CHAPTER-IV

THE GROWTH OF
THE MANIPUR PEOPLE’S PARTY AND
THE KUKI NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

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1. INTRODUCTION:

The Kuki National Assembly and the Manipur People’s Party emerged in two different historical periods in Manipur. In the case of the Kuki National Assembly, it was at a time when democratic institutions were to be introduced replacing the age-long monarchy in Manipur. After the transfer of power to Indians, the Princely States in India regained their sovereignty. Manipur being a Princely State moved towards the process of democratisation with the initiative of Maharaja Bodhachandra Singh, the then Maharaja of Manipur. In the case of the Manipur People’s Party, the party emerged in the midst of a new trend of political aspirations, particularly of the young people in the state on the eve of the attainment of statehood.

The people of Manipur were dissatisfied with the status of the ‘Part-C’ state accorded to Manipur with the commencement of the Indian Republic on 26 January 1950. Unlike other ‘Part-C’ States like Himachal Pradesh, Vindhya Pradesh, Delhi, Bhopal, Ajmer and Coorg, where there were Legislative Assemblies, some ‘Part-C’ States like Manipur, Tripura, Bilaspur and Kutch did not have Legislative Assemblies but “Advisory Councils”. The members of the Advisory Council were nominated by the President in consultation with the Chief Commissioner. The “Advisory Council” in Manipur was composed of a Chief Commissioner and fourteen other nominated members.1 Besides the Advisory Council, there was also an Electoral College consisting of 30...

1 Manipur Gazette Extra-ordinary(A) No.77-E-37, Government of Manipur, Imphal 1950.
(thirty) members for the election of a member to Rajya Sabha. The people of Manipur demanded a full-fledged responsible government, as the power of administration of the state was concentrated to the Chief Commissioner.

The people of Manipur started movement for the restoration of the responsible government, 1948 in Manipur in the early 1950s. Different political parties worked individually on the issue in the beginning of the movement. The Manipur Socialist Party celebrated the 25th June 1954 as the “Assembly Day.”

In response to the movement in Manipur and some other similar movements in other parts of the Indian Union, a State-Reorganisation Commission was constituted to look into the “conditions of the problem, the historical background, the existing situation and the burning of all important and relevant factors.” Consequent upon the recommendations of the Commission, the Parliament of India passed the constitution (seventh Amendment) Act, 1956, which replaced the “States in part-C” and “Territories in Part-D” after the First Schedule by the “Union Territories.” The amendment Act granted a “Territorial Council” of 30(thirty) elected and 2(two) nominated members to those Union Territories. The Territorial Council was not a legislature but, an executive body to perform some administrative functions, as advised by the Central Government.

4 Functions: The functions of the Territorial Council are (i) Construction and proper maintenance of roads, bridges, buildings and canals and tanks. (ii) establishment of primary and secondary schools, construction and maintenance of buildings, and to give training to those teachers; (iii) the establishment and maintenance of state hospitals, dispensaries. (iv) construction of river basin and construction of canals. (v) maintenance and works of veterinary and animal husbandry. (vi) Sanitation and public health and (vii) Panchayati Raj
The people of Manipur were dissatisfied with the “Territorial Council” status on the ground that the council had no legislative power. The people continued the assembly demand movement. In early 1960s an “Advisory Demand Coordinating Committee” was formed at Imphal and it monitored the movement. The movement embraced constitutional method, like rallies, submission of memoranda, picketing of courts and government offices, etc.\(^5\)

Shortly, the Parliament of India passed the “Government of Union Territories Act, 1963.” The Act provided Legislative Assemblies to all the Union Territories of Himachal Pradesh, Manipur, Tripura, Goa, Daman and Diu, and Pondichery. Except the Union Territory of Himachal Pradesh, which had 40(forty) elected legislators, other each Union Territory had 30(thirty) elected legislators.\(^6\) The Act also provided the Central Government the power for nomination of “not more than three” members to the Assembly. The Assembly also had a Speaker and a Deputy Speaker who were to be elected by the members of the legislature. The Legislative Assembly could make laws for the whole or any part of the Union Territory in matters relating to the “State List” or the “Concurrent List” in so far as any those matters were applicable in relation to the Union Territories.

The former Legislative Council Members 30(thirty) elected and 2(two) nominated, continued to be the members of the new Legislative Assembly without any fresh election in Manipur. There were Chief Minister and two other Ministers in Manipur. Shri M. Koireng Singh was the Chief Minister and Shri A. Daiho and Shri S. Angou Singh were the Finance and the Development Ministers respectively.


Manipur with the Territorial Assembly took a new turn in her political history. The year from 1965 to the year of attainment of ‘Statehood’ in 1972, was a period of mass political defection in Manipur. Defections from the ruling party to the opposition and vice versa, were the order of the day.

