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# ROLES OF MIZO WOMEN IN FORMAL POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

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*Mary Vanlalthanpuii*

Research Fellow at the Asiatic Society

*Since 2003, the number of registered female voters has outnumbered the number of registered male voters in the general election for the Mizoram Legislative Assembly. However, this has not resulted in more women being elected to the Assembly. In fact, in the 42 years since Mizoram became a Union territory in 1972 and then a state in 1987, only four women have been elected to the state Assembly. The only woman to become a minister was Mrs. Lalhlimpuii, elected in 1987 from MNF party. This paper discusses Mizo women's role in formal politics from the declaration of statehood in 1987 to the present. The paper begins with the election of women and then turns to the cultural and religious beliefs and attitudes that affect women's political roles. The Mizoram case, where women are literate, participate fully in the workforce, and are registered voter's challenges conventional feminist theory regarding the relationship between education, workforce participation, and increased political involvement by women.*

**Keywords:** *Women, Gender, Politics, Culture, Religion*

## Introduction

It has been widely assumed that education and workforce participation, which brings women into the public sphere, would encourage political activism and participation.<sup>1</sup> This has not happened to Mizo women. Mizo women have made considerable gains in literacy and work participation, and vote in greater numbers than men but remain underrepresented in state politics as well as local politics. Even in the previous

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<sup>1</sup> DAC Network on Gender Equality (GENDERNET), *Women Economic Empowerment*, Issues Paper (April, 2011): 6, accessed September 11, 2019, <https://www.issueab.org/resources/21166/21166.pdf>.

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Legislative Assembly General Election of 2018, only 18 women occupied candidate seats compared to 191 male candidates.<sup>2</sup> Most of the women were independent candidates, not from major political parties. What is significant is that since 1972, the female electorate has been larger than the male electorate in several Legislative Assembly general elections. In 2018, there were 20,516 more women voters than men who turned out to vote.<sup>3</sup>

According to the 2011 census of India, Mizoram's population of 1,097,206 included 541,867 females. Mizoram is the second least populous state in India, but the second in terms of literacy with a female literacy rate of 89.40% (male literacy was 93.71%). Mizo women won national attention following the 2001 census, which stated Mizoram had the highest female worker participation rate at 47.54% with the male worker participation rate 57.29%.<sup>4</sup> However, the 2011 census registered a decline in female worker participation to 36.16% while the male worker participation rate also slipped to 52.35%.<sup>5</sup>

After India gained independence, the Lushai Hills Autonomous District Council was created under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India on April 25, 1952 (Lushai implies Mizo in Colonial documents). It was upgraded to a Union Territory in 1972 and granted statehood as Mizoram in 1987. From the time of the creation of the Lushai Hills District Council in 1952 until 1986, a few women became legislators by nomination and election. The Constituent Assembly fixed the strength of Lushai District Council at 24 members of which 18 were elected and six nominated.<sup>6</sup> Mrs. Lalziki Sailo and Mrs. Hmingliani were nominated as legislators during the District Council period from 1952 to 1957. During this period, this region was a Union Territory and the Legislative Assembly was comprised of 30 elected and three nominated members. Four women were nominated and elected to the Legislative Assembly during the Union Territory period. Miss Saptawni and Mrs. Rokungi occupied nominated seats in 1972 and 1984. Mrs. Thanmawii, elected in 1978 as well as 1979, became the first female elected member of the Legislative Assembly while Mrs. Thansiami was nominated in 1978 and later elected in 1984. The post-1987 Mizoram State Legislative Assembly has had only two female legislators during the 27 years of statehood. Mrs. Lalhlipuii was elected in 1987

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2 Election Commission of India, "Mizoram Legislative Assembly 2018: Candidate Data Summary," accessed September 29, 2019, <https://eci.gov.in/files/file/9687-mizoram-legislative-election-2018-statistical-report/>.

3 Mizoram State Election Commission, *Statistical Report: General election to the Eight Mizoram Legislative Assembly* (Aizawl: Government of Mizoram, 2018).

4 Tara Singhal, *Working Women and Family: Conceptual and Theoretical Framework* (Jaipur: RBSA Publication, 2003), 24.

5 Census of India, "Provisional Population Totals Paper 2, Vol. 2 of 2011, Mizoram," accessed April 11, 2019, [http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/paper2vol2/prov\\_results\\_paper2-Mizoram](http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/paper2vol2/prov_results_paper2-Mizoram)

6 RRT Sanga, "Administrative Development in Lushai (Mizo) Hills up to 1972" (PhD diss., North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, 1990), 149.

and Miss. Vanlalawmpuii in 2014.

