Chapter 3

POLITICAL SYSTEM OF MEITEI-PANGALS
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Durkheim says that human society is sui-generis and is constituted of social facts. Social fact is a thing which consists of "every ways of acting, fixed or not, capable of exercising on the individual an external constraint; or again, every way of acting which is general throughout a given society, while at the same time existing in its own right independent of its individual manifestation".

From this definition, we can draw a conclusion that there are three characteristics of a Social fact. They are general in nature, exteriority and uses constraint on a given society. It is general because it is collective (that is more or less obligatory) and is to be found in each part because it exists in the whole, rather than found in the whole because it exists in parts. Social fact is to be recognized by the power of external coercion which it exercises or is capable of exercising over individuals, and the presence of their power may be recognized in its turn either by the existence of some specific sanction or by the resistance offered against every individual effort that tends to violate it. In a society, individuals establish relationship with others to fulfill their needs by observing the laid down procedure which culminates into a system. While making the constructive progress in life and developing themselves as an individual and a society as a whole, the political institution of a society coexists, with other social institutions like economy, family, marriage, kinship etc. to control and coerce to regulate their different type of activities. These are various terms of coercions which are reflected in the value system of a particular society. These systems have been undergoing certain type of changes through industrialization, modernization and rationality,
equality, democracy and secularism which has changed the coercion system.

Ever since the emergence of the human society, political institutions have existed. It deals with the authority of forming law, laying down directives and thereby implementing it. It also updates the old laws and practices by making timely amendments so that it suits the changing face and behaviors of the society. It, thus, controls the human behaviour through formal and informal organizations.

Formal organizations are those where laws and policies of the government are endowed with legitimate power i.e. to use force to ensure the observance of law by the people.

Informal organizations are those where the customary laws are practiced in order to control behavior of a particular community say – Islam, Hindu, Christianity etc.3

Hence, each society recognizes the importance of political institutions - process of law formation and its implementation. Ralf Dahrendrof just in contrast to Marxian analysis opines that polity is more important than the economy because more significant changes in society can be brought through it.4

Working on these lines, a thorough research has been done to analyze the political structure of Meitei-Pangal (Muslim) discreetly presented in this work. It is necessary to understand the nature of politics in the state and Islam both.

Prior to the integration of the state with the Union of India in 1949, Manipur was ruled by a Maharaja with the help of an appointed Darbar of local people. The Darbar was constituted of local nobles & leaders appointed by the British with an objective of assisting the Maharaja in running the government of the state. This political set up began from the period of time when the Britishers took over Manipur till 1947. India was declared
Independent in 1947. The king was the head of the legislative, executive and judicial bodies. In discharge of his functions, he was assisted by the Darbar. Most of the decisions were taken in consultation with his Darbar. However, he was not bound to accept the views of the Darbar. The king was the pivot of the state administration. The higher position were given to the king’s brother/s in a state and sons. The day to day administration of the state was vested upon the Darbar.\(^5\)

Politically & economically, the native state of Manipur was comparatively backward in relation to those provinces directly administered by the Britishers. In some cases, the Princes, inspite of their eagerness, were unable to take up important developmental project for shortage of resources and support from the British government.

There were no formal codified laws to decide cases. Established customs, usages and precedents were the guiding principles to administer the state. The Punishment inflicted for various offences were numerous. Treason or conspiracy against the ruler was considered the most serious offence that could be committed. Generally, the main offender and sometimes his chief followers were sentenced to death. Murder was also a grave offence. The punishment was death except in the case of Brahmins and women. The form of execution varied according to the nature of the murder. Cases of theft and assault were punished by public flogging. Imposing fines was the commonest punishment, and according to Brown, led to gross misuse. Women were not sent to prison even if they were awarded punishment for offences committed. Depending on the nature of crime, they were subjected to public humiliation.
The villages in the Manipur valley had clubs locally known as “Singlup” (wood clubs). They were like the old panchayats in India. These clubs were under the head of the villages and have the general control of it and adjudicate in trifling cases (Petty) arising in the village. They also render useful social services in the villages like providing help in cases of sickness, dire poverty etc. According to Brown, although many of the inhabitants were very poor, actual starvation or fatal neglect was rendered impossible through efficient management by these clubs.

