

Performance of Political Parties in Village Council Election 2015 in Mizoram: A Gender Perspective

Zonunmawia*

Abstract

Election is the symbol of democracy. The process of modernization for the Mizo people actually started after the coming of Christianity. Lushai Hills became a district of Assam since colonial era. Mizo people became aware of democracy and election since 1952. In the patriarchal set up of Mizo society, share of women is minimal in the decision making process. In the contemporary political history of Mizoram, the election of village council 2015 has made a history for introducing 33 percent seats reservation for women. This election was conducted under Mizoram (Constitution of State Election Commission) Rules, 2008. The paper attempts to analyse the perspectives of 2015 village council election and the status of women.

Key words: Women, Reservation, Political parties, Village Council

Introduction

The paper will focus upon village council election of 2015 in six districts¹ but Sixth Schedule area is not included in this election.² The election was held on 30.4.2015. Based on the records provided by State Election Commission Office, INC won in 303 Village Councils (VC), MNF won in 165 Village Councils, ZNP won in 6 Village Councils, BJP won in 5 Village Councils, independent candidates won in 44 villages, and there were 45 village councils where no political party got majority.³ The paper has the following objectives - To study women representation in the village council election 2015 in general; to study voter turnout at the village level on gender basis, district-wise; to study

what political parties have more representation for women in the village council seats; and to give an assessment of 2015 VC election with special focus on reservation of seats for women.

Status of Women in Six Districts

The six districts include the study area such as - Aizawl, Lunglei, Champhai, Kolasib, Serchhip and Mamit district. The total number of population in the six districts is 19, 22,738. Out of this, males constitute 4, 66,146 which comprises 50 percent of the population. At the same time, females are 4, 56,592 which comprises 49 percent from the total population of six districts. Female literacy percentage in Mamit district is 80.35 percent, Kolasib district is 92.38, Aizawl

*Zonunmawia is Research Scholar in Dept. of Political Science, Mizoram University, Aizawl, Mizoram.
Email: zotea.biatae @gmail.com

district is 97.89 percent, Champhai district is 94.59 percent, Serchhip district 97.53 percent and Lunglei district is 85.49 percent. Overall Mizoram literacy percentage – Males: 93.35 percent and Females: 89.27 percent. The percentage gap between males and females is 4 percent. Literacy percentage of rural areas is different from urban. In rural areas male literacy percentage is 88.16 percent and female is 79 percent. The percentage gap is 9.15 percent which means women literacy is much lower than male literacy percentage in rural areas. At the same time, urban male literacy percentage is 97.98 and female is 97.27 percent.⁴ It can be learnt that there is no percentage gap in urban area. It is to be remembered that the lower the level, the lower the level of political participation.

Participation of Women in Village Council Elections

Just after Indian Independence, the Lushai Hills Autonomous District Council (later on the Mizo District Council) and Pawi-Lakher Regional Council were created under the Six Schedule of the Constitution of India in 1952 and in 1953 respectively. The chieftainship was abolished by an Act of the Assam Lushai Hills District (Acquisition of Chiefs Right) in 1954. Both the Councils democratised the village administration by enacting the Lushai Hills District (Village Councils) Act, 1953 and the Pawi-Lakher Autonomous Region (Village Councils) Act, 1954. The Act empowers the District council to form a village council in every village within the

jurisdiction of Lushai Hills District Council. It also provided that the number of village councils would vary from village to village depending upon the number of houses. The first election to the village council was held from April 23 to July 7, 1954.⁵ Accordingly, the village administration was vested in the democratically elected village councils, which infact started functioning from August 1954 within the respective jurisdictions of the councils. These Acts did not provide seat reservation for women.⁶

The Government of Mizoram adapted the Lushai Hills District (Village Councils) Act, 1953 in 1972 to carry out the village administration in its respective areas. The Village Council (VC) is a democratically elected body whose provisions can be amended by the executive/administrative orders of the Government of Mizoram under the Local Administration Department. The Act does not have nomination or reservation seat for women. But women can fight the election through general seats. Therefore, since 1954 there have been some women members who got elected as members of village councils in the state.⁷