After the election to the Territorial Assembly, 1967, the Congress formed government with seven independent members. M. Koireng Singh was the Chief Minister and Mohammad Alimuuddin, Sibo Lorho, N. Tombi Singh and Gokhenpao were other Ministers. S. Tombi Singh and Kh. Chaoba Singh were the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker respectively.

In the mean time the minds of young people in the state were filled with many aspirations in various fields. One prominent youth organisation, the “Pan-Manipuri Youth League” expressed its feelings and it started disclosing the shortcomings of the Congress-Ministry, in its esteemed journal, the “Lamyanba”.

Shortly, the Congress-Ministry was reduced to a minority. A ‘United Front Ministry’ was installed with L. Thambou Singh as the Chief Minister. But, the UF-Ministry lasted for a few days, as a result of which ‘President Rule’ was imposed in Manipur on 25th October, 1967. The ‘President Rule’ was lifted and a Congress-Ministry, formed with some defectors from the UF-group, was installed on 19 February, 1968. But defection started again and as a result, ‘President Rule’ was re-imposed for a second time in Manipur in 1969.

On 29 February, 1968, the “All Manipur Statehood Demand Committee” was formed. The Committee consisted of the Samjukta

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7 Ksh. Shyamkanhai, op. cit. p. 83.
Socialist Party, CPI, CP(M) and Praja Socialist Party. The ‘statehood’ issue was a burning one in the proceedings of the Territorial Assembly. In the Parliament the opposition M.P.s, specially from the Socialist and the Communist parties put up the issue before the House. At last, the demand became an effective demand. Thus, Manipur with Tripura, Himachal Pradesh and Meghalaya was granted “Statehood” on 21st January, 1972.

2. The Manipur People’s Party:

2.1. Socio-Political Background: The Congress-Ministry in the state failed to perceive the political aspirations of the people when the Assembly demand movement was at its height. The aspirations were full of regional feelings and sentiments with charges i.e. “De-Manipurisation” of key posts in the state civil service, high price of rice, corruption, wastage and non-implementation of the plan scheme in many departments and the “Naga trouble” in Manipur borders, etc. against the Congress Government. The movement was joined by various sections of the society including students. And there was scarcity of rice in Manipur in 1965. On 27th August, 1965, a mammoth gathering assembled in and around the ‘bungalow’ of the Chief Commissioner and it demanded immediate ban on exportation of rice outside the state and the distribution of the same at low prices to the people. The situation became tense. To control over the situation, the police opened fire and it resulted in the killing of three students besides others, and caused injury to many other students.

The newly established youth organisations, like the “Pan Manipuri Youth League”, the “Macha Leima” (a women’s organisation), the All Manipur Students’ Union, etc. expressed the feelings of the youth of the state. Those organisations highlighted the weaknesses of the then Congress-ministry.
There was a hot debate among the members of the Territorial Assembly on the issue of the "statehood" for Manipur. The opposition group argued that Manipur was bigger in area and population than that of Nagaland (which was granted statehood in 1963) and thus Manipur deserved a full-fledged statehood. But the then M. Koireng Singh Ministry was reluctant to accept the opposition's argument on the ground that Manipur needed many "pre-requisites" to attain a full-fledged statehood.

On the issue of the scarcity of food, there was difference of opinion among the members of the Congress party in the state. Y. Yaima Singh, one of the senior members of the Congress party, was denied party ticket in the 4th Manipur Territorial Assembly Election, 1967. Shortly many other senior members, namely S. Tombi Singh, Kh. Chaoba Singh, Mohammad Alimuddin, S. Gambhir Singh, Ch. Rajmohan Singh, S. Lorho, L. Thambou Singh and Mohammad Ashraf Ali. were also expelled from the party.

Following the mass expulsion of the Congressmen, some of the ex-Congressmen, namely Y. Yaima Singh, S. Tombi Singh, Kh. Chaoba and some other members formed the Manipur People’s Party on 26th December, 1968. The establishment of the party was formally announced at a public meeting held on 27th January, 1969 at the Aryan Hall, Imphal. The party fought the Lok Sabha election in 1971. On May 8, 1971, a conference of the party held at the residence of Sinam Krishnamohon Singh, M.P. and adopted the constitution of the party. It also elected L. Jugeshwar Singh and Y. Yaima Singh as the General Secretaries and L. Thambou Singh the Treasurer.

