EMERGENCE OF MODERN PAITE ELITES IN MANIPUR:
SOCIO-POLITICAL BACKGROUND

At what point of time Paite as a community name originated in the trans-boundary area of India and Myanmar is not known. Some literary records suggest that the name Paite was not of local origin. According to George A Grierson, the Lusei called them Paite based on the ways in which they dress up their hair. Grierson writes, 'the Lusei called all the hill tribes who wear their hair in a knot upon the top of the head Poi or Pai.' To Vumson, a native scholar from Burma, Paite is a name given by the Lusei and Pawi (Lai) to people living in Tedim, in the southern and eastern parts of Manipur district and in the Somra Tract. To some, they were first called as 'Paihte' by the Lushais and Pawis / Pois (Falam Chins), which is a derogatory term, meaning 'thrown away'. In course of time, the people so designated called themselves as Paite by omitting the letter 'h'. The people living in Tedim area in Chin State of Myanmar who disclaimed the term preferred to be called Tedim. According to Kamkhenthang, even for the people on the Indian side, it took some time for all to accept the name Paite. He further writes, a Paite is a Paite as long as he is in India, if he goes to Burma he becomes Tedim people and vice-versa.

Some writers and scholars consider that the name ‘Paite’ is of recent origin. Scholars who subscribe to this view argue their case by giving a literal interpretation of the term. According to them, Paite denotes ‘people on the move’ for ‘Pai’ means go or on the move and ‘te’ is a plural suffix indicating many or in big number. Subscribing to this view, some native scholars such as T Liankhohau, Nangkhanpau Hauzel writes, “those people who entered India are called Paite by their relatives in Burma, and, thus, the name Paite came to be applied to those who went to India”.

The original constitution of the Paite National Council (PNC), which was adopted on June 27, 1949, also defined Paite in this manner. This kind of interpretation seems to denote their history of migration.

Whatever differences of opinion may be there on the origin and meaning of the term ‘Paite’, it is certain that no outsiders gave them their dialect and their sense of identity. In India, the Paite are recognized Scheduled Tribe (ST) community in Manipur and Mizoram. In Manipur they are mainly concentrated in Churachandpur district. They are found in substantial numbers in Jiribam sub-division and the Imphal municipality areas of Imphal district. In the state of Mizoram, the Paite are found in Champhai and Aizawl districts. The people claiming to be Paite are there in other northeastern states as well.

The language spoken by the Paite people is ‘Paite Pau’ (Zokam). The language has no script of its own and the Paite use the Roman script. In the

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introductory note on The Paite Customary Laws, 1986, the PNC makes mention of ten Paite dialect / accent groups. These are Bukpi, Dapzal, Khothak, Lamzang, Lousau, Ngennung, Tedim, Teizang, Tuichiap, and Val. Liangkhaia from Mizoram also made mention of thirteen dialect / accent groups among the Paite. The Paite claimed Ciimnuai, located in Burma to be their first place of settlement. Singkhawkhai speculates the probable date of the Ciimnuai settlement to be the early part of the sixteenth century. Like in many other tribal communities of the region, a chief who exercised absolute power over his subjects headed the traditional Paite village. Earlier accounts referred them by the names of their ruling chiefs. Before they embraced Christianity, the Paite were animists worshiping various spirits, which they believed to have dwelt in different places like precipice, water, woods, rocks and spirits of the ancestors elsewhere. They came under the influence of Christianity since the beginning of the twentieth century. Today, the community is cent percent Christians.

The Paite society is patrilineal and patriarchal. The eldest son (i.e. first born male) inherits the property of the family. The brothers stay together in their father’s house until they build a family of their own. The customary practice among the

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11 The exact date and year of Ciimnuai establishment are shrouded in mystery. One is not sure whether it is a myth or history. But the Paite and other Zo tribes project it as a historical events. See Ciimnuai Chronology, Appendix-II, in Sing Khaw Khai, Zo People and Their Culture: A Historical, Cultural Study and Critical Analysis of Zo and its Ethnic Tribes, Lamka, Manipur, 1995, p. 71.
community was that the eldest brother’s sibling has to perform ‘\textit{Tou Sagoh}’\(^{14}\) ceremony in the house of their eldest brother (i.e. in father’s house). It is obligatory on the part of the younger brother to perform this ceremony. This ceremony was performed by married couples as a sign or mark of respect shown to their ‘\textit{Tou}’. Until and unless the couple performs ‘\textit{Tou Sagoh}’ ceremony, all the material possessed and owned by them is considered as that of the first-born male. Even though the observance of ‘\textit{Tou Sagoh}’ ceremony is gradually losing its significance in contemporary Paite society, it is still observed by some family with reverence. Another significant feature of the Paite community is that every married couple (or every household) has to constitute institution of \textit{Indongta}. According to H Kamkhenthang, the English equivalent term for \textit{Indongta} is ‘Household Council’.\(^{15}\) The \textit{Indongta} comprises of select familial relatives. Inclusion into \textit{Indongta} is considered as an honor by the appointees.\(^{16}\) For every family, there are sets of \textit{Indongta} with corresponding set of duties and responsibilities tied with rights and privileges. The institution supports and protects the family be it in times of celebrations and also in times of troubles.\(^{17}\) Paite families are socially, culturally, economically, and structurally inter-related, and dependent on one another through this institution. Generally, \textit{Indongta} is constituted under the supervision of the ‘\textit{Tou}’. Customarily, a married couple can have \textit{Indongta} of their own only after they perform ‘\textit{Tou Sagoh}’ ceremony. Through the institution of \textit{Indongta}, the personal laws relating to marriage, divorce, inheritance, adoption, etc. are normally administered. The

\(^{14}\) ‘\textit{Tou}’, which means ‘Lord’ refers to the first-born son in the family, ‘\textit{Sagoh}’, means killing animal. ‘\textit{Tou Sagoh}’ thus stands for ‘killing animal for Tou’.

\(^{15}\) Refer, H Kamkhenthang, 1988, \textit{op. cit.}

\(^{16}\) Sing Khaw Khai, \textit{op. cit.}, p.150.

Indongta also decides cases of civil and criminal offences. The institution of Indongta plays a very important role in the Paite society even today.¹⁸

Traditional Political Society and Emergence of Modern Paite Elites

The traditional political institutions of the Paite are in many ways similar to those of other Zo communities like the Lusei, Thadou, Hmar, etc. In the past, each village of the Zo people was under the control of its own traditional chief. In the absence of common political administration, feuds and infighting between the clans / villages were common. Customary laws governed the social and political activities of the villages. The only institution that could be called political in nature was the institution of chieftainship. As in the case of many tribal communities of the region, the traditional Paite polity was confined to village level. Therefore, for understanding the nature of traditional elite in Paite society, it becomes important to analyze in brief the structure and organization of the traditional Paite village administration.