There were two chief courts, the Chirap and the Guard or military court. There was also a court for the trial of cases in which women were concerned and other minor court for cattle disputes etc. An appeal lay with the Ruler against a decision of any of these courts. The Chirap, which was the chief court, consisted of 13 senior members appointed by the Ruler. The military court was composed of 8 major permanent members (Senior army) and some other officers of the army. It decides all cases in which the sepoys were concerned and occasionally other cases were also taken up.

The women court which is popularly known as ‘Paja’ consisted of six members appointed by the Raja from all classes. In this court all cases of family disputes in which women were involved like family violence, adultery etc. were in the first instance, heard. Serious cases may afterwards be escalated before the Chirap.

The Muslims who is locally known as the Meitei-Pangals appeared before the devastation (1819-1825) of the country by the Burmese. They were looked after by a Qazi who was appointed by the Raja. This Qazi was the authority in matters relating to personal affairs of the Manipuri Muslim (Meitei-Pangals). They
have the reputation of being an honest man with a long vision, hard working and performs Lal-Lup as Manipuris.¹⁶

Lal-lup primarily was a military organization, but in the times of peace it was made to play a part in the economic life of the country at times.⁷

According to Hudson, the definition of Lal-Lup narrated by an old person to him was the duty of appearing at the kings offices (loisang) for ten days and working there according to the grade to which the person belonged. The persons liable to duty under the lal-lup system were Meiteis, the Brahmins and the Musalmans who are called Pangals.⁸

With the end of British rule in India and Manipur on August, 14, 1947 a number of political movements were witnessed in Manipur. The basic objectives of the movements were –

For the establishment of a full responsible government.

For the merger of the State into the dominion of India, however, some sections of people were very much against Manipur being merged into the Indian union.⁹

As the demand for a responsible government grew stronger, the Maharaja under people’s pressure announced his desire to introduce a fully democratic and constitutional form of government in Manipur.

The Manipur State constitution Act and Hill Regulation Act 1947 was brought out, giving rights to people to participate in the administration of the state including certain fundamental rights like equality before law, opportunity and liberty.

The Act extended to the whole of the Manipur state including hill areas. The Administration of the state was to be carried out in the name of the Maharaja.¹⁰ Succession to the throne was to be governed by the law of primogeniture subject to
the condition that the heir must be recognized by the Council of Ministers.\textsuperscript{11}

In case of dispute as to the succession to the throne or in case of failure of heirs, the state assembly had to determine by a majority of 75% of the members present in voting.

The council of ministers were very much a powerful unit over Maharaja under this constitution. After this constitution was put into practice, Manipur became an image of the coming democratic element and grass root.\textsuperscript{12}

Since 15\textsuperscript{th} October, 1949, Manipur became a part of the Indian Dominion. His Highness, the Maharaja of Manipur (Budha Chandra) transferred to the Dominion government, full and exclusive authority. Jurisdiction and powers for and in relation to governance of the state and agreed to transfer the administration of state to the Dominion government on the 15\textsuperscript{th} day of October 1949. The state was to be administered by the chief commissioner as a part of ‘C’ state.

Later on, it became a union territory in 1957 and then in 1972 a full fledged state. The Uttar Pradesh Panchayat Act was extended to Manipur in the year 1959-60.\textsuperscript{13}

Before 1955, the administration of criminal and civil Justices was governed by the Manipur court Act 1947 but after 1955, it was more or less same as in other states of India. This means that the different departments say executive, judiciary, police according to rules and regulations and law abide by the constitution and the government of India. The grass root governance (Panchayati Raj) as a part of decentralization of power to develop India (a vision of M.K. Gandhi) came into force around this time.

However, the customary laws are not completely absent either, we even observe different Singlups (Clubs) gathered
together to solve a problem in a leikai (locality/Mohalla). The elders usually take active part in any function and sometimes in solving problems related to marriages. The family to whom a boy/girl can marry is generally decided by the Meitei/Meetei law. These clubs of the leikai (Mohalla) organize games and sports, quiz and competitions in different disciplines in order to enhance the overall development of the personalities of the children. They sometimes engage in social services like cleaning the drainage, health awareness programmes for AIDS etc. In various religious rites/functions, the old people and even the younger one gathered in the Mandap (a place where people gather together).

