

# Local Self-Government in Manipur: A Case Study of Phayeng Gram Panchayat

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## ABSTRACT

The institutions of local government have been functioning in India since time immemorial. The village elder's council or village panchayat as they were popularly called, were, ancient institutions and were themselves functioning like a republic system of government. This local governance system has a distinct place, without which political system in India would have no authenticity. In Manipur also, since the early period, there was village level administration for every *Loi* (outcasted and low caste section of Manipuri society during the native rule in Manipur) village under the leadership of village Chief locally known as *Khullakpa*. He was assisted by other village officials. They were under the subjection of the King of Manipur. In the traditional village level administration, the *Loi* villages (especially of the *Chakpa Loi* origin villages like Sekmai, Phayeng, Andro etc.), the number of officers and their assignments were different from one *Chakpa Loi* village to another *Chakpa Loi* village mainly due to the different in nature and occupation of each of the *Chakpa Loi* village.

Since the institution of the Panchayati Raj system was introduced in Manipur from early 1960s, under the United Provinces Panchayati Raj Act, 1947, the Phayeng Gram Panchayat was created as one of the Gram Panchayats under the extension of this Act in Manipur. And in Manipur, panchayat election was held in 1964. Since then, like other Gram Panchayats of Manipur, the Phayeng Gram Panchayat is also has been conducting elections till date. The present paper is an attempt mainly to analyse the participation of the electorate in the panchayat elections of this Gram Panchayat.

**KEY WORDS:** *Chakpas*, Gram Panchayat, Local Self Government, *Loi*, Phayeng Gram Panchayat and Pradhan.

## INTRODUCTION

The institutions of local government have been functioning in India since time immemorial. The village elder's council or village Panchayat as they were popularly called, were, ancient institutions and were themselves functioning like a republic system of government. This local governance system has a distinct place, without which political system in India would have no authenticity. In Manipur also, since the early period, there was village level administration for every *Loi* village under the leadership of village Chief locally known as *Khullakpa*. He was assisted by other village officials. They were under the subjection of the King of Manipur. In the traditional village level administration, the *Loi* villages (especially of the *Chakpa* origin villages like Sekmai, Phayeng, Andro etc.), the number of officers and their assignments were different from one *Chakpa Loi* village to another *Chakpa Loi* village mainly due to the different in nature and occupation of each of the *Chakpa Loi* village.

The institution of the Panchayati Raj system was introduced in Manipur from early 1960, under the United Provinces Panchayati Raj Act, 1947. The Phayeng Gram Panchayat was created as one of the Gram Panchayats under the extension of this Act in Manipur.

Through this Act, a two-tier system of Panchayat was established in Manipur valley. Then the State Government enacted the Manipur Panchayat Act 1975, which provided for a three-tier system of Panchayats in the State comprising of Gram Panchayats at Gram Sabha level, Panchayat Samitis at the Block Level, and Zilla Parishads at the District Level. Again, in pursuance to the passing of 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act to the Constitution of India, Manipur passed the Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 which has come into force on 23/04/1994. This Act again provides for a two-tier system of Panchayati Raj Institution – one at village (s) level known as Gram Panchayat and other at District level known as Zilla Parishad. (www.e-pao.net)

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There are some literatures available in English and Manipuri on the Scheduled Caste *Lois* which were published in periodicals, journals, newspapers, etc. There are also some M.Phil. dissertations and Ph.D. thesis submitted to Manipur University on this subject. However, these literatures have not specifically focused on the present study regarding the local self-government in the Scheduled Caste *Lois*' areas in Manipur. For example, an article written by L. Bino Devi (1994) entitled 'The Political Life of the Lois of Sekmai, Khurkhul, Andro and Phayeng' focused only on the political participation of the above mentioned four Scheduled Caste *Loi* villages in the State Assembly Elections of Manipur from 1972- 1984 in the Sekmai Assembly Constituency. In other two articles, namely 'A Note on the Lois' written by Ch. Budhi Singh (1994) and 'A Note on Lois: A Brief Survey' written by S. Sanatomba Singh (1994) also did not highlight any regarding the local self-government in the Scheduled Caste areas except the study of their emerging trends of social status in present Manipuri society. An article published in "Researchers World" (Volume IX, Special Issue, April 2018)

named 'The Issue of Kakching as Scheduled Caste Lois From the Perspective of The Constitution of India' traces and analyses the nomenclature conflict between the Scheduled Caste *Loi* villages in Manipur. So, this paper also does not mention anything about local self- government in scheduled Caste *Loi* areas. And in a book written by L. Bino Devi (2002) entitled "The Lois of Manipur", mainly focuses on the socio-economic and the political life of four Scheduled Caste *Lois* villages of the valley of Manipur, namely Andro, Khurkhul, Phayeng and Sekmai. It does not discuss about local self-government in their areas. In another book written by N. Basanta entitled "Modernisation Challenge and Response: A Study of the Chakpa Community of Manipur" deals mainly on the records, documents, customs and traditions of the Scheduled Caste *Lois* of Chakpa Andro. So, this book also does not mention anything about local self-government in Scheduled Caste *Loi* areas.

