



# An Analysis Of Women's Reservation In Local Councils Within Aizawl Municipal Area: A Case Study Of Bethlehem Vengthlang Local Council.

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## Abstract:

Before India's independence, village governance in Mizoram was overseen by hereditary chiefs. When the British arrived in 1890, they adopted a policy of limited intervention, allowing local administration to remain under the authority of these chiefs. Following independence, the Constituent Assembly established the North East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas Committee, commonly referred to as the Bordoloi Committee, to propose a governance framework for Assam's hill regions. Based on its recommendations, autonomous district councils were formed in each hill district, and these provisions were later enshrined in Article 244(2) of the Indian Constitution under the Sixth Schedule. In 1954, the Lushai Hills District (Village Councils) Act of 1953 led to the creation of village councils, marking the beginning of grassroots democratic institutions in Mizoram. Over time, women's participation in these councils has steadily increased. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, enacted during Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao's tenure, mandated the reservation of one-third of seats for women in rural and urban local bodies across India. In Mizoram, this commitment was reinforced through the Village Council (Amendment) Act of 2014, which legally ensured seat reservations for women. This paper seeks to evaluate the effects of these reservation policies on women's representation and participation in the local councils of Bethlehem Vengthlang, Aizawl, Mizoram.

**Keywords:** Administration, Independence, Reservation of women's seats, local councils.

## INTRODUCTION

Decentralization in India entails the transfer of authority, executive authority, and financial assets from the government at the national level to local entities. The objective is to augment participatory democracy, improve governance, and guarantee superior public service delivery. Article 40 of the Indian Constitution emphasizes the establishment of village panchayats as autonomous governing entities. Significant advancements occurred through the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments in 1992, which instituted a robust decentralization framework by empowering local entities in rural and urban regions. Local entities, such as Panchayati Raj institutions (PRIs) and urban local bodies (ULBs), acquired the power to address local matters, hence fostering grassroots democracy (Kumar, 2025)

Before British domination in Mizoram, the chief held administrative responsibilities. The British arrived in Mizoram in 1890, intending to exert minimum interference while maintaining power through the rulers (History of Mizoram, n.d.). Subsequent to India's independence, the Indian constituent parliament established the North East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas Committee, referred to as the Bordoloi Committee, to propose a governance structure for the hill regions of Assam. Consequently, District Councils were instituted in each hill district, and these proposals were integrated into Article 244(2) and encompassed under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The councils contested the chiefs' authority, resulting in the dissolution of the oppressive chiefship in the Mizo hill district pursuant to the Lushai Hills District (Acquisition of Chief Rights) Act of 1954 (History of Mizoram, n.d.). Thereafter, village government was overseen by elected councils beginning in August 1954. These councils primarily manage administrative and minor judicial responsibilities, according to the Village Councils Act of 1953 and 1954. The Mizo Hills District was designated as the Union Territory of Mizoram under the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganization) Act of 1971, leading to the dissolution of the Mizo Hills District Council in 1972 (Government of Mizoram, 2022).

The Pawi-Lakher Regional Council was subsequently divided into three District Councils: Lai, Mara, and Chakma, in accordance with the same Act. Since 1972, the Government of Mizoram and the three Autonomous District Councils have implemented the Lushai Hills District (Village Councils) Act of 1954 for village governance in their jurisdictions. The stipulations of these Acts may be modified by executive or administrative directives from the Government of Mizoram and the Autonomous District Councils. The governance of the Village Councils is managed by the Local Administration Department (LAD) and the Town Planning/Housing sector of the Government of Mizoram. Mizoram comprises two distinct sets of village councils, each autonomously administered by the government of Mizoram and the district councils. The Lushai Hill (District Councils) Act of 1954 was changed twice: first by the Lushai Hills District (Village Councils Amendment) Act of 2006, and subsequently by the Lushai Hills District (Village Councils Amendment) Act of 2014. The recent revisions have expanded the reserve of seats for women from 3 years to 5 years (Lalsangliani, 2008).