Comparing pre-statehood and post-statehood female participation in the legislature, it is clear the earlier period provided better opportunities for women because of the imposition of a nominated seat in the Legislative Assembly. At the same time, two women won their seats by securing majority votes in their respective constituencies. It is important to note that although these women only participated in the Legislative Assembly for short periods of time, they brought about remarkable changes in the status of women during their tenure. For instance, Mrs. Hmingliani, in the Second District Council in 1957, worked for changes in the customary law. Because of her efforts, women can inherit property if wills are properly executed although inheritance, under Mizo customary law, passes through the male line.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the representation of Miss Vanlalawmpuii in the Legislative Assembly in 2014 paved the way for the implementation of 'The Mizo Marriage, Divorce, and Inheritance of Property Act 2014,' which gave women greater property rights than existed in customary law.

When the Indian Parliament introduced special administrative institutions for tribal areas, some regions were protected under the Sixth Schedule while others were given constitutional safeguards. Most tribal areas follow customary law. The 53rd amendment to the Indian Constitution of 1986 recognized Mizoram through Article 371G. This recognition approved the authority of customary law, which governs marriage, property rights, and other social relations. Moreover, the Mizoram Accord of 1986 stated that Mizo Customary Law could not be amended or modified without the approval of the Legislative Assembly. As a result, it is almost impossible to change or modify customary law without the support of men in the legislative assembly.

The Mizo Women Organization or *Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl*, founded in 1974, has worked to improve the status of women ruled by the customary laws, especially focusing their attention on laws that denied daughters, married, and divorced women the right to inherit and claim for property rights. However, Mizo Women Organization has made no headway in two decades. It is apparent that women's political representation is essential to change laws in matters of women's status in the society. Although there were only a few women represented in the political office, it may be noted that while some female representation brought changes to women's status, not all women were supportive of changes to improve conditions. As such, there is great need for women in legislature who want to bring about change for women.

In seeking to more deeply explore the reason why women remain underrepresented in state politics, it is not just a matter of representation; women do not even run for the assembly and tend to avoid politics. Interviews were conducted with 100 male and female registered voters, randomly selected from local residents of villages Seling and Reiek regarding their attitudes about women's participation

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7 Sangkima, "Mizo Hmeichhe Tangruai," in *A Study in Perspective, Proceedings of NEIHA*, Seventh Session (Aizawl: Government of Aizawl College, 1996), 373.

in politics. While it is important to recognize that the effectiveness of women's participation depends on the patterns of power, views about women's proper roles in religion and society and the value of women's political engagement are key to women running for and being voted into the Legislative Assembly, and then working for changes that would improve women's status.

### Cultural and Religious Beliefs that Affect Women's Political Roles

Traditional attitudes toward gender can be seen as the main explanation for women's non-participation in formal politics.<sup>8</sup> Mizo society has always been a patriarchal society, and most of the important positions in administrations and religious institutions are occupied by men. Mizo folktales and histories characterized women as lower than men.<sup>9</sup> The system of hereditary Chieftainships originated in the early 18th century after the Mizo people migrated toward India and placed every village under the authority of a male hereditary chief.<sup>10</sup>

Along with the village chief, the traditional social institution called Bachelor dormitory or *Zawlbuk*, constructed adjacent to the house of the village chief, served to instruct young males to become responsible adult members of society.<sup>11</sup> The village chief was head and leader of the *Zawlbuk*. An Elder or *Val Upa*, appointed by the chief, carried out the administration of the *Zawlbuk*. These institutions occupied a central position in the organization and administration of the village, and marginalized women.<sup>12</sup> Although abolished in 1938 after the intervention of Christianity, *Zawlbuk* was once an important mechanism to enforce male dominance because the joint action of members of *Zawlbuk* had the power to punish a girl's family if her male suitor was not happy with her conduct during courting.<sup>13</sup> Within a society where boys and girls mixed freely, marriages often followed a traditional institutionalized courtship initiated by males. One common punishment occurred when a young man felt offended by a girl's hesitant behavior towards him. If the

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8 Vyonne Galligan and Sara Clavero, "Prospects for Women's Legislative Representation in Post-Socialist Europe, The views of Female Politicians," *Review Work (s), Gender and Society* 22, no. 2 (2008): 149-171.

