cultivators</b>	420,379	208,221	212,158
<b>Agriculture Labourer</b>	22,571	12,899	9,672
<b>Household Industries</b>	9,525	4,731	4,794
<b>Other Workers</b>	288,704	216,353	72,351
<b>Marginal Workers</b>	232,943	105,153	127,790
<b>Non Working</b>	1,004,380	477,292	527,088

Regardless of other basis for gender equality, in SDG- 4, the Gender Parity Index (GPI) for higher education (18-23 years) - 93.80 which is relatively higher than most of the states/UTs in India.

According to the SDGs- 8, economic growth report, the Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR) in between the age group 15- 59 years is 47.8 out of 68.3. Moreover, the percentage of women account

holders in PMJDY[ Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana ] is 54.75 which is more than 50 [ Target as per SDGs-5] and is closer to the average percentage of India which is 55.34.

### **Naga Mothers Association**

Naga mothers association, aka NMA was founded as a voluntary organization in Kohima district of Nagaland in 1984 to address social issues. They have participated in various peace talks with the government over the years and played an important role in the steps taken to bring in Article 243 i.e, reservation for women in politics and administration. They started this battle for reservation and moved the case from high court to supreme court when it was required. They are also responsible for bringing this issue into limelight as they gained mass support through the same.

### **Naga Women in Politics (Non applicability of article 243 in Nagaland)**

Article 371A of the Indian constitution provides Nagaland the status of a special state in order to protect the natural land and the tribal culture of the Naga tribes. The article states that “Special provision with respect to the State of Nagaland.—Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution,— (a) no Act of Parliament in respect of— (i) religious or social practices of the Nagas, (ii) Naga customary law and procedure, (iii) administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to Naga customary law, (iv) ownership and transfer of land and its resources, shall apply to the State of Nagaland unless the Legislative Assembly of Nagaland by a resolution so decides”. While there are varied and conflicting opinions regarding the applicability as well as morality of this law, it has created a distinct impact on the female participation in Nagaland administration. Article 243D and 243T of the Indian constitution, that provide at least 33% reservation to women in panchayats and municipalities all over the nation, is overruled in Nagaland by the special status given to the state. Precisely, the reason that there has been no women MLA in Nagaland for the past 55 years i.e, since the statehood of Nagaland and only 1 women MP has been elected from Nagaland since then, i.e., Rano M.Shaiza.

### **Acting on Naga Women’s Reservation (2017 protests)**

In 2001, Nagaland passed its Municipal and Town Council Act. However, this act said nothing of reservation for women and the 2004 Urban local bodies (ULB) election was conducted without implementing the same. After the Guwahati High court directed it to enforce the reservation in 2005, the state government amended the act; however ULB polls could not be conducted till 2009 due to protests against the same. Since the government wasn’t taking the required action, the Naga Mothers association moved to the high court in 2011 to ensure reservation in the next ULB poll. However, the Nagaland government appealed to the bench which revoked its previous judgment in July 2012. In September 2012, a resolution was passed in the Nagaland State Assembly, which stated that the reservation for women infringes the rights of Nagaland as a ‘special state’. The women's association

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in Nagaland had no choice but to move to the Supreme Court for intervention. Under the banner of joint action committee for women rights (JACWR) a special leave petition was filed against the order of Guwahati high court and the Nagaland assembly resolution. The court ruled that Article 243 lies over Article 371 and hence, provision for reservation must be made. The state government, still reluctant to make the amends, tried negotiating with the JACWR by offering them nomination to municipal bodies with voting rights instead of reservation but were turned down immediately. The government also had a series of discussions with male dominated tribal organizations who did not accept reservation for women. With the rising tension in the state, the government decided to postpone the ULB elections by two months; however, the Guwahati High court asked the state to move ahead with the elections.

Out of 32 ULBs scheduled, 12 were held with reservations. In retaliation to this decision, tribal organizations held a strike against the ULBs on the following day and much of the state was shut down. Two days later, violence erupted in the state as protestors burnt down two dozen government buildings in Kohima and two deaths resulted in police firing in Dimapur. This led the ULB polls to be declared null and void and forced the government to request the apex court to abrogate their decision. Unexpectedly, the peacefully demanding JACWR was blamed by the tribal organizations for the violence.

The reason given to disapprove the reservation was that it violated Nagaland's status of a special state. Many higher officials even said that political representation should be given on credibility rather than gender and women themselves are not stepping forward in this area.

In a traditional naga society women are highly respected, educated and hard working and their safety is generally given utmost importance by the members of the society; however, naga women have minimal decision making power in household matters and no hereditary rights. The men of the family are the head of the households and it is believed that the son must take the family name forward. Due to household and cultural barriers, women may have not been given the opportunity to step into politics. Though with changing times, participation of naga women in politics has for sure has improved. In 2018, a total of five women out of 195 contestants participated for a seat in the assembly. However, no woman was elected. The reservation would have brought in some gender diversity in the assembly and given recognition to their contributions to society.

Even though the literacy rate is higher in Nagaland, when it comes to the right to be a decision-maker and to be a representative in legislative assembly or customary council the right is still not given by the rigid traditional system. Even after so many movements, the reservation of 33% is given to women, still it is deplorable to see only one woman representative, Rano M Shaiza, who was elected to Lok Sabha in 1977.

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Women's role in the political sphere remains bleak and sings irreversible with persisting cumulative deadlock between Article 243T (2) and (3) of the Indian constitution which famously speaks in favour of reservation of seats for women and the indispensable Article 371A that grants special provision concerning the state of Nagaland with Article 371A(2) as the major contention.

If we look at the trend of women standing in the election in Nagaland that is also a bit shocking

In 1969, for the first election, there were two women representatives — Ravole U and RL Kinghen — contesting the Assembly polls. Nonetheless, they both lost the election. Since then Nagaland has held ten Assembly elections, yet no women representation in the state Assembly. The positive news was when in 2013, a total of 16 women contested elections.

Year	No of Women Contestants	Won	Forfeited Deposit
2013	2	0	1
2008	4	0	3
2003	3	0	3
1998	0	0	0
1993	1	0	1
1989	0	0	0
1987	3	0	2
1982	1	0	1
1977	0	0	0
1974	0	0	0

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1969	2	0	0
1964	0	0	0

### Conclusion

Naga women have a long way to go to achieve the same status as men, especially in the field of politics. There has been slow developments in their status over the years as even with minimal support, women are coming forward, voicing their opinions and struggling for their rights. Naga women are educated but not given enough opportunity to apply their knowledge to work in the manufacturing or service sectors. In spite of it, many Naga women are working in different fields such as doctors, engineers, entrepreneurs, art, music, sports, media, research and other professions and are also the bread earners of the family, living in the patriarchal society which has its deep roots in the tradition of the state.

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