Traditional Paite villages were composed of three categories of people viz. the chief (Hausa), the chief nominated Council of Elders (Hausa Upa), and the commoners (the villagers). Although different villages under their respective chiefs could follow different practices, the system of village administration was considerably similar in pattern. Generally, the social, economic and political activities of traditional Paite people revolved round the village chief, to which all the legal authority was attached. The chief was supreme in his own village. Matters relating to civil and criminal cases were tried and enforced in the chief's court. It was the responsibility of

¹⁸ For a brief discussion on the organisation, functions and other related issues concerning Indongta, see H Kamkhenthang, 1988, op. cit.
the chief to protect the life and property of the villages; to distribute lands to the
villagers for cultivation; and to administer justice based on customary laws. In view of
the responsibilities that he undertakes, the chief enjoyed different rights and
privileges. The chief owned the village land. As such, he had the right to confiscate
house or land of the villagers. When any members of the village leave the village
without the consent of the chief, his property automatically become that of the chief.
The chief imposed a sort of taxes called Buhsun or Tangseu in the form of annual
tribute of paddy produced from field from the villagers. The chief claimed Saliang i.e.
the right hind leg of any game killed by whatsoever means. The house of the chief
was constructed by the villagers free of cost.

In the traditional society where inter and intra tribal wars were common, the
strength and safety of the village largely rested on the strength of the youth. In their
villages, the Paite had an institution called bachelor dormitory (Ham or Sawm in
Paite). The Ham / Sawm was located in the house of the chief or some person of
importance and influence. It was in this institution that the village youth learned the
fundamental principles of discipline, social etiquette, cooperation, respect of elder and
also the art of warfare.¹⁹

Although the Paite chief used to collect rent from persons cultivating his land,
the villagers used to see him a benefactor who distributed lands to the villagers for
their maintenance.²⁰ The chief's court was the place where the villagers could take
refuge and shelter. The chief had the power to pardon and forgive any person accused

¹⁹ T Jamkhothang and H Kamkhenthang, 'A Brief Introduction to the Language and Culture of the
Paites (Tedim Chins)', in K B Singh (ed.), An Introduction to Tribal Language and Culture of
Manipur, Manipur State Kala Akademi, Imphal, 1976, pp. 119-120.
²⁰ J N Das, A Study of Land System of Manipur, Law Research Institute Eastern Region, Gauhati High
Court, Gauhati, 1985, p. 45.
of committing a crime. Disputes or crimes in the village were tried in the chief’s court, which was usually the chief’s house. For initiating any case, the accused had to bring zubel (rice-beer) to the house of the chief. The accused also (may) pay court fee as prescribed by the chiefs. If a person was convicted or found guilty, the accused had to arrange sasat (feast) besides other fines and penalties. Sasat involves the killing of four-footed animal for (the eating of) the chief and his elders. The head and heart of the killed animal goes to the chief and the legs (fore) go to the village crier.

As stated earlier, the chief also had council of elders (Hausa Upa) to support and assist him in carrying out his duties. The chief himself nominated the Hausa Upa. The Upas enjoyed certain privileges viz. i) they were exempted from payment of Buhsun / Tangseu; ii) they were exempted from forced labor; iii) they could select jhuming field every year (before the villagers made their choice); and iv) they participated in eating of sasat.

Besides his council of elders, the village chief used to appoint a village siampu (priest), siksek (blacksmith) and tangau / tangkou (village crier). The village priest performed all religious rituals and sacrifices on behalf of the villagers. The blacksmith made necessary tools and implements such as hoe, dao, axe and other materials for the use of the villagers. The village crier went round the village normally after dark, shouting out the chief’s orders. These three officials of the chiefs generally received donation from each house in return of their services.

Even though the chief’s court acted as the custodian of the villager’s life and property, it will be an exaggeration to conclude that the institution of chieftainship had always lived up to the expectations of people in the villages. The chief had
powers to drive out any recalcitrant villagers who defied or disobeyed him. In extreme cases, where the relation between a villager and the chiefs was not cordial, the former had no other choice but to leave the village. The traditional political structure and power relations remained unchallenged and intact until the emergence of modern Paite elites from within the community members.

Colonial Intervention

The hill areas inhabited by the Nagas and Zo tribes also came under the British suzerainty when the British took control of the administration of Manipur. Initially, the British government did not give much importance to the administration of the hill areas of Manipur. They followed the policy of indirect administration of the hill tribes. Their administrative policies were largely guided by their colonial political and economic interests. The British government introduced hill house tax of three rupees per annum in the hill areas. To further their colonial interests, the British government followed a policy of aligning themselves with tribal chiefs in the hill areas. In the year 1906, they gave boundary documents to all village chiefs in the hill areas and upheld the traditional social hierarchy. Due to their privileged social and economic status, the traditional elite enjoy every luxury.

The traditional economy of the Zo people was based on subsistence agriculture. In the traditional economy, money played a little or even no role. For circulation of goods and services, a system of barter of locally produced elements

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21 For detail information on the traditional village chiefs and its various aspects, see G Thangchinlian and T Jamkhanthang (compilers), op. cit., pp. 9-10; Chinkholian Guite, 'The Guite Chiefs of Manipur: A Study of Churachandpur District', M. Phil Dissertation, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, 1989.

such as food grains, maize, etc. prevailed. The system itself was simple, compelled more by necessity rather than the desire for gain. All economic transactions were carried out in kind. The annual tribute (a sort of taxes) that the village chiefs collected from the villagers was also rendered in kind. After colonization, money became the medium of exchange for goods and services. However, for a community, which relied heavily on agricultural produced and jhum cultivation for their livelihood, the importance of money in their life was limited, except to pay the annual house-tax. In general, the economic and social conditions of the Paite people before the advent of Christianity was poor. Money was not easily available to the people. As such, it had become a burden for most of the hill tribes to pay hill house tax in cash. As G Khamkam wrote, “before they (read Paite) became Christian, there were very few people who could pay the annual house-tax levied by the Government”. As there was no transport and market facilities, their agricultural produced had no commercial value. In such a social condition, traditional system of barter continued to be used by the indigenous tribal communities for quite sometime.

