

Nepalis in Manipur: Making Their Mark in Electoral Politics

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Abstract:

From the early colonial time onwards, the British had brought outsiders to the state of Manipur to meet their needs and services as labourers, servants, cooks, coolie, helpers, etc. Later, the migrants brought their families and started settling down with permission granted by the Manipur State Durbar and British Political Agents from time to time. The British were very much satisfied and attracted by these migrant communities because of their courage, hard work, trustworthiness, honesty, sincerity, and valour, and the British realized their importance both during the war and peacetime as soldiers and peasants, respectively. This migrant community is none other than the Nepalis/Gorkhas. Their coming and movement had been seen from the time of the British setting up of the Political Agency in Imphal in 1835, which even today inherits this legacy during the post-colonial time through the Indo-Nepal Treaty of 1950. As the population influx occurred in the state in the 1960s and 1970s, the Nepali broadly expanded their settlement throughout the once Gorkha Reserve- Kanglatongbi-Kangpokpi belts and made the Kangpokpi AC 50-50 with the local tribes, which even led to being elected as representative from it after converted into a general seat. This legacy of fighting elections continues even today, even though they lost it by a margin after the 1980s. Besides, they have also participated in panchayat and ADC elections with elected members and cast their votes in the valley and hill constituencies other than Kangpokpi.

Keywords: *Nepali, Assembly, Kangpokpi, Election and Kishore Thapa.*

Introduction

Manipur now has 16 districts, bifurcated further from the previous 9 districts created by the then Government of Manipur in 2016.¹ Among the 7 new districts, Kangpokpi is one of them, bifurcated from the Senapati District. It was inaugurated by the Hon'ble Chief Minister, Manipur on 15th December 2016. It is inhabited by multi-ethnic groups with inherent socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, mainly the local tribes, Kukis, and the Nepali-speaking population, with a few Naga tribes. The Deputy Commissioner, Kangpokpi, heads the administration of Kangpokpi District. The district is bounded by Senapati district on the north, Tamenglong on the west, Imphal West on the south, and Ukhrul on the east.

¹ The govt order vide notification no. 16/20/2016-R dated 09-12-2016 and subsequent corrigendum dated 14-12-2016 of Secretariat: Revenue Department.

Kangpokpi District Headquarters is situated at Kangpokpi Town, at an altitude of 992 meters above the mean Sea Level and about 45 km from the state capital, Imphal. Kangpokpi District comprises mainly nine (9) sub-divisions viz, Kangpokpi, Saitu-Gamphazol, Saikul, Kangchup-Geljang, Bungte-Chiru, Island, Champhai, and Lhungtin. These nine (9) subdivision boundaries form the boundary extent of Kangpokpi District. The area of the district is approximately 1698 Sq. km and comprises 534 census villages and some hamlets. The population of the entire Kangpokpi District is 1,93,744, comprising 98,908 males and 94,836 females (Census 2011). Kangpokpi District has an Autonomous District Council by the name Sadar Hills Autonomous District Council, headed by its chairman with 24 elected Members of District Council (MDCs) and 2 nominated MDCs.²

The district is 45 km from Imphal on the north of the Imphal-Dimapur road NH-39. The Sex Ratio of the district is 989 females per 1000 males (Saikul- 1009, Kangpokpi – 968, Saitu- 898). The district's literacy rate is 85% (Male – 89%, Female – 80.34%) and is above the state average of 76.94% (Census 2011). The main religion of the district is Christianity, followed by others.

Sl. no	Religion	Percentage %
1	Christians	79.90%
2	Hindus	17.68%
3	Buddhist	0.92%
4	Not Stated	0.66%
5	Muslims	0.45%
6	Sikh	0.06%
7	Jain	0.02%
8	Other	0.30%

Table 1: Religion in Kangpokpi Constituency

The following are the major languages/dialects spoken as mother tongues in the district:

Sl.no.	Languages/dialects	Percentage %
1	Thadou Kuki	52.85%
2	Nepali	15.96%
3	Vaiphei	5.08%
4	Tankhul	5.02%
5	Liangmei	3.56%

² Earlier, it was known as the Sadar Hills ADC with HQ. At Kangpokpi till 2016, under the Senapati District