## **THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA AND MIZORAM**

Subsequent to the 73rd and 74th Amendments, the state government established the requisite tiers of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) and urban local authorities. The infrastructure required for the election of local representatives was administered by state election commissioners. Approximately three million elected local government officials exist, alongside roughly 250,000 Panchayati Raj Institutions and urban local governments. The Amendments required that women occupy a minimum of one-third of the positions in local governing bodies. India has the highest number of women in elected office, totaling 1.4 million. Furthermore, seats and positions for sarpanch/pradhan were reserved for SC/ST candidates (74th Amendment and Municipalities in India, 2026). While SC/STs and other marginalized groups have traditionally benefited from reserved seats in India, women are afforded reservations only at the local government level. In contrast to reserved seats at the legislative tier, SC/ST candidates possess genuine influence in governance alone at this level. Research conducted by Lakshmi Iyer, Anandi Mani, Prachi Mishra, and Petia Topalova indicates that women are more inclined to report crimes when they have representation in local government (Imtiyaz & Fakhruz-Zaman, 2019).

Research by R. Chattopadhyay and E. Duflo indicates that districts led by female sarpanchs or pradhans allocate significantly greater resources to drinking water, a public utility of considerable importance to women. Furthermore, they found that SC sarpanch/pradhans have a greater propensity to allocate funds for public utilities in SC hamlets, marking a notable departure from segregated communities in India. These changes are significant in a country where caste and gender often determine access more than economic status (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004). Women constitute about fifty percent of Mizoram's inhabitants, and their involvement in developmental initiatives is essential. Women play a vital part in Mizo society, making substantial contributions to their families, villages, and the state, while often being disregarded. The status of women has progressively enhanced, indicating a more cultured viewpoint.

Notwithstanding this advancement, Mizo society continues to be patriarchal, with heads of families exercising dominion over their households. Historically, women's roles were predetermined from birth, with explicit expectations to fulfill the duties of exemplary daughters, wives, and mothers. The patriarchal view of women is widespread in Mizo society. Women's engagement in politics and involvement in the political system were very atypical both prior to and following the arrival of the British (Gangte, 2010).

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

C. Nunthara's 2015 publication, "Local Governance in Northeast India," examines the functioning of local government in Mizoram, focusing on the regulatory and developmental responsibilities of Village Councils, alongside urban local administration. Notwithstanding constitutional provisions, it underscores that genuine devolution of authority, responsibilities, and officials has not been realized in numerous states. It delineates various factors contributing to this deficiency, such as an absence of political resolve for decentralization, inadequate public awareness and vigilance, insufficient collaboration from officials, bureaucratic opposition to engaging with elected local governments, restricted decision-making processes, and inadequately formulated rules and procedures.

Lalneihzovi (2017), in her study "Decentralised Governance for Rural Development in Mizoram: Problems and Prospects," examined the importance of democratic decentralization via the Panchayati Raj system and the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992, with an emphasis on Mizoram. It analyzes how the amendment fosters grassroots democracy by transforming Panchayati Raj into an instrument for local self-governance. The article emphasizes the imperative of collaboration between the 73rd Amendment and the local entities of Mizoram's Autonomous District Councils, Village Councils, and the Panchayati Raj system.

Dr. Lily Sangpui and Dr. Robert Sanglora Khawbung (2024), in their study "Village Council in Mizoram: A Critical Assessment," analyzed the powers and responsibilities of the Village Council, the most fundamental governmental entity in Mizoram. In contrast to Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) established by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992, it addresses the challenges faced by Village Councils in delivering essential services for rural development. The document emphasizes the existing problem within the Village Council framework and its repercussions on the execution of socioeconomic development initiatives. To enhance its role as a grassroots entity for local self-governance, it underscores the imperative of reforming and fortifying the Village Council while augmenting its financial and functional authority.

The edited volume by C. Lalkima and Lalneihzovi (2019), titled "Participation of Women in Politics and Governance: Local and State in Mizoram," examines women's engagement in political and governance spheres at both local and state levels. It emphasizes women's contributions from the Autonomous District Council era to statehood, encompassing their involvement in the Mizoram Legislative Assembly and the Aizawl Municipal Corporation (AMC). The book examines obstacles to women's involvement in politics, particularly patriarchal values in rural regions, and underscores the necessity of addressing gender bias to enhance women's engagement in political governance.