## THE OBJECTIVES OF THIS PAPER:

The main objectives of this paper are:

1. To examine the election of the Pradhan and members of this Gram Panchayat.
2. To analyse the participation of the electorate in the Panchayat elections of this Gram Panchayat.

## METHODOLOGY OF THE PRESENT PAPER:

The present study is mainly based on secondary data. The primary data is also used whenever arises. Primary data is collected through the personal interviews with some local grass root politician. In collecting information, prior informed consents (PIC) have been taken from the interviewed persons. Secondary data is collected from government publications, books etc.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A. THE PHAYENG GRAM PANCHAYAT:

In Manipur, Panchayat elections were held for the first time in 1964 under the United Provinces Panchayati Raj Act, 1947. Like other Gram Panchayats of Manipur, the Phayeng Gram Panchayat is also has been conducting elections till date. The Phayeng Gram Panchayat is a constituent of Imphal West-I Block of Imphal West District. Since the introduction of Panchayati Raj system in Manipur, there is a provision which says that the Deputy Commissioner of a District, for the conduct of election of a Panchayat member, may divide the area of the Gram Sabha into territorial constituencies in such manner that the ratio between the population of each constituency and the member of seats allotted to it shall, as far as practicable, be the same throughout the Gram Sabha area. (Manipur Panchayati Raj Act 1994, Section 17) Again, there is also a provision which clarified the composition of a Gram Panchayat not exceeding to 13 elected members including the Pradhan. (Manipur Panchayati Raj Act 1994, Section 17) Before the implementation of the Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, the Phayeng Gram Panchayat is composed of 5 elected members including the Pradhan of the Panchayat. Now, it has 10 elected members including the Pradhan of this Panchayat. (Manipur Panchayati Raj Act 1975, Section 15 & Manipur Panchayati Raj Act 1994, Section 17) They are simultaneously elected by the Phayeng Gram Sabha.

### **B. WHY DOES THE PHAYENG GRAM PANCHAYAT IS SELECTED FOR THE PRESENT STUDY?**

The Phayeng Gram Panchayat is selected for the present study. The main reasons for selecting this Gram Panchayat are (i) the Phayeng Gram Panchayat is mainly composed of the Scheduled Caste population i.e. about 99.5% of the population is Scheduled Castes; (ii) there is no tribal population to reserve for a tribal seat; (iii) there are three Scheduled Caste villages in this Gram Panchayat, namely Phayeng, Tairenpokpi and Koutruk; (iv) the Scheduled Caste women also actively

participate in the Panchayat election 1997 Panchayat Election in Manipur; (v) this Gram Panchayat is the only Scheduled Caste Reserved Gram Panchayat in Manipur; and (vi) the Scheduled Caste candidates pursue the non-Scheduled Caste electorates to cast their votes to them in this Gram Panchayat. (Narrated by N. Ibungo Singh of Phayeng)

### **C. THE ELECTION OF THE PRADHAN OF THE PHAYENG GRAM PANCHAYAT:**

In the Panchayat Elections held in 1964, there was no direct election of Pradhan of the Phayeng Gram Panchayat as under the United Provinces Panchayat Raj Act, 1947, the Pradhan was elected amongst the elected members of a Gram Panchayat. (Singh,1992:26) So the Pradhan of Phayeng Gram Panchayat was elected by the elected members amongst themselves in the above two elections. (Manipur Gazette Extraordinary No. 10-E-6, April 28, 1964, and Manipur Gazette Extraordinary No. 83, June 12, 1978)

The next Panchayat Election was held in 1978 by implementing the Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1975. In this election the Phayeng Gram Panchayat was formed by clubbing Phayeng and Tairenpokpi (Scheduled Caste villages) and other surrounding non-Scheduled Caste villages of Kangdaband, Haorangsabal, Lamlongei, Lairesajik etc. In the election of Pradhan of the Phayeng Gram Panchayat, Ningthoujam Damu Singh of Phayeng was elected. (Manipur Gazette Extraordinary No. 83, June 12, 1978)