Evangelization and Modern Education: The Prime Agent of Social Change

The traditional social structure, which was mostly intact for centuries, began to experience a steady change under the influence of the Christian missionaries and the progress of evangelization and modern education. Christianity did not take long to uproot the tradition and culture of the hill tribes. This was also true in the case of the Paite of Manipur. The first Christian missionary to reach the people of Churachandpur was Watkin Robert. He entered Senvon village (a village located on the Manipur-

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23 H Chin Khenthang, Against all Odds (An Autobiography), Shillong, 2006, p. 15.
24 Ibid., p. 102.
25 G Khamkam, op. cit., p. 298.
Mizoram border) from Aizawl on May 7, 1910. Two native Christians Pu Thangchingpuia and Pu Vanzika and local converts like Pu Lungpau, Pu Thangkhai and Pu Savawma accompanied Watkin Robert from Lushai Hills. In Senvon village, they set up their first centre, and in course of time, the missionaries extended their activities to other villages and areas of Churachandpur (and beyond). The Christian missionaries began their evangelizing mission among the Zo people of Churachandpur in Lusei language. For quite sometime, the hymnbooks and the Bible written in Lusei language were used in church and mission schools.

As in other parts of the region, the missionaries made efforts to educate the Zo people by opening up mission schools.\textsuperscript{26} The missionaries also carried out humanitarian activities for social upliftment of the hill tribes. As the missionary activities progressed, different villages came to be influenced by the mission activities. One of the earliest Paite converted to Christianity was Pu Thangvung Guite from Phaitong village. He set up a sort of Christian school in March 3, 1915 at Phaitong village. Total number of Christian workers among Paite in 1915 was twenty-two.\textsuperscript{27} The number of Paite Christians increased gradually.

In the year 1930, the mission field headquarters was shifted from Lakhimpur (in Cachar) to old Churachand (also known as Mission Compound). The Maharaja of Manipur gave permission to North-East India General Mission (NEIGM) to occupy Mission Compound on the condition that only one English men should be there and

\textsuperscript{26}Most of the educational institutions run by the missionaries were primary school with the objectives of imparting the art of reading and writing so that the people would be able to read especially the Bible and songs.

\textsuperscript{27}Evangelical Baptist Convention Tangthu, EBC Secretariat Dorcas Hall, Convention Press, Lamka, Manipur, 1998, p. 6.
they should not preach Christianity among the Meitei. The mission compound was temporarily abandoned during the Second World War due to the advancing Japanese soldiers. After the end of the war, the NEIGM compound was reoccupied. The mission workers resumed their work. Church, school, hostels and houses were also reconstructed. The NEIGM compound became the centre of evangelization and literate culture in southern Manipur. In the early part of 1946 NEIGM had more than forty village schools (mostly primary schools) located in the area and their teachers numbering more than sixty. In addition to the Christians mission schools, there were also some lower primary schools established by the government. After schooling, some even went to Imphal and other places to pursue higher studies. By the time India became independent, a considerable number of educated elites were there among the Paite people.

**Tradition-Modernity Divide and the Triumph of Modern Forces**

The spread of Christianity and formal education initiated new changes in the Paite society. The attitudes and ethos of the people came to be molded by the ideas and beliefs of the church. The church became the centre of social gathering for the newly converted Christians. Persons connected with the mission emerged as a new elite in the Paite society. Some of these emerging elites were even employed by the

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British to help in their administrative activities.\textsuperscript{31} By the time of India's independence, the emerging Paite leaders/ elites were convinced about the need for western education for the uplift of their community.

The spread of Christianity and modern ideas had far-reaching impact on social interactions and power relations within the Paite tribe. The emergence of a new group of people created dual leadership situations: the traditional elites represented by the chiefs and his council of elders on the one side and the newly emerging Christianized modern elites on the other side. In other words, missionary activities created a definite rift between the newly converted Christians and non-Christians. To put it in the words of J H Hutton, the evangelizing process essentially drove a 'sword of dissension'.\textsuperscript{32} In such a social situation, it was but natural that the converts met stiff resistance especially from the influential traditional chiefs. As the traditional elites saw a threat to their authority and status they were determined to stop their villagers from becoming Christians. The traditional elites stood for maintaining the status quo as far as traditional socio-political structure was concerned. There were many instances of persecution faced by the newly converted Christians from non-Christians and the traditional Chiefs.\textsuperscript{33} The Christians were mocked, insulted and tortured by non-Christians. Some had their houses burnt or pulled down.\textsuperscript{34} For instance, the Christians fled from Sialbu village to different villages to avoid persecution by the chief. These Christians spread Christianity to the villages where they fled. As H Nengzachin put it, "just as the persecution intensified, the number of Christians multiplied".\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{34} Chinkholian Guite, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 66.
\textsuperscript{35} H Nengzachin, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 3.
For the church and the newly converted Christians, everything that was associated with traditional practices was viewed as something opposed to Christianity. The Christians believed that they had nothing to lose, and that they would only gain from the rejection of traditional practices. As such, the newly converted Christians began viewing drinking rice beer, worshiping of evil spirits, performing sacrifices and rituals, etc as taboos. The native Christians found in the missionaries their friends and supporters. As such, they rallied behind the missionaries. The evidence of this point can be seen in an incident that took place in Songtal village in 1942. On April 13, 1942, the people of Songtal village observed traditional sacrificial rites called Kosah. The Christians of Songtal were fined for not participating and contributing to the traditional rituals. The Christian wrote a complaint letter to Paul Rostad (NEIMG missionary at that time), wherein, they stated that they were even ready to move out of their village. Paul Rostad referred the matter to the President of the Manipur State Durbar. The President of the Manipur State Durbar soon issued the following instructions: “A Christian cannot be compelled to sacrifice to demons or to contribute specially to the expenses of such a sacrifice; nor can a non-Christian be compelled to stop sacrificing to demons”.

