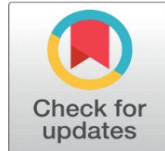
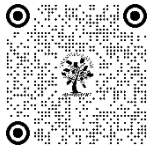


OPPOSITION PARTY AND ELECTORAL POLITICS IN MANIPUR: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.3748](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.3748)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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ABSTRACT

The opposition party is a vital component of democratic governance, acting as a check on the authority of the ruling party and assuring representation for a variety of opinions in the political scene. It operates outside of the ruling government and provide alternative viewpoints and policies. Their major responsibility is to scrutinise the acts and policies of the ruling party or coalition, offering criticism and alternative ideas. It is essential in democratic system because it provides checks and balances, ensures responsibility, and represents a wide range of social interests. In a parliamentary system, opposition parties keep the government accountable through debates, questioning in parliament, and offering alternative legislation. It also helps in shaping public opinion through media coverage and grassroots activism. It contests in elections with the goal of attaining power and forming its own government. In light of this framework, the article investigates the role and involvement of opposition parties in the five state assembly elections of Manipur held during the post-statehood period.

Keywords: Election, Government, Opposition Party, Manifesto, Manipur Legislative Assembly

1. INTRODUCTION

The In a democratic society, different ideologies and interests exist among the population. Opposition parties represent these diverse viewpoints, ensuring that all segments of society have a voice in the political process. This fosters inclusivity and ensures that policies reflect a broader range of perspectives. Healthy political competition facilitated by opposition parties encourages debate and discussion on various issues. This exchange of ideas helps voters make informed decisions by providing them with different policy options and perspectives. It also contributes to the development of more robust and effective public policies. The presence of viable opposition parties is essential for maintaining electoral integrity. They monitor elections, ensuring fairness, transparency, and accountability in the electoral process. Their participation also helps prevent electoral fraud and irregularities by providing additional oversight.

2. UNDERSTANDING OPPOSITION PARTY: MEANING AND CHARACTERISTICS

An opposition party refers to a political group that opposes the party or coalition in power. The main function of opposition party is to provide alternative policies, examine the acts of the ruling party, and provide diverse viewpoints on government and decision-making. The role it plays in democratic institutions is of utmost importance as it serves to ensure accountability, facilitate debate, and represent a wide range of perspectives within society. Additionally, it functions as a mechanism to restrain the authority of the ruling party, challenging its policies and actions through parliamentary debates, public discourse, and electoral competition.

Opposition parties play an important role in a democratic society. There are various characteristics of opposition parties. Opposition parties provides an alternate vision to the ruling party or government. They present different policies, approaches, and solutions to address societal issues. They scrutinise the activities and decisions of the ruling party or government. They hold them accountable for their promises, actions, and use of power. They provide a check on the power of the ruling party or government. They ensure that decisions are made in the interest of the public and prevent the abuse of power. They represent the voice of dissent within a democracy. They compete in elections against the ruling party or government. They offer voters a choice and provide an avenue for political participation and expression. They contribute to the development of public policy by proposing alternative ideas and legislative initiatives. They stimulate discussion and innovation in governance. They represent minority views and interests that may not be adequately addressed by the ruling party. They ensure that diverse perspectives are taken into account throughout decision-making processes.

3. THE ROLE OF THE OPPOSITION PARTY IN MANIPUR POLITICS: 1972-1995

In the 1972 Manipur Legislative Assembly election, the Congress was the major opposition party, winning 16 seats. Despite emerging as the single largest party, it was unable to form the government. The Manipur People's Party formed a coalition government with other like-minded parties. The MPP-led coalition government fell on March 26, 1973. A mid-term election was held in February 1974. In this election, the Congress criticised the MPP and its allies, claiming that regionalism and money power created havoc on the campaign. It targeted the MPP by promising that the party would provide leadership and guidance to the younger generation in the mainstream of national life, discouraging regional sentiments. It reminded people that the party, as the oldest and largest national organisation, has a unique role in Manipur. The Congress Party organised large gatherings to demonstrate the party's power and support. It formed an electoral alliance with the CPI to counter the emergence of regional sentiments promoted by local parties, as well as the show of financial strength by a significant number of independent candidates and regionalist forces. However, the Congress Party won only 13 of the 49 seats contested in hills and valley. The MPP emerged as the single largest party in the 1974 election. It suggested that the Congress, as an opposition, could not contain the expanding powers of the MPP, which has a regionalist ideology. The MPP government in 1974 lasted only four months. Ministerial instability in Manipur occurred from 1974 to 1977 as a result of widespread MLA defection from one party to another. The formation of the Janata government at the national level in 1977 resulted in the establishment of the Janata government in Manipur, led by Yangmasho Shaiza.