9 HL Malsawma, *Glimpses of the Mizo Society: Sociology of the Mizos* (Delhi: Spectrum Publications, 2002), 7.

10 P. Lalnithanga, *Emergence of Mizoram: The Land, the People, and Early History* (Aizawl: Mizoram Publication Board, 2005), 17.

11 Sangkima, "Position and Status of Women in the Traditional Mizo Society," in *Proceedings of North East India History Association, Ninth Session*, ed. Jayanta Bhusan Khattacharya on behalf of North East India History Association (Shillong: Department of History, Northeastern Hill University, 1988), 293-303.

12 J. Zorema, *The Zawlbuk Institution: Indirect rule in Mizoram 1890-1954* (New Delhi: Mittal Publication, 2007), 18.

13 Lalthansangi, "Women in Mizo Society, An outlook based on Masculinity vis-à-vis Femininity," in *Women in Mizo Society*, ed. Harendra Sinha and B. Lalrinchani (New Delhi: Mittal Publication, 2013), 52-53.

angry man complained to the *Zawlbuk*, the community would destroy the girl's hut. This punishment was called *Bang Sawi*. In some cases, the families of girls moved to other villages because they were no longer welcome by the villagers after this incident. Though he was the head of *Zawlbuk*, village chiefs did not interfere in such matters to stop the *Zawlbuk*.<sup>14</sup> This incident demonstrates the traditional males' absolute power in courting and why no girl dared to ignore her suitors. Thus her freedom to choose a partner was hindered and the security of her family was determined by her behavior.<sup>15</sup> As mentioned, the *Zawlbuk* institution was abolished after missionaries introduced formal education. Indigenous customs and practices were gradually eradicated after adapting Christian virtues. To replace *Zawlbuk* and preserve the traditional Mizo virtues, Welsh missionary Rev. David Edward founded the Young Lushai Association in 1935. Renamed Young Mizo Association [YMA] in 1938, it has become the first and largest organization in Mizoram to date. With an aim to preserve the so-called Mizo cultural norms of *tlawmngaihna* that of "self-denial for the cause of community and individuals who were in need."<sup>16</sup> YMA serves as an instrument to uphold traditional Mizo identity as the guardian of the society. Unlike *Zawlbuk*, irrespective of gender, all can become a member of YMA, but men still dominate leadership positions.

Furthermore, marriage was a civil contract that endorsed bride price. This affected family relationships as parents often arranged marriages without the consent of their daughters.<sup>17</sup> When the bride price was paid in kind, it varied depending on the status of the bride's clan and generally ranged from three to ten domesticated Mithuns. Mizos valued the birth of the girl child more than the birth of the boy child because a girl child could generate wealth through the bride price.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, female physical beauty was highly valued. Songs welcomed an attractive female infant as being worth ten Mithuns (e.g., a high bride price). For economic reasons, daughters were preferred because unlike boys, who by custom had to move to the *Zawlbuk* at an early age, girls could be employed in domestic work and look after younger siblings when her parents were in the field.<sup>19</sup> Bride price was meant to compensate for the loss of a girl's labour in her parental home. At the same time, after paying the bride price to the bride's father, the girl's new family expected her to work hard to

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14 Anup Shekhar Chakraborty, "Emergence of Women from Private to Public, A Narrative of Power Politics from Mizoram," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 9, no. 3 (2008): 31- 44.

15 T. Vanlaltlani, *Mizo Hmeichhiate Kawngzawh* (Aizawl: Mizoram Publication Board, 2005), 21.

16 Lawmsanga, "A critical study on Christian mission with special reference to Presbyterian church of Mizoram" (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 2010), 66.

17 Irene Colbert, "Women and Politics," in *Mizoram Dimension and Perspective, Society, Polity and Economy*, ed. JK Patnaik (New Delhi: Concept Publication, 2008), 340-349.

18 C. Nunthara, *Society and Economy in Northeast India* (New Delhi: Regency Publication, 2004), 83.

19 Sangkima, *Position and Status*, 295.

meet their expectations. Traditional society expected women to be submissive and obedient, attitudes upheld by the Christian church.<sup>20</sup> Even today, society's definition of the ideal Christian mother is someone who works hard in domestic duties and instills Christian moral virtues in her children. Society's opposition to women taking a prominent part in public and religious affairs is still very strong because women are expected to concentrate on the welfare of the family.<sup>21</sup>