6	Yimchungre ³	2.64% ⁷
7	Others	14.9%

Table 2: Language speakers in Kangpokpi Constituency (Census 2011)

The Nepali-speaking population residing in the districts is 30927. The Kangpokpi AC has the highest number of Nepali settlements, with 23701 under the Sadar West Division, followed by Saitu-Gamphazol with 5582 under the same division and Saikul with 1644 under the Sadar East Division in the Saikul area. There are three constituencies in the Kangpokpi district. They are as follows:

1. 46-Saikul (S.T.) A.C., with 56 Polling Stations
2. 50-Kangpokpi (Gen) A.C. with 39 Polling Stations
3. 51-Saitu (S.T.) A.C., with 67 Polling Stations

The political Inspiration of Nepali/Gorkha:

The Nepalis/Gorkhas were initially brought by the British to Manipur, especially for political and economic reasons. They settled down to a sedentary life after the 1st World War, witnessed by the creation of Gorkha Reserved areas in Kanglatongbi-Kangpokpi hilly belts, located on the NH-39, Imphal-Dimapur Road, which is divided into less or more equal halves. Today, these are the areas where they expanded the influx of population and settled permanently. By 1947-48, there was hardly a 3,000 Nepali-speaking population either settled down or present in the state, especially among the graziers and ex-soldiers. In the 1951 Census, there was a 2859 Nepali-speaking population in the state. However, the migrant influx scenario has affected the geographical and demographic of the state, especially the Kangpokpi districts, at present. Initially, the Nepalis had settled down in and around Imphal areas or valleys like Chingmeirong, Mantripukhri, Pangei, Iroisemba, Koirengai, and Kanglatongbi, and later absorbed into the Grazing Reserved Areas in the colonial period (NEIHA 2022: 580-581).

Under the terms of the Indo-Nepal Friendship Treaty of 1950, the Tripartite Delhi Agreement of 1951, and the 1956 revised Indo-Nepal Agreement, free interchange and flow of both countries' nationals as well as their right to own property in either country is allowed, unhindered and without restrictions.⁴ These agreements made official that had existed de facto from the British period onwards. Due to this agreement and the revocation of the Permit System in 1950 by the Chief Commissioner, there was a massive influx of Nepali speaking population in the state, which increased to 13571, where its decadal growth was more than 4 times (Census 1961). Similarly, in the 1971 and 1981 censuses,

³ A small group of tribes unrecognized in Manipur, but also found a few settlementst in Nagland and Myanmar, belonged to the Naga tribes

⁴ Articles 5 and 6 of the Indo-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship 1950

the Nepali population kept increasing due to the main factors of the treaty, followed by removal from prohibited and restricted areas, which means going anywhere freely without a check. The influx of surplus migrants started settling down after 1950, and the government accommodated some in the valley areas, including the ex-servicemen, due to various reasons (Acharya 2019: 96-97, 101-103). The British provided two panchayats in Kangpokpi areas in the 1930s (Administrative Report 1934-35; Acharya 2019: 124), where its hall still existed in Kangpokpi, and the subsequent implementation of the UP Panchayat Raj Act, 1947 to Manipur in the 1960s was also extended to Nepali getting three Gram Panchayats which gave them more advantage to take the political right under such move. One Gopichandra Riyalt and Debakar Khatiwara, the Nepali residents of Keithelmanbi, were appointed as members of the Manipur Territorial Congress Committee in 1965 (Acharya 1999: 60; 2019: 156). The following table shows the Nepali population figures in the state.

Year	Population
1951	2859
1961	13571
1971	26381
1981	37046
1991	46500
2001	45998
2011	63756

Table 3: The Nepali population in Manipur (Census of India)