Even though there was stiff resistance from the chiefs and elders to the new faith and modern ideas, the traditional forces could not stand against the new forces in the long run. With the fast growth in number of Christians converts, the non-Christians had become minority in most of the Paite villages. The gradual increase of

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37 *Kosah* ritual involves killing of animal. Part of the killed animal was buried together with the dead man’s body. It was believed that the spirit of the buried animal (*Kosah ken*) follow or guide the spirit of the dead man and thus respected by *Sahnu*, which in turn opened the gate of death. ‘*Sahnu*’ was believed to have power to cause harm or misery to people. The ritual was believed to make the *Sahnu* happy - appease *Sahnu*. Refer T Gouzanang, *op. cit.*, pp.1-8.
the number of Christians discouraged the traditional chiefs from openly opposing Christianity. Moreover, with the emergence of new institutions and leaders some of the erstwhile traditional tribal leaders chose to swim with the new current. It was a painful experience especially for the chiefs and elders as it affected their traditional status and authority. Nevertheless, the traditional chiefs continued to enjoy the privileges that the institution of chieftainship bestowed on them. Despite the challenges that the new forces posed to traditions and customs of Paite, there appears to be some kind of compromise between tradition and modernity, with chiefs themselves converting to Christianity in course of time. Yet, it needs to say that the growth of modern forces could not completely eliminate customary practices. In a study of the Paite tribe, T Liankhohau has mentioned five cultural practices that the Paite people retained even after they became Christian. They are i) The traditional pattern of cultivation has been retained largely. No food habit has changed; ii) Kinship practices such as taking bride, formation of household council (Indongta) are not touched; iii) Bride price is retained with no fixed rate. Along with it, moutam and sialkhumsa are also retained; iv) Tousa is retained; v) Killing of domestic animals during Laangkhet ritual is replaced by offer of tea as a Christian practice.

**Development of Paite Print Language during Colonial Era**

Scholars like Benedict Anderson, Adrian Hastings, Paul R Brass have acknowledge the crucial role of language and literature in the emergence of conscious ethnic community. One of Anderson’s thesis about people’s ability to imagine

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41 T Liankhohau, *op. cit.*, p. 150.
themselves as members of a community (even nation) centered around the role of language, especially print language that became prominent with the arrival of print capitalism. Anderson says that print-capitalism made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves and to relate themselves to others in a profoundly new ways. Adrian Hastings considers literary development of a spoken vernacular as (almost) certainly the most influential and widespread single internal factor in shaping community consciousness. To Paul Brass, creation of a self-conscious language community out of a group of related speakers is the first stages in the development of conscious political community. Even though forces of modernization such as typewriter, print technology could transform oral language or dialects into script language, print technology and language by themselves are the objects. They become instruments and political tools for the community when emerging elites or intellectuals within the society intervene. Among the indigenous tribal societies of Africa, Asia, including northeast India, intervention of modern educated elites or intellectuals in the political discourses of community life is usually associated with the arrival of modernization. In northeast India, the emerging indigenous elites or intellectuals transformed the spoken dialects of the indigenous communities into script language. Most of these intellectuals were outsiders such as Christian missionaries or European anthropologists. The local emerging elites or intellectuals were also intimately involved in the process and worked hand in hand with their European counterparts as well. As L Lam Khan Piang pointed out in his work, Kinship, Territory and Politics: The Study of Identity Formation amongst the

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Zo, the introduction of print culture transformed various dialects of the Zo people into
print language and the language so developed became the anchor, which led to
development of distinct group identities among the Zo communities. Having the
Bible translated in their dialects became the social confirmation of their assertion of
separate identity, of the distinctiveness of the tribe. In this connection, the remark
made by Andrian Hastings on the impact of script in shaping the consciousness of
communities hitherto untouched by printing is worth noting. Hasting writes, “the
effect of a relatively small increase in the number of books in a community which has,
hitherto, had none or very few is far greater than people in a world used to a surfeit of
books can easily realize, and it extends far beyond the literate. Thus, the impact of a
vernacular literature in shaping the consciousness of communities hitherto untouched
by printing could be enormous”.

Within the Paite, the emerging elites soon consolidated their hold over the
society by occupying positions of importance and influence. As they were educated,
they began to command respect from the fellow village folks. The arrival of
Christianity and formal education initiated the desire to read and write especially the
scripture and hymns. It aroused the desire to have a written script and literature
among Paite. In 1903 with the assistance of Rev. David E Jones, one T Vialphung of
Kaihlam village in Manipur who was attending the school at Aizawl in those days
produced ‘Paite Bulbul’, Paite Primer in Roman script. In 1904 G A Grierson’s
Survey of different languages of northeastern India made reference to the language

45 L Lam Khan Piang, ‘Kinship, Territory and Politics: The Study of Identity Formation amongst the
46 Adrian Hastings, op. cit., p. 31. Also, see Donald Horowitz, ‘Symbolic Politics and Ethnic Status’, in
47 During those days people who had passed class eight were considered as highly educated and those
who had little education were also respected and feared. H Chin Khenthang, op. cit., p. 61.
48 David E Jones was a Christian missionary in Lushai Hills. T Liankholau, op. cit., p. 120.
specimen of the Paite. In the year 1942, the first Paite Khrisitian Labu (Paite Hymn book) in India was published in Manipur. Nengzachin also translated portions of the Bible in Paite. Growth of script language and the availability of some portions of the Bible and songbooks in Paite language contributed to the rapid progress of the community.\textsuperscript{49}

The development of scripts and books in Paite was followed by formation of Paite centric organizations in the state. The first organization formed was Siamsinpawlpi (formerly known as Paite Students Association). It was formed on January 13, 1947 at Mission Compound (NEIGM headquarters). As the organization was meant for the student community, it was placed under the charge of the students themselves. In course of time, organizations such as Paite National Council (1949), Manipur Christian Convention (1950), Paite Literature Society (1950), Young Paite Association (1953), etc., emerged one after another. The formation of organizations marked another important period in the historic development of the Paite community in Manipur. It initiated the emergence of students and youth leaders among the community. Several important elites of the community have had their association with one or more of such organizations.

\textbf{Status of Hill Areas on the Eve of Indian Independence}

Neither the Maharaja nor the State Durbar had any direct control over the administration of the hills areas of Manipur. When the British took over control of the princely state of Manipur in 1891, they created separate sets of administration for the plains and the hills. On May 15, 1907 the British revived the Manipur Durbar to

accelerate direct participation of the people in public affairs. However, the draft scheme made the position of the Maharaja and his Durbar subordinate to the imperial interests. The scheme was also silent about the representation of the hill tribes in the Durbar. Except that the Vice-President (usually British ICS officers) was given charge of the hill tribes, little was mentioned of the whole scheme.\textsuperscript{50}

Manipur, being a princely state, was outside the purview of the Government of India Act, 1935. Nevertheless, there was a proposal to bring Manipur under the federation scheme under the Government of India Act, 1935. When the question was being discussed, the Political Agent of Manipur suggested to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam to retain control over the Hills if the Maharaja decided to accede to the Federation on the ground that "if the state takes over the Hills, it will both neglect and oppress the hill men".\textsuperscript{51} The question of Manipur joining Burma upon its becoming separate Dominion was also discussed in the official circles. The Government of India readily agreed that, "If His Highness wishes strongly to leave India and join Burma, there is no objection to his putting forward the request".\textsuperscript{52} However, the Maharaja never made such a request as he thought it unwise to de-link himself from British India, which had provided unfettered protection.\textsuperscript{53} The advent of the Second World War kept the federal scheme at abeyance.

