



Research Article

Women Reservation Act 2023 in Manipur Politics

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Abstract

Women, since ancient time had been categorised as the helping hand of men. Manipur's women have immensely contributed to shaping the present Manipur. Beginning from *Nupi Lan*, or the women's war against British rule, to *Meira Paibi*, women are politically active. With the coming of the Women's Reservation Act 2023, the Meitei women will become more powerful. Manipur is famous for *Ima Keithel*, a women's market, women sports players will add another baton of political leaders. The 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution had already given leverage to women for more representation. Ironically, all was just on paper, still, women leaders rely on men. With this understanding, it is still vague to assume the Women Reservation Act 2023 will make women more empowered in the level of decision-making positions. The practicability of women becoming empowered solely lies in the effective implementation of the act. The act was purely on time limit since it is to be reviewed after 15 years in practice. Besides this, there is also an issue of implementing the act after delimitation. And the prevailing political unrest of Manipur, wherein people demand the implementation of the National Register of Citizens to check the influx of Myanmar and Bangladesh nationals, is also another factor. Another issue is that of the 'Triple Test' clearance requirement for the implementation of this act.

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INTRODUCTION

Women have been regarded as subordinate to men since ancient times. Women claim to be the largest minority in India with a variety of social and economic disabilities that prevent them from exercising their human rights and freedoms in society (Gupta, 2002). In the case of Manipur, women have been contributing in every aspect of life. The present-day Manipur was a gift from the relentless contribution made by Manipur's women.

The Meitei women fight against the '*Lalup System*', the unregulated export of rice grains, the misuse of drugs, fighting alcohol addiction, against the atrocities of security forces, etc. Meitei women, beginning from British rule in Manipur to the merging of Manipur into the Indian Union, vigilant Meitei women are politically active. The Meitei women who had played a major role in every aspect of life, ranging from social and economic to political, education and sports, stand as a real testimony of women empowered. Political consciousness is relatively high amongst the Meitei women. The Women Reservation Act 2023 may have added another baton to the Meitei women, and this will exhibit a more powerful role of Meitei women in Manipur society.

Manipur's economy seems to be handled by the women of Manipur, as the famous *Ima Keithel* (entirely women market). Additionally, as the sports became popular and the women's category was also added, Meitei women sports players have now become a great asset to India's sports. The Meira Paibis of Manipur may also be known to the world as the most effective and reliable activists to check the government's faults and social evils.

India's Constitution 73rd and 74th amendment may have added extra boost to the status of Meitei women in Manipur. This amendment act provided one-third reservation of women at local self-governance. Meitei women are already politically active ranging from election campaign to vote bank politics. With the coming of this amendment act the more responsive for the women in self-governance have increase manifold.

This paper argument seeks to explain that despite this level of awareness and active responsive along with the constitution guaranteed women leaders still rely on man for every decision made. It may be due to the Hinduism religion that Meitei have adopted since Manipur's king Garibniwas reign. Further, since the women still depend on men, then what can be the utility of implementing the Women Reservation Act 2023 will also be the other version that will explain by this paper?

The question and practicability of women becoming politically empowered solely lies to the effective implementation of the act. The act was purely on time limit since it is to be review after 15 years of in practice. Beside this there is also an issue of implementing the act after delimitation. And the prevailing political unrest of Manipur wherein people demand for implementation National Register of Citizen to check the influx of Myanmar and Bangladesh nationality is also another factor. Another issue is that of 'Triple Test' clearance requirement for the implementation of this act.

73rd and 74th Amendment of 1992 was applicable throughout India. Und this constitutional amendment women seats are reserve in both rural and urban local self-governance. Under the

73rd the rural Manipur got two tier systems as Gram Panchayat and Zilla Parishad. And the 74th amendment gave Manipur's Municipalities got local self-governance. The first election under 73rd and 74th in Manipur held in 1997 for the first time with 1/3 or 33% seats reserved for women. Despite this constitutional provision real woman political participation seems to be struggling against the socio-political challenges.

As the women's political participation in Manipur is still a matter of debatable wherein women are politically very active, 'Women Reservation Act 2023' (WRA) comes up. There was high hope for the women of Manipur particularly Meitei women with the coming of WRA. With the recent rejection of this act at Lok Sabha, the practicability also became a matter to be study thoroughly.

The demand of National Register of Citizen, by the indigenous community of Manipur and the issue of delimitation is also a matter of concern along with women political participation. Further, before the WRA come into practical the act had to undergo Triple Test. The 106th Constitutional Amendment Act may have to undergo triple test of equity, efficiency and empowerment. With this, there is also a challenge of complex political maneuvering on the implementation of the women reservation and women political participation.