In the General Election to Village Councils held in February 2006, there were 556 village councils against 2036 VC seats within the six districts of Mizoram excluding the two districts lying within the Autonomous District Councils. In this election, out of a total of 2036 VC seats, only 33 (i.e. about 1.09%) women were elected. During the General

Election to village councils for the term of 2009-2012 which was held in February 2009, total women contestants were 84. Out of this, 34 women were elected, which is the highest number ever recorded of women VC Members in Mizoram. In this election, there were 557 village councils having 2071 VC seats within six districts of the state. Women voters had out numbered their male counter parts even in this election as was experienced in the past. This increasing number of women VC Members is due to the intervention of the Core Committee of Panchayat Mahila Shakti Abhiyaan (PMSA) to women at maximum number.⁸

Recent Developments for Women Reservation in Mizoram

The village council which is considered a democratic institution at the grass root level is largely dominated by males. Though women are not debarred for contesting the election of VC, they (women) were not encouraged to join the political arena. Since this is the case in the state of Mizoram, the women of the state especially women NGOs like Panchayat Mahila Shakti Abhiyaan (PMSA), All Mizoram Women Federation and Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (MHIP) are exerting pressure on the political party leaders to make room for women by reserving seats and by nominating women with party tickets. Initiative for reservation of seats for women was championed by PMSA (Panchayat Mahila Shakti Abhiyaan(PMSA)).⁹ This Core Committee in their State Charter of Demands¹⁰ submitted to the Government of Mizoram and to the

Government of India in October 2008 included 33 percent seat reservation for women as per the 73rd and 74th CAAs. They also demanded to provide 33 per cent seats reservation for women in the village council Act and the same must be included in the party election manifestos to cause women empowerment in Mizoram. They even submitted representation to field women in these elections to all leaders of political parties so that each party could field potential women candidates at least not less than 33 percent to the selections of MLA and Village Councils.¹¹

The Mizoram Government has passed the Lushai Hills District (village council) Amendment Act, 2015. This repealed and amended the Lushai Hills District (Village Council) Act, 1953. This amendment changed the term of the village council members which is from three to five years. Moreover, reservation of seat for women in the village council election was added in the amendment.¹² Thus, the enactment of this Act was an important landmark taken up by the Mizoram Government to make women politically empowered.¹³ In Village Council Election 2015, the Mizoram State Election Commission has made certain changes in the number of village council seats provided in the Lushai Hills Village Council Act, 1953. This modification is based on The Lushai Hills District Village Council Amendment Act 2014.

The Lushai Hills District Village Council Amendment Act 2014 provides that -

- For villages not exceeding 200 households, there shall be 3 (three) elected members, of whom 1 (one shall be woman);
- For villages with more than 200 households, but not exceeding 500 households, there shall be 5 (five) members, of whom 1 (one) shall be a woman;
- For villages with more than 500 households, but not exceeding 1000 households, there shall be 7 (seven) elected members, of whom 2 (two) shall be women;
- For villages with more than 1000 households and above, there shall be 9 (nine) elected members, of whom 3 (three) shall be women.¹⁴

Based on the above amendment act, females are to be elected from the female reserved seats through popular election. This condition necessitates direct involvement of women in the decision making process as well as in politics. The provision also provides for different colours of ballot papers for male and

female candidates. With regard to symbol, those who have party affiliation may use reserve symbol as provided in The Mizoram Election to Village Council Rules, 2014.

Overall Performance of Political Parties: Village Council Election, 2015

In the village council election which was held in 2015, the Indian National Congress has the highest score. It can be assumed that forming ministry at the state level had repercussions in the election of Village Councils. INC took 270 village councils and won 1080 seats, MNF took 125 village councils and won 676 seats, ZNP took 6 village councils and won 88 seats, BJP took 5 village councils and won 31 seats, MPC could not get solid village council but won 21 seats. Independent Candidates took 45 village councils and won as many as 258 seats. There were hung village councils in 50 villages where no political party got majority in the village council election. Table 1 highlights the score of different political parties in the village council election and number of seats won by each political party.