Towards the end of 1944, the indigenous tribal communities showed a great amount of political consciousness. To evolve some form of self-government for the

\textsuperscript{51} Cited in Bimal J Dev and Dilip K Lahari, Manipur: Culture and Politics, Mittal Publications, Delhi, 1987, p. 51 and 103.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., p. 104.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., p. 104.
tribals, the British government proposed to set up a Manipur Hill Tribes Committee for promoting inter-tribal fellowship and ensuring the material and social progress of the hill tribes. At the insistence of the Governor of Assam, the Maharaja agreed that the hill people should be allowed to exercise some system of local self-government in a form suitable to their local conditions. However, the Political Agent was of the opinion that since the hill tribes of Manipur are intermingled far more than elsewhere, a territorial rather than a tribal organization was the best solution. Accordingly, the President of the Manipur State Durbar made a plan to set up village and circle councils in hill areas to which the administration of hills could be gradually delegated.  

Though the concept of hill state did not take shape, the hill-valley cleavage surfaced at the time of transfer of power. Yet, the hill tribes displayed divergent responses to the political development. In June 1946, the Mao Nagas made it known that “the people would feel humiliated if the British Officers made them to step in Manipur state and their administration is put directly under the Manipur State Durbar”. The Tangkhuls were emphatic that on no account did they wish to be handed over to the Maharaja, but wished the existing arrangements to continue. Jessami, an Angami village also expressed their reluctance to be put under the Maharaja. The hill communities in the southern part of the state preferred to remain under state administration ‘with safeguards’. The Kukis were not averse to live together with the plain people under an agreed settlement.

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54 Ibid., p. 68.  
55 Ibid., p. 68.  
56 Ibid., p. 69.
With the failure of the plan to merge the hill tribes of Manipur with other hill tribes of Assam and Burma, it was considered desirable to evolve appropriate means whereby all powers exercised by the President of the State Durbar would be returned to the Maharaja by specifying safeguards against the exploitation of the hill people.\textsuperscript{57}

For this purpose, the President of the State Durbar favored simultaneous introduction of constitutional government in Manipur along with strengthening the base of self-government in the hills. Any idea of possible integration of the state with independent India was then ruled out, but the trump card of keeping the hill tribes separated from the mainstream of Manipur was retained.\textsuperscript{58}

On the eve of India’s independence, the Maharaja of Manipur formally inaugurated the Manipur State Constitution Making Committee on March 10, 1947. It consisted of two sub-committees, one to draft the State Constitution Act, 1947 and the other to draft Manipur Hill Peoples (Administration) Regulation Act, 1947. The latter sought to ensure local self-government for the hill areas. Even then, some of the hill leaders continued to express their reservations.

**Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947 and Hill Tribes**

With the passing of the Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947 Manipur became a constitutional monarchy. The constitution brought the hills and plains of Manipur into the fold of common administrative framework. The Manipur State Constitution Act was extended to the whole of the state, except in areas which were under the provisions of the Manipur Hill Peoples (Administration) Regulation Act, 1947. The constitution consisted of eleven chapters. Chapter III and IV of the constitution dealt

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., p. 69.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., p. 107.
with the powers, position and nature of the executive body (Council of Ministers) and the State Assembly respectively. According to the provisions of the constitution, the Council of Ministers was to consist of seven members- Chief Minister and other six ministers. Out of the seven seats, two are reserved for representatives from the hills. The members of the Council of Ministers are to be elected by the members of the State Assembly. The State Assembly members are to be elected by the people for a period of three years. The members are to be elected based on adult franchise and on the principle of 'joint electorate'.

As the British departure became imminent, the Maharaja abolished the Manipur State Durbar on July 1, 1947. An interim government known as the State Council of Ministry was formed on August 14, 1947. The Council took over the responsibility of administration of the state from the British after their departure. This Interim Council lasted until October 7, 1948. It may be noted that the state political parties were not happy with the way the government i.e. Interim Council was formed. They desired to establish a responsible government. Under pressure from the people and political parties, the Maharaja made an official announcement on November 10, 1947 that full responsible government would be installed by April 1948.59

On November 14, 1947, Franchise Sub-Committee was formed to look after all election matters.60 The committee prepared electoral rules and electoral roll. The committee resolved to follow single constituency system in the election. The committee also divided the state into a number of assembly constituencies. The valley area was divided into twenty-nine assembly constituencies. The whole hill area was

60 Ibid., pp. 175-193.
divided into eighteen assembly constituencies. The first State Assembly election based on adult franchise was held on June 11, 1948. As no party could secure absolute majority, a coalition ministry was formed with Maharaja Kukar Priyabrata Singh as the first elected Chief Minister. The other members of the ministry were Major R Khathing, Arambam Ibotomcha Singh, Dr. Ningthoujam Leiren Singh, Ayekpam Gourabhdhu Singh, Teba Kilong, T C Tiankham (first Speaker), and Bokul Singh (Deputy Speaker). With the formal inauguration of the maiden session of the Assembly by the Maharaja on October 18, 1948, the first Manipur Legislative Assembly under the Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947 was formed.

For administration of the hill areas, the Manipur State Hill Peoples (Administration) Regulation Act, 1947 was passed. This Act gave the administration of hill areas to the Maharaja in Council and the power was exercised in accordance with the Constitution Act, 1947 of the State and the provisions of the Hill Peoples’ Regulation Act, 1947. The hill areas were placed under a minister who was in-charge of hill affairs. Manipur State Hill Peoples (Administration) Regulation Act, 1947 did not give self-government in the hill areas. It only created statutory local authorities in the form of village authorities. Under the provision of the Act, village authority can be constituted in any village if there are twenty tax-paying houses. After the enactment of this Act, village authority was constituted in most of the hill areas. The Act did not have any effect on the position of the chief. The chief still enjoyed the traditional power of nominating members in the village authorities. The members of the village authority were nominated in accordance with the tradition and customs of the village. As such, it consisted of the village chief and his council of elders. The primary function of the village authority was the maintenance of law and order within its
jurisdiction. In that capacity, it was responsible for the administration of justice. In the
discharge of its judicial functions, the village authority was guided by customary laws/
practices of the village. The Manipur State Hill Peoples (Administration) Regulation
Act created a four-tier structure of administration of justice in civil and criminal cases.
These are court of village authority at the village level, court of circle authorities for a
group of villages, a hill-bench at Imphal, and a chief court\textsuperscript{61} stationed at the capital of
the state. At village level, the village chief along with the village authority functioned
as the village court.\textsuperscript{62}