In terms of religion, traditional Mizos followed an animistic religion and believed in the existence of a supreme god and the spirit of good and evil. Women had no role in religious matters. For example, there is the traditional saying, *Hmeichhia leh chakai in sakhua an nei lo* which translates to 'women and crabs have no religion' implying that women must simply follow their husband's religion.<sup>22</sup> The Mizo religion's eternal resting place *Pialral* admitted only *Thangchhuah* [Distinguished Men]. According to Lawmsanga, who studied the traditional Mizo religion, *Thangchhuah* is a title given to a man who has killed a certain number of different animals in chase or by giving a certain number of public feasts.<sup>23</sup> The wife of a *Thangchhuah* shares the title of her husband. This situation suggested that a rich man could avail a permit to *Pialral* by sacrifice and meritorious deeds and women might have a chance of entering the *Pialral* based on the deeds of their husbands.

The two male priests *Sadawt* and *Bawlpu* performed all the rituals in their respective roles. Additionally, evil spirits were believed to be responsible for every misfortune and illness in this world. Thus, to maintain good health and a good harvest, people offered sacrifices to the evil spirits through the male priest. The *Sadawt*, appointed by the chief, perform all the sacrificial rites and worship. He is held in high prestige for his role in the village community.<sup>24</sup> The *Bawlpu* performed sacrificial rites for sick people. As a medicine keeper, he was known to be aware of a particular spirit that caused illness to the patient. The family, who consulted the *Bawlpu* for sickness, would follow his prescription that involved the killing of a particular domesticated animal.<sup>25</sup> Women were not allowed to take part in these sacrificial rites.

In the context of traditional Mizo practices, an important change in the traditional norms is associated with the intervention of British colonial and Christian

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20 UA. Shimray, "Women's work in Naga society, Household work, Workforce Participation and Division of labour," *Economic & Political Weekly* 39, no. 17 (2004): 1709.

21 Lalnilawma, "Progress of Women in Mizoram from the Earliest times to the Present," (PhD diss., Gauhati University, 1990), 36.

22 Tribal Research Institute, *Mizo Women Today* (Aizawl: Directorate of Art and Culture, Mizoram, 1991), 39.

23 Lawmsanga, "Christian mission," 48.

24 Ibid, 34.

25 Ibid, 35.

missionaries since 1894.<sup>26</sup> While the colonial officials focused on reforming the law and practices, missionaries tried to reform the social structures by inculcating the Christian spirit among the Mizos. The system of marriage price drew the attention of the British officials due to frequent quarrels between the bride's and the groom's families over the delay of payments. In 1928, N.E. Parry, the Indian Civil Service, Superintendent of the Lushai Hills from 1925 to 1928 wrote *A Monograph on Lushai Customs and Ceremonies*, which became the basis of the laws governing the Mizos in every aspect of life. In addition, the Lushai Hills District Acquisition of the Chief's Rights Act of 1954 removed the existing clan variations that determine marriage price.

In the various accounts of this period, colonial missionaries were portrayed as having promoted the status of women. Because the older generation was opposed to the education of women and characterized women in traditional ways such as being lacking intelligence, missionary interest in female education was seen as advancing women's position. Missionaries encouraged girls to attend schools, trained women as nurses beginning in 1902, and opened a separate school for girls in 1903.<sup>27</sup> That is why a considerable achievement of literacy rate in Mizoram has been credited to the work and contribution of the missionaries. However, it is important to identify the nature of missionary education for women to determine whether it challenged or reinforced women's status in the traditional culture.

Women began to take part in church activities after adopting the Christian religion. Mizo women became bible women and were trained as midwives and nurses to serve as important instruments for spreading the gospel. Christianity spread quickly; within a few decades of the arrival of Welsh missionaries, the majority of the population became Christians. Although Christianity brought about changes in the position of women, gender inequality still prevailed in the church activities. In the case of the Presbyterian Church, women's contribution through the project "Handful of Rice", beginning in 1904, has become one of the most important sources of income for the church to date and there are hundreds of female missionaries working in various parts of the country. Besides the Theological College founded by missionaries in 1907, admission opened to women only in 1968 producing 102 female theologians, but they were denied ordination as pastors unlike male theologians which hindered their decision making power in the church.<sup>28</sup> The majority of female qualified theologians, who were denied work as pastors were

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26 Lalrinkimi Sudhir, "Modernity in the context of Education and Socio-Cultural Factors, A Study of Social attitudes in Mizoram," *The Journal of Social Psychology* 126, no. 3 (2001): 379.