In the eve of 1980 State Assembly election, the opposition parties leading up included the Congress (I), Congress (U), CPI, CPI (M), and the MPP. The electoral manifesto of the Congress (I) party emphasised the leadership of Rajiv Gandhi inside the Congress (I) organisation, as well as the party's growth and development over its 105-year history, including 44 years in Manipur. Congress (U), an opposition party, urged people to scrutinize the past political trajectory of the political parties and their leaders prior to delving into their electoral manifestoes. The statement asserts that the establishment of a stable administration is contingent upon the party. The role of other political parties in defection, corruption, partiality, and unwillingness to engage in long-term planning has been highlighted by the CPI. Additionally, the previous government has been characterized as ad-hoc. The MPP promised to grant Manipur the maximum autonomy by amending the Indian Constitution, the improvement of agriculture, development of Manipuri language, fostering harmonious relations between hills and valley, removal of the Armed Forces Special Power Act, 1958 (AFSPA, 1958) and establishment of one Regiment for Manipur. The workers of the opposition party, primarily from Congress (I), CPI, and MPP, exerted relentless efforts to oppose the candidates nominated by the Janata Party. Each opposition political party conducted their election campaigns independently of one another, urging voters to cast their votes for the candidates presented by their various parties. It is evident from the outcomes of the 1980 State Assembly election that the opposition parties emerged as the prevailing winners. The Congress (I) party emerged as the largest party, winning

13 out of the 58 seats that were contested. Out of the 40 seats contested, the Congress (U) obtained six seats. The MPP obtained four seats, while the CPI gained five seats. The Janata Party, which held power from 1977 to 1979, obtained 10 out of 57 contested seats. Congress (I) was joined by two independent candidates from Churachandpur. Two additional elected Members of the Legislative Assembly from the Janata Party had also joined Congress (I), resulting in a total of 17 members in Congress (I). A coalition government led by the Congress (I) was formed, consisting of the Congress (U), MPP, and Kuki National Assembly (KNA), with RK Dorendra Singh serving as the Chief Minister. From January 1980 until December 1984, there were coalition ministries led by Congress (I). During this period, there was a significant and widespread transfer of MLAs from one political party to another. The motion of no confidence against the Rishang Keishing's government was introduced by the opposition party in February 1981. The People's Democratic Front was established through the coalition of the MPP, CPI, Congress (U), CPI (M), and the Janata Party. The Front made a formal request to the Governor for the establishment of a government. However, the Governor declined to provide permission for the Front to form a government due to the fact that the Front's collective strength constituted just fifty percent of the overall strength of the House.

On the eve of the 1984 State Assembly election, the MPP, which had been a coalition partner during the formation of the Congress (I) led coalition, assumed the role of the opposition party under the leadership of Chief Minister RK Dorendra Singh. The manifesto of the MPP outlined 22 items including the removal of AFSPA, 1958, development and establishment of agricultural industry, inclusion of Manipuri language in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution of India, a separate Governor and a separate High Court for Manipur, etc. The election manifesto of CPI had criticised the policies and programmes of the Congress government. The party's election manifesto had the following objectives: the eradication of corruption, the removal of AFSPA, 1958, and the advancement of the rights, culture, and language of the hill people, etc. The party workers affiliated with the MPP, CPI, Congress (U), and Janata Party were employed to support the respective party candidates in the electoral campaign. The campaign characteristics exhibited a notable degree of similarity across the opposition parties. The campaign typically encompasses several activities such as conducting meetings, engaging in house-to-house campaigns, distributing posters featuring candidate images, and organizing rallies, among others. The election outcomes demonstrated the poor performance of the opposing parties. Only the leader of the opposition in the Assembly namely M. Koireng Singh had the ability to secure his own election. The Janata members who were just elected were also newcomers. Similarly, the MPP was able to secure a mere 3 seats out of the total 34 candidates who contested the election. The CPI was able to secure only one seat out of the 17 seats that were contested. The BJP had contested election for the first time in Manipur. However, it was unable to open its account in the electoral politics of Manipur. In short, the opposition parties were unsuccessful in garnering the trust and support of the people. The ruling Congress experienced an increase in the number of seats compared to the 1980 election. In the history of electoral politics in Manipur, the Congress party achieved a significant milestone by securing 30 seats, which accounted for half of the total strength of the Assembly. In the 1984 Legislative Assembly election, the opposition parties, including the MPP, CPI, Janata Party, and the BJP, maintained their position as opposition parties.