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9 Interview with S. Tombi Singh, the founding President of the M P P. dated 27.7.1983.
of the party. On July 13, 1971, the Election Commission of India recognised the M.P.P. as a 'State Party' allotting the "Bi-Cycle" to be the reserved symbol of the party, on the basis of the votes polled by the party in the 1971 Lok Sabha Election.\footnote{Election Commission of India vide Memo No 567/XIII dt 13.7.71 as published in the Extra-Ordinary Gazette of India, dtd 13 July, 1971}

The M.P.P. had ups and downs in its existence. The party headed coalition ministries in the state in 1972, 1974 and 1990. The party suffered heavily in its position and strength due to a merger plan with the Janata Party in 1977. Now the party continued its independent existence with its organisation.

2.2. **Social Base:** The Manipur People's Party does not concentrate its area or membership to a particular community. Rather it extends its interest to safeguard and uphold the interest of the people throughout the state. The party spreads its organisation in most parts of the valley both urban and rural areas. The party can establish its base among the Muslim population in the state. It also can penetrate in some parts of the hill areas.

An analyses on the basis of participation in the Assembly elections in the state shows that the Manipur People's Party could set up its candidates in all 40 (forty) valley constituencies and 7(seven) hill constituencies in 1972. In the 5(five) Muslim constituencies in the valley, the Manipur People's party could draw a large number of its supporters. Thus, the party's Muslim candidates won the election in Keirao, Lilong and Athokpam constituencies, and got second positions in Khergao and Top Chingtha constituencies. In 1974, all 6(six) Muslim candidates of the party in Khetrigao, Keirao, Andro, Mayang Imphal, Lilong and Wangkhem constituencies won the elections. But in 1980 and 2000 elections its Muslim candidates suffered defeat badly.
In the beginning the Manipur People’s Party had a strong base among the Youths in the valley areas. Very recently, it is reported that middle aged group of people are more in the organisation of the party than others.\textsuperscript{12}

2.3. \textbf{Ideology and Policy and Programme:} The Constitution of the Manipur People’s Party expressed that “whereas it has been felt necessary to safeguard and uphold the interest of Manipur politically, economically, culturally, educationally and linguistically, a political organisation called the Manipur People’s Party has been constituted.”\textsuperscript{13} The party aims to establish an egalitarian society on the basis of democratic socialism.

The party also believes in the principles of socialism, secularism and democracy.\textsuperscript{14} It is clearly stated that the party would fight against communalism, class distinctions and other anti-democratic institutions and principles. It also suggests that the party follows the ideals as given in the constitution of India. In general, therefore, there is no contradiction between the ideals adopted by the Indian Republic (as in her Constitution) and those embraced by the party. The party, however, strongly feels that a united strong India would be possible only when all her units (states) become equally strong.\textsuperscript{15}

The election manifesto of the Manipur People’s Party published in the first State Legislative Assembly Election. 1972, was the most remarkable political paper of the party. The manifesto promised many developmental and constructive programmes enlightening the masses particularly the frustrated

\textsuperscript{12} Interview with Shri O. Joy Singh, President, M.P.P. at his office chamber on 19.9.2002.
\textsuperscript{13} Preamble to the Constitution of the Manipur People’s Party (as amended and enforced by the party conference held on 4.2.1989 to 6.4.1989), General Secretary (Publicity), M.P.P., Imphal
\textsuperscript{14} Preamble. ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} Y Yaima Singh. \textit{1975 Ifkoigiee Wakhel}, Imphal. M.P.P. pp. 8-9
youths, in the midst of distrust and hatred of the former congress-ministry. The employment programme under the industrial scheme relieved the unemployed youths from the anxiety of unemployment up to a great extent in the state. The programme of land reforms, establishment of factories and industries, introduction of modern technology for agricultural purposes, a quality education, abolition of corruption, proper supply of water and electricity in all villages, were some other attractive items.

2.4. **Factionalism and Defection:** After the passing of the “Constitution (Fifty-Second Amendment) Act, 1985” by the Parliament of India, the changing of one’s party and joining or merging with other parties have undergone a different shape. Under the provision of the Act, changing of one’s party may not be a case of defection provided that the changing of elected member or members forms a group representing a faction of the original party and that such group consists of “not less than one-third of the members of such legislature party.”

The Manipur People’s Party experienced factionalism and defection. It was the cause of its downfall. The factionalism and defection of the party may analyse in three broad phases. The first phase starts from March, 1973, the year in which the Manipur People’s Party MLAs started defection from the then United Legislature Party-Ministry, and it continued till 1977, i.e. the year in which the merger process of the Manipur People’s party with the Janata Party was initiated. The second phase covers from 28 May, 1977 to 27 December 1978, i.e. from the date on which the Executive Committee of the Manipur People’s Party took the merger decision after the walk out of Manaobi and his group from the meeting, to the date on which Election

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Commission of India passed its judgement on the M.P P-Janata merger case.\textsuperscript{17} The last phase starts from the 1980 Assembly Elections and covers upto the enforcement of the 52\textsuperscript{nd} Constitution Amendment Act, 1985 in the state. The factionalism and defection in the first and third phase were of ordinary nature, whereas that of the second phase was of extra-ordinary nature for the simple reason that in this phase the defectors not merely defected but tried to merge with other political parties like the Janata Party.

