

## **Manipur Legislative Assembly Election, 2022: The Success of Five Women Candidates**

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In the recently concluded Manipur Legislative Election, 2022, Manipur saw a dramatic change in the electoral politics, with the success of five women candidates which is quite remarkable and significant and thus created history in the state electoral politics.

Amid the gloom of the COVID-19 pandemic, women in Manipur have something to cheer about. In a historic moment, five women candidates have come up trumps in the recently-concluded Legislative Assembly Election, 2022 in Manipur, which is quite remarkable and significant. Despite the fact that the number of Manipuri women voters outnumber men and women are known to take the leading role in economic activities and social and civil rights movements –from the women-led movements like the two Nupilals against British forces and the Meira Paibi movement of women torchbearers, keeping night vigil of any unwanted elements in the locality, and the anti alcoholism movement of Nisha Bandh from the late 1970s to the solely run women led trading Markets or Ima Market in Imphal. Not to forget in sports in which many women have held a record better than the males, women find it difficult to rise in electoral politics against the tradition of male dominance. Clearly women's representation is not the only factor, but it is a critical factor for the development of inclusive, responsive and transparent democracies. The representation of women in Assemblies, Lok Sabha and local self-governance platforms has been minimal in the state Manipur has had less than 10 women legislators and a women MP in over five decades of electoral politics since 1972.

Women play a key role in electoral politics as a vote bank but not in leadership roles in Manipur. Women's equal participation and leadership in political life is essential for the full emancipation of women. The under-representation of women in politics constitute a serious democratic deficit. During election times we can see a long queue of women voters lining up at the polling booths at the time of the poll. In every event of election campaigning, women actively participate. But the truth is that, the Manipuri society being a male dominated society it is difficult for aspiring women candidate to wrest seats from them. The 60-seat Assembly in Manipur has 19 reserved Scheduled Tribe Constituencies, 1 Schedule Caste Constituency and 40 general constituencies. In Manipur, the total voters as of November 2021, published by the Chief Election Officer comes to 19, 68,476 of which 10,12,655 are females. In simple terms, Manipur has more female voters than males. The state also has a

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total of 164 third gender voters. The plain-valley areas of 40 non-reserved constituencies have 33% reservations for women in the local bodies. However, in the 19 reserved tribal constituencies under the Autonomous District Council (ADCs) women reservation is still to materialize. The first Manipur Legislative Assembly Election was held in March, 1972.

**History of Manipuri Women in Electoral Politics**  
In almost every election, State Legislative Assembly as well as Parliamentary, women have been actively participating in the electoral activities. But upto 1990 no women MLA were elected in Manipur. The first time a woman was elected as an MLA was in 1990 when Mrs. Hangmila Shaiza, wife of former Chief Minister Late Yangmaso Shaiza was elected from Ukhru constituency. The second time, another women candidate was elected was in the by-election

of October 1991. In this election, Smt. K. Apabi Devi, wife of Shri Th. Bira Singh sitting Congress MLA who died in a plane crash was elected. In the 6<sup>th</sup> Assembly Election which was held in February, 1995 as many 329 candidates including 11 women candidates contested, but none of the women candidates were elected.

The 7th Assembly Election was held in February 2000, and as many as 402 candidates including 11 women candidates were in the fray. In this election, Smt. W. Leima Devi, wife of Congress leader, Late Wahengbam Angou Singh, who had been Speaker in the State Legislative Assembly and later a Rajya Sabha member, was elected as a sole women MLA from Naoriya Pakhanglakpa constituency. In the 8<sup>th</sup> Assembly Election held in February 2002 as many as 364 including 7 women candidates were in the fray. In this election, only one woman candidate could get elected, Smt. W. Leima Devi was again elected. She also achieved the feat of being the first female cabinet Minister in the state in the first Shri Okram Ibobi led Congress ministry. In the 9<sup>th</sup> Assembly Election held in February 2007, as many as 231 candidates including 10 women were in the fray, but none of the women candidates were elected. But in the by-election of February 2007 Smt. O. Landhoni Devi, wife of Chief Minister Shri O. Ibobi was elected as MLA from the Khangbok constituency. She was the fourth woman elected in the Assembly of Manipur.

In the 2012 Assembly Election, Smt. O. Landhoni was again elected as an MLA. She was joined by another two new women MLAs, Km. Ak. Mirabai from Patsoi constituency and Nemcha Kipgen from Kangpokpi constituency respectively. Thus in the 2012, Assembly election 3 women candidates were able to secure an electoral berth in the State Legislative Assembly. In the 2017 Assembly

Election, two women candidates, Km. Ak. Mirabai and Nemcha Kipgen both sitting MLAs secured their seats again.

### **The performance of women in the 12<sup>th</sup> Manipur Legislative Assembly Election, 2022**

The 12<sup>th</sup> Manipur Legislative Assembly Elections were held in 28<sup>th</sup> February and 5<sup>th</sup> March, 2022 in two phases to elect 60 members of the Manipur Legislative Assembly. The results were declared on 10<sup>th</sup> March, 2022. In this election, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) scored a landslide victory by winning as many as 32 seats. The Indian National Congress (INC) which bagged the maximum number of seats in the previous 11<sup>th</sup> Manipur Legislative Election suffered a crushing defeat this time. The party led by three-time Chief Minister, Okram Ibobi could manage to win just five seats. The Janata Dal (U) made it's debut in the state's political landscape with a bang bagging six seats. National People's Party (NPP) won seven seats, Independents three and Kuki People's Alliance two. Among 60 elected MLAs, five were women candidates this time.

