Conclusion

The opposition has become very important in modern democratic countries. The importance of the opposition was felt more after the Second World War when the colonies under the British Empire became independent and had introduced democratic form of government. The opposition plays very little role in authoritarian and totalitarian systems. In a monarchical form of government there may be a little change as the monarch ruled the State in order to promote the welfare of his subjects.

The opposition, in modern sense, had its origin in the British Parliament. In UK the opposition has been described as an integral and indispensable part of the working of British constituency. The existence of an organised and officially recognised opposition is the peculiar feature of the Parliamentary form of government in UK. There is no strong organised opposition in USA like that of opposition in UK. The same may be said of France. Of course the opposition was recognised officially in Canada in 1905, in Australia in 1920, Tasmania in 1927 etc. The concept and importance of opposition has been recognised slowly and slowly in democratic countries of the world.

Real democracy can function only when there is strong, vigilant and vigorous opposition. It is the responsibility of the opposition to inform the nation in time the defects and dangers in official plans and policies and to mobilise public opinion to get them suitably modified. The government enjoys majority support and the opposition always remain minority in the legislature. But the opposition is to evolve in the arrangement of business of the House. Members of the opposition and members from the ruling side are the members of the Business Advisory Committee. When there is disagreement between the opposition and the
government, the controversial matter is put up in the legislature. The government normally accepts the demands from the opposition for thorough and detail discussion of a specific issue. On the other hand, the government may request the opposition to give up some items in the course of discussion of a government business due to constraint of time in the House. The opposition usually co-operates with the government in such situations.

When the government proposes the making of laws on specific items, the opposition generally oppose such proposal. The opposition may submit alternative proposals. Both the government and the opposition may submit two proposals. It would be a mistake on the part of the government to bypass the opposition in the making of laws or in framing important government policies and programmes. In the normal democratic procedure, the government and the opposition follow the democratic principle of give and take. The opposition in many democratic countries had supported large number of bills which are proposed by the government.

The main function of the opposition it is often said, is to oppose and criticise the government. But it is no longer acceptable in the working of democratic government. The opposition seeks to expose the errors, the omissions and the commissions while asking questions and raising debates on adjournment motions in the legislature. Through general debates on the budget and through motions of censor on other occasions, the opposition greatly contributed for the successful working of parliamentary democracies. The absence of an overt and organised opposition always promotes the growth of dictatorship or authoritarian regime. Another important function of the opposition is to make the government to behave properly not only in the legislature but also outside
the legislature. It is the opposition which guides the reaction of the people to the policies and programmes undertaken by the government. Every policy or programme of the government is minutely studied and examined by the opposition.

The Indian democracy had started with the advantage of being the offspring of a mature democracy. The system of the Cabinet and also of the opposition had a precedent evolved over a less than two centuries in Britain. At the Central level, the Congress enjoyed an unchallenged hegemony so much so that the opposition was comparatively weak and ineffective. The opposition was also equally weak in the States of India before the fourth general elections to the State legislatures. It was only after the fourth general elections that the Congress party was pushed into the opposition in seven States. The Congress as an opposition in these States are found equally weak. Of course the Congress as an opposition could contribute a little to help the nation to move forward.

The era of coalition governments in Indian politics had emerged after the fourth general elections. Indian politics equally witnessed a multi-party opposition. The weak point of the multi-party opposition was that the coalition partners could not come together on any common ideological programme. The opposition parties were ideologically divided and their differences were clearly spelt in major legislative programmes.

The opposition parties in India may be classified into a) the right wing b) the moderate left wing c) the extreme left wing and d) the sectional and regional opposition parties. The right wing opposition parties are the Hindu Mahasabha, the Bharatiya Jan Sangh now Bharatiya Janata Party, the Swatantra party etc. The moderate left wing opposition parties like the Praja Socialist Party, the Socialist Party, the Forward Bloc, the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party etc. had adopted socialist ideologies.
These opposition parties had wanted to establish a casteless and classless society through peaceful means in India. The Samyukta Socialist Party under the leadership of Ram Manohar Lohia was a strong and effective opposition in the politics of the States in the 1950s, 1960s and middle of 1970s. The third group of opposition parties namely the Communist party of India, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), the Revolutionary Socialist Party etc. were inspired by the economic and political development of the erstwhile Soviet Union and other Communist countries of the world. The Communist Party of India and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) are playing a very active role as an opposition at the national politics of India. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) is a strong opposition party since Trinamool Congress came to power under the Chief Ministership of Mamata Banerjee.

