

Majoritarian and Realignment Elections in Churachandpur District, Manipur: A Study of Singat Assembly Constituency from 1972-2007 Assembly Elections

Bulchong Lhungdim Hemkhomang

Majoritarian and realignment elections are global phenomena in liberal democracy. The paper attempts to analyse this phenomenon in Churachandpur District (Manipur State) in general and Singat Assembly constituency in particular over the past elections after Manipur attained statehood. Unlike the other five Assembly constituencies in the district, Singat is the only constituency where no one so far has won the seat consecutively for the second time. The social apex body of the Zou community has a major role in the electoral politics of the constituency. In Manipur from the 1st Assembly election in 1972 till the 9th elections in 2007, the study reveals that there are only three constituencies where realignment in election took place in each subsequent elections and Singat is one of them. In such constituencies, elections are found to be not only more competitive in nature, but also the people in general are more politically educated than their counterparts. This model may be prescribed for the other constituencies in the district as well as to the entire State of Manipur to reactivate the essence of democracy once again as a vibrant institution to deliver the goods equally irrespective of socio-religious, economic background or descent.

Keywords: Electoral politics, Churachandpur, Singat Constituency, Manipur

Conceptual Background

Democracy is unthinkable without election. Election thus makes democracy meaningful and complete.¹ Broadly speaking there are two types of elections in liberal democracy: majoritarian and proportional elections. Proportional methods are used when several representatives from each constituency are to be elected. They are motivated by a quest for proportional representation of existing political opinions, or fair representation as some would say (Dixit 2010: 63). While the more important and widely used is the Majoritarian Elections also known by another name as plurality method and also called the-first-past-the-post method, it is used when the problem is to elect one member from each constituency. In this case, the candidate who gets most votes, that is a plurality,

Dr. Bulchong Lhungdim Hemkhomang is Associate Professor in Political Science at Jawaharlal Nehru Government College, Pasighat, East Siang District, Arunachal Pradesh.

wins (Dixit 2010: 62). This type of election is widely in-vogue in modern democracy and more so in a multi-party system.

The dictionary of political science says that realigning election or realignment are terms from political history and political science describing a dramatic change in politics. The central holding of realignment theory, first developed in the political scientist V.O. Key's 1955 article "A Theory of Critical Election", is that American elections, parties, and policy making routinely shift in swift, dramatic sweeps. Some of the most distinguished election scholars of the past two generations, like V.O. Key Jr., E.E. Schattschneider, James L. Sundquist, Walter Dean Burham and Paul Klepner studied the election returns going back to 150 years and found patterns so similar and so peculiar that at first they seemed difficult to believe. Though they differed on some of the details, it was concluded that not only do realigning elections occur but that they occur on a regular schedule (Arora, 2007: 401). In other words elections, which may lead to a basic shift in the party identification of the electorate, may be termed as realigning election.

Majoritarian and realigning elections are global phenomena in liberal democracy. The paper attempts to analyse this phenomenon in Churachandpur District in Manipur State in general and Singat Assembly constituency in particular in the past elections since Manipur attained statehood from the 1st Assembly election in 1972 till the 9th Assembly elections in 2007. Besides, it intends to find out and suggest the probable consequences thereof. The system of Majoritarian election where the candidate who got the highest votes became the winner is denounced by critics as the winner in reality enjoys only a weak support. Such instances were demonstrated in the 9th Assembly election in 2007 in Keirao constituency where an MSCP candidate Karam Thamarjit was defeated by an Indian National Congress (INC) candidate Allauddin Khan by just 2 votes (Singh 2009: 541); Tipaimukh constituency in 2000 election where Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) candidate Ngursanglur defeated INC candidate Chaltonlien Amo with 14 votes;² 36 votes in 2002 Assembly elections in the same constituency where Chaltonlien (INC) defeated Ngursanglur (NCP);³ and 90 votes in Churachandpur constituency in 1984 elections where J.F. Rothangliana Kuki National Assembly (KNA) defeated K. Vungzalian (INC).⁴ Contrary to the realigning election in Manipur, the longest serving members of Manipur Legislative Assembly during the study period are Okram Joy Singh, Rishang Keishing, R.K Dorendro Singh and Th. Devendra Singh. O. Joy Singh has been elected for seven times from Langthabal seat since the 2nd Assembly elections in 1974 till the 9th Assembly elections in 2007 except a break during the 6th election in 1995 where he was defeated by K. Babudhon Singh, an INC candidate. On the other side, Rishang Keishing has also been elected uninterruptedly for seven times from Phungyar constituency since the 1st Assembly election in 1972 till the 7th elections in 2000. The major difference between the two leaders is that Okram Joy Singh is a staunch Manipur People's Party (MPP) leader and Rishang Keishing, a Congress veteran. The second longest serving MLAs are R.K. Dorendro Singh from Yaiskul and Th. Devendra Singh (INC) from Jiribam seat. The difference between Rishang Keishing and R.K. Dorendro Singh is that the former is a Congress man all through and the latter, MPP man in 1974, Congress man in 1980, 1984 and 1990, and BJP man in 2000 and 2002 Assembly elections. While similarity between the two is that both of them had the privilege to become Chief Ministers

