Chapter - V

SOCIO-POLITICAL SYSTEM

Unlike their congeners and neighbours, their polity was somewhat democratic.
CHAPTER - V

SOCIO-POLITICAL SYSTEM

In order to acquire better understanding and deeper knowledge of the sentimental and behavioural aspects of the people, we shall concern ourselves with some of the most important socio-political institutions in this section of our study.

Let us first observe the family and in sequence the clan, village chief, village organisation and administration.

The Vaiphei Family:

As we all know, the family is the oldest and smallest unit of Vaiphei’s socio-political institution. Without doubt, the first socio-political unit is the family or ‘household’.

A Vaiphei family generally consists of a husband and his wife their married and unmarried offsprings. The husband is the head of the family. His old parents may also be living with him. Unlike some other Zo tribes the eldest son and his wife are highly regarded and respected by their siblings next to the father and mother. In fact the eldest son gets all the right of inheritance and is at liberty of sharing it or not with his other younger brother(s).
Structurally, a Vaiphei family is in the middle course between the nuclear family of the Western countries and compound or joint family of the Eastern countries. It is partly nuclear in the sense that members of the joint family breaks up when the younger brother(s) entered into conjugal life and sets up new home with the assistance of the eldest son. The joint family is practised rarely except when there is no alternative, i.e. because of poverty, physical handicaps etc.

Having described the general structure of a typical family and the mode of formation of new families, we shall now observe the functions and powers of the head of the Vaiphei family.

To be candid, the Vaiphei family is strictly and purely patriarchal. The father is a bonafide patriarch with an absolute authority over his family. As such, he has certain duties, responsibilities and powers.

The economy of the family is mainly depended upon how much he laboured. He must provide food, look after and maintain the position of the family. Laborious, intelligent, brave and eloquent father or head of family is respected even outside this small institution and these qualities may entitle him to an important position in the clan, village and tribe. He is also the family priest and performs his duties during festivals and other ceremonies. He distributes among the different house-holds of his clan the meat of the animal killed or sacrificed for his family during a special ceremony. The father, as the head, occupies a leading role in the marriage of his sons and daughters with the assistance of his clan. Apart from these duties within the family, he also represents his family in the clan meetings and in courts.

Another indispensable duty and responsibility of the head of the family is training up the elder male issues. He is an instructor for the male offsprings. He must teach them the art and techniques of weeding, cropping, hunting animals, building houses, crafts etc.
From him, the children learnt the customs and culture of their clan and tribe. In the true sense, unlike other tribals, the father is not regarded only as the head but a Godfather for the whole family members. His decree is venerated by all the members of the family. His orders or decisions are carried out promptly with no grumbling. So a sluggard and an inefficient father is a curse for the family.

As hinted already, after the death of the father the eldest son or ‘Insung-Uupa’ and his wife (Insung-Uunu) are responsible as much as the father. Sometime, a happy family breaks-up after the death of the father due to the inefficacy of the Insung-Uupa and Uunu. Such splitting of a Vaiphei family often occurred where the eldest son turned out to be a ‘Thai-ne-lou’ (henpeck). Even during the lifetime of the father, such incident occurred where the Insung-Uupa and Uunu were cursed with jealousy and covetousness. In such case, the father, mother and their younger children move out of the house to set up new home. However, if the head is bold and intelligent enough, with the co-operation of the younger son (s) and his clan members such wicked and heartless Uupa and Uunu are ousted in a ‘Knock-out system’ from the parental home.

In other words, it can be said that the socio-political system of the family is both rigid and flexible to some extent, depending upon the affairs in the family. In fact, the welfare of a Vaiphei family is completely depended upon the sagacity of the ‘Insung-Paper’ (father/head) and the humanity of the ‘Insung-Uupa’ and ‘Uunu’. And also the complacency or amicability of the younger children is obligatory and as well indispensable to build an integrated and welfare family.