## OBJECTIVES AND SPECIFICATIONS OF BETHLEHEM VENGTHLANG VILLAGE COUNCIL

This article tries to analyse the inception of the village council of Bethlehem Vengthlang and till the present local council of Bethlehem vengthlang the participation of women and the reservation policy, whether women effectively participated in the development of the society or faced hurdles in the development of society. The name of Bethlehem Vengthlang was previously known as Bethlehem. Earlier, the locality was also referred to as Thatvunga, Pidum, and Babaji. The name Bethlehem was given by Zikpuia in 1961. By 1966, following the announcement of independence by the Mizo National Front from India, many people from different villages migrated to the Bethlehem locality. In 1971, the Bethlehem Village Council was created, carved out of the Venghlui Village Council. The first president of the Bethlehem Village Council was Vanbawia. With the growing population, the locality of Bethlehem was

divided into two parts: Bethlehem and Bethlehem Vengthlang, through Notification No. LAD/VC-5/88/730 dated 3 October 1990 (Rohluna, 2022).

The first members of the Bethlehem Vengthlang Village Council were:

President	C. Lalsanglura
Vice President	K. Thangzuala
Secretary	C. Laltuma
Members	Saingura Sailo, K. Lianchhia, R. Sangliana
Nominated Members	Lalzuia, Hmangaiha

#### Source collected from fieldwork

The present members of the Local Council of Bethlehem Vengthlang (Aizawl Municipal Corporation, 2025).

1	Chawngkhawliana	ZPM
2	C.Zonunsanga	MNF
3	Rosangzela	ZPM
4	C.Lalzuiliana	ZPMI
5	H.Lalrothianghlina	MNF
	PC Vanlalpeki	ZPM(Res)
7	Lalhmingchhuangi	MNF(Res)

According to the database maintained by the Bethlehem Vengthlang Local Council, the 2026 records are as follows:

#### Demographic Profile of Bethlehem Vengthlang

1	Total Population	Approximately 9,020
2	Available Infrastructure:	Number
	1. Sub-Center	1
	2. Clinic Centre	1
	3. OST Satellite	1
	4. Anganwadi Centers	6
	5. Government Primary Schools	3
	6. Government Middle Schools	2
	7. Government High School	1
	8. English Medium Elementary School	1
	9. Church School (PES)	1
	10. Government Forest Research Office for Bamboo and Rattan.	1
	11. Power & Electricity Side Office	1
	12. Mizoram Rural Bank	1
	13. Government Forest Training School	1
	14. Playgrounds	2
	15. Community Hall	1
	16. Dental Clinics	2
	17. Laboratories	2
	18. Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Department	1
	19. Pre-School	1
3	Top 3 Occupations:	
	1. Handicraft workers	

	2. Businessmen/traders	
	3. Government employees	
4.	Number of Churches	7
5.	Number of Households (Families)	Approximately 980
6.	Number of Houses/Buildings	Approximately 1,120
7.	Population by Gender:	
	Male – 4,210	Female – 4,810

### Source Collected from Fieldwork

In the year 2002, in the village council of Bethlehem Vengthlang, for the first time, P.C. Liantluangi was elected as the member of the village council. In the second general local council election 2015, under the reservation, two women, Lalremruati and Jennie Lalthanpuii, were elected as members of the village council. Again, in the third general local council election 2020, Lalhmingchhuangi and P.C.Vanlalpeki were elected as members. Again, in the fourth general local council 2025, P.C.Vanlalpeki and Lalhmingchhuangi were elected as members of the village council.

R. Lalawmpuii is an elected Corporator of the Aizawl Municipal Corporation (AMC), representing Ward No. 16. She is affiliated with the Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) party. She has also been active in community and educational events. For example, during a program at Bethlehem Vengthlang Middle School II, she emphasized the importance of teachers as role models for students, highlighting their role in shaping society.

### DATA ANALYSIS

Historically, from the inaugural village council election, women's participation was minimal, and they were seldom elected, particularly in the Bethlehem Vengthlang village council. The Bethlehem village council was carved out of the Venghlui village council, and by the order of the Government, in the year 1990 Bethlehem Vengthlang village council was established. Aizawl, the capital of Mizoram, has undergone significant political and administrative transformation in the last few decades. Traditionally governed by Village Councils (VCs), the city gradually transitioned to an urban governance model in line with the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act (1992), which mandated the establishment of urban local bodies across India. This shift culminated in the creation of the Aizawl Municipal Council (AMC) in 2008 under the Mizoram Municipalities Act, 2007, leading to the conversion of village councils into local councils.