for five and four times respectively without completing a single full term of five years.⁵

The realigning elections are apparently seen in two valley and one hill constituencies; Sagolband and Thanga in the valley, and Singat constituency in the hills respectively.⁶ In these constituencies no single candidate has ever won the Assembly election consecutively for the second time. In Sagolband constituency Moirangthem Kumar Singh won the seat twice in 1980 and 1995 elections both with MPP tickets and Khwairakpam Loken Singh also won the seat twice in 2000 and 2007 elections with Janata Dal (Secular) [JD(S)] and INC tickets respectively, while the other elections were won each time by different candidates. The 1st Assembly election in 1972 was won by Thokchom Bira Singh with CPI ticket, the 2nd election in 1974 by Salam Tombi with MPP ticket, the 4th election in 1984 by Salam Damodar as an Independent (IND) candidate, the 5th election in 1990 by R.K. Jai Chandra with INC ticket and the 8th Assembly election in 2002 was won by Soram Natum Singh with MNC ticket.⁷ While, Thanga Assembly constituency which spread in the midst and periphery of the Loktak lake is another valley Assembly seat where no one has won the seat consecutively for the second time. Barring Salam Jayanta Kumar Singh (INC) who won the seat once in the 2nd Assembly election in 1974, the other four candidates won the seat twice each. Haobijam Kangjamba won the seat in the 1st and 3rd elections with SOP and IND tickets respectively. Heisnam Sanayaima Singh won in the 4th and 7th Assembly elections as IND and Manipur State Congress Party (MSCP) candidates respectively. Salam Ibohal Singh won in the 5th and 8th elections with MPP and Federal Party of Manipur (FPM) tickets, Thongbram Mangi Babu won in the 6th and 9th Assembly elections with JD and INC tickets respectively.⁸

Assembly Elections in Churachandpur District

In Churachandpur district elections are all remembered well by the young and the old respectively for one reason or the other, because election is the synonymous vocabulary of “Sopi-vote-kong” or “U-nau-vote-Kuang”(a loose translation of a big BOWL where brethren dined together momentarily). Like in India as a whole, where elections are believed to be essentially a manipulative process by the elites through the applications of myriad combination of techniques and forms (Kausik 1982: 15), in Churachandpur district also election time is a time to launch new alignments at the cost of shelving differences, pampering kinsmen and friends and forgiving foes. People are so engrossed with election fevers that their normal way of life comes into a standstill not only the campaign and polls are over but till the results are declared and hence to many till the formation of government comes into a reality. Elections, as usual, are very competitive and hectic too. Every bit of votes becomes ever valuable. In many cases the winning margins are very narrow. The narrowest margin of a win was 14 votes in the 2000 Assembly election when NCP candidate Ngursanglur secured the Tipaimukh seat by defeating an INC candidate Chaltonlien Amo by polling 2407 votes. A befitting show was exhibited by INC candidate Chaltonlien in the mid-term poll in 2002 when the Tipaimukh seat was recaptured from NCP candidate Ngursanglur by a margin of 36 votes by polling 3602 votes. The other narrow winnings are – 90 votes in 1984 where a KNA candidate J.F. Rothangliana from the shackles of Tihar Jail snatched the Churachandpur seat by polling 2797 votes from K. Vungzalian (INC); 142 votes in 1980 Assembly election where