There was an aspiration to bring together all the Nepali settlements in the state, both politically and also based on their cultural commonality due to the increase in their population. This was witnessed by establishing the Manipur Gorkha Welfare Union in 1951, followed by the All Manipur Nepali/Gorkha Student Union in 1967. It is also to be noted that many of them were eventually enrolled as voters, particularly in the hill constituencies. As a result, one Mr. Kishore Thapa, a Nepali, submitted a memorandum to the then Lt. Governor, D.R. Kohli of Manipur, on 13th September 1971, which was then under President Rule to declare Kangpokpi constituency as a dereserved constituency, which ultimately was accepted (Singh 1990: 9). In the midterm election of 1974, he was elected from the constituency and won consecutively for three terms. After that, he never won by a narrow margin due to specific reasons. This political ambience was connected with the Darjeeling agitation for including the Nepali language in the 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution and to be merged with Sikkim as a part of India in the 1960s. These changes in the political scenario in indirectly affected the Nepalis of Manipur, who

migrated from Darjeeling through Assam. Apart from the state election, the Nepali villages came under both the Panchayat Raj System in the valley and for Kanglatongbi-Kangpokpi belts till 2012 which had four panchayats and a Zila Parishad since 1985 (NEIHA 2022: 586-588; Acharya 2019: 127-133) and after continue to act as a District Council⁵ in the hills with contesting election rights in Irang areas but they were also nominated in it (NEIHA 2022: 588-589). Kanglatongbi Gram Panchayat is the only panchayat exclusively for the Nepali settlements, which was under the Imphal West District today. Earlier, they were also elected as Pradhans and members in the valley areas in Serou and Makeng Dolaithabi (NEIHA: 586-587).

Today, in more than 10 Assembly Constituencies, the Nepalis played an essential role in winning the election. Most of them were enrolled as voters, especially in Serou, Khundrakpam, Wangkhei, Karong, Saitu, and Kangpokpi Assembly Constituencies. In contrast, some of them were not enrolled and stayed temporarily and moved from one place to another, like in Bishnupur, Chandel, Ukhrul, and in some parts of Singhat, Saikul, and Tamenglong constituencies. Kangpokpi is the only constituency where they are concentrated and can contest elections against the native candidates and are defeated by a narrow margin.

Political Participation of Manipur's Nepali-speaking Population in the State Legislative Assembly Election:

For the effective democratic government under the Constitution of India, the Representation of the People Act of 1950 and the Delimitation Commission Act of 1952 were incorporated by the central government, where the population and territory are important characteristic features of a sovereign state. In other words, the four important pillars of a state are population, territory, government, and sovereignty. Under Article 82 of the Constitution (Readjustment after each census), Parliament, by law, enacts a Delimitation Act after every census. After that, the central government constituted a delimitation commission. In India, four such Delimitation Commissions were constituted in 1952, 1963, 1973, and 2002 under the Delimitation Acts of 1952, 1962, 1972, and 2002, respectively. The participation in the rural political and electoral activities and contested in the parliamentary election of 1952 of Shri Ishwori Devi (Kamei 2016: 111), the Nepali queen of the last Manipur King, Bodh Chandra, has made the Nepalis more in an advantageous position and led to take the upper hand in the state election which could be seen shortly after Manipur acquiring statehood in 1972.

⁵ Manipur Hill Areas District Council was passed in 1971, and the elections were held in 1973 to 1984, where there was a lapse for 20 years, and finally held the election in 2010 and 2015. In the absence of ADC elections, Panchayat Raj was imposed on the Nepali settlement areas and continued until 2012, when it was deleted by the state government after the formal implementation of the 4th Amendment to the ADC Act 2011. Meanwhile, there was an overlap between the Panchayat and ADC systems in the 1970s and 1980s, which benefited both systems.

When the Territorial Council in Manipur was formed in 1957 after becoming a Union Territory, many Nepalis were enrolled as voters and participated in exercising their universal adult franchise from all their settlement areas, including the Irang areas, in the first electoral council. This electoral participation was followed in the 1962 and 1967 elections, which were under the Union Territory (Acharya 2019: 105).

In the 1967 election under the Union Territory and the 1972 statehood's first election, there was no Kangpokpi Constituency. It was only after the delimitation in the state in 1973 under the Delimitation Act 1972 constituted and organized that Kangpokpi was given by transferring one seat from 4 seats in the Ukhrul district to the Senapati district, which increased to 6 from 5 seats (ECI 1972). Initially, the Kangpokpi seat was reserved for S.T. when it was demarked as a constituency. Due to the presence of more than 40% of the Nepali population and the subsequent memorandum submitted to the then Lt. Governor of the state, it was converted to a general seat aftermath of the delimitation and prior to the collapse of the 1st statehood election of 1972 over the power in 1974. Only after the 1st term was over in two years was the mid-term election of the 2nd term, where Kangpokpi was assigned as the assembly constituency of the state under the then Senapati district as a general seat out of the 20 ST seats.