The Revolutionary Socialist Party and the Revolutionary Communist Party could not play important role as opposition parties both at the national and State politics of India. Since 1980s, the national politics is dominated by both the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party as opposition parties in both parliament and State legislatures in India. For example, during BJP led National Democratic Alliance Rule, the Congress played as main opposition party. During the rule of the Congress led United progressive Alliance Rule (UPA) since 2004, the BJP is playing an effective role as main opposition party in Parliament as well as in the national politics of India.

The Manipur State Congress having 14 members was the first opposition party in the Manipur State Legislative Assembly 1948 established under the Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947. The opposition members led by S. Somorendra Singh and L. Achou Singh had played important role as opposition party in the proceedings of Manipur
State Legislative Assembly 1948-49. After the merger of Manipur into the Indian Union on 15 October, the Manipur State Legislative Assembly was abolished. With the enforcement of the Constitution of India on 26 January, 1950, Manipur was placed as Part C State. An advisory Council consisting of Advisors appointed by the President of India in consultation with the Chief Commissioner of Manipur was introduced. There was practically no opposition as such in the Advisory Council. The main function of the Advisors was to render advice to the Chief Commissioner in the discharge of his administrative functions. Therefore, there was practically no opposition in the Advisory form of government. The law making power, financial power and judicial powers were in the hands of the Parliament of India.

It was in the middle of 1950s that the opposition parties like the Socialist Party, the Communist Party of India etc. formed the Democratic Front and started to demand a democratic government in Manipur. As a matter of fact, it was the Samyukta Socialist Party of Manipur which started a movement for the restoration of responsible government of 1948 in Manipur. The Praja Socialist Party had observed 25 June, 1954 as the Assembly Demand Day. Later on the opposition parties had formed a larger body called the United Front Organising Committee, later converted into United Assembly Demand Committee. All the hill organisations and the hill people had actively participated in the movement for the restoration of responsible government, 1948 in Manipur. In response to the movement, the Seventh Amendment to the Constitution of India was passed creating a legislature in Manipur under the Territorial Council Act, 1956. After three years of the working of Territorial Council, the opposition party namely the Socialist Party had resumed the movement for the restoration of responsible government,
1948. The main reason for resuming the movement was that the Territorial Council was not given any legislative, financial and judicial powers. Later the opposition parties formed the Assembly Demand Coordination Committee consisting of the representatives of the opposition parties namely the Samyukata Socialist Party, the Praja Socialist Party and the Communist Party of India. The movement was in the form of Civil Disobedience movement. The main demand of the movement was the granting of a legislature in Manipur. The Congress had joined the movement demanding a Legislative Assembly in Manipur. The Union Government had responded to the movement for granting a Legislative Assembly to Manipur by the 14th Amendment to the Constitution of India, 1962. Article 239 A was inserted to the Constitution of India granting a Legislative Assembly to Manipur consisting of 30 elected and 2 nominated members.

The issue of granting Statehood to Manipur was hotly debated by the leaders of the opposition parties. The opposition parties were not satisfied with the upgradation of the Territorial Council into a Territorial Assembly in July, 1963. Though enjoyed legislative power, the Territorial Assembly lacked financial and judicial powers. The political instability after the downfall of the Congress government led by M. Koirang Singh as Chief Minister, 1967 and the fall of the United Front Ministry after 12 days in power in 1967 had added another political dimension to the movement. It was after the downfall of the United Front ministry under the Chef Ministership of L. Thambou Singh that the movement for full fledged status for Manipur became very strong. The installation of the Congress ministry on 19 February, 1968 with M.Koirang Singh as Chief Minister could not weaken the movement for Statehood of Manipur. The
opposition led by L. Achou Singh, Socialist Party was able to defeat the Congress Ministry on 24 September, 1969.

The four opposition parties namely the Samyukta Socialist Party, the Praja Socialist Party, the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) had geared up their political strength in the movement demanding full-fledged statehood status for Manipur. The opposition parties staged demonstrations during the visit of Y.B. Chavan, the then Union Home Minister and other Central leaders to Manipur in 1968. The newly formed regional political party called the Manipur People’s Party in December, 1968 joined the movement for Statehood. In October, 1969, the five opposition parties, the Samyukta Socialist Party, the Praja Socialist Party, the Communist Party of India, the Communist Party of India (M) and the Manipur People’s Party had formed the United Action Committee. The United Action Committee had started a vigorous campaign for achieving full-fledged status for Manipur. In the meantime, the Congress party joined the movement and the All Parties Statehood Co-Ordinating Body was formed by the opposition parties along with Congress. On 9 May, 1970, an All Parties Parliamentary Delegation had visited Manipur. On the day, the All Parties Statehood Demand Co-ordinating Body organised a rally and submitted a memorandum demanding Statehood for Manipur. In response to the demand and memorandum submitted by the All Parties Parliamentary Delegation, the Union Government had upgraded the post of the Administrator from the Chief Commission to the Lieutenant Governor and empowered him to take decisions on the spot without frequent reference to the Centre.