Holkhomang Haokip (IND) secured the Henglep seat consecutively for the 3rd times by defeating Mangkhothong Haokip (INC) by polling 3233 votes; and 149 votes in 1984 where Ngulkhohao Lungdim (MPP) secured the Saikot seat for the 3rd time consecutively defeating Lala Khobung (IND) by polling 5005 votes in a triangular contest. In 2002 Assembly election in Churachandpur constituency T. Phungzathang (INC) defeated V. Hangkhanlian (NCP) with a margin of 228 votes by polling 15271 votes in a 10 cornered contest. In 1972 Assembly election Haokholal Thangjom (IND) secured the Churachandpur seat against Goukhenpau (INC) with a margin of 301 votes by polling 2824 votes. In the Assembly elections of 1980 with INC ticket and 1984 with IND ticket Ngurdinglien defeated Selkai Hrangchal (IND) and (INC) consecutively for the 3rd and 4th times in Tipaimukh constituency with a margin of 316 and 331 votes by polling 3872 and 3961 votes respectively.⁹ In 2007 election Ngursanglur (RJD) defeated Chaltonlien (INC) with 325 votes by polling 4946 votes. In 1980 election Thangkhanlal (INC-I) defeated Haulianthang (INC-U) with a margin of 336 votes by polling 3701 votes in Singat constituency.

The above winning margins given are the closest ones for identification of the competitive nature of Assembly elections in Churachandpur district. Among the six Assembly constituencies, the neck to neck battles were fought frequently from the Tipaimukh and Churachandpur constituencies. Moreover, one time each in Henglep, Saikot and Singat constituencies was also demonstrated. Besides tribal or clannish politics responsible for a stiff fight, there are also other probably apparent factors responsible. The people as a whole are politically and educationally emancipated lots. The district as a whole is markedly so diversified within the Kuki-Chin conglomeration to shoulder leaderships of the various groups grouped in the forms of tribes and clans.

Nevertheless, the largest margins of winnings are also exhibited. One of them was demonstrated during the 1995 Assembly election where V. Hangkhanlian of the national People's Party (NPP) won the Churachandpur seat against K. Vungzalian (MPP) with a margin of 8306 votes by polling 14641 votes against 6335 votes respectively in 11 cornered contests. Again V. Hangkhanlian (NPP) won the Thanlon seat with a margin of 5986 votes by polling 7695 votes against Zabiaksang (BJP) who polled 1709 votes in a 9 cornered contest. The 3rd largest margin was demonstrated by Selkai Hrangchal (JD) in 1990 election with a margin of 5713 votes by polling 8506 votes against Ngurdinglien (INC) who could poll 2793 votes in a straight fight.

Besides, there are also evidences of dummy candidates in the district who could manage to get hardly a single digit or two. These candidates seemed to take undue liberty of their democratic rights and hence democracy becomes nothing but a hoax and mockery. In the 1974 Assembly election Thongkhogen got 13 votes in Saikot constituency. In the same constituency in 1980 election, Nengzasoi got 10 votes, Thangkhum 12 votes, K. Lianthang 15 votes, Jangkholun 24 votes, all of them are Independent candidates. In 1990 election Tunzakham got 17 votes in Thanlon. In 1995 Assembly election in Thanlon, Demkho-on got 6 votes, Doukholun 10 votes, Nohkhopao 15 votes, Muana 16 votes, Satpi 22 votes, Liankhogin 30 votes, S.L. Mawia 31 votes, Lunkhohao 35 votes and B.K. Rose got 36 votes. In the same year in Saikot P. Pumzadou polled 3 votes. In 1995 Assembly election in Churachandpur seat, Nehkholet got 5 votes, Lunkhomang

7 votes, Paokhogin 8 votes and Tongkhopao 13 votes. In 2000 Assembly election in Henglep constituency, Chonglan Gangte polled 4 votes, John Gangte 17 votes, Thenkhohao 24 votes, Thongkholun 30 votes, Letkhopao 48 votes and Ngulkhothang 55 votes. In Tipaimukh seat Malswam got 35 votes. In Saikot in the same year, Onjang Haokip polled 13 votes, Hmangkhum Joute 37 votes and Lalkhongam Hangsing polled 98 votes. In Singat seat, Thongkhohao got 70 votes. In 2002 election T. Mangkhopau polled 3 votes in Churachandpur seat and Pumlianpau got 4 votes in Singat constituency. In the 2007 Assembly election Helien Kipgen got 30 votes in Thanlon constituency.¹⁰