Table 1 Seats Won by Political Parties in VC Elections, 2015

Sl. No	Name of Political Party	No.of winning Village council	No.of seats Winning
1	Bharatia Janata Party (BJP)	5	31
2	Indian National Congress (INC)	270	1080
3	Mizo National Front (MNF)	125	676
4	Mizo Peoples Conference (MPC)	0	21
5	Zoram Nationalist Party (ZNP)	6	88
6	Others	98	258
TOTAL		504	2154

Source: Compiled from State Election Commission, Mizoram, and Researcher own Calculation. General Elections of Village Council, 2015 - held on 30th April, 2015

Male and Female Voter Turnout: District-wise Analysis

In five districts, Aizawl, Lunglei, Champhai, Kolasib and Serchhip, the percentage share of female voters turnout is higher than male voters turnout. It is evident from the fact that in Aizawl District, male percentage is 49 percent and female is 50 percent. In Lunglei district, male percent is 49 and female is 50 percent. In Champhai district, male percent is 49 and female is 50 percent. In Serchhip district, male percent is 49 and female is 50 percent. In Kolasib District, male percentage is 48 percent and female is 51 percent. In all the above districts, percentage share of women voters turnout is higher than male. This exhibits that the

level of women participation in grassroots level politics has shown an improvement and women participation has increased over the years.

In Mamit district, percentage share of male (51 percent) exceed female voter turnout (48 percent). Mamit district is the only district, having higher male voter turnout percentage than female voter turnout percentage. Thus, it is evident from the above that the level of women participation is higher than male participation in five districts. The table highlights that women participation at village level election is encouraging and positive. Details of voter turnout in six districts are demonstrated in Table 2.

Table 2 Voter Turn Out in VC Elections, 2015

Abstract of Voter Turn Out										
Sl No	Name of District	Total No. of Voters			Total No. of Votes cast			Percentage of voters		
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1	Aizawl	29274	30164	59438	23917	24223	48140	49.68	50.31	80.99
2	Lunglei	48861	49296	98157	20940	21085	42025	49.82	50.17	42.81
3	Serchhip	21332	22169	43501	16243	16484	32727	49.63	50.36	75.23
4	Champhai	39530	39885	79415	27967	28494	56 383	49.6	50.53	71
5	Mamit	24953	24156	49109	20477	19592	40069	51.1	48.89	81.59
6	Kolasib	22164	23276	45440	16392	17141	33533	48.88	51.16	73.8
TOTAL		186114	188946	375060	125936	127019	252877	67.67	67.23	67.42

Source: Compiled from State Election Commission, Mizoram, and Researcher own Calculation. General Elections of Village Council, 2015 - held on 30th April, 2015

Representation of Women: District-wise Performance

In Aizawl District, there are 69 village councils having 299 seats. Out of this, male candidates were 219. At the same time, women candidates based on

seat reservation and elected were 80. The percentage of male representation was 73 percent and the percentage share of women was 26 percent. In Lunglei District, there are 145 village councils, out of the total number of village council seats of 589, male representation was 430 and

female representation was 159. The percentage share of male representation was 73 percent and the percentage share of women was 26 percent. In Serchhip District, there are 107 village councils. Out of the total number of 522 seats, women occupied 140 seats and male occupied 382 seats. The percentage share of male was 74 percent and the women percentage share was 25 percent in 2015 village council election. In Champhai District, there are 49 village councils, out of the total number of 256 VC seats, women occupied 66 seats and male occupied 191 seats. The percentage share of male was 72 percent and the women percentage share was 26 percent in 2015 village council election. In Mamit District, there are 87 village councils, out of the total number of village council seats of 357, male representation was 267 and female representation was 90. The percentage share of male representation was 74 percent and the percentage share

of women was 25 percent. In Kolasib District, there are 46 village councils having 230 seats. Out of this, male candidates elected were 172. At the same time, women candidates based on seat reservation and elected were 58. The percentage of male representation was 74 percent and the percentage share of women was 25 percent.

In the six districts, the total number of seats was 2256, and total number of women representation was 593. The percentage share of women in the said district was 26 percent. The male representation was 1663, which is 73 percent. It is evident that introduction of reservation of seats for women has encouraged level of women political participation in Mizoram. Abstract of six districts are given in the table below. It is evident that percentage share of women in each district has not yet reached 30 percent (Table 3).