For the purpose of administration, the Hill Peoples (Administration)
Regulation Act, 1947 also envisaged a higher authority called Circle Authority.
According to the provisions of the Act, all villages in the hill areas were grouped into
nine circles and sub-divisions. For each circle, a Circle Authority was constituted. The
Circle Authority was the highest authority with regard to administration and
maintenance of law and order within the circle. It consisted of a Circle Officer and a
Council of five members. The village authorities falling within the Circle elected the
members. This for the first time introduced democratic elements at the village level.
The elections to Circle Authority were not carried out on the principle of adult
franchise. Instead, the number of tax-paying houses in a village determined the
number of voters. For every village with twenty to fifty tax-paying houses, the
number of vote was fixed at one. If the tax-paying houses number more than fifty but
less than hundred, the village can have two votes. According to clause 12 of the Hill
Peoples (Administration) Regulation Act, 1947, the Circle Authority was responsible

\textsuperscript{61} The Chief Court means the chief court of Manipur State as constituted under the Manipur State
Courts Act 1947 for the trial of cases or suits to which hill people are a party.
for the administration of lower and primary education, construction and the maintenance of all bridle paths and bridges, the maintenance of land records, collection of taxes on lands and other immovable property, etc. It also had the power to hear appeals against the decisions of the village authorities. The over all administration of each Circle Authority was placed in the hands of Sub-Divisional Officer, who had the final authority in matters concerning the election and constitution of the Circle Authority. The hill areas of the state were administered in accordance with the provisions of the Hill Peoples (Administration) Regulation Act, 1947 until 1949, the year Manipur merged into the Indian Union.

Merger of Manipur with Indian Union and Its Impact on Hill Tribes

Manipur merged with the Indian Union in the year 1949 and the state became a Part C State administered by the Union Government through the Chief Commissioner (under Articles 239-42, Part IX of the Constitution of India). The Legislative Assembly formed under the Manipur Constitution Act, 1947 was dissolved and a provision for the Legislature and a Council of Ministers was made under the Part C States laws. It may be noted that even after Manipur merged with India the administrative system under the Hill People’s Act remained in force for some time. The hill bench and the hill courts were abolished in 1950 and the circle bench in 1955. The political arrangements under the aegis of Part-C States continued until the First General Election of India in 1952, wherein the people of the state also participated to elect two representatives – one for Inner Manipur Parliamentary constituency and the other for Outer Manipur Parliamentary constituency. For

63 The merger agreement was signed between the Maharaja of Manipur, Bodh Chandra and the Governor General of India at Shillong on September 21, 1949.
election to the state legislature, an electoral college of thirty members was constituted. In the year 1957 the Territorial Council formed under the Territorial Council Act, 1956 replaced the electoral college. Manipur became a full-fledged state of India on February 1, 1972 and the strength of the Legislative Assembly was raised to sixty.

An analysis of the various legislations passed and adopted by the Indian parliament and Manipur state legislature will be useful to understand the political setting in which the modern Paite elites in particular and the hill communities in general engaged.

**Manipur Village Authorities (in Hill Areas) Act, 1956**

The Indian Parliament passed Manipur Village Authorities (in Hill Areas) Act, 1956 for the administration of the hill areas of the state. The Act that came into effect from 1957 replaced the Manipur State Hill Peoples (Administration) Regulation Act, 1947. The Act introduced new chapters in the administration of the hill areas. One important change that came out of it was the introduction of democracy at the grass root level. Unlike the Hill Peoples (Administration) Regulation Act of 1947 where the chiefs based on the customs and traditions of the village nominated the members of the Village Authority, the new Act provided for creation of elected Village Authority. All the members of the Village Authority were to be elected based on adult franchise. According to the provisions of the Act, the strength and composition of Village Authority depended on the number of tax paying households. A village that had twenty to sixty tax paying houses can have five member Village Authorities. In a village of sixty to hundred tax-paying houses, the village can have seven members.

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For hundred to one hundred and fifty, the strength of Village Authority was ten. The Act made the traditional village chief the ex-officio chairman of the elected Village Authority. The main function of the Village Authority was to maintain law and order.

The Act of 1956 also provided for the setting up of separate Village Courts. It authorized the head of the state to appoint two or more members of the Village Authority to act as the Village Court. Earlier the chief along with the Village Authority functioned as the Village Court. Under the new Act, if the chief was not a member of the court he could not preside over it. The Village Court had jurisdiction both in civil and criminal cases as specified in the Code of Criminal Procedure of 1898 and the Code of Civil Procedure of 1908.\(^\text{65}\)

Even though traditional institution of chieftainship continued to exist in the hill areas of Manipur with the enforcement of Manipur Village Authorities (in Hill Areas) Act, 1956 it places certain restrictions on the powers of the chief. The introduction of election process certainly robbed away the chief’s overriding or unquestioned prerogative of nominating any one of his villagers to be his councilors.\(^\text{66}\) The judicial and administrative powers of the chiefs were also transferred to the elected Village Authority.

**Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act, 1960**

Another significant legislative measure which has an important bearing on the hill people and land relations in the state of Manipur was the passing of Manipur Land

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Revenue and Land Reforms Act (in short, MLR&LR Act,) 1960. The passing of the Act could be considered as an attempt by the government to introduce agrarian reform in the state. The MLR&LR Act, 1960 has been implemented only in the plain areas of the state. The government, however, can extend the whole or any part or any section of the Act to any hill areas of Manipur by invoking section 2 (i) of the Act. According to section 2 (i) of the Act the term ‘hill areas’ means such areas in the hill-tracts of the state of Manipur as the state government may by notification in the official gazette declare to be hill areas. As a result, a hill area does not simply constitute a ‘hill area’ by virtue of its being located in the hill districts. It requires declaration by notification in the official gazette. By invoking the said section of the Act, the state government applied the MLR&LR Act, 1960 to about six hundred sixty five villages (as of 1983). Out of the six hundred sixty five villages, five hundred fifty villages are situated in the plain districts and the rest one hundred and five in the hill districts. In Lamka (Churachandpur) sub-division the said Act was extended to eighty-nine villages in 1962 vide notification No. 142/12/60-M on 22/2/62. These villages are located in the fringe of Manipur valley of the Churachandpur sub-division.