In Churachandpur district, Phungzathang Tonsing is the longest sitting MLA who got elected for 5 times. Ngurdinglien, Holkhomang Haokip, Thangkhanlal and T.N Haokip got elected for 4 times each. Ngulkhohao Lhungdim, V. Hangkhanlian, Songchinkhup and Manga Vaiphei won for 3 times each. This analysis is made from the 1st Assembly election in 1972 till the 9th elections in 2007. It is to be noted that many of them were elected consecutively for 2-4 times. But unlike the other 5 constituencies in Churachandpur district, Singat Assembly constituency has never been won consecutively for the second time in the course of 10 Assembly elections including the bye-election in 1998 in spite of the fact that Thangkhanlal won for 4 times and T. Gouzadou for 2 times. This is a peculiar situation in Churachandpur district and invites for the quest of realigning electoral politics. Another peculiar situation is that no Independent candidates so far won the Singat seat unlike the other 5 constituencies in the district.¹¹

Singat Constituency

The Singat (ST) Constituency is the 60th Constituency of Manipur and also one of the Sixth Constituencies of Churachandpur District. The Singat constituency is in existence since the 1st Assembly election in 1972. Of course there were Five Constituencies during the 1st Assembly election in 1972 in the district. It was during the 2nd Assembly election (mid-term poll) in 1974 that one more constituency called the Saikot Constituency was created after Re-adjustment of the constituencies were done in the State in accordance with the 1971 census. As per the demographical structure of the district of Churachandpur, the Singat constituency is mainly peopled by the Kuki-Chin, Zou speaking (Tribe) groups. However, sizeable populace of other language speaking groups under the Kuki-Chin, namely, Paite, Thadou, Vaiphei, Thangkhal, etc. too, co-exist in close proximity in the Singat constituency.

Election time in Churachandpur district in general and Singat constituency in particular as usual is a time to re-assert and re-trace one's Bona-fide in terms of kith and kin, language and dialects, paternal and maternal lines, brothers/sisters-in-law lines keeping aside one's party affiliations for a while in the doldrums. However, it became a sure hitting of the 'Jackpots' if a candidate to whom they supported is also filing nominations under the party label in which majority of them are also affiliated to it (party). The electoral scene in Singat constituency is something different in the district. The United Zoumi Organisation (UZO), the social apex body of the Zou community, has major role in the electoral politics of the constituency.¹² The post of Presidentship of UZO is taken as a half-way ticket to win the seat in the constituency for the ensuing Assembly election. Hence, the fight for the UZO Presidentship is equally as taxing as the battle for the

Assembly seat.

Unlike the other five Assembly constituencies in the district, Singat is the only constituency where no one so far had won the seat consecutively for second time during the course of ten Assembly elections including bye-election in 1998. In spite of the fact that the Zou veteran politician (L) Thangkhanlal had won the Singat seat for four times including the bye-election in 1998 and another veteran politician T. Gouzadou had won the seat twice. The Table below shows the Elected MLAs of Singat Assembly Constituency from 1972-2007.

Table1: Elected MLAs of Singat Assembly Constituency from 1972-2007

Serial no.	Name of elected MLAs	Party	Year	Votes Polled	Total votes polled	Poll %
1.	Shri Thangkhanlal	INC	1972	5166	10632	75.70
2.	Shri T.(Tungnung) Gougin	MHU	1974	5276	9437	82.51
3.	Shr Thangkhanlal	INC	1980	3701	11498	81.18
4.	Shri T.(Tungnung) Gouzadou	INC	1984	6567	12852	90.63
5.	Shri Thangkhanlal	KNA	1990	6464	17218	90.26
6.	Shri T.(Tungnung) Gouzadou	NPP	1995	6327	17530	85.88
7.	Shri Thangkhanlal (bye-poll)	INC	1998	9670	18839	92.29
8.	Shri N.(Naulak) Zatawn	JD(U)	2000	6450	20183	92.97
9.	Shri Thangso Baite	MSCP	2002	6815	19067	87.93
10.	Shri Hangkhanpao	NPP	2007	12859	22599	

Source: Election Commission of India-State Elections, 1972-2007 to the Legislative Assembly of Manipur – Constituency Summary-Data.