Table 3. Gender Comparison in VC Elections, 2015

District-wise Abstract							
Sl. No	Details	Aizawl District	Lunglei District	Serchhip District	Champhai District	Mamit District	Kolasib District
1	No. of Villages	69	145	49	107	87	46
2	Total No.of male candidates and elected	219	430	191	382	267	172
3	Total No.of female candidates based on seat reservation and elected	80	159	66	140	90	58
4	Percentage of women representation	26.75	26.99	25.63	26.71	25.2	25.21
5	Percentage of men representation	73.24	73	74.31	72.9	74.78	74.78
6	Total No.of seats	299	589	257	524	357	230
GRAND TOTAL		2256 Village council seats					

Source: Compiled from State Election Commission, Mizoram, and Researcher own Calculation. General Elections of Village Council, 2015 - held on 30th April, 2015

Women Representation: Performance of Political Parties

Indian National Congress (INC): In Aizawl District, INC won 30 seats which is 41 percent out of the total number of female seats. In Lunglei district, INC won 75 seats which is 50 percent. In Serchhip District, INC won 37 seats which is 59 percent. In Champhai District, INC won 72 seats which is 57 percent. In Mamit District, INC won 35 seats which is 50 percent. In Kolasib District, INC won 28 seats which is 48 percent. Thus, 277 (51 percent) women representation in the six districts are from INC. Thus, the Indian National Congress (INC) has highest women representation among the political parties operated in Mizoram.

Mizo National Front (MNF): In Aizawl District MNF won 26 seats, which is 36 percent out of the total number of female seats. In Lunglei district MNF, won 47 seats which is 31 percent. In Serchhip District, MNF won 18 seats which is 29 percent. In Champhai District, MNF won 34 seats which is 26 percent. In Mamit District, MNF won 24 seats which is 34 percent. In Kolasib District, MNF won 20 seats which is 34 percent. Altogether, MNF won 169 seats (31 percent) from six districts. It stood second place for having 169 women representation in Village Council Election 2015.

Zoram Nationalist Party (ZNP): In Aizawl District, ZNP won 4 seats which is 5 percent out of the total number of female seats. In Lunglei district, ZNP won 4 seats which is 2 percent. In Serchhip District, ZNP won 2 seats which is 3 percent. In Champhai District, ZNP won 4 seats which is 3 percent. In Mamit District ZNP won 5 seats which is 7 percent. In Kolasib District, ZNP won 3 seats which is 5 percent. Aggregate score of ZNP was 22 seats, which comprised of 4 percent.

Mizoram Peoples Conference (MPC): In Aizawl District MPC won 2 seats, which is 2 percent out of the total number of female seats. In Lunglei district MPC won no seats. In Serchhip District, MPC won 3 seats which is 4 percent. In Champhai District, MPC won barely 1 seat. In Mamit District MPC won no seats. In Kolasib District, MPC won 2 seats which is 3 percent. The aggregate score of MPC is 8 seats, which is a mere 1.4 percent.

Bharatia Janata Party (BJP): In Aizawl District BJP did not win a single seat. In Lunglei district BJP won 1 seat which is 0.6 percent. In Serchhip District, BJP won no seats. In Champhai District, BJP won no seats. In Mamit District BJP won 2 seats which is 2 percent. In Kolasib District, BJP won 1 seat which is 1 percent. Details of performance of political parties are presented in Table 4 and Figure 1.

Table 4. Details of Performance of Political Parties in VC Elections, 2015

Performance of Political Parties in Village Council Election, 2015													
Sl. No	Name of Political Parties	Aizawl		Lunglei		Serchhip		Champhai		Mamit		Kolasib	
		No of women elected	% women representation	No of women elected	% women representation	No of women elected	% women representation	No of women elected	% women representation	No of women elected	% women representation	No of women elected	% women representation
1	INC	30	41%	75	50%	37	59%	72	57%	35	50%	28	48%
2	MNF	26	36%	47	31%	18	29%	34	26%	24	34%	20	34%
3	ZNP	4	5%	4	2%	2	3%	4	3%	5	7%	3	5%
4	MPC	2	2%	-	-	3	4%	1	0.70%	-	-	2	3%
5	IND	10	13%	21	14%	2	3%	15	11%	4	5%	4	6%
6	BJP	-	-	1	0.60%	-	-	-	-	2	2%	1	1%

Source: Compiled from State Election Commission, Mizoram, and Researcher own Calculation. General Elections of Village Council, 2015 - held on 30th April, 2015.