These kind of practicing customary laws can be seen more particularly among the Meitei-Pangals (Muslims) in Manipur. This is because of the religious practices and culture of Islam. Muslim personal law is generally controlled through Qazi – the religions leader of the community. The Qazi system is practiced since the time of the Maharaja's rule and then at the time of British rule too. It is the Qazi (religions leader) who gave fatwas etc. in any matter if it is against the Muslim personal law and practices which is prescribed by the Holy Qura’n and Hadith.

After the British rule, the Muslim leaders too started contesting the election so that they too can help in bringing about the development of the state. Md. Alimuddin from Lilong constituency, Md. Ashraf Ali Irilbung, Yairipok, Topchingkha Constituency and Md. Chaoba from Charangpat, Khongjom constituency were the main Muslim political leaders who joined their hands together in the neighbouring community leaders for the development of the state since 1967.

In Manipur, the Meitei-Pangal (Muslims) society, though are part of the state and are subject to the state laws and regulations, is generally controlled by religious leaders through Qura’n and
Hadith (Shariat) and the old people. Being a part of Muslim Community the sovereignty – that makes difference between the western democracy and Islamic democracy, rests in the hands of Allah. No law can be formulated against the will of Allah whether it is a popular demand or choice of few.\(^{17}\)

So Meitei-Pangal says that Allah is the only authority that has all the characteristics essential for sovereignty. He knows every thing. Each and every thing is under His authority either voluntarily or non – voluntarily. No one is there to revise His orders. Allah is not answerable to anyone.

According to Islam, one should surrender all his authority and will, to the will of Allah and accept that he is only a representative of Allah. Each Muslim is responsible and has rights and duties towards the system, the community can be carried out only in a democratic way. Qura’n used the term “Shoora” (mutual Consultation) for it. Qura’n stressed a lot on it and said “And those who answer the call of their Lord and perform salah (Prayer) and do their affairs by mutual consultation”.\(^{18}\)

“And Consult them in the affair”\(^{19}\), according to Maulana Maudoodi, Islam stressed on it (mutual consultation) because of the following factors.

To decide a matter individually which involves two or more persons implies exploitation. It is nearer to justice if those parties involved in the matter are given a chance to express their opinion. If the matters belong to a huge population, then the chance should be given through their reliable representatives.

Taking decision about a common matter is not an easy task. Any one who is Allah fearing and believes that he will be answerable before Allah can never dare to take decisions independently. A responsible person will try to involve all the people to whom the matters belong, either directly or indirectly.
So decisions can be taken in an appropriate way and the responsibility can be shared by all.\textsuperscript{20}

In this way, the Meitei-Pangals (Muslim) have given ample powers to their elders and the religious leaders. Minor cases were always in first instance, admonished by the elders. They are not formally elected but generally elderly persons who command respect and carry some influence because of their age, experience, character, high economic status and so on, are all treated as responsible members of the community. Their main function is to guard the social prestige of the group and settle the village disputes. They mostly deal with social disputes relating to marriage, divorce, adultery etc. after detailed discussion among the elders of both sides. Due hearing is given and the party found guilty is punished in keeping with the nature of the offence. Generally, meeting of the elder members of both parties in conflict are held in the house of the Pradhan (who is elected democratically) so that both the parties can be heard and then a settlement can be arrived at.

In religious matters, disputes are solved through the elders of both the Sagei and elders of the villages (Mohalla). The respected members of the Mohalla (Elite) and the religious leaders (Imam of the particular Mohalla) and moreover the elected Pradhan of the villages are also part of the discussion. Then they will decide according to Shariat and keeping in mind the welfare of the community.

If the dispute is related with murder or serious clashes then the case is handed over to the police and the court. They (Police) used to solve the case accordingly.

This system of mutual consultation is not recommended only at governmental level. But it is an essential part of society at all the levels. Here are some of the sayings of the Prophet (PBUH)
that support the mutual consultation. Hazrath Ali asked the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) that what we should do if we come across any problem, about which we do not find any direction in the Holy Qura’n, and in your sayings. The Prophet (P.B.U.H.) said "Assemble the good man of my Ummah and do mutual consultation among them and do not judge any matter by the opinion of any single man".