The Singat constituency during the 1st Assembly election in 1972 was a triangular contest among Thangkhanlal (INC), Kulzadal (IND) and Ginzanang (IND). The seat was bagged by Thangkhanlal, an INC candidate, with a comfortable margin of 2164 votes against his nearest political rival Kulzadal by polling 5166 (49.41%) votes. While Kulzadal polled a total of 3002 (28.71%) votes and Ginzanang polled a total of 2288 (21.88%) votes out of a total of 10,632 polled votes. During the 1st Assembly election Singat recorded a total of 14,045 electors, 10,632 voters, 10,456 valid votes and a poll percentage of 75.70.¹³

The Singat constituency during the 2nd Assembly election in 1974 registered a four-cornered contest among T. Gougin, Thangkhanlal, Nengkhusuan and Khamkhanthang. While the prestigious seat was bagged by T. Gougin a Manipur Hill Union (MHU) candidate with a margin of 1404 votes against his political rival Thangkhanlal by polling 5276 (56.97%) votes. The INC candidate Thangkhanlal polled 3872 (41.81%) votes. Nengkhusuan polled 59 (0.64%) votes and Kamkhanthang polled 54 (0.58%) votes. The Singat constituency during this election recorded a total of 11,437 electors, 9437 voters, 9261 valid votes and a poll percentage of 82.51.¹⁴

The Singat constituency in the 3rd Assembly election in 1980 was a six-cornered contest among Thangkhanlal, Haulianthang, S. Lianzakup, T. Gougin, Amchinkam and Nengkhusuan. However, the prestigious Singat seat was bagged by Thangkhanlal, an

INC candidate, for the second time with a small margin of 336 votes against his nearest rival Haulianthang by polling 3701 votes. While Haulianthang an INC(U) candidate polled 3365 (29.91%) votes; S. Lianzakup, a KNA candidate, polled 1750 (15.55%) votes; T. Gougin, an Janata National Party (JNP), candidate polled 1680 (14.93%) votes; Amchinkam an Independent candidate polled 393 (3.49%) votes and Nengkhosuan another Independent candidate polled 362 (3.22%) votes. The last two candidates did not fare impressive in the poll. The Singat seat recorded 14,163 electors, 11,498 voters, 11,251 valid votes and poll percentage of 81.18 % during the 3rd Assembly election in 1980.¹⁵

The 4th Assembly election of Singat seat in 1984 was contested by four candidates. The seat was won by T. Gouzadou an INC candidate with a big margin of 1884 votes against his nearest rival Thangkhanlal (IND) by polling 6567 (52.14%) votes. While the other three Independent candidates, namely, Thangkhanlal, Goukhenpau and Paukhogin polled 4683 (37.18%) votes, 1140 (9.05%) votes and 205 (1.63%) votes respectively. Singat seat recorded a total of 14,181 electors, 12,852 voters, 12,595 valid votes and poll percentage of 90.63 in the 4th Assembly election in 1984.¹⁶

The 5th Assembly election of Singat seat in 1990 was again contested by four candidates. This time Thangkhanlal bagged the seat again for the third time but as a KNA candidate with a comfortable margin of 2023 votes against his nearest rival T. Gouzadou by polling 6464 (37.96%) votes. The electoral battle this time was very competitive between the second and the third contenders. The second contender T. Gouzadou, an INC candidate, polled 4441 (26.08%) votes and the third contender Pauthuam an ICS (SCS) candidate polled 4440 (26.08%) votes. While the fourth contender S. Lianzakup, an Manipur Hill People's Conference (MHPC), candidate also exhibited an impressive poll of 1682 (9.88%) votes. The Singat constituency recorded a total of 19,077 electors, 17,218 voters, 17,027 valid votes and 90.26 poll percentage in the 5th Assembly election in 1990.¹⁷