2.4.1. The First Phase: The defection of Assembly members belonging to M.P.P. started in March, 1973. I. Tompok Singh, an MLA, of the MPP initiated the “Manipuri Official Language Bill”, on the advice of the MPP Executive Committee. But the bill failed to get passed in the Assembly despite having the MPP-led United Legislature Party Ministry. I. Tompok Singh and his followers were not happy in that situation, particularly in the strain relationship between the legislative and organisational wings. Shortly, nine members of the MPP-led ULP-Ministry including I. Tompok Singh and two other MPP MLAs defected from the ULP-Ministry and form the Progressive Independent Group.\textsuperscript{18} The MPP expelled its three MLAs for 6(six) years from the party.\textsuperscript{19} Consequent upon the defection of the 9(nine) ULP-members the first ULP-Ministry resigned in March 1973.

Defections of elected members from the MPP started again after the formation of the second ULP-Ministry headed by the MPP in July, 1974. S. Tombi Singh, the then Finance Minister in the 2\textsuperscript{nd} ULP-Ministry and also the founding President of the MPP started bargaining with Progressive

\textsuperscript{17} In the Election Commission the case was known as “Symbol Case”.
\textsuperscript{19} Resolution No. 1 of the Executive Committee of the MPP, dated 20 3 1973.
Democratic Front (PDF), the opposition group, to overthrow the ULP-Ministry. Besides L. Jugeshwar Singh, the then President of the MPP, left the party on the ground of opposition of his candidature of the Rajya Sabha election by the MPP Legislative Wing. Thus, many important leaders left the party.

Defections from one party to another party and coming back to the original party were a regular feature in the state after the mid-term poll, 1974. As a result, different ministries were formed during the period, i.e. 1974-1977. The extent of defection was so high that the existing strong Congress-Ministry having 55 members in a House of 60 suddenly collapsed due to mass defection of its members to the newly formed Janata Party in the state. In such critical political situation in the state the MPP declared its merger with the Janata Party.

2.4.2. The Second Phase: The MPP had one of the worse experiences in its history so far in this phase. Most of its senior members made an attempt to merge the party with the Janata Party. A small faction of the party, after a case fought in the Election Commission of India, could retain the party.

The Janata Party that came to power in the Centre in 1977, lured the defectors in Manipur to form a new ministry in the state. The MPP MLAs could no longer remain silent in that situation. The MPP MLAs decided to

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20 Th. Gokul Singh. op.cit. p. 54.
22 All the MLAs of the Congress Party, including the leader of the Congress Legislature Party, Shri R.K. Dorendra applied for their admission to the Janata Party. Many of them joined the Janata Party. For detail, please see Th. Gokul Singh op.cit pp 62-72.
merge the party with the Janata Party. A special session of the MPP held at Moirang on 3 July, 1977, resolved "In consonance with the prevailing political situation in India and to keep pace with the changing political atmosphere towards the polarization of political parties and in response to the call of the national leaders for merger of all regional political parties with the Janata Party forthwith. . . . It is believed that this merger will serve the the interest of the public and this state."23

On 4 February, 1977, a provisional Merger Agreement was signed between the President of the MPP, H. Nilamani Singh and the Vice-President of the Kanglei League, Ch. Yaiphaba Singh, pending an approval to it by the MPP-Conference, the highest body of the MPP. The provisional Merger Agreement was concluded on three points:

(i) the Kanglei League had to merge with the MPP;
(ii) the MPP should adopt the flag of the Kanglei League as its flag; and
(iii) the MPP should include the nominee of the Kanglei League in its Executive Council and all constitutional bodies of the party in a ratio of 50:50 of the party.

Consequently, 20 members of the Kanglei League were incorporated in the 40(forty) member Executive Council of the MPP. But the flag of the Kanglei League was not accepted by the MPP.

On 28th May, 1977, an Executive Council meeting of the MPP was convened. The meeting discussed, besides others, about the merger of the

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23 Resolution No.3 of the Special Session, MPP, 3:7 1977 at Moirang
the MPP with the Janata Party. L. Manaobi Singh and other newly co-opted Executive Council members from the Kanglei League, opposed the merger of the MPP with the Janata Party. Later on, the Manaobi group staged walkout from the meeting and the other remaining members of the council resolved to merge MPP with the Janata Party. The merger resolution of the Executive Council of the party required the approval of the MPP conference to make it a final one.

