

ELECTORAL POLITICS IN MANIPUR

A Spatio-Temporal Study

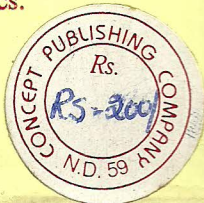
RAVINDRA PRATAP SINGH

The present study analyses the political behaviour in Manipur, a land of rich cultural heritage and equally fascinating politics, in the light of her ecological setting in the Fifth General Elections held in 1972. It surveys the previous elections and peeps into the anatomy of the constituencies, analyses of party manifestoes, background of candidates, campaign processes, poll verdict, voting and its determinants in the spatial perspective. To make the study more comprehensive and up to date three post-1972 elections held in the State have been briefly surveyed in the Epilogue.

The study, which is rich in data and analytical in approach, helps in understanding the complexities of the electoral processes in Manipur. Inferentially it also offers an insight into the various politico-integrational processes in a state, the socio-cultural asymmetries and pluralities of which have posed baffling problems. More specifically, the study brings out how the recruitment of a new strata into politics is causing the displacement of traditional elites. This makes the elite strata rather broad based. But simultaneously, owing to its traditional character, the process also carries certain disintegrational implications with it. This may explain the chronic political instability that Manipur has been witnessing. From the methodological angle the study succeeds in blending the observational and survey research methods, one enriching the other, to analyse the electoral verdict in this border state.

Of absorbing interest to students of political science, and political geography and lay readers who wish to be well-informed on this aspect of the country's politics.

RAVINDRA PRATAP SINGH, born in 1940 at Piparsandi (Gorakhpur), took his Master's degree in Geography from Allahabad University and his doctorate in Political Geography from Vikram University in 1969. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, London in 1969. Dr. Singh, a Senior Lecturer in Geography at D.M. College of Arts and Commerce, Imphal, is the Vice-President of the Indian Council of Geographers, and the Honorary Secretary of the Indian Institute of Public Administration, Manipur Branch. He has served on various committees of the Indian Science Congress Association and has published a number of papers in academic journals. His forthcoming book is *Geography of Manipur* (NBT).

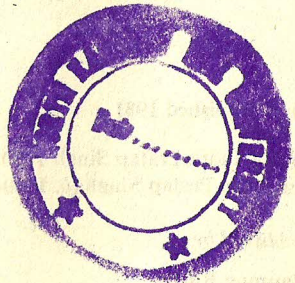


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To
The Memory of
My Father Late Yamuna Singh

PREFACE

ELECTIONS are the backbone of democracy. They represent the people's participation in the state affairs. The systematic study of the voting behaviour in the elections provides a peep into the national political development and the pattern of politics in a particular region. In democratic, secular and socialist India the democratic setup at the centre and state levels is based on a broad adult franchise, direct elections, individual freedom and competitive parties. The state has commitments for "economic and social planning, particularly extensive and sustained governmental direction, control, and to some extent ownership of economic enterprise. It is a system dedicated to raising the standard of living, redistributing income, improving the economic status of the common man, and in moving towards egalitarian social and political ends".

Political development after the integration of the state of Manipur with the Union of India in 1949 has taken place in the context of a concerted effort by the state to promote social and economic development, involving the creation of employment opportunities, the improvement of living standards, the extension of education and an attempt to reduce inequality. Over two decades, 1951-71, there has been an increase in literacy from 11.4 per cent to 32.9 per cent, a rise in urban population from 2,862 to 1,41,492 and an expansion in the coverage of the mass communication media, all of which have an important bearing on the electoral politics of the state.

This is the first study of the general elections in Manipur, which have gone through four general elections, held at regular intervals of five years, since 1952, and a mid-term parliamentary

poll (1971) prior to the 1972 General Elections. The state also went through a mid-term Assembly poll in 1974 and the parliamentary general election 1977. In selection of the state leadership the people of this border state have been guided by their geopolitical setting and socio-economic structure and considerations.

1. The present study analyses the political behaviour in Manipur in the light of socio-geographical and economic infra-structure and cultural determinants of the area in the fifth general elections, held in 1972. It surveys the previous elections as they had a definite bearing on the 1972 elections. The demographic structure of the
 2. Assembly constituencies, the salient features of the election manifestoes of the political parties, politico-cultural grouping of the contesting candidates and some aspects of the electoral campaign have been presented in this election study of Manipur. Regional and districtwise variation in the voting pattern have been noticed in the state because of geo-cultural differences. The electoral behaviour in an urban constituency—Uripok, projected in this study reflects the motivations, attitudes, values and expectations of the public, which goes once in five years to the polls to vote for the local leadership, who in turn become part of the state and national leadership. To make the study more comprehensive and up-to-date three post-1972 elections have been surveyed in brief in the Epilogue.

I am indebted to Professor B.R. Sen Gupta for contributing two chapters—Election Manifestoes of Political Parties, and Some Aspects of Electoral Campaign—and for going through the manuscript. I am glad to express my thanks to Professor G. Kabui and N. Ibohi Singh for their help and cooperation; to Ms. Ng. Sunitibala Devi, Chandramani Singh, Rajendra Singh, Mani Singh and Ms. A. Ibemhal Devi for assistance in collection and tabulation of the relevant data. My thanks also go to the then Election Officer Nabkumar Singh and his staff, particularly Nandkishor Singh for providing necessary electoral materials and election results.