The 6th Assembly election of Singat seat in 1995 was again contested by four candidates. The seat was bagged for the second time by T. Gouzadou but no more as an INC candidate but under the label of NPP. He bagged the seat with a margin of 1104 votes against his nearest rival T. Ngaizanem by polling 6327 (36.74%) votes. The MPP contender T. Ngaizanem polled 5223 (30.33%) votes; the INC contender Thangkhanlal polled 4696 (27.27%) votes and the FPM contender Vungkholian polled 977 (5.67%) votes. Thangkhanlal re-secured the INC ticket again from T. Gouzadou after a gap of two Assembly terms. Singat constituency this time recorded a total of 20,413 electors, 17,530 voters, 17,223 valid votes and 85.88 poll percentage.¹⁸

Bye-Election of Singat Constituency-February 16, 1998

During the 6th Assembly term with effect from 29th July 1995, four MLAs were disqualified by the Speaker under the Anti-defection law of the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution. They were W. Basantakumar (RJD) from Kshetrigao constituency, O. Lohri (RJD) from Tadubi constituency, Sehpu Haokip (JD) from Henglep constituency and T. Gouzadou (NPP) from Singat constituency. The bye-election to these four Assembly constituencies along with Khundrakpam which occurred due to the untimely death of K. Binoy Singh was held on 16th February 1998 (Singh 2009: 317-319). The bye-election to Singat seat was a straight fight between the INC contender Thangkhanlal

and the MSCP contender Smt. T. Ngaizanem. Ultimately, the prestigious Singat seat was bagged by Thangkhanlal with the not-so-big margin of 501 votes against his only opponent T. Ngaizanem by polling 9670 votes.

The 7th Assembly election of Singat seat in 2000 was contested by seven contenders. There was high proliferation of votes among the first-five contenders. The seat was bagged by a JD (U) contender N. Zatawn with a margin of 1384 votes against his nearest rival Smt. T. Ngaizanem (Nenem Haokip) by polling 6450 (32.29%) votes. The **SAP** candidate Smt. T. Ngaizanem polled 5066 (25.36%) votes; the FPM candidate Thangkhenkhum polled 4283 (21.44%) votes, the RJD candidate Thangso Baite polled 2751 (13.77%) votes, the MSCP candidate T. Gouzadou polled 1116 (5.59%) votes, the MPP candidate Khamlienkhup polled 237 (1.19%) votes and the INC candidate Thongkhohao polled 70 (0.35%) votes. In this election Singat recorded a total of 21,708 electors, 20,183 voters, 19,973 valid votes and the highest poll percentage of the district at 92.97%.¹⁹

The 8th Assembly election of Singat seat in 2002 was a Jumbo-sized one where as many as nine-contenders were in the electoral fray for the coveted seat. Like in the previous election high proliferation of votes were seen again among the first-five contenders. The seat was won by Thangso Baite with a big margin of 1501 votes against his nearest rival T. Hangkhanpao by polling 6815 (36.19%) votes. While the INC candidate T. Hangkhanpao polled 5314 (28.22%) votes, the FPM candidate N. Zatawn polled 3305 (17.55%) votes, the SAP candidate Smt. T. Ngaizanem polled 1455 (7.73%) votes, the NCP candidate T. Gouzadou polled 1332 (7.07%) votes, the MNC candidate Smt. Jubilee Momoi polled 531 (2.82%) votes, the BJP candidate Thangkhenkhum polled 65 (0.35%) votes, the Independent candidate Ginsuanhao polled 08 (0.04%) votes and the Lok Shakti Party (LSP) candidate Pumlianpau polled 04 (0.02%) votes. However, the last three contestants were mute contenders. Singat seat recorded a total of 21,684 electors, 19,067 voters, 18,829 valid votes and 87.93 poll percentage during the 8th Assembly election.²⁰

The 9th Assembly election of Singat seat in 2007 was a triangular contest among T. Hangkhanpao, Thangso Baite and Thangliankhum. However, the real battle was between the NPP candidate T. Hangkhanpao and the INC candidate Thangso Baite. The Singat seat was won by T. Hangkhanpao with a comfortable margin of 3186 votes against his nearest rival Thangso Baite by polling 12,859 votes. While Thangso Baite polled 9673 votes and Thangliankhum polled a mere 67 votes. The total polled votes consist of 22,599.²¹