He second caliph Hazrath Umar says "you are not prohibited to kill any one who invites to his own leadership or to the leadership of any other without mutual consultation of Muslims". At another place he says: No caliphate without mutual consultation.

Islam says that mutual consultation is an essential task directly or indirectly. Of course, at family level and village level, direct consultation is possible but at state level it is not possible. So an indirect process is needed. The term that is used for Islamic democracy is "Shooraiet".

The relationship between state and individual is complementary. It is a general belief that state should guarantee to it, and security of the citizens, fundamental rights and basic human rights. Laski has said, "State is known by the rights that it maintains".

Besides rights, duties are also equally important. Duties are the obligations of citizen towards the state. What is a right in regard to one's self is a duty in regard to others. These are two sides of the same coin. The citizen in an Islamic state are not allowed to create disturbances. They must be loyal to state (Government). They should co-operate in all progressive steps of government. It is a symptom of a healthy state. Qura'n says "Help one another in Al-Birr and Al-Taqwa (Virtue, righteousness and piety) but do not help one another in sin and transgression".
It is a very important duty of every citizens (People) towards their government in protecting its integrity by all means.

Qura'n says,"What is the matter with you, that when you are asked to march forth in the cause of Allah, you cling heavily to the earth? Are you pleased with the life of this world rather than hereafter"? 24

"If you march not forth, He will punish you with a painful torment and will replace you by another people". 25

"March forth whether you are light or heavy, strive hard with your wealth or your lives in the cause of Allah".26

So, in this way the Meitei-Pangal like other Muslim Communities in the world cooperates in every progressive step of state government along with the Islamic System of Government.

There are also some civil organizations set up by the Meitei-Pangals (Muslim) of Manipur for the welfare and development of the community in the field of socio-cultural, educational and economic activities. They are as follows:-

1. AMMESCO:-

All Manipur Muslim Educational, Social and Cultural organization (1978), established for struggling related to Muslim reservation and other socio-economic and political development. It is an organization of educated and intellectual Muslim personalities.

2. ICRA:-

Islamic Cultural, Research Association is working for the development of educational and the cultural identity of Meitei-Pangal since last 10 years.

3. Jamatul Ulema:-

They are working to maintain the Islamic laws.
4. AMMPWA:-

All Manipur Meitei-Pangal Welfare Association (1993) was established just after the genocidal killing of Muslims by the Majority groups. It was formed for an all round development of Muslims in the state. They also demand Muslim reservation in government jobs and admission of deserving Muslim students in higher and Technical Education.

5. AMMOCOC:-

All Manipur Muslim Organization Co-ordinating Committee (1997). It is the first Apex organization of Muslim youth to fight for the rights, identity and integrity of the Minority Muslims in the state.

6. KMCDO:-

Kangleipak (Manipur) Muslim Chanura's Development Organization. It is the first women organization of Muslim to protect and fight for the women rights in the state.

7. AMMSO:-

All Manipur Muslim Students organization fight for the education and students interest - they are also struggling for the reservation of Muslims in Governmental Jobs and admission of Muslim students in higher and technical education.

There are more organisations like Muslim rights forum which work for the development of cultural and educational work etc.

The main objectives of these organisations are to demand the reservation of Muslims for various government jobs and in the technical education and general development. These organization works for the over all development among the Muslim Community in the field of socio-cultural, educational and economic activities by the provision to set up the state Minority department and state Minority commission etc.
Through the Kangleipak (Manipur) Muslim Chanura’s development organization (KMCDO), the Meitei-Pangal women formed a suborganization in each and every village, Mohalla. They, to some extent control the behaviours of the individuals in the respective Mohallas. These women groups are known as Meira-Paibi meaning hereby ladies with a torch of fire in hand. Generally it consists of elder women. They some times settle issues relating to marriages, adultery drugs, alcohol etc. They work for the social welfare. They gather everyday at a set common place after their domestic (household) work and discuss what is happening and going on in a particular leikai (Mohalla) respectively.

They even remand person using and selling drugs, alcohol and punish them according to the nature of the action.