The demand for full fledged Statehood for Manipur became strong after the granting of Statehood to Himachal Pradesh on 31 July, 1970.
The All Parties Statehood Demand Co-ordinating Body had boycotted the Independence Day, 1970. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India announced in the Lok Sabha on 3 September, 1970 about the granting of Statehood to Manipur. It was the long struggle and movement of the opposition parties which had resulted in the attainment of Statehood by Manipur on 21 January, 1972.

In the Manipur Legislative Assembly, 1972 the main opposition party was the Congress (R) having 17 seats in the House. The Communist Party of India with 5 MLAs was also in the opposition. There were also 6 Independents MLAs in the opposition. Altogether the strength of the opposition was 28. The leader of the opposition was M. Koireng Singh, Congress who was the former Chief Minister of Manipur. In the Assembly after the mid-term Assembly elections, 1974 the India National Congress (R) had continued to be the main opposition party having lesser number of MLAs i.e. 13. The leader of the opposition was Sinam Bijoy Singh Congress, representing Jiri Assembly Constituency. The Communist Party of India and a section of the Manipur Hill Union was also in the opposition. These opposition parties namely the Congress (R), the CPI and Manipur Hill Union formed Progressive Democratic Front and became the ruling party with Yangmasho Shaiza as the Chief Minister of Manipur on 10 July, 1974. During the period from 1974 to 1977, the opposition could not play an effective role due to the rampant defections of the MLAs from the opposition to the ruling and vice-versa. One MLA had defected at least 4/5 times from one group to another group, always seeking political benefits and advantages.

It was only after the formation of Janata ministry on 29 June, 1977. Before the formation of the ministry, there was practically no opposition in the Assembly except the 4 CPI MLAs. But after the formation of the
Janata ministry at the Centre, the Congress MLAs who were in the ruling party crossed the floor, thereby enabled to form the Janata government. Among the opposition leaders during the period 1972 to 1977, mention may be made of M. Koireng Congress 1972-73; M. Meghachandra Singh and Ph. Parijat Singh, both CPI; Rishang Keishing Congress, the leader of the opposition, 1974 to 1977 etc.

In 1980 Manipur Legislative Assembly, the opposition had only 14 MLAs. The opposition parties were Janata Party, CPI and CPI (M). M. Koireng who was elected on Janata ticket was the leader of the opposition. The opposition parties except CPI could not play an effective role in the Assembly. Later the opposition consisting of MPP, CPI, Congress (U), CPI (M) and the Janata formed People’s Democratic Front led by Kh. Chaoba. In the Legislative Assembly, 1984, the opposition had only 9 MLAs. The opposition parties were CPI, Janata Party, MPP and Kuki National Assembly. The prominent leaders of the opposition were M. Koireng, Janata; Wahengbam Nipamacha, Janata; Okram Joy, MPP and Moirangthem Nara, CPI.

The Congress though secured the largest number of seat i.e. 26 could not form government but remained as main opposition in 1990 Assembly. The leader of the opposition was R.K. Dorendra Singh, former Chief Minister of Manipur. Other prominent members of the opposition were Rishang Keishing, Irengbam Tompok Singh, M. Koireng, R. K. Jaichandra, Th. Devendro and Th. Chaoba, all Congressmen.

There were 24 MLAs in the opposition belonging to different political parties. The parties were MPP, CPI and BJP. Due to leadership crisis within the Congress party, as many as 15 ministers (11 Cabinet and 4 State ministers) had resigned from the government and from the party. The Speaker, W. Nipamacha Singh also resigned from Speakership.
formed a new party called Manipur State Congress Party. With the formation of this party, the strength of the opposition had increased in the House. In the no-confidence motion against the Congress government led by Rishang Keishing, the opposition won by 38 votes to 16. During the period 1995 to February, 2000, the role of the opposition was not in a stable manner, frequently changing from one major political party.

In the Legislative Assembly 2000, the Congress was the main opposition party along with BJP with 6 MLAs. The prominent members of the opposition was Rishang Keishing, the former Chief Minister; Radhabinod Koijam, Congress; R. K. Dorendra Singh, BJP, former Chief Minister; Haobam Bhubon, BJP etc. The opposition had 19 MLAs altogether. When there was Congress led coalition government after the Assembly Elections, 2002, the opposition had 24 MLAs. The opposition parties were Federal Party of Manipur, BJP, Samata Party, MPP and Democratic People’s Party. When we study the position of the opposition from 1972 to 2002, it is found that the opposition had the highest having 28 MLAs in the Legislative Assembly, 1972.