An analysis of the results of Singat constituency reveals the fact that INC is the only party that fared well since the 1st Assembly election in 1972 till the 9th Assembly elections in 2007. INC won the seat four times including the bye-election in February 1998. Thangkhanlal won the seat three times in 1972, 1980 and 1998 (bye-election) and T. Gouzadou once in 1984. The INC also secured the second place for four times in 1974 by Thangkhanlal; in 1990 by T. Gouzadou; in 2002 by T. Hangkhanpao and 2007 by Thangso Baite. The INC secured the third place with high polling of 4696 (27.27%) votes in 1995 Assembly election by Thangkhanlal. However, INC had experienced a dismal performance in 2000 Assembly election where Thongkhohao polled 70 (0.35%) votes and secured the bottom place in a seven-cornered contest. Besides the INC, the

Singat seat was won by KNA in 1990 by Thangkhanlal, NPP in 1995 by T. Gouzadou, JD (U) in 2000 by N. Zatawn, MSCP in 2002 by Thangso Baite and NPP again in 2007 by T. Hangkhanpao. It is to be noted that unlike the other constituencies in Churachandpur district, the Singat constituency was never bagged by an Independent candidate.

The Indian National Congress was the party that the Singat (Zou) people are emotionally attached with since the 1st Assembly election till the 5th Assembly elections and the same spirit was revived once again from the 8th Assembly election which subsequently resulted into the victory of the INC in the 10th Assembly election in 2012. The Singat constituency as the traditional bastion of the Congress is due to the elderly leaders of the Zou society who shared a close association/tie-up with the Gandhi-Nehru family. The INC prospects in the Singat constituency in the days to come remained undoubtedly bright. It is to be seen that the people of Singat become disloyal to the Congress only when Kinsmen became an alternative. It is also to be seen that the support base of the Congress in Singat constituency is firmly rooted as the party had secured the second place also four times in spite of the other social factors which are also active players during elections. Second to INC in the Singat constituency is the NPP which won the seat twice. The KNA and the JD (U) won the seat one time each. But these parties unlike the Congress do not show any consistency in Singat constituency.²²

An important question now is why no one so far won the Singat seat consecutively for the second time. The Zou politics is not only so deep and so wide but very competitive in nature as well, and the main reason for not winning the Singat seat consecutively for the second time by any contestant is the competitive nature of the Zou politics.²³ On the other hand it is a simple indication to show that the said community has enough leaders who could voluntarily render their services for the cause of the society at large.²⁴ As Lord Bryce has said 'eternal vigilance is the price of democracy/liberty'. It is an exhibition of a real democracy where the populace ever remained the watchdog of their representatives who were elected periodically and who at will has the mandate to change them if they are proved inefficient to deliver the goods. The Singat model may be prescribed for the other constituencies in the district preferably and to the entire State of Manipur to reactivate the essence of democracy once again as a vibrant and kicking institution to deliver the goods equally irrespective of caste, creed, religion, place of birth so on and so forth. Until then the major chunks of the populace will continue to suffer since the long standing MLAs thrive to groom their supporters alone and ignoring the other electors of his/her constituency. In the present scenario educating the electors alone is not going to help in the face of anti-social (Underground) organisations which are also instrumental in manufacturing certain MLAs. Another version expressed was that in Singat constituency, the other linguistic groups like the Paites played a 'King Making Role' in the election.²⁵ The calculation in the number games is that if they could not put up a winning candidate in the electoral fray, they thrive on the King making game between/among the larger linguistic groups in Singat constituency. The calculations seem to work wonders in the 7th Assembly election in 2000 where N. Zatawn a JD (U) candidate could be elected.²⁶ The Paite speaking group will continue to play a King making role for a longer period of time and the dominant linguistic groups had to make themselves prepared to continue to adjust with the situation.

As to the question why, unlike the other five constituencies in Churachandpur district, no Independent candidates in Singat have, not so far, won the seat is that, the general masses of the Singat voters believed in partisan politics and do not have confidence in Independent candidates.²⁷ They generally perceived Independent candidates to be non-serious contestants and they happened to be in the electoral fray because they are either sponsored by prospective candidates to polarise votes against dominant opponents or simply to exhibit their importance in the public domains. Another reason is that voters in Singat generally perceived Independent candidates if elected also do not have good prospects in the government formation, and thus wastage of mandates of the people. Indeed, this is the general perception of common men, and not many people think in terms of quality representative democracy where democracy becomes successful only with strong opposition party.