I express my sincere thanks to Principal Brajamani Singh for his help and encouragements; to Asim K. Datta for helps at the initial stage; to K.B. Singh for suggestions and comments; and to Ramashray Roy for valuable suggestions and encouragement.

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I gladly acknowledge my indebtedness to the authors of various books and articles listed in the Bibliography, whose works have helped me in completing this study.

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ABBREVIATIONS

B.J.S.	Bhartiya Jan Sangh
Central Dist.	Manipur Central District
Cong./Congress	Indian National Congress
Cong. (O)/Congress (O)	Indian National Congress (Organisation)
C.P.I.	Communist Party of India
C.P.I. (M)/C.P.M.	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
East Dist.	Manipur East District
Ind.	Independent Candidate
M.N.O.	Manipur Nationalist Organisation
M.N.P.	Manipur National Party
M.P.P.	Manipur People's Party
North Dist.	Manipur North District
P.S.P.	Praja Socialist Party
S.C.	Scheduled Caste
Soc./Socialist	Socialist Party of India
South Dist.	Manipur South District
S.S.P.	Samyukta Socialist Party
S.T.	Scheduled Tribe
U.N.I.C.	United Naga Integration Council
W.C.	Women Candidates
West Dist.	Manipur West District

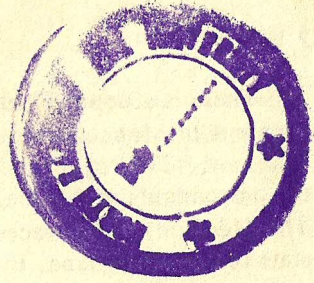
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Introduction

TWENTY FIRST JANUARY NINETEEN HUNDRED AND SEVENTY TWO

WITH THE dawn of this day a new state, the State of Manipur, emerged on the eastern horizon of our great country, the Republic of India. On the green lavish lawns of the Imphal Raj Bhavan Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, inaugurated the twentieth state of our Union. The occasion marked the fulfilment of the long cherished desire of the people of Manipur.

Manipur, which controls the gateways from Burma into the densely peopled Assam valley, has always been an Indian state. Right from the ancient times she has been used as the highway to the east. After 1947, when India attained her independence, this tiny princely state under geopolitical compulsions arising from the British departure and lapse of paramountcy, led the then Maharaja of Manipur sign the merger agreement on 21 September 1949, and the state was amalgamated with the Union of India on 15 October 1949. Since then Manipur has been the scene of eco-cultural transformation, bringing the state to the threshold of overall development.

Manipur in the olden days has been called by a variety of names. The Burmese called it *Ka-the* and *Ka-se*, and the Assamese *Mekheli* and *Mogalou*. To the people of Cachar in Assam it was *Mogli*. Manipur literally means the "land of gems" and has been referred to the various connotations like "jewel of India", "a little paradise", "a flower on lofty heights", and "the Kashmir of eastern India".

There is a popular belief among the people of the state that Manipur of Mahabharata is identical with the present state of Manipur. The royal family of Manipur has always claimed to be the descendants of Arjuna, the third *Fandava* of the Mahabharata. The *Manipur Purana* traces the royal lineage of the kings of the state to Babhruvahana, the son of Arjuna and Chitrangada, the only daughter of King Chitrabhanu, an ancient legendary ruler of Manipur.

Though Manipur has been inaccessible in the past, now it is traversed by two major roads, the National Highway No. 39, which connects the Brahmaputra valley with Burma, and the Pan-Asian Highway (Indian Section), connecting Burma with Bangladesh through Manipur and Assam. From Calcutta Manipur's capital city Imphal is only two hours journey by air.

A good number of tribes inhabit the hills of Manipur while the central basin is peopled mainly by the Meiteis (Manipuri Hindus) and the Muslims. As a whole Manipur provides a fertile ground for the study of the variety of the human responses to her varied physical environment.

The present study attempts to analyse and interpret the political behaviour in Manipur in the light of socio-geographical and economic infrastructure and cultural determinants of the area with particular emphasis on 1972 General Election in the state. The role of political parties, their candidates and the methods of campaign have also been studied as they influence much the electoral behaviour of the people in a democratic set-up.

Voting behaviour is usually explained in terms of party loyalty, and this loyalty in turn is decided by multiple factors like caste, social class, religion and regionalism. The factor variables are dependent upon macroscopic analysis of cultures and institutions. Caste and religious voting, like other parts of India, have not much of significance in the state of Manipur, under the impact of Vaishnavism. But the concept of social class in terms of occupation, income, education, ethnical factor, hill-valley dichotomy, and division into indigenous and migrant population have influenced the voting behaviour. Whether the party identification determines the electoral behaviour or new issues or personalities sway the mind of the voters—these need deeper analysis or probing, which is beyond the scope of the present study. However, a very

humble maiden attempt has been made in broad-descriptive-historical style to bring out basic information on General Election of 1972 in the state of Manipur. This may provoke enthusiastic scholars to go in for a depth of study of its voting behaviour in the context of the complex role of election in a small state in the total political system of India.

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