In the Pradhan elections of 1985 and 1991 also, Angom Tochou Singh and Angom Lokonjao Singh of Phayeng were elected respectively. (Manipur Gazette Extraordinary No. 81 (A), May 21, 1985 and Manipur Gazette Extraordinary No. 438, September 16, 1991) The main reasons for winning by candidates from Phayeng in the election of the Pradhan of the Phayeng Gram Panchayat were (a) Phayeng village was the largest among the constituent

villages, (b) the electorates of Phayeng and surrounding villages generally vote for the candidates from Phayeng, (c) the other candidates for Pradhan could not influence other villages except their respective small villages, and (d) the candidates from Phayeng had more money power in compare to other candidates. (Interview with N. Ibungo Singh of Phayeng)

The Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 which specifically reserved the Phayeng Gram Panchayat as a Scheduled Caste Gram Panchayat, was implemented in 1997. Under this Act, the Scheduled Castes villages of Phayeng, Tairenpokpi and Koutruk form the Phayeng Gram Panchayat. Phayeng constitutes about 70% of the total electorate of the Gram Sabha. (Interview with N. Ibungo Singh of Phayeng) In 1997 Pradhan Election, Angom Ibohal Singh of Phayeng Makha Leikai was elected. (State Election Commission, Manipur) In the election of 2002, the Pradhan of the Phayeng Gram Panchayat was a reserved seat for woman. For the seat of Pradhan, there were three women candidates namely, (i) Ningthoujam Memcha Devi of Phayeng Kangjeibung, (ii) Leichongbam Ibem Devi of Phayeng Mayai Leikai, and (iii) Ningthoujam Indira Devi of Tairenpokpi. In the election, Ningthoujam Indira Devi of Tairenpokpi (which had about 450 electorate out of 3400 electorate) won the seat of the Pradhan of the Phayeng Gram Panchayat. (State Election Commission, Manipur) The main reason for her winning was the wholehearted and open support by the local MLA of Sekmai Constituency i.e., Ningthoujam Biren of Phayeng. (Ningthoujam Biren Singh of Tairenpokpi) In 2007, the Pradhan election of the Phayeng Gram Panchayat, Angom Maimu Singh of Phayeng won the Pradhan seat by defeating Angom Norenkumar Singh of Phayeng. Angom Maimu Singh gets 1902 votes while Angom Norenkumar gets 1621 votes. (State Election Commission, Manipur). In the last election of the Phayeng Gram Panchayat which is held in 2012, the seat of Pradhan of Phayeng Gram

Panchayat is won by Angom Gojendro Singh by defeating his rival Angom Maimu Singh by a margin of 69 votes. A. Gojendro gets 1199 votes while A. Maimu Singh gets 1130 votes. (State Election Commission, Manipur) In 2017 Pradhan seat is reserved for women, and Angom ongbi Shyama Devi is elected as Pradhan of this Gram Panchayat. (State Election Commission, Manipur)

#### **D. PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTION OF THE MEMBERS OF THE PHAYENG GRAM PANCHAYAT:**

Members and Pradhan of the Phayeng Gram Panchayat are elected simultaneously for every Panchayat election held in Manipur. For the elections of the members and people's participation, the present study will only focus on the election of the Tairenpokpi member constituency. Being a small village, it is unfortunate that Tairenpokpi does not have an electoral strength to elect a member of Panchayat from the village before the implementation the Manipur Panchayati Raj Act 1994. There is no specific provision for the exact electoral strength for electing a member of Panchayats. Under the United Province Panchayat Act, 1947, the Chief Commissioner may establish a Gram Sabha for every village or a group of villages having a population of 1998; but it does not mention about the electoral strength for electing a Panchayat member. The Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1975 also does not specify about the electoral strength of electing a member of Panchayat. The Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, specifies the electoral strength of electing a member of Panchayat at 350 i.e., those who are included in the electoral lists of the State Assembly Elections. (The Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, Section 17) The Manipur Panchayati Raj Act 1994 is implemented in 1997. So, if we closely examine the above available facts and the electoral strength of Tairenpokpi village (470 population as per 1981 Census and 621



population as per 1991 Census; and 351 eligible electorate as per the electoral lists of the State Assembly Election held in 1995), it will be cleared that before the implementation of the Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 in 1997, Tairenpokpi does not have a chance of electing a member of Panchayat from its electoral strength. Since, there is no electoral strength to elect a member of Panchayat to the Phayeng Gram Panchayat from this village, Tairenpokpi combines with the villages of Atong Khuman (an electorate of around 160 voters), Kangdabi (an electorate of around 140 voters), Polangsoi (an electorate of around 70 voters) and the new village of Phayeng Hill (an electorate of around 180 voters) to elect a member of Panchayat to represent the above-mentioned villages to the Phayeng Gram Panchayat. (N. Tomcha of Tairenpokpi, a former and the Up-Pradhan of the Phayeng Gram Panchayat)