Out of the five elected women candidates, four are first timers. While two of these first time winners are from the state's tribal communities; the other two first-timers are from the majority Meitei community. In all, the 12<sup>th</sup> Manipur Legislative Assembly has five women MLAs- three from hills and two from the valley area.

In this election, 17 women out of the total of 265 candidates were in the fray across Manipur's 60 assembly constituencies. The women candidates of the BJP and those of a new ethnicity-based party recorded a victory strike rate of 100% in the election. All three women candidates the BJP had fielded won and succeeded in becoming victorious in their respective constituencies.

### **Elected Women Candidates, 12<sup>th</sup> Manipur Legislative Assembly Election, 2022**

| Constituency         | Constituency number | Elected Candidates      | Elected Party           | Trailing Candidate          | Trailing Party          | Margin |
|----------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|--------|
| Chandel              | 41                  | SS. Olish               | BJP                     | Langhu Paulhring Anal       | Naga People's Front     | 27341  |
| Kangpokpi            | 50                  | Nemcha Kipgen           | BJP                     | Soshim Gurung               | Janata Dal (United)     | 5396   |
| Naoriya Pakhanglakpa | 21                  | Sagolshem Kebi Devi     | BJP                     | Soibam Subhaschandra Singh  | National People's Party | 531    |
| Saikul               | 46                  | Kimneo Haokip Hangshing | Kuki People's Alliance  | Kenn Raikhan                | Independent             | 1249   |
| Oinam                | 25                  | Irengbam Nalini Devi    | National People's Party | Laishram Radhakishore Singh | BJP                     | 442    |

**Source:** Manipur State Election Commission

The five elected women candidates are former Social Welfare Minister and sitting MLA Nemcha Kipgen (BJP) from Kangpokpi seat, SS. Olish (BJP) from Chandel, Soraism Kebi (BJP) from Naoriya Pakhanglakpa, I. Nalini Devi of National People's Party from Oinam seat Kimneo Haokip Hangshing of Kuki People's Alliance (KPA) from Saikul seat, respectively

In a fever-pitched campaign, the 2022 Assembly Election in Manipur, saw party dissent, pre-poll violence and defections, and the low participation of women in the election with only 6% of the total contestants being women, even though women voters outnumbers men in the state's total voters. While women's political participation remains low in the state, this election makes a significant shift, with the victory of five women candidates and created history. Earlier in the 2017 polls, Manipur had only two women legislators in the 60 member Assembly of the state, in Nemcha Kipgen, representing BJP from Kangpokpi constituency and Congress MLA Akoijam Mirabai Devi from Patsoi. Kipgen went on to become the only women minister in the Shri N. Biren Singh BJP led government in 2017. In the 2017 election only 11 women contested the election, out of a total of 266 candidates. Compared to the 2017 elections, political parties have increased the number of their women candidates marginally in the 2022 Assembly polls. While the Congress topped the list by naming four women as their official candidate, BJP and NPP gave tickets to three women candidates each. The Nationalist Congress Party gave tickets to two women while the Janata Dal (United) the Communist Party of India and the Kuki People's Alliance announced a women candidate each. Two other women contested the poll as independents. Forty-three constituencies saw no women candidates being fielded at all. More number of women have been given tickets by the parties this time. It showed that they were looked at seriously by their parties. The getting of party tickets by women candidates depends on their winnability, their capacity to show to their parties and to the public that they are capable of winning on election.

The proportion of women of the total contestants in legislative assembly elections has progressed from 3% to 6% between 2007 and 2022, according to a data from the statistical report of the Election Commission of India. In recent years, more women have joined political parties and are engaged in political work. Even though, an apparent increase has been observed in the numbers of women contesting elections, there is still a lot more work that requires to be done in the male dominated state. The acceptance of women, particularly in the tribal areas, as political candidates is emerging. Nowadays, many women in

the tribal areas are involving themselves in politics and are actively participating in political activities. Being a women candidate is hard work and is not an easy task. Women candidates, they lack financial resources, and there is also a custom of women being unwelcome at the highest-decision making platforms, and the field of politics is usually considered 'dirty' for women. The involvement of underground organizations and violence in elections is also another hindrance to women's political participation.

When the election results were announced several derogatory comments about the victorious women candidates surfaced on the social media that they would be puppets, or that they won the election due to the husband's involvement or huge financial resources or certain insurgent groups were behind their win, or they were allegedly in relation with some powerful politician or wife or some powerful man, etc. Their success raises eyebrows with sexist remarks and comments being made. So, even if they get elected, the capability of women is not acknowledged or recognized. The encouragement and support by the society especially by men, for women's political involvement is needed.

The rate of political participation of women in elections as voters is high in the state, but their success in elections as people's representative is low. Women's role in electoral politics is yet to match with both their numbers as well as their significance in society. Fewer women contestants' means that very few are elected to the legislature assembly. The 2022 Assembly Election in Manipur has seen the highest number of women contestants and the highest number of elected women MLAs thus creating history in the electoral politics of Manipur. This Election showed a sharp change in the outlook of the electorates and a new way towards woman empowerment in the state.

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