The Territorial Council elections of 1962, 1967 and the 1st Manipur Assembly Election, 1972:

In the 1962 Territorial Council election, two Nepali candidates contested in the Sagolmang constituency but lost due to the vote sharing of the Nepali voters (Manipur Gazette 1962). They were given below as follows:

- a) Chandra Bahadur Gurung from Thangal Bazar with the lion symbol
- b) Rup Narayan Upadhyay from Toribari with scales symbol

This means there were many Nepali voters in the constituency by the 1960s and the beginning of the final political awakening and consciousness among them. Many of them were also enrolled in the political parties as members, which furthered awareness of the country's party system, which impacted the state of Manipur, even though it had a low literacy rate.

The present Kangpokpi area was part of the two S.T. reserved seats as Mao East A.C. in the 30-member Union Territory Legislative Assembly in 1967, in which Shoukhothang won as an independent candidate. The Nepali settlers were enrolled and voted in the election. Of the 30 seats, INC got 16 seats and formed the state government. The Territorial government was affected by the dissident MLAs, which led to presidential rule in the state in 1969.

In the 1st Manipur Statehood Election, 1972, Kangpokpi was a part of the three Assembly Constituencies - Karong, Saikul, and Saitu where the winners were Athikho Daiho of INC,

R. Voi of Independent and Paolen of INC candidates respectively (ECI 1972)⁶. In the election, Nepalese voted and played an important role in winning the assemblies, especially at Saitu and Karong. In the election result, the INC and MPP got 17 and 15, respectively, where Md Alimuddin of Lilong AC became the 1st statehood Chief Minister with the support of the independents and other minor parties (Kamei 2016: 129).

2nd Manipur Assembly Election, 1974

The 1st term government collapsed after a little more than two years, and the assembly was dissolved due to dissension among MLAs for power, and the mid-term election was held in March 1974. Md Alimuddin was returned as Chief Minister, but again, no stable government was witnessed. From the table below (Table 4), it is seen that the two candidates directly contested among the Nepali and the Local Kuki candidates in the Kangpokpi Assembly Constituency. Kishore Thapa was the Indian National Congress candidate, who won the election by 912, whereas Paokhosei was the Kuki National Assembly candidate (ECI 1974). The first litmus test of state politics officially began from this election, where the constituency was declared a general seat in the 1973 delimitation. The victory meant for the Nepali security and safety in the state and settlements and changed/affected the demographic balance in the constituency, with almost a 50-50 share of voters.

Candidates	Total voters	Total voted	Margin	% Polled	Vote share	Party
Kishore Thapa		5029	912		54.99 %	INC
Paokhosei		4117			45.01 %	KNA
Total	11555	9519		82.38%		

Table 4: The Result Sheet of the 2nd General Election of Kangpokpi Constituency

3rd Manipur Legislative Assembly, 1980

In this election, two candidates from the Nepali community stood against the two native Kuki candidates as independents in the constituency. They were the sitting MLA Kishore Thapa and Ram Prasad as the candidates of INC-I and JNP, respectively. By this time, Kishore Thapa had increased his margin of victory to 2,120 votes because of the divided Kuki votes among the candidates. He got 5353 votes from Nepali and defeated his nearest

⁶ This was the Statistical Report of the Kangpokpi Assembly constituency of erstwhile Senapati District and presently in the heart of Kangpokpi District from 1974 to 2022 from the Election Commission of India, New Delhi

rival, Taokhosli, who got 3233 votes from Kuki (ECI 1980). When it looked into the vote share, 50-50 voters were again between the Nepalis and Kukis.

Candidates	Total voters	Total voted	Margin	% polled	Vote share	Party
Kishore Thapa		5353	2120		48.16	INC (I)
Taokhosli Kipgen		3233			29.09	IND
Paokhothang		2335			21.01	IND
Ram Prasad		194			1.75	JNP
Total	12838	11498		89.56%		

Table 5: The Result Sheet of the 3rd General Election

4th Manipur Legislative Assembly, 1984

The election was held in December 1984, where three candidates from the 6 candidates in the Kangpokpi AC were Nepali-speakers. Once again, Kishore Thapa was elected from the Kangpokpi AC as an independent candidate against the INC candidate, Padma Prasad Kharel, who defeated his nearest rival, T. Kipgen, by 3096 votes (ECI 1984). The Nepali had a voter share of more than 54% in this election, which was seen as a vast influx and raised anti-foreigner issues in the state. This election was the last heyday of Nepali participation in state politics.