Even after Aizawl grew into a town post-Independence, governance remained under the traditional village council system. These councils were small, community-based institutions with limited powers, primarily responsible for local disputes, sanitation, and minor development works. With rapid growth, Aizawl became home to more than 25% of Mizoram's population. The village council system proved inadequate for managing urban infrastructure, planning, and services. The Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), launched in 2005, provided external pressure for Mizoram to adopt municipal governance in its capital (Vanlalpeka, 2025)

The Mizoram Municipalities Act, 2007, formally created the Aizawl Municipal Council (AMC) in 2008, covering an area of 129.91 sq. km. The city was divided into 19 wards, each further subdivided into 82 localities, with each locality governed by a Local Council of 5–7 elected representatives (Lalthlangliana, 2007). These local councils replaced the village councils in urban areas, functioning as grassroots democratic institutions under the municipal framework. They handle local sanitation and waste management, street lighting, and minor infrastructure, community welfare programs, and assist AMC in implementing urban schemes.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CONVERSION

1. Democratic Decentralization: Local councils brought governance closer to the people, ensuring representation at the neighborhood level.
2. Urban Service Delivery: Unlike village councils, local councils are integrated into municipal planning, enabling better coordination in urban infrastructure and services.
3. Legal Empowerment: The councils derive authority from the Mizoram Municipalities Act, aligning Aizawl with national urban governance standards.
4. Community Participation: Local councils preserve the participatory ethos of village councils while adapting to urban needs.
5. Resource Constraints: Local councils often lack adequate funds and depend heavily on AMC.
6. Capacity Issues: Transition from traditional village governance to modern urban administration requires training and institutional strengthening.
7. Coordination Problems: Overlap of responsibilities between AMC and local councils sometimes leads to inefficiency. (Lalchhuanawma & David V. Kiangte, 2018)

The conversion of Village Councils into Local Councils in Aizawl represents a landmark in Mizoram's governance evolution. It reflects the adaptation of traditional institutions to modern urban realities, balancing grassroots participation with structured municipal administration. While challenges remain, this transformation has laid the foundation for more responsive and democratic urban governance in Mizoram's capital (Ralte, 2015). The councils of the Lushai Hill District enacted two changes to the 1954 Act: the Lushai Hills District (Village Councils Amendment) Act of 2006 and the Lushai Hills District (Village Councils Amendment) Act of 2014. The latest revisions act designated seats for women and extended the three-year tenure to five years. Similarly, a community including little over 200 residences necessitates three members, with one position designated for women. (Vanlalpeka, 2025)

Two members are mandated for villages with 201 to 500 households, with one seat designated for women. Three members are mandated for villages with 501 to 1000 households, with two positions reserved for women. Four members are mandated for villages over 1000 households, with three seats designated for women. (Nunthara, 2014) Commencing with the general election of village councils on April 30, 2015, in the non-sixth schedule districts of Aizawl, Lunglei, Serchhip, Champhai, Mamit, and Kolasib, the Legislative Assembly of Mizoram enacted the Lushai Hill District (Village Council Amendment) Act 2014, which instituted the reservation of seats for women for the first time. Candidates may also contest for the seats allocated for women (Government of Mizoram, n.d.). Seat Reservation in Local Councils of Mizoram was amended in Article 243T of the Indian Constitution mandates reservation of seats for women in local bodies (both rural and urban).

This applies to Mizoram's Local Councils under the Mizoram Municipalities Act, 2007. At least one-third of the total seats in every municipality (including Local Councils) are reserved for women. Reserved seats are rotated among different wards/localities in successive elections to ensure fairness. The Mizoram Municipalities (Ward Committee and Local Council) Rules, 2010 detail how Local Councils are constituted and how reservations are applied. In Aizawl and other municipal areas, each Local Council (usually 5–7 members) must include reserved seats for women. The State Election Commission of Mizoram conducts a draw of lots before each election to determine which wards/localities will have reserved seats. This ensures women's representation at the grassroots level in urban governance. Provides opportunities for women to participate in decision-making at the neighborhood level. Ensures that urban governance reflects diverse voices. While village councils also had reservations introduced, local councils extend this principle into urban settings. At least one-third of seats in Mizoram's Local Councils are reserved for women, determined by rotation across wards/localities before each election, as per the Mizoram Municipalities Act, 2007, and Rules of 2010 (P. Lianhrima, 2010).