From the first Panchayat election held in 1964, till the fourth Panchayat election held in 1985, the member of the Phayeng Gram Panchayat representing the above-mentioned villages, was elected from Tairenpokpi. The member elected from this constituency generally become the Up-Pradhan of the Phayeng Gram Panchayat. However, due to the non-election of the member from Tairenpokpi as the Up-pradhan of the Phayeng Gram Panchayat in the last Panchayat election of Manipur in 1985, the villagers of Tairenpokpi boycotted the Panchayat election which was held in 1991. The member representing the above-mentioned villages was elected from the Phayeng Hill village. (Interview with N. Tomcha Singh of Tairenpokpi)

Now, the question is that on what grounds the villagers of Tairenpokpi boycotted the Panchayat member election of 1991, which was generally won by the candidate from the village. The main reason of boycotting Panchayat election was that when every Panchayat election was held, the Pradhan of the Phayeng Gram Panchayat election was held, the Pradhan of the Phayeng Gram Panchayat was automatically won by the

candidate from Phayeng village which was the main constituent of the Phayeng Gram Sabha. Then, the Up-Pradhan was traditionally elected from Tairenpokpi which constitute second largest area after Phayeng in this Gram Sabha. When the member elected from the village was not elected as the Up-Pradhan in 1985 Panchayat election, the sentiment of the villagers was hurt, and at the same time they also angry at the election of both the Pradhan and the Up-Pradhan from Phayeng. So, they boycotted the Panchayat election held in 1991.

The Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, as mentioned earlier, was implemented by holding the Manipur Panchayat Election in 1997. In this election, Tairenpokpi had the strength of electorate to elect its own Panchayat member (it had 351 eligible electorates as per the electoral list of the State Assembly Election). When the Phayeng Gram Panchayat was divided into 8 member constituencies, Tairenpokpi became one of the constituencies of the Phayeng Gram Panchayat. (The State Election Commission, Manipur)

In the Panchayat election held in 1997, the Tairenpokpi member constituency was uncontested. N. Shamu Singh was elected uncontested from this member constituency to represent the village in the Phayeng Gram Panchayat. Again, in the Panchayat election held in 2002, the Tairenpokpi member constituency was uncontested. In this election, Tampakleima Devi was elected to represent the village in the Phayeng Gram Panchayat. However, in the Panchayat election held in 2007, there was two candidates- a woman (N. Padma Devi) and a man (N. Niogthoujao Singh) to contest the Panchayat member election from this village. In the election, N. Ningthoujao Singh who got 286 votes defeated N. Padama Devi who got 184 votes. So, N. Ningthoujao Singh was elected to represent the village in the Phayeng Gram Panchayat. (The State Election Commission, Manipur) In the Panchayat Election held in 2012, the Tairenpokpi member constituency is a

woman reserved seat. In this election, Ningthoujam Leihao Devi is elected to represent the village in the Phayeng Gram Panchayat. (The State Election Commission, Manipur) In the Panchayat Election held in 2017, the Tairenpokpi member constituency is not a woman reserved seat. Eventhough, in this election, Ningthoujam Devi (197 votes) is elected by defeating her near rival Leichongbam Sorojini Devi (195 votes) to represent the village in the Phayeng Gram Panchayat. (The State Election Commission, Manipur)

### **E. ELECTORAL BEHAVIOUR IN THE PHAYENG GRAM PANCHAYAT:**

If we closely examine, the elections of the Pradhan and the members of the Phayeng Panchayat, the nature of the political participation by the electorates of this Gram Panchayat is a very complicated one. Because all the contestants of the Pradhan and the members are all close relatives. So, it is very difficult for all the voters to cast their valuable votes to the candidates for every constituency. Nevertheless, every candidate campaign in every election is conducted through a variety of familiar techniques such as public speeches, meeting, and ceaseless travel by the candidate like house-to-house campaign etc. At the same time, it is also canvassed through wall posturing, flag hoisting and festooning in every nook and corner of the constituency. Sometimes, candidates or their supporters offer parties or feasts to woo the voters. Clans also play a major role in the Phayeng Gram Panchayat Elections. So, the electorates cast their votes considering the closeness of the candidates to their clans. They also cast their votes taking into account the candidates' capacity of extravagance, leadership quality, political awareness, etc. (Interview with N. Banikanta Singh of Phayeng and N. Tomcha Singh of Tairenpokpi)

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, now, it can be said the electorate of the Phayeng Gram Panchayat,

are very much interested in taking part in the political process at the grass root levels. The policy of reserving seats for them in the State Assembly (as Sekmai Assembly Constituency is the only Scheduled Caste Reserved Constituency in Manipur and Phayeng Gram Panchayat is under its jurisdiction) and local bodies has been useful for them to be closely associated with grass roots politics. The reservation for women in the Pradhan (sometimes) and members' quota are also playing an important role in shaping all folks of people's participation in this Gram Panchayat.

### ***Declaration by Authors***

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