Candidates	Total voters	Total voted	Margin	% Polled	Vote share	Party
Kishore Thapa		6782	3096		42.54%	IND
Thangkholet Kipgen		3686			23.12%	IND
Seikam		3582			22.47%	IND
Padma Prasad Kharel		1774			11.13%	INC
3 Others (Ranjit Gurung)		118 (57)			0.75%	IND
Total	17200	16145			100%	

Table 6: The Result Sheet of the 4th General Election

5th Manipur Assembly Election, 1990

According to the 1991 census, more than 46000 Nepali people were reported as voters, and more than 35,000 stayed in the Senapati district, with the majority settled down in the Kangpokpi constituency. In the 1990 election, four Nepali candidates contested among the eight candidates in Kangpokpi AC, where one L.S. John, belonging to the Kuki tribe, and

Janata Dal won by defeating his nearest rival, S.P. Kipgen, by just 27 votes (ECI 1990). In this election, the local population in the voting outnumbered the Nepali voters, which stretched to more than 5000 voters. The 50-50 % in the previous elections was now completely changed due to various factors, especially the anti-foreigner movement and immigration from Burma, along with internal displacement due to the Naga-Kuki clash. Kishore once again contested the INC candidate and got only a slight half of the Nepali population divided with his rival Hari Prasad Nepal. From the voting share, the Kuki and Nepali voters were 70% and 30% in the Kangpokpi AC, respectively.

Candidates	Total votes	Total voters	Margin	Voting %	Vote share %	Party
L. S. John		4529	27		24.46%	JD
Shekhogin Pagin Kipgen		4502			24.32%	ICS(SCS)
Tongkhohao Hangshing		3770			20.36%	MPP
Kishore		2922			15.78%	INC
Hari Prasad Nepal		2367			12.78%	IND
Apao Chongloi M		311			1.68%	IND
2 other Nepali candidates		114			0.62%	MHPC and Ind
Total	20400	20400		92.18%		

Table 7: The Result Sheet of the 5th General Election

6th Manipur Legislative Assembly, 1995

The election was held in the month of February 1995, where Kishore Thapa was the lone candidate, and Thangminlen of MPP was the winner in the Kangpokpi AC. His vote share was only 34 %, which means it is now almost 2/3rd majority by the Kukis. Even though he contested against the three odds, he was defeated by more than 2000 votes by Thangminlen (ECI 1995). More and more stretched the gap between the Kuki-Nepali voter share, it became more difficult for them to win the election. Out of the 22312 eligible voters, only seven thousand were Nepalis.

Candidates	Party	Votes	Vote share	Margin	Total votes	Voting %
Thangminlen	MPP	9134	44.52%	2072		
Kishore Thapa	SAP	7062	34.42%			
L.S. John	INC	4011	19.55%			
Solomon Veino	IND	308	1.50%			
Total		20881			22312	93.59

Table 8: The Result Sheet of the 6th General Election

7th Manipur Legislative Assembly, 2000

In this election, four Nepali candidates frayed among the six candidates, where ex-MLA Kishore Thapa got less than 1% of the total votes. In this election, the chance of winning the election in the Kangpokpi AC from the Nepali candidates was less as the margin of victory was more than 9000 votes for the NCP candidate Thangminlien Kipgen from the INC candidate Ranjit Gurung (ECI 2000). Among the voter share, the local population completely outnumbered the Nepali population by 2/3rd majority.