Conclusion

It may be stated that in Manipur from the 1st Assembly election in 1972 till the 9th elections in 2007, the study reveals that there are only three constituencies where realignment in election takes place in each subsequent elections. In other words the three constituencies such as Sagolband and Thanga in the valley and Singat constituency in the hills of Churachandpur district are the Assembly constituencies where no one so far had won the contested seat consecutively for the second time, in spite of the fact that many of them had won more than 2 to 4 times. In these constituencies, elections are found to be not only more competitive in nature than their counterparts but also the people in general are more politically educated than its counterparts. However on the other hand, the difference between the two valley constituencies and the Singat hill constituency is that, no Independent candidate had won the contested seats in the Singat constituency while Independent candidates won the contested seat once in Sagolband and twice in Thanga constituencies. The Sagolband seat was won by an Independent candidate Salam Damodar in the 4th election in 1984, where as the Thanga seat was won by two Independent candidates such as Haobijam Kangjamba in the 3rd election in 1980 and Heisnam Sanayaima Singh in the 4th Assembly elections in 1984. In this respect it may be said that the people of Sagolband and Thanga in general are not inclined strictly towards partisan politics but also throw weightages in the charismatic personality of the candidates vis-à-vis the Singat hill constituency.

Notes

¹ L.B. Hemkhomang: 'Democracy is....!', Manipur Express, Churachandpur, Manipur, April 5, 2014

² Election Commission of India, State Election to the Legislative Assembly of Manipur, 2000.

³ Ibid: 2002

⁴ Ibid: 1984.

⁵ Statistical Abstract Manipur 2009. Directorate of Economics & Statistics, Govt. of Manipur, Imphal, p. S-4.

⁶ Election Commission of India, State Election, to the Legislative Assembly of Manipur,

1972-2007.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Election Commission of India, State Election, to the Legislative Assembly of Manipur, 1972-2007

⁹ Election Commission of India, State Election, op.cit.

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ ibid

¹² An Interview with Aloysius Nehkhojang Tungdim, Senior Teacher Catholic Mission School & Adviser to TPO.

¹³ Election Commission of India-State Election, 1972 to the Legislative Assembly of Manipur, Singat Constituency Data-Summary.

¹⁴ Election Commission of India-State Election, 1974 to the Legislative Assembly of Manipur, Singat Constituency Data-Summary.

¹⁵ Election Commission of India-State Election, 1980 to the Legislative Assembly of Manipur, Singat Constituency Data-Summary

¹⁶ Election Commission of India-State Election, 1984 to the Legislative Assembly of Manipur, Singat Constituency Data-Summary

¹⁷ Election Commission of India-State Election, 1990 to the Legislative Assembly of Manipur, Singat Constituency Data-Summary

¹⁸ Election Commission of India-State Election, 1995 to the Legislative Assembly of Manipur, Singat Constituency Data-Summary.

¹⁹ Election Commission of India-State Election, 2000 to the Legislative Assembly of Manipur, Singat Constituency Data-Summary

²⁰ Election Commission of India-State Election, 2002 to the Legislative Assembly of Manipur, Singat Constituency Data-Summary

²¹ Election Commission of India-State Election, 2007 to the Legislative Assembly of Manipur, Singat Constituency Data-Summary.

²² Election Commission of India-State Elections, 1972-2007 to the Legislative Assembly of Manipur.

²³ An interview with Mr. S. Thangboi Zou, Ph.D Scholar, NEHU. Dated 25/11/2012

²⁴ An interview with Dr. Johnny Lalbiaklian Tuining Village, Churachandpur. Dated 13/07/2012

²⁵ An interview with T. Gouzadou Ex-Minister to the Legislative Assembly of Manipur. 14/08/2012

²⁶ Election Commission of India-State Election, 2000 to the Legislative Assembly of Manipur.

²⁷ An Interview with Tungnung Ginzamang, Asstt. Prof. of Sociology, Churachandpur Govt. College, dated 15/06/2012

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