Madhu Limaya, the then General Secretary of the Janata Party expressed acceptance to the proposed merger of the MPP with the Janata Party on 27.6.1977. As a result of the acceptance of the Janata leader, the following MPP members joined the Janata Party and assumed following positions in the party:

1. Mohammad Alimuddin - Deputy Leader of the Manipur State Janata Legislative Party(M.S.J.L.P.) and member, Manipur State Committee, Janata Party(M.S.C.J.P.)
2. Y. Yaima Singh - Member, M.S.J.L.P. and M.S.C.J.P.
3. Kh. Chaoba Singh - Member, M.S.J.L.P.
4. O. Joy Singh - -do-
5. H. Nilamani Singh - President, M.S.C.J.P. (Former President of the MPP).

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24 Letter sent to the Chief Election Commission of India by H. Nilamani Singh, the President of the MPP. File No.56/56/77 Vol.I (Section ESI). Secretariat of the Election Commission of India, New Delhi. p.9.
25 Article XXX of the Constitution of the MPP, as amended and enforced by the party conference held on 4 to 6 April, 1989. p. xxvi
26 Letter No 6/MPP-EL/77-II dated 10.8.77 from Ch. Pishak Singh, President MPP to the Under Secretary (Legal), Election Commission of India, New Delhi:
27 Ibid.
6. K. Jila Singh - Member, M.S.C.J.P. (Former General Secretary, MPP).
7. Ch. Rajmohon Singh - do-
8. Th. Chandrasekhar Singh - do-

Now the MPP had two groups. The first group was a pro-merger group headed by H. Nilamani Singh and the second group was an anti-merger group led by L. Manaobi Singh. The contention of the pro-merger group was that the two leaders, namely Ch. Pishak Singh and Laishram Manaobi Singh of the anti-merger group, were no longer members of the Manipur People’s Party because Ch. Pishak Singh was a member of the Kanglei League and he was provisionally included in the Executive Council of the MPP. Now the provisional inclusion of the members of the Kanglei League was not approved by the special session of the MPP held on 3rd July, 1977. The party membership of L. Manaobi Singh for the year 1976-77 was not renewed and as such, his membership was invalid.\(^{28}\) Hence, the MPP symbol, the ‘By-Cycle’ should be frozen.

L. Manaobi Singh and his group refuted the contention of H. Nilamani Singh and his group on the grounds that the 20 members of the Kanglei League had already included in the 40-member Executive Council of the MPP and they participated in the meetings of the Executive Council of the MPP. Further, they pointed out that L. Manaobi Singh expelled those MPP office bearers who had joined or supported the Janata Party from the MPP. Lastly, it also pointed out that the membership of L. Manaobi Singh was duly renewed for the year 1977.

\(^{28}\) Affidavits submitted by H. Nilamani Singh and others to the Chief Election Commission of India, vide File No. 56/56/77 Vol I (Section F.S.I.) Election Commission of India, New Delhi, p.9.
The Election Commission of India pronounced its judgement on the case in favour of L. Manaobi Singh and his group. Thus, the party survived in spite of the internal contradictions and factionalism.

2.4.3 The Third Phase: There was normalcy inside the MPP for a short period after the MPP-Janata merger case. Its members tried hard to reorganise the party. But soon after the 1980 Assembly Election in Manipur, defection and factionalism started again. In August 1980, the MPP was divided into two factions on the issue of supporting the Congress(I), Congress (U) and MPP Coalition Ministry. L. Manaobi Singh, the President of the party and sitting MLA, and his group stated that MPP withdrew its support from the Coalition Ministry headed by R.K. Dorendra Singh. On the other hand, L. Gokulchandra Singh the Vice-President of the party and his group claimed that the MPP was still in support of the said ministry.

After this episode, many of the founding and senior members of the MPP, who had defected or joined other parties, started returning to the MPP. Thus, O.Joy Singh, Kh. Chaoba Singh and some other rejoined MPP in 1982 and Y.Yaima, R.K. Ranbir, etc. joined in 1988. H. Bhuban Singh, an ex-army officer, joined MPP in 1987. Y. Saiza, a powerful hill leader, joined MPP in 1984.

29 Interview with A.K. Sanaton Singh, General Secretary, MPP on 11.9.2002.
3. The Kuki National Assembly:

3.1. Socio-Political Background: The Kuki National Assembly (K.N.A.), a regional political party in the hills was a product of the process for the establishment of democratic institutions and extension of franchise to Manipur on the eve of British departure. The historical background of the origin of the party could be traced back to the formation of the ‘Kuki Chiefs Association’ in 1935-36. The Association was demanding for abolition of “Pothang” (forced labour) and the ‘beggar’ system prevalent in the hill areas of Manipur during the British period. The Association also fought against the ‘Lambus’.

The political system of the Kukis was based on Chieftainship. The Chief was the head of administration.