Candidates	Party	Votes	Vote share	Margin	Total votes	Voting %
Thangminlien Kipgen	NCP	14565	63.04%	9133		
Ranjit Gurung	INC	5432	23.51%			
Hari Prasad Nepal	BJP	3010	13.03%			
Kishore Thapa and other	SAP/JDU	75	0.33%			
Vunggholal Chongloi	FPM	21	0.09%			
Total		23265	100%		25253	92.13%

Table 9: The Result Sheet of the 7th General Election

8th Manipur Legislative Assembly, 2002

The Kangpokpi AC had a total number of voters of 26369, and more than 65% belonged to the local population. Even though only two candidates out of 8 belonged to Nepal, the chance of winning was still less in the assembly segment. The margin of victory was 3396 again by Thangminlien to the nearest rival BJP candidate, Hari Prasad Nepal, who got only 25% vote share (ECI 2002). Still, the other candidate was ex-MLA Kishore Thapa, the

SAP candidate, getting below 10% of the total vote shares. Out of 31 polling stations, 15 were majority by the Nepali voters, whereas Hari Prasad got a majority in 10 seats.

Candidates	Party	Votes	Vote share	Margin	Total votes	Voting
Thangminlien	FPM	9265	40.05	3396		
Hari Prasad Nepal	BJP	5869	25.37			
V.L. Chongloi	INC	4690	20.27			
Kishore Thapa	SAP	2276	9.84			
4 others local		1032	4.46			
Total		23436			26369	88.88%

Table 10: The Result Sheet of the 8th General Election

9th Manipur Legislative Assembly, 2007

In this election in the Kangpokpi AC, Kishore Thapa continued to fight back as an independent candidate against the sitting MLA Thangminlen of NPP with a margin of 2171 votes and Haokholal Hangshing of INC. He got 6522 votes against 8693 of the sitting MLA (ECI 2007). There was another minor candidate, Tek Bahadur, who was independent. Still, there were more Kuki voters than Nepali voters. Kishore Thapa got more votes in the polling booths where Nepali voters settled. He nearly blanked in the local polling stations.

Candidates	Party	Votes	Total voters	Voting %	Margin
Thangminlen Kipgen	NPP	8693			2171
Kishore Thapa	IND	6522			
Haokholal Hangshing	INC	5589			
3 others (Tek Bahadur)	IND	1776			
Total		22580	29762	75.87	

Table 11: The Result Sheet of the 9th General Election

10th Manipur Legislative Assembly, 2012

In the 2012 Assembly Constituency, there was a closed fight between MSCP candidate Nemcha Kipgen and AITC candidate Khadga Bahadur by just 443 votes (ECI 2012). The election witnessed the lowest voting in the constituency, just 61%. The other two candidates were Padma Kharel and Bhumi Prasad, and if not contested, Khadga Bahadur had the upper hand to win in the Kangpokpi Constituency. He got most Nepali voters in around 20 polling stations out of 36 stations in the assembly.

Candidates	Party	Votes	Total voters	Voting %	Vote share %	Margin
Nemcha Kipgen	MSCP	6636			39.00	443
Khadga Bahadur	AITC	6191			36.40	
Haokholal Hangshing	INC	3408			20.09	
Padam Kharel	JD (U)/ IND	769			4.51	
Total		17004	27934	60.94		

Table 12: The Result Sheet of the 10th General Election

11th Manipur Legislative Assembly, 2017

This election had only one candidate and a new face known as Kharga Tamang, who was initially an INC candidate but changed due to public protest as an independent candidate in the constituency. He got a stiff fight with sitting MLA Nemcha Kipgen but was defeated by a margin of 2297 votes. He got only 43% of the vote share, whereas Nemcha Kipgen got 52% (ECI 2017).

Candidates	Party	Votes	Total voters	Voting %	Vote share %	Margin
Nemcha Kipgen	BJP	13454			52.32	2297
Kharga Tamang	IND	11181			43.40	
Athikho Solomon Enah	NPF	875			3.39	
NOTA		289			1.12	
Soshim Keishing	NCP	228			0.88	
Total		26065	30088	86.63		

Table 13: The Result Sheet of the 11th General Election

12th Manipur Legislative Assembly Election 2022

In the Kangpokpi constituency, there was a triangular fight among the candidates of Congress, BJP and Janata Dal. The sitting MLA Nemcha Kipgen retains the seat efficiently with a comfortable margin of more than 5000 votes over the Nepali candidate, Soshim Gurung, from Janata Dal. She was able to consolidate all the tribal voters in Kangpokpi and swing some voters belonging to the Nepalis as well.