Thus, this paper will try to relay the practicability of imposition of WRA at Manipur for women's better political participation. Amidst the Manipur in chaotic period minted out from the ethnic clashes the analysis of WRA practicability is worth discussed. As the time and place demand the propriety of WRA and active women political participation at decision making level, Manipur is an exception place to be tested.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Muchandi and Kolakar in their article Panchayat Raj Institutions In India: Amendments And Reforms, stated that, 'The successful implementation of these constitutional principles at the state and municipal level is crucial for the viability of panchayat raj institutions. Political interference, lack of capacity building and lack of adequate financial resources are some of the issues that need to be addressed. While the Panchayati Raj system has made tremendous progress, further reforms are needed to increase capacity, distribute resources fairly and ensure that these institutions are more inclusive, accountable and capable of delivering tangible development outcomes at the local level. All government levels must work together to make Panchayati Raj a true instrument of participatory democracy and citizens should be vigilant and actively involved in this process'.

Dr. Mangoljao Maibam, and B. Sharatchandra Sharma in their article 'Local Self-Government in Manipur: A Case Study of Phayeng Gram Panchayat' stated that, 'The policy of reserving seats for them in the State Assembly (as Sekmai Assembly Constituency is the only Scheduled Caste Reserved Constituency in Manipur and Phayeng Gram Panchayat is under its jurisdiction) and local bodies has been useful for them to be closely associated with grass roots politics. The reservation for women in the Pradhan (sometimes) and members' quota are also playing an important role in shaping all folks of people's participation in this Gram Panchayat'.

Kavita Saini, and Lehar Isarani, in their article Women's Reservation Bill 2023: An Important Step Towards Women Empowerment - Implementation and Importance stated that, 'The Women's Reservation Constitution (128th Amendment) Act is a milestone in India's democratic journey. The Act, passed in the new Parliament House during a special session, is an important step towards women empowerment. It coincides with the 30th anniversary of constitutional reforms in the context of local self-governance, which reserved one-third of the seats in panchayats and municipalities for women. While the final implementation of this reservation in Parliament depends on the delimitation and census processes. This is an opportune moment to consider the 30-year experience of women's reservation in local government and its implications for Indian democracy'.

Gaps

None of the scholar had studied on the Manipur context from the perspective of Women Reservation Act 2023'. Thus, this paper is to Manipur politics in the wake of implementation of Women Reservation Act 2023.

73rd and 74th Amendment Act and Women Political Participation in Manipur

The idea of women participating in politics encompasses a wide range of civic duties that have an impact on politics, such as voting, supporting political causes, interacting with legislators, sharing political thoughts and opinions with others, and other similar activities (Nandibala, 2022). The 73rd and 74th had given 33% of women reservation at local self-governance makes women political participation a constitutional mandatory. This enhances the political empowerment of the women. At least 63 women Pradhans are enhance in the grassroots level decision making position to the women.

Women Reservation Act 2023 and Manipur Women

Nari Shakti Vandan Abhiyam or Women Reservation Act 2023 or 106th Amendment mandated 33% seats reservation for women in Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assembly throughout India. The reservation does apply to the seat reserve for SC and ST too and it also function on rotation basis as per to the mandate and law made by Parliament. And as for the Manipur women it may be delayed since there is demand for NRC first before delimitation, so the 2027 election may not be able to incorporate the WRA. WRA will make a historic move for the politically active women of Manipur who are underrepresentation as political leader. This act will enhance direct influence of women on decision making legislative and participation in governance.

National Register of Citizen and Women Reservation Act 2023 in Manipur

National Register of Citizen (NRC) and WRA are two critical political issues in Manipur in the wake of delimitation. As the WRA is link to the delimitation and the delimitation is link with the census; the antagonism arise here. The civil societies and people of Manipur demanded NRC before census and Government of Manipur intended to conduct census first there

is incapable of the government machinery to carry out since there is oppose from the people of Manipur. The hill dweller may have a contradictory opinion and stand that there should be census, delimitation and WRA then follows the NRC since it will greatly beneficial to them.

Triple Test for Women Reservation Act 2023 in Manipur

In 2010, the Triple-test rule for political reservations was set out by the Supreme Court. The test requires a State government to follow the following bellows steps; (Triple Test Rule, n.d.)

1. Set up a dedicated commission for inquiry into the nature and implications of backwardness specifically concerning local bodies.
2. Specify the proportion of reservations required for political representation based on the dedicated commission's recommendation.
3. Ensure total reservations for Scheduled Caste (SC)/Scheduled Tribe (ST)/OBC groups do not exceed 50% of the total seats.

Here the pertinent question is the capability, sincerity and willingness of the male dominated Manipur government. As per to the Supreme Court ruling there is need of dedicated commission to study the feasibility of reservation. Manipur is already trouble benthic on the issue of power capturing either in ethnic line or in gender line and the coming of WRA might add another paradoxical conflict of interest.

CONCLUSION

The Women Reservation Act 2023 may transform the political landscape of Manipur politics. Manipur is known for active women political activism. With the coming of WRA there may be increase in women legislature from Manipur's women along with structural change in candidates. Further, Meitei women are known for its role in peace building, so increase in representation may lead to more inclusive policy of lasting peace and conflict management and reconstruction. Yet, there may also have apprehension of proxy representation as per experience from the 73rd and 74th amendment. Despite this there might be a possibility of women addressing the common issues unlike men for prolong peace of Manipur.

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