27 JV. Hluna, "Female Education in Mizoram," in *Proceedings of North East India History Association, Ninth Session* ed. Jayanta Bhusan Khattacharya on behalf of North East India History Association (Shillong: Department of History, North-Eastern Hill University, 1988), 304-309.

28 Association of Theologically Trained Women of India, *ATTWI Silver Jubilee Souvenir 1989-2014* (Aizawl: ATTWI, 2014), 63-67.

instead missionaries with a few holding teaching positions in theological college. Despite their considerable financial contributions and support through their role as missionaries, women do not challenge the status quo in order to obtain better status in the church. There is hardly any initiative in the form of recommendation from women in the church to challenge their roles to the church authority. In 2001 and 2011 the Church Assembly rejected the proposal of female pastoral ordination on the grounds that society is not ready to accept females as pastors; there was also a strong opinion among the majority of the delegates in the Assembly that even if female pastoral ordination was approved in the assembly, the whole Mizo society might not be ready to accept female pastors. Here, we may say that under the influence of the combination of social ideas and religious doctrines, society was influenced by the idea that women were incapable of performing rituals in the church. This attitude reinforces women's approval to their subordinate roles in the church thus opposed initiation to protest for female ordination.

#### **Attitudes Toward Women in Politics**

Studies assert that women across the world tend to be less concerned about their under representation in political office than men.<sup>29</sup> The existence of a wide gender gap in knowledge about politics was considered to be one of the factors responsible for women's lack of participation in politics. For this, lack of education was considered the factor responsible for a lack of women's understanding of their political rights. However, it is evident that education is not the only backdrop of women's understanding of political rights as even when women made gains in education, they were still dissuaded from exercising their political rights. The response of my interviews proved evidence that there are many challenges women face when it comes to exercising their political rights. Although women may have the right to participate in the political process, cultural explanation of gender including society resistance often creates substantial barriers to the exercise of these rights.

As mentioned earlier, this researcher used a qualitative approach to understand Mizo attitudes towards women engaging in formal politics. This approach involved asking 100 local residents from Seling and Reiek villages about their ideas on Mizo women entering politics. Among the male respondents, twenty-eight percent are government servants and pensioners from the army, twenty-five percent are engaged in small hardware businesses, furniture workshops, private and individual drivers, and the rest of the respondents are farmers, daily wage laborers working in construction, and a few contractors (full time politicians). Among the female respondents, only six percent were employed by the government as schoolteachers, nurses, and health workers. Thirty-two percent owned small businesses such as tea stalls, grocery shops, selling sold second-hand clothes, and vegetables. The other respondents were farmers and housewives.

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29 Pamela Paxton, Sheri Knavish and Melanie M. Hughes, "Gender in Politics," *Annual Review of Sociology* 33 (2007): 264



It has been assumed that in a society where the attitudes towards women are traditional, there is a clear distinction between the public roles of men and the private roles of women.<sup>30</sup> Because women are socialized into domestic roles, they cannot see themselves in the public spheres. Fifty-five percent of the respondents in both villages did not think women should enter formal politics. Female respondents expressed stronger views than men against women entering politics. Twenty-seven percent of the respondents had no opinion on whether women should enter politics, and some indicated they were reluctant to discuss any issue in politics, only eighteen percent favored women's participation in politics.

The majority of the male and female respondents based their views on what they thought the Bible taught. Many cited the Bible: "The head of the woman is the man."<sup>31</sup> They perceived politics and Christian life as incompatible. To summarize, they equated women entering politics with trying to overturn the Biblically ordained domination of men over women.

However, before most respondents voiced their opposition to women in politics, they highlighted the duties of daughters, wives, and mothers, emphasizing the negative impact on families when women failed in their responsibilities at home. Some of the male respondents said they would not want their wives to travel with male politicians or to have to stay away overnight for political party committee meetings, campaigns, or other activities. Some men declared they would never let their wives, daughters, or other female relatives enter politics. They proclaimed that women's participation in voting was sufficient to perform their duties as good citizens. Most of the male and female respondents believed that women should be active in the church, not politics. In this regard, Bijukumar (2008) rightly argues that these attitudes-are influenced by Christian beliefs.<sup>32</sup> For many of the female respondents, entering politics was not simply the wrong decision for women; they thought it to be shameful. They claimed they were satisfied performing their responsibilities as nurturers. Many women interviewed indicated they would rather be good mothers than good politicians. They said a good mother is a "Godly mother" who fulfills the ideal role of the Christian mother, free from worldly life including politics.