Performance of Political Parties in Village Council Election, 2015

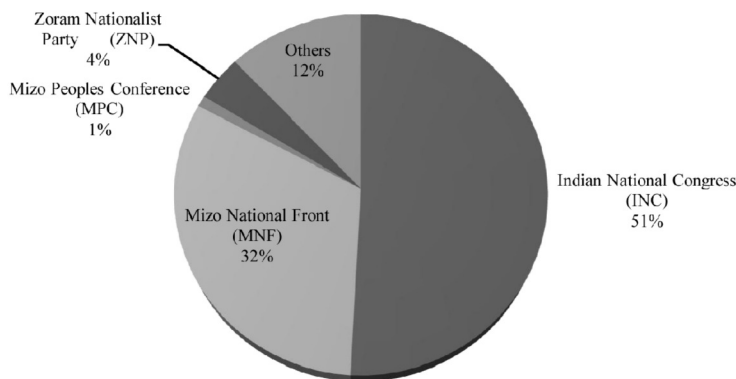


Figure 1: Performance of Political Parties in Village Council Election, 2015.

Conclusions

In all the six districts, Indian National Congress (INC) has highest women representation among the political parties. The Mizo National Front (MNF) has the second highest representation of women. In this connection, it can be said that share of women in the political parties are concentrated in two major political parties, they won most seats of the village

councils. The other political parties such as: MPC, ZNP and BJP share in winning village council seats are relatively low in comparison to the aforesaid two political parties. With regard to the voter turnout in all the six districts, female voter turnout exceeds male voter turnout. This has exhibited that the level of women participation in the village council election was quite impressive. The total number

of women in Village Council Election of 2015 was 536. It constitutes 26 percent. At the same time, male percentage share is 73 which means males still dominate the politics at village level. It is an undeniable fact that the present introduction of reservation of seats for women has resulted in the increase of percentage share of women in village level administration. In support of women, Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation once said that “*Women have to play a much more meaningful role in politics,*

making it more accountable, transparent and corruption free”. Writing in *Harijan* on 21 April 1946, he emphasized the need to “*enroll women as voters, impart or have imparted to them practical education, teach them to think independently, release them from the chains of caste that bind them so as to bring about a change in them...If they will do this, they will purify the present unclean atmosphere.*”¹ He prophetically said, “*as long as the women of India do not take part in public life, there can be no salvation for the country*”.^{xvi}

Endnotes

¹Six districts include-Aizawl, Lunglei, Champhai, Mamit, Kolasib, Serchhip district

²Six Scheduled areas- Lawngtlai and Saiha District are exempted

³ Mizoram State Election Commission reports on Results of Village Council Election, 2015.

⁴Mizoram Statistical Handbook, 2014 published by Directorate of Economics and Statistics, government of Mizoram.

⁵Patnaik, Jagadish K, Mizoram: “*Dimension & Perspectives, Society, Economy and Polity*”, New Delhi:Concept Publishing Company, 2008, pp287-288

⁶Lalneihzovi, “*Political Empowerment of women in Mizoram*”, IndianJournalofPublicAdministration Vol.I X,No.3,July-September,2014.

⁷ Ibid., Lalneihzovi

⁸Charter of Demands from Elected Women Representatives of Mizoram under Core Committee-Panchayat Mahila Shakti Abhiyan submitted to the Government of India and Government of Mizoram in October, 2008.p.5.

⁹In pursuance of Government of India’s Ministry of Panchayati Raj’s D.O.Letter -No.R-12012/31/2007-P-J Dated 21/1/2008, the Governor of Mizoram Constituted Core Committee for Mizoram for the purpose of successful implementation of Panchayat Mahila Evam Yuva Shakti Abhiyan through Mizoram Gazette Extra ordinary and Published by Authority.

¹⁰Charter of Demands from Elected Women Representatives of Mizoram under Core Committee-Panchayat Mahila Shakti Abhiyan submitted to the Government of India and Government of Mizoram in October, 2008.p.5.

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