The Act also contained ‘Special Provision Regarding Scheduled Tribes’ of the state under section 158. This section deals with transfer of land by the hill tribes. It prohibits the hill communities to transfer land to non-tribal people. If any non-tribal desires to acquire or buy land in the hill areas they have to get permission from the Deputy Commissioner. Before giving such permission, the Deputy Commissioner has

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to secure the consent of the members of the concerned District Council. However, clause (c) of the same section allows the mortgage or transfer of land to a cooperative.

As the MLR&LR Act, 1960 is not extended to cover all the hill areas in the state, the government could not carry out land survey. Any attempt on the part of the government to extend the Act in the hill areas met with stiff resistance especially from the village chiefs. There has been an apprehension among the hill communities of the state that application of the Act in the hill districts would dispossess them of whatever productive assets they have to the plain people who are politically and economically superior to them. The hill communities are aware of their weak and unenviable economic position vis-à-vis the plain people. They are also aware of their numerical disadvantage. It is feared that if the Act is implemented in the hill areas, the lands that had hitherto been protected from the outsiders would become purchasable commodity. Such arrangement in the end might result in the total displacement of the Zo communities from their own lands. The apprehension is quite deep rooted and widespread among all the Zo people of Manipur.

Manipur Hill Areas (Acquisition of Chief’s Rights) Act, 1967

In 1947 the people of Tedim area in the Chin Hills, Burma launched an agitation for the abolition of chiefship. The government of Burma responded by appointing a Commission of enquiry in February 1948. The Commission recommended the abolition of chiefship and prescribed the scale of compensation to be paid to the chiefs. Towards the end of British rule the feeling of resentment against

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the chiefs started gaining ground all over the Lushai Hills as well. Finally, the Assam government on August 16, 1954 abolished the chiefship in Lushai Hills. The abolition of institution of chiefship in the then Lushai Hills was possible because of mass based political movement of the Mizos against their chiefs. In Manipur, also discontentment against chiefship by certain section of Zo people can be seen since the time of India’s independence. They were influenced by the development that took place in the Chin Hills and the then Lushai hills. There were instances where the villagers not only declined to pay taxes to the chiefs, but also refused to work for them. In 1948 in Lungthul village in Singngat sub-division of Churachandpur one person named Lungchinpau refused to give saliang (meat tax i.e. fore leg of wild animal killed) to Liankhomang, the chief of the village. The chief filed a court case against Lungchinpau wherein the chief claimed one mithun and also the cost be paid to him by the defendant for failing to give saliang. The Circle Officer ordered for payment of the claim to the plaintiff by the defendant. The chiefs also brought the case to the notice of the government. As a result, the Chief Commissioner of Manipur issued an order stating that payment of the dues (i.e. Buhsun and Saliang to the chiefs as the case may be) would continue at the existing rate until further orders. However, about confiscation of houses, gardens and other properties of villagers by the chief when the villagers migrated to another village and the building of the houses of chiefs using forced labor were kept in abeyance. In spite of the orders issued by the government, the village chiefs in most of the villages turned a deaf ear to the order of the government and court verdicts. Moreover, the executive also did not show any interest in enforcing those orders. Even though several cases of non-payment of taxes by the people to the chiefs were witnessed among the hill communities, the kind of popular

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72 T Thangkhollim Haokip, 1995, op. cit., p. 78.
73 Chinkholian Guite, op. cit., pp. 94-95.
political offensive as was witnessed in the then Lushai Hills was absent in the hills of Manipur.

There were political attempts to abolish institution of chiefship in the state. In the year 1949, the State Congress Committee of Manipur resolved to abolish the customary rights of the chiefs and passed a resolution to that effect. In spite of the Congress resolution the institution of chiefship continue to survive. Another attempt to abolish chiefship on the part of the government through legislation was seen in the year 1967. When the government attempted to extend the MLR&LR Act, 1960 to the hill districts, it realized the problems created by the existence of institution of chieftainship. According to the customs of the Zo communities, all land in the village belonged to the village chief. Because of this, the chiefs had challenged the application of the MLR&LR Act, 1960 in the hill districts of the state on the ground that the government encroaches upon the land of the hill communities. It was legally not tenable to extend the Act to the hill areas without first abolishing the ownership rights of the chiefs.

Realizing the legal problems created by the existence of chieftainship (that stood in the way of implementing MLR&LR Act, 1960 in the hill areas) the government of Manipur made an attempt to abolish the traditional institution of chieftainship in the hill areas. With this objective, the government passed Manipur Hill Areas (Acquisition of Chief's Rights) Act, 1967. The Act acknowledged the existing rights of the chiefs. The objective of this bill was to acquire the rights and

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75 For a discussion on problems of extension of the Act, see J N Das, *op. cit.*
title of the chiefs in and over land in the hill areas by offering compensation to the chiefs. Another objective of the Act was to introduce land reforms with a view to distribute land to the tillers. Through the Act, the government purported to root out communal or chief ownership over the land and introduce individual ownership rights. The main argument in favour of the Act was that the existing land tenure system in the state (read as hill) hinders achieving progressive / socialistic goals. The existing mode of cultivation with its ownership structure appears to have no longer sustained the economy of the people. The cultivators have no permanent rights over the land they cultivated. The tenants-at-will also paid a part of their produce to the chief as rent. The mode of cultivation in the hill areas leaves no incentive for the cultivators / people to develop the land. Adopting individual ownership rights over the land may be more in tune with production and productivity in the long run. Such a permanent ownership may strengthen the economic base of the poor cultivators.

Even though the Manipur Hill Areas (Acquisition of Chief's Rights) Act, 1967 bill was passed, the government could not enforce it till today due to certain inherent problems in the Act. As one scholar put it, “Implementation of the Act had to be kept in abeyance because of intricacies involved in the matter of land ownership and the possible displacement of traditional loyalty structure”.