Moreover, the group of youth members of the Leikai generally set up an association under the leadership of President, Vice-President and Secretary etc. These group of youth, (association) is usually called as Club of the Leikai (Mohalla). The Secretary is the one who actually runs the association – means every work is done through him. This group or association too works as an agent to protect the society from the anti-social activities and behaviour of the members of the society, for example used of drugs and alcohol, anti-social elements etc. Like the Meira-paibi (women groups)\textsuperscript{32}, the Club members also encourages the educational and other social welfare and political development programmes in the society. Sometimes this association organizes Quiz, drawing competition etc. so as to encourage the students of the community.

The mosque which is a place of worship is also the place where male members gather and discuss religious, economic, social and political matters particularly after Namaz in each and every Leikai (Mohalla).
Though rare, it is not uncommon to witness cases where people gather together in a mosque to collect contributions for a grand feast. On the day of the feast, before lunch/dinner members of the Leikai (Mohalla) discuss things related to the welfare and developmental work for the coming year. This include the last years experience and what steps would be needed for the coming years. Nowadays, since two-three years, we can witness the electing of representatives among the members, say for financial matters- Treasurers, Secretary etc. Friday Namaz is also important for each and every male members for the congregational Namaz held in Masjid. Almost all male members try to offer Salah in their respective Mohallas Masjid but exception is everywhere.

**ROLE OF ELITE:**

The term elite is part of a tradition which make modern social scientist uneasy. The concept is used to describe certain fundamental features of organized social life. All societies, simple or complex, agricultural or industrial needs authorities within and spokesmen and agents who are also symbols of the common life and embodiments of the values and maintain it.

Idiomatically, elites are thus roughly the same as leaders, decision makers or influential and not too different from spokesperson dignitaries or central figures. Thus, elites are those minorities which are set apart from the rest of the society by their pre-eminence in one or more important distributions.

When most social scientists talk about elites, they have in mind those who run things that is certain key factors playing structured, functionally understandable roles not only in a nation governance process but in other institutional settings. This plurality of elites reflects and promotes the pluralist characteristics of the modern society in general.
The social formation, classes, communities and movement from which elites are derived are not fixed. They are the custodians of the machinery for making policy.\textsuperscript{34}

The nature of the elites in Meitei-Pangal society is more or less different from other communities. And influential person has been treated as elite. The influence might be due to his achieved academic status, political status or due to the traditional social system i.e. religion. Thus categorized into (1) Academic elites (2) Political elites (3) Religious elites.

These days, young and educated individuals who have the potential to bring developmental benefit to the community (Meitei-Pangal) and who have worked as political linkages tend to become the new elites.

Academic elites hereby meaning those individual who have gained enough knowledge in their respective academic fields. They are well qualified and attains higher position and status in the state.

Political elites are those which have the great skills of holding people of the society together are the representative. They held political power and have a hand in the over all development of the Meitei-Pangal.

Religious elites are those religious leaders in the Meitei-Pangal society who function as the care taker of the Meitei-pangal society up to a large extent. They set good example to the mass and are exemplary to the society in respect to almost all chores of life. Along with them elders also hold a key control to the manifestation of the people in a Meitei-pangal society\textsuperscript{27}.

The elites can influence and also influences the behaviour of the masses. They regularly come up with new innovative and scientific ideas with which a society can climb the ladder of
development. They are the creator of new ideas and values and hence their imitation by the mass.

It is generally assumed that in the wake of democratic experiment, periodical election to parliament, state legislature and district councils or election of village council has created a new awareness among the Meitei-Pangal. But these things have open up the channel between the individual and the government. They are also the major instruments of the political socialization and political participation and maintaining solidarity in the society.
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8. Ibid., P. 61
11. Ibid., P. 48
13. Ibid., P. 176
14. MANDAP:-A place where people gather together to perform and attain the various religious rite and functions.
18. The Holy Qura’n. *Shoora*, 38
19. The Holy Qura’n, *Al-Imran*, 159
23. Ibid, 62
24. The Holy Qura’n, *Tauba*, 38
25. The Holy Qura’n, *Tauba*, 39
26. The Holly Qura’n, *Tauba*, 41
28. Ibid., p. 27