The main issues raised by the opposition were crimes against women, law and order situation in Manipur, ethnic crisis among the Nagas and the Kukis, the excesses committed by Central Security Forces under the Armed Forces Special Power Act 1958, corruption, misuse of powers by the government officials, Public Distribution System, misappropriation of government money, games and sports, bandhs, blockades etc.

The socio-economic background and status of the opposition MLAs is considered to be very important in understanding their role as opposition. The educational qualification, though considered to be important in judging the role of MLAs, it is not so effective in the case of
Manipur. There was small percentage of MLAs having higher educational qualifications but they could not assert their political views in the power game politics of Manipur. It is true that the number of educated MLAs had increased its number since 1972 to 2002, but the politics of the State is still controlled by less educated MLAs. The higher educated MLAs in the opposition could not play effective role in the proceedings of the Assembly as well as in the politics of the State.

The opposition MLAs having the highest academic qualifications i.e. post graduate is highest in 1974 and 2002 Legislative Assemblies. Regarding opposition MLAs possessing graduate degree, the highest percentage is found in the Legislative Assembly of 1980. Regarding the age group of the opposition MLAs, the highest percentage was between the age group of 46 to 50 in the Legislative Assembly of 1990. And the opposition MLAs belonging to the age group of 55 to 60 had constituted the highest percentage in the Legislative Assembly of 1980.


After the study of opposition parties and electoral politics during the period, 1972-2002, it is found that all the national and regional political parties of Manipur were in the opposition. The political parties which fought Assembly elections with the agenda of defeating the ruling party or parties were able, sometimes, to form government, mostly coalition in nature. In the electoral politics one always find charges and counter-charges between the ruling and opposition parties. They even
pointed out the mistakes committed by the ruling parties. Corruption was the main charge levelled by the opposition against the ruling party or parties. The Assembly elections had acted as the main outlet for expressing the view-points of the parties, both ruling and opposition criticising each other, going even to the point of character assassination.

During the period under study i.e. from 1972 to 2002, it is found that the Congress was in the opposition four times, the first in 1972, the second in 1974, the third in 1990 and the fourth in 2000. Though the Congress was the single largest in 1972 and in 1990, the party had to remain in the opposition as MPP and MSCP was able to get the support of like-minded parties to form coalition governments. On the other hand, the MPP was in the opposition on the basis of electoral performance three times, the first in 1984, the second in 1995 and the third in 2002. Though based on regionalism and greater autonomy for Manipur, the MPP could not attract the voters with its political ideologies and principles. The Communist Party of India was in the opposition five times, first in 1972; the second in 1974; the third in 1980; the fourth in 1984 and the fifth in 1995. The party was in opposition more than any other political party of Manipur both national and regional. The BJP had entered into electoral politics quite late when compared with other political parties. It was opposition party three times, the first in 1995; the second in 2000 and the third in 2002. The Federal Party of Manipur (FPM) was in the opposition in 2002 Assembly. It had secured 13 seats in the Assembly election, 2002.

On the whole, the role of the opposition in the Assembly as well as in the politics of the State is not a satisfactorily one. The opposition parties in the early phase i.e. from 1963 to 1969 are found to be more effective than the later period of the political history of Manipur. The
leaders and members of the Socialist Party and Communist Party of India had played an effective role within the Assembly as well as in the politics and political movements of Manipur. Even national leaders like Ram Manohar Lohia and Madhu Nimai had visited Manipur many times to participate in the political movements in the mid 1950s and 1960s. After the attainment of statehood, the opposition was in a very unstable situation due to the rampant defection of MLAs from one party to another party, particularly in the 1970s. From 1980s till 2000, it may be said that the opposition, though, enjoyed its status was not in a proper direction as many of the members were interested in getting political benefits and advantages from the government.

The unstable situation of the opposition became more deplorable after the formation of Congress led coalition government called Secular Democratic Front with O.Ibobi Singh as the Chief Minister of Manipur in 2002. The Congress Party was in majority and with the support of CPI, the Secular Democratic Party was able to manage the government in a stable manner. The role of the opposition in the Legislative Assembly as well as in the politics of the State is not satisfactorily. Most of the MLAs in the opposition are guided not by the concept and principle of opposition but by the sense of gaining political benefits. Once the Chief Minister, O. Ibobi Singh had remarked that the members of the opposition were interested more in attendance than playing the role of being opposition. Of course, the role played by individual opposition political leaders in the opposition is noteworthy and constructive in nature. Let us hope for an effective and constructive role of the opposition in Manipur so as to contribute in the larger interest of the people of Manipur.