The State Assembly election of 1990 took place in February of that year. The electoral contests witnessed the participation of various opposition parties, such as the CPI, Janata Dal, Congress (S), CPI (M), and MPP. Prior to the election, a coalition of six parties was established to challenge the Congress. They included the MPP, the Janata, the Congress (S), the KNA, and the National Political Conference. The manifesto of MPP included the safeguard of the territorial integrity of Manipur, inclusion of the Manipuri language in the 8th Schedule, removal of AFSPA, 1958, more autonomy to the state, industrialisation of Manipur, one job to one family, etc. The Youth Front of MPP worked for the party's candidates in several constituencies in Manipur. The women wing of the party demonstrated comparable performance to the Youth Front during the election campaign organised by the MPP. The electoral manifestoes of various opposition parties such as CPI, Janata, CPI (M), KNA, etc. addressed both local and national issues. Several manifestoes expressed criticism towards the policies and programs implemented by the reigning Congress government. The opposition parties did not form an electoral coalition to participate in the Assembly election of 1990. They achieved a mutual understanding regarding the adjustment of seats. In instances where a consensus could not be reached in certain constituencies, political parties presented their respective candidates and referred to the situation as a "friendly contest." The term "friendly contest" had experienced a decline in its value and relevance due to the independent conduct of election campaigns, house-to-house campaigns, and rallies by each opposition party. The Congress party, which had power, managed to gain a mere 25 out of the 60 seats that were contested. Despite obtaining 25 seats, it was the party with the biggest number of seats. Each of the MPP and the Janata party obtained 11 seats. The CPI secured three seats. Two seats were secured by another party within the opposing alliance. The Congress (S) got a total of six seats, while the National Peoples Party

secured a single seat. Overall, the opposition parties had successfully secured a total of 34 seats. Despite being the largest party, the Congress was unable to form the government. The opposition parties established the United Legislative with the objective of forming a government. RK Ranbir of MPP was appointed as the Chief Minister of the state, establishing the new government. However, its duration was limited to a mere two years. During the period from 1992 to February 1995, the Congress successfully bolstered its power and established two ministries under its leadership.