The Chief was the via media between his people and the state administration. The colonial rulers had an indirect intervention in the hill areas of the state. They had their rule through the Chiefs in the beginning. They protected the economic interest of the Maharaja and the British. The tribal Chiefs also achieved their interest of “safeguarding the frontiers and

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31 In Kuki society, the Chief exercised supreme authority. The land belonged to him. His subjects lived in his territory with his permission and his subjects gave some portion of their harvest to the Chief. One leg of the killed animal was also given to the Chief. The Chieftainship was hereditary; the eldest son succeeded his father. In the administration of justice and other administrative matters, a council supported the Chief. In external relations the Chief represented his people.
plundering the economic resources” of the neighbouring areas.\textsuperscript{32} The Chiefs enjoyed sufficient freedom in the administration of their villages.

The influence of the chiefs declined tremendously when the British administration created and appointed a new post called “Lambu”. Initially appointed as interpreters and advisors to the British rulers who in their turn depended on them rather than the chief’s in administrative matters.\textsuperscript{33}

The spread of modern education in the hill areas of Manipur was low and slow.\textsuperscript{34} It was reported that in spite of the efforts of the (Christian) missionary not more than fifteen schools were established in the hill areas of Manipur during the period from 1890 to 1919.\textsuperscript{35} Among the Kukis, it was also reported, hardly ten graduates were there in Manipur in 1946.\textsuperscript{36} (the year in which the K.N.A. was established). As a result a true mass political socialisation was not possible among the Kukis at the end of colonial period.

\textsuperscript{34} Regarding the growth and development of modern English education among the tribals in Manipur it was reported that the state government established an L.P. (Lower Primary) school for imparting education to tribal Children at Mao Thana in 1993. One more school was set up in 1896 at Ukhrul. The attendance of students in those schools were very poor. Some of the enrollment of children were withdrawn by the parents after one or two years. The school at Mao Thana was closed down in 1932 due to non-availability of students. In the valley schools, though there were provisions for accommodating the tribal and other backward class children, a very few tribal children received education, “There were hardly 12 students receiving high school education in 1931-32.” Please see for a detailed reading, Dr. Jammini Devi, 1989, Education in Manipur, Tera Bazar, Imphal: Rai Pravina Brothers. pp.96-97 and 143-144.
\textsuperscript{36} Interview with T. Haokip, Chief of Mumpi, dated at his residence at New Lambuland, Imphal, 19.4.2003.
The British administration over the Kuki inhabited areas, as also did in case of other tribes in Manipur, was indirect and for a longer period the Thadou Chiefs enjoyed sufficient freedom of action. But at the later part of the colonial rule in the state, the chiefs felt insecure in their position and power. On the eve of independence of India and the departure of the British, the Nagas, and the Lushais demanded for their separate homelands. The Kukis felt the need for uniting and forming a Kuki organisation for themselves and to promote the interest of the Kukis. In 1945 S.M. Zavum who was a clerk in the hill office and also a son of a chief, was removed with other two government employees from state service on the charge of writing a petition against the Lambus. T. Kipgen, then a C.O.(Circle Officer), convened a meeting of the chiefs. The meeting was mainly attended by the chiefs and other prominent members of the Kukis. Thus the Kuki National Assembly started as a socio-political organisation of the Kukis on October 24, 1946 at the Kuki cooperative society building in Imphal. T.Kipgen imported the word “assembly” from the French National Assembly” of the French Revolution to put it in the nomenclature of the new political party. The flag of the party was designed by H.Thangjom; the background green representing Hills, the red the bravery and the star representing unity. The founder president and secretary of the party were S.M.Žavum and T.Kipgen respectively.

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38 Interview with T.Kipgen, the founding secretary of the K.N.A., dated at his residence, Imphal, 13.10.2002.
39 Ibid.
41 Interview: T. Kipgen dt. 13.10.2002.
42 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
The Kuki National Assembly objected nomination of the 5(five) hill representatives in the Constitution Making Committee without asking for their opinion in its annual conference held in October, 1946.\textsuperscript{45} The conference of the K.N.A. also expressed its worries about their living space, that Kukis paid double taxes – one to the state and the other to the land owner, and many Kukis who were owners of land in Pre-British time became landless people during the British days. The party started its activities with a plan for settlement of the Kukis in Kangpokpi-Kanglatombi reserve in north Manipur.\textsuperscript{46}

In the beginning the K.N.A. was not an active political party. It was rather a para-political platform of the Chiefs.\textsuperscript{47} The party adopted its constitution only on 17\textsuperscript{th} October 1969.\textsuperscript{48} It was recognised as a “State Party” by the Election Commission of India and allotted itsreserved symbol “Two Leaves” in 1975.\textsuperscript{49}

3.2. \textbf{Social Base of the Kuki National Assembly:} The Kuki National Assembly is a party which stands for Kukis in India.\textsuperscript{50} The provision for becoming a primary member given under Article 4(1) of the constitution does


\textsuperscript{46} Resolution No.1 of the All Kuki National Council meeting held at Tujang Village on 19\textsuperscript{th} August, 1947 in Gassah, L.S. (Ed.). op cit. p. 186, footnote No.3.