P.C.Liantluangi was selected for the first time in 2002 as the female member of Bethlehem Vengthlang village council, which was under the open category. Again, only in the second general local council election, 2015, under the reserved seat, Lalremruati and Jennie Lalthanpuii got elected. Again, in the third general local council election, 2020, under the ward number XVI, Lalhmingchhuangi and P.C.Vanlalpeki were elected. Again, in the fourth general local council election, the same were elected. R. Lalawmpuii from Bethlehem Vengthlang was elected as a councillor of the Aizawl Municipal Corporation (AMC) during the 2021 AMC elections. The newly elected councillors, including her, were administered the oath of office on March 1, 2021. All women, except one possessing a B.A. degree. Only one individual has a life partner; the others are single. Ninety percent of the current members of the Bethlehem Vengthlang local council indicate their unwillingness to participate in the forthcoming council election.

Questionnaires and personal interviews were conducted with all elected women, along with the president, vice president, secretary, and other male members of Bethlehem Vengthlang village council. There were six (6) female respondents from the local council, fifty-five (55) male respondents from Bethlehem Vengthlang local councils, and seventeen (17) respondents from NGOs. The two largest Non-Governmental Organizations in Bethlehem Vengthlang, Y.M.A (Young Mizo Association) and MZP (Mizo Zirlai Pawl), were included. Seventy-five percent of the respondents of the NGOs asserted that women's seat reservations were vital and that the current female members were adequately promoting community welfare, whereas the remaining percent contended that such reservations were unnecessary but did not oppose open categories or question their capability to ensure the populace's welfare. They believed that women did not sufficiently demonstrate their capabilities under the reserved seat. In the local councils of Bethlehem Vengthlang, 62% of male Presidents, Vice Presidents, Secretaries, and members conveyed favorable opinions, asserting that the reservation of seats in the village council is crucial. Meanwhile, 38% of respondents disagreed with the necessity of seat reservations.

Ninety percent of the ladies elected to the local council of Bethlehem Vengthlang, encompassing both reserved and unreserved seats, were unmarried. An equivalent number of respondents said that they would participate in the forthcoming local Council general elections, citing their contributions to the local council. This suggests that in Bethlehem Vengthlang, 87% of male respondents believe that engaging in politics or local councils necessitates transcending the conventional lifestyle of a Mizo woman.

Among the respondents, 69% articulated a negative perspective, asserting that following the implementation of women's seat reservations in the local council elections of 2002, 2015, 2020, and 2025, the elected women have been insufficiently effective in advancing the welfare of the populace or enhancing collaboration within the village council. 31% of respondents favorably indicated that the elected women were quite effective, exhibiting an ability to engage with people more efficiently.

We can deduce from the results that men have consented to the local council's reservation of seats for women. They also note the good impact of women's engagement, saying that it promotes the working environment and influences the development of Bethlehem Vengthlang. However, in councils where women were viewed as less effective, many local council members and NGOs did not see the importance of integrating women. They suggested that women's inability to trek into the forests when needed and their emphasis on household duties could limit the town's development.

## CONCLUSION

Since the foundation of the village council in Bethlehem Vengthlang, women's participation has remained negligible. Despite the support from educated citizens, NGOs, and male council members for reserving seats for women, it is vital for women to actively and effectively engage in these roles to contribute to local development. In numerous local councils in Bethlehem Vengthlang, women have yet to exhibit their complete potential. Nevertheless, in cases where women have demonstrated their competencies, they have been broadly acknowledged, even within a patriarchal society. In this male-dominated community, women in Bethlehem Vengthlang have considerable challenges in engaging in local administration due to societal expectations that hinder their political involvement. Politics is viewed as a domain predominantly suited for men in our conventional society viewpoint. As a result, women engage in political activities less frequently than men. Domestic duties and childcare are traditionally regarded as women's obligations, resulting in diminished time for exterior pursuits. The absence of social support systems further constrains women's capacity to participate in public activities. Women in Bethlehem Vengthlang have enormous hurdles when making an effort in local administration because they are not normally assumed to be engaged with politics in this male-dominated town. Our prevailing social viewpoint posits that politics is a domain predominantly suited for men.

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