Most of the female respondents agreed that politics is not and should not be a priority for women and that women should not struggle to become politicians. At the same time, they regarded politicians as corrupt and dishonest. They also indicated that women who entered politics are masculine. They made it clear they knew very little about politics because these topics were never discussed at home. Respondents, even those from the families of politicians, said that, "[they] never discuss politics at home." Generally, they believed the discussion of politics at home

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30 Shawn Meghan Burn, *Women across Cultures: A Global Perspective* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2011), 199.

31 I Corinthians 11:3, Holy Bible: King James Version.

32 V. Bijukumar, "Civil Society and Social Capital in Mizoram: Changing Dimensions and Emerging Trends," *Man and Society, Journal of North East Studies* 5 (Spring 2008): 56-72.

was incompatible with the way a good Christian family behaved. There was a greater desire to make history in the church rather than politics and people indicated more respect for female theologians than female politicians.

The female respondents defended their position by arguing that they had tremendous responsibilities at home and therefore no time for public activities. It can be argued that combining family responsibilities and political office are largely a problem for women because the sexual division of labor keeps women tied to the private domestic sphere.<sup>33</sup> However, one cannot discount the role of the views cited above on women's decisions.

A few respondents accepted the fact that women should enter politics, but pointed out the problems involved in encouraging more women in politics. They believed political fitness for women did not come from intelligence, the desire to be a politician, or popularity in the communities. They said women must have special traits to enter politics and suggested these could include high academic achievement and obedience to Christian ideas. It was clear they were reluctant to encourage women in general to enter politics. They also identified the fact that society is not ready to have mothers in politics and worried that the demands of public engagements and frequent travel were incompatible with the role of an ideal Christian mother.<sup>34</sup> These attitudes fit dominant stereotypes about proper gender roles for women and essentially excluded women from political participation.

Overall, there was a generalized reluctance among interviewees to support the implementation of reserved seats for women in the Village Councils elections as a strategy for enhancing women's political participation. Following the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments to the Constitution of India, the Mizoram Legislative Assembly passed the Lushai Hills District (Village Councils Amendment) Bill of 2014, on November 2014. As per the amended Act, one seat will be reserved for women on Village Councils having five seats, two seats in village/local councils having seven seats, and three seats in village councils having nine seats. This amendment also extended the term of the Village Councils from three years to five years. This amendment opened opportunities for women to enter politics at the local level. While the highest number of females elected to Village Council was 37 in 2002. In the largest district of Aizawl, 78 women were elected to the Village Council in 2015 (Government of Mizoram) after the imposition of this Act.<sup>35</sup>

In spite of this promising result, most respondents thought society was not ready for this change. The general perception was that the introduction of reservations for women, in a context where women have not achieved the necessary skills for the job, would undermine democratic decision-making. Respondents reasoned that

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33 Burn, *Women Across Cultures*, 191.

34 Narayanan Usha, "Women Political Empowerment, Imperatives and Challenges," *Mainstream Publication* (April 10, 1999), 7.

35 Government of Mizoram, *Consolidated Results of the General Elections to Village Councils held on 30th April 2015* (Aizawl: Directorate of Local Administration Department, 2015).

reservations confirmed the fact that women could not secure sufficient votes to win the election and was thus anti-democratic. The few respondents who supported women participating in politics argued Mizoram should follow the lead of other countries in the world. They believed that having female leaders would improve the status of women in society. They also believed female politicians would prove women's capability in the field of politics.

### **Conclusion**

Those responding to my interviews in Seling and Reiek Village believed that women are not qualified to become politicians because of their domestic responsibilities and inability to handle political issues, and that the role of a politician is incompatible with the role of a Christian daughter, wife, or mother. It is evident that there is little support or appreciation for women's role in public affairs. In contrast, there is a great deal of support and approval for performing traditional roles, roles that reinforce the inferior status of women.

This means that to enter and stay in politics, Mizo women have to be able to withstand various challenges. This is not unusual; many societies have cultural barriers and practices that make it difficult for women to exercise their political rights. However, for Mizo women, cultural barriers are reinforced by religious beliefs.

This research suggests that at present Mizo women do not regard political representation as an important step to improve their roles in society. There is a great need to create awareness among women to make them understand how women in politics could represent women's needs. However, it remains a question of what mechanism would best create awareness. I believe the church, being the most influential group, would be the best institution to create awareness regarding attitudes to women in politics, but it is impossible to predict if the church would agree to take up this initiative. In the present situation, it is difficult to see how it will be possible to convince women that they should join together to combat their marginalization in formal politics.