The State Assembly Election of 1995 took place in February of that year. The opposition parties consisted of national parties such as the Congress (S), Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Samata Party, and Janata Dal. The regional opposition parties included the MPP, NPP (the recently established party), and others. The Federal Party of Manipur (FDM), which had recently emerged, also participated in the electoral process. The Congress (S) manifesto pledged to defend the nation's integrity and democratic principles, including the right to employment, clean and efficient governance, etc. The Janata Dal made a commitment to establish a bio-technology research scheme at Manipur University, as well as to ensure equal access to facilities and one third job reservation for women in government services, etc. The Samata Party promised to construct a Manipur Regiment following the removal of Assam Rifles from Manipur, as well as to establish a Minority Commission to safeguard the rights of minority groups. The BJP pledged to remove the AFSPA of 1958, handover of Kangla, address insurgency, integrate Manipur, establish a stable ministry, and ensure a corruption-free government. The MPP promised to conduct a review of the Merger Agreement of 1949, the transfer of Kabaw Valley, the political resolution of the insurgency issue, and the removal of the AFSPA of 1958, etc. The recently established FPM pledged to actively pursue various initiatives, including safeguarding the territorial integrity of Manipur, granting autonomy to districts and villages, and engaging in negotiations with insurgents. The NPP promised to decrease the taxation on water and power, lower the prices of basic commodities, and establish a governing system free from corruption. The opposition parties pledged to establish an alternative government in lieu of the corrupt Congress government. The electoral landscape of the 1995 election exhibited notable distinctions when compared to preceding elections. In contrast to national concerns, the opposition candidates and political parties placed greater focus on local matters. The ethnic violence between the Nagas and Kukis in Manipur in 1992 raised significant apprehension among all political parties in the electoral fight. The Congress was criticized by the MPP, CPI, and other opposition parties for its inability to effectively address the issue. The issue of South Nagaland or Greater Nagaland, as sought by certain organizations, was also highlighted by the MPP. The electoral contest mostly revolved around the Congress (I) and the MPP. The opposition parties did not form an electoral alliance. There was indeed a mutual electoral understanding between the CPI, CPI (M), and the Janata Dal. The outcome of the election demonstrates a significant enhancement in the electoral efficacy of the opposition parties. The MPP secured 18 out of the 54 seats that were contested. Each of the FPM and NPP were able to secure two seats. The BJP opened its account by winning one seat out of 20 seats contested. Out of the 24 seats contested, the Samata Party obtained 2 seats. However, the Janata Dal, CPI, and CPI (M), among other opposition parties, were unable to enhance their electoral powers. Only 7 out of 41 contested seats were secured by the Janata Dal. The CPI secured two seats. The CPI (M) was unable to demonstrate its presence in the electoral arena. The ruling Congress secured a total of 26 seats, which were subsequently reduced to one seat in the by-election. The United Democratic Front, comprising the MPP, Janata Dal, Congress (S), Samata Party, and CPI, was established by the opposition parties with the intention of forming a government. However, due to its overwhelming majority in the election, the Congress party successfully established the government, with Rishang Keishing serving as the Chief Minister.

4. FINDINGS AND RESULTS

The findings of the performance of major opposition parties in the above-discussed five state assembly elections are highlighted here. Between 1972 and 1995, the Congress was in opposition on three occasions: once in 1972, once in 1974, and once in 1990. Despite being the largest political party in 1972 and 1990, the Congress party remained in the opposition due to the successful formation of a coalition government by the MPP and MSCP, who were able to garner support from likeminded parties. Conversely, the MPP was in the opposition two times because to their electoral performance. In 1984, they had only 3 Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), and in 1995 they had 18 MLAs. Despite being founded on the ideals of regionalism and advocating for greater autonomy in Manipur, the MPP failed to garner voter support due to their political ideologies and values. The CPI had criticism on five occasions, specifically in 1972, 1974, 1980, 1984, and 1995. The party was in opposition more than any other political parties in Manipur, both at the national and regional levels. The party was only able to secure 5, 6, 5, 1, and 2 seats in all five terms. The BJP entered the realm of electoral politics quite late in comparison to other political parties. It was the opposition party in 1995 election securing only 1 seat.

5. CONCLUSION

The Manipur state legislative assembly elections witnessed the active participation of both the government and opposition parties on the eve of elections during the period spanning from 1972 to 1995. The opposition parties exhibit greater levels of activity in comparison to the ruling parties. They presented diverse perspectives and policy recommendations inside their respective election manifestoes. They serve as a mechanism to restrain the power of the ruling party. The government policies, activities, and choices were subjected to thorough scrutiny, with the aim of guaranteeing accountability and mitigating the risk of potential abuses of power. It is observed that all national and regional political parties in Manipur were found to be in opposition. Political parties who participated in Assembly elections with the objective of challenging the ruling party or parties occasionally managed to establish a government, but predominantly through coalition formation. The government and opposition parties engaged in a series of charges and counter-charges. The opposition primarily accused the ruling party or parties of corruption. In general, the opposition parties played a crucial role in providing a necessary balance to the ruling party, so enhancing the overall strength and efficacy of the political system. The existence of effective opposition parties served as a catalyst for the ruling party to exercise greater responsibility and efficiency in its governance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

None.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

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