Candidates	Party	Votes	Vote %	Margin	Total voters
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Nemcha Kipgen	BJP	14412	57.37	5396	30855
Soshim Gurung	JDU	9016	35.89		
Haokholal Kipgen	INC	1376	5.48		
	Nota	315	1.25		

Table 14: 12th Election Result Sheet, Kangpokpi

Overall Outcome:

Even though earlier there were five panchayats meant for the Nepali villages- 1 in the valley Kangpokpi, and 4 in the hill district of Kangpokpi, the four panchayats in the hills are currently not functioning since 2012 as they are included in the ADC system under the hill administration of the state. They continue to contest the panchayat election in the valley of Kanglatongbi, Serou and Makeng Dolaithabi areas. In the ADC system, earlier the Nepali candidates fought the election by contesting in four seats under the Kangpokpi ADC and won in three seats, but today they fight only in Irang Part I and Part II constituencies and also, they are nominated to the ADC.

In the Assembly election of Manipur, the Kangpokpi constituency is the only seat in the hills to be general out of 20 seats meant for ST seats. Since its creation in 1973, the 2nd to 4th elections in the Kangpokpi seat were represented by the Nepali candidate, Kishore Thapa, in the assembly. Thereafter, there have been no more MLAs from the Nepali community till today. In 2012, there was a chance to win the election, but it was lost by a mere 500 votes to Khadka Bahadur against sitting MLA Nemcha Kipgen. The Kangpokpi constituency is fought between the Nepali and Kuki candidates in every election.

Challenges:

1. The decreasing population in all the remote villages is due to outflux and security reasons.
2. The land and power sharing issues with the neighbouring tribal villages, either the panchayat or ADC system in Kangpokpi areas and the village authority system in Irang areas
3. The demographic and ethnic tension with and between the tribal groups over the influx of population and the creation of a new district in Kangpokpi
4. The largest Nepali settlement sites are located in different constituencies of the valley and hill of Sekmai, Sagolmang, Kangpokpi, Saitu, Tadubi, and Karong.
5. The deletion of panchayat systems in Kangpokpi district in 2012 and working under ADC, and recent re-installment order of the state government for panchayat election, but yet to hold the election, which shows unsuitability not only to ADC but to the Panchayat system, which had been working since the 1930s. This weakens the political unity and inspiration from the Nepali candidate.

6. The arrival of more candidates imparted disunity among the Nepali voters, while the unity among the tribal voters was maintained by increasing the number of population and voters. The lack of financial power and support for the election are also other factors.

7. The economic factor for the Nepali community is more important or stronger than the political inspiration due to a survival strategy as they are living in temporary structures of settlement and move out to other states for permanent residency in Siliguri, Darjeeling and Sikkim after being employed there or getting access to wealth by buying lands there.

Conclusion:

It has been seen that the Nepali-speaking population have actively participated in the political structure in the state of Manipur throughout the last century, especially in the Kangpokpi district. After their significant recognition in the colonial period, they got an identity as a domiciled community of the state by abolishing the Foreigner's Tax just after Manipur gained independence in 1947. When Manipur was under central administration as a Union Territory from 1949 to 1971, there was the implementation of the Indian panchayat system in the 1960s in the meantime. In the latter, Nepalis played a crucial part, and they were even elected as members of the Imphal-west I Block Development Committee in 1965, as the population had also increased substantially. In the following years, the creation of three Nepali panchayats and the appointments of their Pradhan and members were notified in 1967 and 1968 and subsequently, in 1978, it became five panchayats. This was the most prominent landmark of their settlement in Manipur. The four panchayats under Kangpokpi, a hill district (then Senapati district), were abolished in 2012 by the then government, but valley panchayats continued to be in operation.

They have also been a part of the village authority since 1956 in Irang areas previously under the Irang Panchayat during the colonial period, and have never been included, even today, under the panchayat system. They also participated in the District Councils in the hills. After getting statehood, Kishore Thapa contested and won the Kangpokpi constituency. The Nepali community is even so politically aware that they were elected as Pradhans in the other General panchayats of the state. Besides, many voters have played a vital role in winning the election in some other constituencies of the erstwhile Senapati district and Imphal-Sekmai and Khundrakpam. The biggest achievement of Nepalis in electoral politics of Manipur is the ongoing Kangpokpi constituency that still has unreserved seats, though it is under the hill district of the state and further recognizes some of the Nepali castes under the OBC category as the domiciled community of the state.

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