\textsuperscript{47} ibid.

\textsuperscript{48} Preamble to the Constitution of the Kuki National Assembly N.E. India, as amended at the General Assembly of the party held at N.K.T. Churachandpur from 15\textsuperscript{th} to 21\textsuperscript{st} March, 1986.

\textsuperscript{49} Vide Election Commission of India, Notification No.56/75-III dated 14\textsuperscript{th} April, 1975; Please see the Constitution of the K.N.A., N.E. p. 26.

\textsuperscript{50} This point is very clearly expressed in the ‘Preamble’ to the Constitution of the K.N.A., N.E.
not mention that “only Kukis” may become a member of the party. Instead, it allows ‘anyone’ who is loyal to the party and accepts the “aims and objects”, “policy and programme” of the party and who is not a member of another political party to become its primary member. But the undercurrent communal feelings runs high while expressing about the matters relating to the demarcation of the jurisdiction, the aims and objectives and most distinctively the nomenclature of the party itself. As a result, the party fails to attract members from outside the Kuki community. Thus, the membership of the party confines to the Kukis settled in Kuki villages scattered through the state.

Since the Kuki National Assembly emerged as a para-political platform of the Chiefs, it tried to protect the interest of the Chiefs. Thus, the K.N.A. defended receiving the ‘Changseo’ and ‘Simul’ on the ground that these are customary tributes to be paid to the Chiefs and that it could not be considered as taxes.

One more point that caused dissension of the Kuki fraternity in the Kuki National Assembly was the Thadou dominated nature of the party. The main functionaries, particularly the Presidenship and the Secretariship were confined most of the time to the Thadou Chiefs or other close relatives of those Chiefs. As a result, the K.N.A. found itself difficult to be

51 An amount of rice paid to the Kuki Chiefs as tribute.
52 Hind leg of the killed animal paid to the Kuki Chief as tribute.
53 This point was stated in a statement made by Mr. S.L. Lunneh, President of the K.N.A., dt. 28.7.1949, as a reply to the Congress Committee’s resolution on the abolition of the customary rights of the Chiefs in Manipur. Please see also, Gassah, L.S. (Ed.). op. cit.. p. 188.
55 This point will be specifically discussed in the discussion of ‘Leadership’ of the K.N.A. in the next chapter.
represented as the Pan-Kuki organisation. It could not expand its base in all parts of the hill areas in the state. The party could not have its organisational bases in the valley constituencies.

3.3. **Ideology and Policy and Programme:** The ideology of the K.N.A. was developed around the purview of one’s love and feeling for preservation and protection of one’s own ethnic identity. The party aims at uniting all the Kukis living in different states of India and to stand unitedly by organising themselves for a political status. The party also expressed a strong determination to make a homeland for the Kukis and other members of the K.N.A. party. The party further pledged to improve the living and economic conditions and to enhance the education of the Kukis and its members. The party also strongly committed to the building up of the life of the Kukis and its workers, and to maintain Kuki National Culture. Unlike the constitution of other political parties in India, the party never explicitly expressed any concrete category of ideology that the party had embraced. But from a close evaluation of the constitution of the party it may be concluded that the party believed in democracy. It also strongly committed to communalism. The annual conference held from 23rd to 25th October, 1946 the Kuki National Assembly formulated its ‘Future Policy’. It stated: “Taking into consideration the various aspects of the vexing problem of Hills and valley it is the desire of the Kuki National Assembly to announce that the Hills should come under the Darbar provided conditions are satisfactory but failing to obtain

56 The dismantling of the Pan-Kuki fraternity was a renewal of an old rivalry on the issue of the primacy of Thadous among the Kukis in the much-debated book “Notes on Thadou Kukis” (1929) by William Shaw, where William Shaw claimed the primacy of the Thadous among the Kukis. As a result the Khulmi National Union (K.N.U.) emerged as a parallel organisation of the Kukis in 1946. Please see, Gassah, L.S. op.cit. p. 188.