Although some of the hill people supported the move of the state government, many were against it. The hill communities look at the Act as an attempt on the part of the government to take away the land of the hill communities. They see it as a

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76 Among the Naga tribes the community owns the land while among the Zo people (Kuki-Zomi) land belongs to the chiefs.


political attempt by the dominant Meitei community to abolish the traditional institution of chieftainship. They are afraid of losing their traditional land and along with it their security and identity. As land in the hill areas of the state belongs to the indigenous tribal communities, abolition of chieftainship would tantamount to loss of the rights to claim land as theirs. Chinkholian, a Zomi scholar states, "The safety of our land till today was due to our institution of chieftainship." He further says that it may not be good to have the institution of chieftainship forever. However, before chieftainship is abolished, the hill districts should first be brought under Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The existing rule (i.e. District Council Act, 1971) which govern the five-hill districts in the state have not, in the true sense, protect the customs, tradition, culture, identity and interest of the hill tribes. Another important reason for non-implementation of the Act was due to its discriminatory nature. The Chief Minister of Manipur pointed this out in a meeting of the Deputy Commissioners on 1983. As the Chief Minister pointed out the provisions of the said Act, 1967, as it stood at the moment were applicable only to the non-Nagas communities of the state. He then asked the Revenue Department to make suitable amendment to make the same applicable to all chiefs of other tribes also, otherwise, the provisions of the Act would be discriminatory and it would be difficult to enforce it.

Due to non-implementation of the Act, the institution of chieftainship continues to exist in the hills. However, its status and authority has been reduced largely. The contemporary chief of the 'Zo people' no longer enjoys special position. The chiefs remain the village chiefs. They also acted as the ex-officio chairmen of the Village Authority. However, the chief no longer enjoys special powers. Nevertheless,

79 G Chinkholian, op. cit., pp. 300-304.
80 Ibid., pp. 300-304.
the institution ensured that the provision of the Manipur Hill Areas (Acquisition of Chief’s Rights) Act, 1967 and the MLR&LR Act, 1960 also could not be implemented in the hill areas of Manipur.

Manipur (Hill Areas) District Council Act, 1971

Another significant political development in the state of Manipur relevant to the hill communities was the passing of the Manipur (Hill Areas) District Council Act in 1971 by the Indian Parliament. This Act was a package deal for the entire hill areas of Manipur. The Act made provisions for the establishment of District Council in the hill areas. The District Council Rules were framed in the year 1972, which came into effect from August 1973. The Act divided the hill areas into six Autonomous Districts each with a District Council. According to the provisions of the Act, each District Council consists of eighteen elected and two nominated members. The term of the District Council was fixed for five years. The elections to the District Council were based on adult franchise.

The Manipur (Hill Areas) District Council Act, 1971 bestowed several responsibilities and functions to these District Councils. In the executive field, the District Council has been given the powers to manage matters like maintenance and management of property- movable and immovable and institutions as may be transferred to the Council by the administrator; the construction, repair and maintenance of roads, bridges, canals and buildings; the establishment, management and maintenance of primary schools, dispensaries, ponds, markets and fairs; the preservation, protection and improvement of livestock and prevention of animal
diseases, public health and sanitation; the management of any forest except the
reserved forest; the regulation of the practice of jhum or other forms of shifting
cultivation, etc.  

In the legislative field, the District Council enjoys limited powers. Its power
has been in the nature of recommendation. In that capacity, the District Council can
make recommendation on matters, which concern members of the schedule tribes
such as succession and appointment of chiefs, inheritance of property, marriage and
divorce, and social customs.

In the field of finance, the District Council has been given the powers to raise
its own council funds. They are given exclusive powers to levy taxes on different
professions, trades, jobs; on animals and vehicles and boats; on the entry of goods into
market for the sale therein and tolls on passengers and goods carried on ferries;
maintenance of schools, dispensaries, roads and any other tax falling under List II of
the Seventh Schedule to the Constitution of India which the legislature of the state,
may, by law, empower the District Council to levy. The District Council may also fix
and levy schools fees and fees for the use of or benefit derived from any of the works
done or service rendered under paragraph 29 of the Act.

The first elections to the District Councils were held in 1973 in the state. In
this election, the indigenous tribal communities participated with enthusiasm. It may

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however be noted that the provisions of the District Council were not up to the expectations of the hill communities. Different ethnic communities and student organizations of the state have been demanding that the administration of the hill areas of Manipur should be brought under Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. As a part of the demand for administration of the hill districts of Manipur under the provisions of the Sixth schedule of the Indian constitution, the Sixth Schedule Demand Committee, Manipur (SSDCM) boycotted elections to the District Councils in the year 1984. Elections, which was not held since then, was conducted again in May 2010 amid protest and boycott from the indigenous hill communities.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it is evident that a number of factors and forces have contributed to the emergence and growth of modern Paite elites. In one sense, the modern Paite elites are the products of the onset of modernization, especially Christianity and modern education in the early part of the twentieth century. Prior to the coming of Christianity, the traditional elites occupied dominant position in the society in social, political and cultural life of the people. Under the impact of Christianity and modern education, a new group of people emerged within the society. Consequently, the traditional social values and system, which was mostly intact for centuries, began to experience a steady change. Churches and schools became new centres of social gathering for the newly converted Christians, thus, replacing the traditional institutions.
The newly emerging Paite elites began to command respect from the fellow village folks. They soon consolidated their hold over the society by occupying positions of importance and influence. Despite the challenges that the new forces posed to traditions and customs of Paite, there appears to be some kind of compromise between tradition and modernity, with chiefs themselves converting to Christianity in course of time. Moreover, modern forces could not completely eliminate customary practices.

By the time India became independent, a considerable number of modern elites had emerged among the Paite. Under their leadership and initiatives, vernacular language and literature in Paite began to grow. Language consciousness, the growth of print media and spread of Christianity saw the gradual progress of the community. The modern Paite elites were also instrumental in the formation of different Paite centric organizations, which played an important role in the development of the Paite community in Manipur and contributed to the emergence of students and youth leaders among the Paite.

Apart from the structural changes mentioned above, the changing political situation in the hills of Manipur since India’s independence also influenced the political outlook and dynamics of the modern Paite elites. This political transformation of the state from hereditary monarchy to constitutional monarchy saw the induction of the indigenous tribal communities in the political administration of the state. The subsequent transformation of the state from constitutional monarchy to democratic form of government under the Indian Union further increased political participation of the hill people and led to the emergence of modern political elite
among the hill communities of the state. As parliamentary democratic form of
government demands sending representatives to the Union Government and to the
State Legislature, hither traditional communities also began to view it as a matter of
prestige to have their community members represented in the house. This resulted in
competition for political power between different ethnic communities or elites. The
government Acts such as Manipur Village Authorities (in Hill Areas) Act, 1956,
Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act, 1960, and Manipur (Hill Areas)
District Council Act, 1971 etc., shaped the ethnic political dynamics of the indigenous
hill communities, including that of the Paite.