58 “Aims and Objects” of the K.N.A. as stated in its Constitution. ibid. p. 2.
satisfactory conditions, the Kukis regretfully will have to follow the footsteps of their other hill brethren demanding for full secession.60

Before Independence, the 15th August, 1947, the party also started putting strong pressure for a satisfactory solution in matters relating to the land alienation problem of the Kukis, the abolition of the forced labour system and the grant of equal rights with the plainsmen, the hill representatives in the Assembly to be nominated by the hill people, etc.61

The K.N.A. remained inactive after the election of the members of the Electoral College in 1952 till late 1960s. After the 1967 Parliamentary and Territorial Assembly elections, the party revived its organisational activities and it adopted its constitution in October, 1969.62 The party made a switchover in its demand from a “Kuki State” within the Indian Union to a separate revenue district for the Kukis in Manipur. The demand for a separate district for the Kukis was first voiced in 1970.63 The K.N.A. persisted putting its demand for creation of a separate district since then. It successfully organised a big demonstration on 5th May, 1977 in the streets of Imphal demanding the creation of a separate Sadar Hills district.64 But the demand for

59 There was a strong movement launched by a section of Nagas of Mao and other Naga inhabited areas of Manipur under the leadership of A. Daiki, the President of the Naga People’s League demanding for merger of their areas with the proposed Nagaland. In the meantime, the Hmars in Manipur also demanded the merger of Hmar inhabited areas with the Lusai Hills.


63 The Sadar Hill District Demand Committee was formed earlier. But it was the Kuki Chiefs’ Zonal Council which held its meeting on 3rd September, 1970, that was “instrumental in bringing the matter to the fore”. Gassah, L.S. op. cit. p. 199.

a separate district for the Kukis was objected by the Nagas of Manipur, particularly of the Senapati District. Of late, the Kukis again demanded for creation of the said district when the Government of Manipur divided the Imphal district into the Imphal East and the Imphal West district. But, the creation of a separate district for the Kukis was not materialised. Thus, the K.N.A. fails to ripe a concrete objective till yet.

3.4. **Factionalism and Defection:**

In the early part of its establishment, the K.N.A. was very enthusiastic to build a strong political party even by accommodating members from other tribes other than the Kukis in it. Besides, the K.N.A. carried out mutual understanding and working with other ethnic groups like the Nagas (Maos, Marams and Khoiraos) and the Lushais, etc. But, such an effort did not last long mainly due to the ethnic character of the K.N.A. The party later on failed to provide satisfactory resources even to all the Kuki groups. It was largely responsible due to the much traditional character of the Kuki Chiefs, particularly the Thadou-Kukis, in the party. Language dispute between Thadous and other Kukis is another major cause of factionalism in Pan-Kuki fraternity.

The formation of a "Kuki-Homeland" or a "Kuki State" which has been the first and foremost aim and objective of the party becomes impracticable due to the scattered habitation of the Kukis in Manipur and the neighbouring states. As such, it would be very difficult to create a "Single administrative Unit" by covering all the Kuki inhabited areas in Manipur. Thus, the "Kuki-Homeland" is an illusion.

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66: ibid.
The two K.N.A. candidates, namely Zampu Kipgen from the Saitu (S.T.) constituency and Ngulkhohao from Saikot (ST) constituency, were elected in the mid-term election in 1974 in Manipur. It was a time of mass defection of MLAs from the ruling to the opposition and vice versa. The two sitting K.N.A. MLAs, could no longer remain as KNA MLAs in that trend, as a result of which they defected from their party and joined the Congress on 2nd July, 1976.\(^69\) Two of the KNA candidates elected in the State Assembly Election 1980, namely Satkonal from Chandel (ST) Constituency and Jainson Haokip from Tengnoupal (ST) Constituency, Jainson Haokip contested and elected as an Independent Candidate from the same constituency in the State Assembly Election, 1984. Again, T.N. Haokip, the KNA candidate elected from Saikot (ST) Constituency in the State Assembly Election, 1990, left the party after sometime and joined M.P.P. He then contested and elected as an MPP candidate in the State Assembly Election, 1995 from his former constituency.

4. **Conclusion:**

The Kuki National Assembly and the Manipur People's Party, the two different regional political parties emerged in two different political phases of Manipur. The KNA emerged when democratic institutions were introduced in Manipur, while the MPP emerged on the eve of the attainment of statehood of Manipur.

The KNA emerged as a para-political organisation of the Kuki Chiefs. Its base confined mostly to the Kuki inhabited areas in the state. Due to conflicts among the tribes, particularly the Thadous and non-Thadou groups in the Kuki National Assembly. The party could not move forward in its political activities even affecting its own strength.

\(^{69}\) Th. Gokul Singh. op. cit. pp. 48-70.
The MPP came up as a regional political party with many promises in Manipur. It successfully expanded its base throughout the valley areas crossing communal boundaries. Thus, it established its base among the Muslim population of the state. The party also could expand its organisation in some of the hill constituencies. But the MPP suffered much due to defection and factionalism among the leaders.