Having got informations about the structure of a Vaiphei family and the role played by the father and eldest married son, we shall now observe the position or role of women in Vaiphei society (or family). Her position in the family is next to the father. Majority of household affairs are in her hands. She looks after the children, weaves cloth for the
entire family, passes the art of weaving into her daughters, stores food for a rainy day, brews rice beer (Zu-Ting/ Zu-pi) and rice wine (Zu-kha) for her husband and his friends, dries tobacco for his pipe and feeds the pigs, poultry and cattle, cooks the food, portions out the food and feeds the children, fetches water in long bamboo pipes from the distant village water supply, helps her husband chop wood in the jungle for fuel and carry it all the way home, pounds paddy, makes rice-cakes and other delicacies for the family. In addition she takes her fair share in jhumming land for cultivation, digging the paddy fields, transplanting paddy and protecting the growing crops from birds and other destructive animals. Laziness is a luxury among these hard worked, or to be nearer the truth, overworked women. When not engaged in difficult work or when not on their feet, they may be seen bending over their looms or some needle-work. The lady of the house is the last to retire at night and the first to rise long before the crack of dawn.¹

In a family where the sons are married, the mother of the family will carry the grand-children or will take care of them while the daughter(s)-in-law are busy in household affairs. At the same time, the mother (In-Teknu/In-neipi) is solely responsible in making a peaceful relation between her daughter-in-law (Mou) and female offsprings (Cha-Nu).

The mother is always assisted by the elder daughters in pounding and husking rice, weaving, chopping wood as well as in odd jobs around the house. The younger daughters must look after their baby brothers and sisters generally. The little boys must fetch water or start going to the fields or get fodder for the animals.²

A Vaiphei woman, like the Ao woman quoted by Mills: "Her position is not whit inferior to that of man. She always has her clan behind her and were a bad-tempered husband to bully his wife he would soon have a swarm of angry in-laws buzzing round..."
his cars. Indeed, 'even if she be married there are her brothers and clan relatives and they come to her rescue whenever she is in any trouble or danger' in her in-laws house. If she has no brother(s), her clan relatives will come to her rescue.

All her life a woman enjoys considerable freedom. She is allowed to participate freely in the singing and dancing during festivals. Another point that deserve to mention is that, when the tired husband came home with the kill after a hunt, she had to entertain the friends who accompanied him or came to celebrate his achievement. Thus we see that a Vaiphei woman has high and secure status in her society and the family centres round her.

The Clan:

The family is a closely knit unit but at the same time it cannot be denied that it is also a very small unit and as such would prove ineffective, specially in the primitive society, in case of wars, raids and head-hunting. To present an effective front to all external aggression, several families would unite on a particular basis, thus forming a clan. Any clan can be trace back to a single family which has multiplied into numerous families and which in turn have managed to stay connected. Generally, two or more such clans form a village and also, a tribe. To speak about Vaiphei, now there are more than fifty clan and sub-clan descended from NEILUT, BAITE (PAUTE) and VANGLOK (VANGUA) who are placed as the eldest, third and youngest sons of SUANIAK. (See also Annexures - XI and XVII).

Thus the clan or kinship is a continuation of the family unit on the paternal side. Commonly bearing the same surname and supposed to have a common ancestor. Like the head of the original family each clan also has its head called 'Phungpi-Uupa' (head of the clan). There is no specified qualification except he should be the eldest surviving male (not female) of the clan in question. In case of his death the office goes to his eldest surviving son or, if he has no son, to his next brother and so on.
There is no fixed term or period to hold the office of the clan headmanship. However, there are two conditions of deprivation from the headmanship. If he or his eldest son is insane or mentally retarded, he or his son may be deprived from the clan headmanship. Secondly, there is also a form of voluntary relinquishment of his office by the clan head if he finds himself too infirm because of old age or any other cause to discharge his several duties efficiently. He then officially asks his eldest son to take over but is consulted by the entire clan on various matters till his death. If, of course, besides fulfilling this main condition the person in question has other qualities such as leadership and integrity, he makes an efficient head indeed. On the other hand if unfortunately the clan head is a man of little worth and many vices, he still remains the head of the clan by virtue of the law of primogeniture much to the chagrin and disgrace of the entire clan whose position naturally goes down in the village.7

Many a time the headmanship of a clan passes from one family to another in the same clan when the head of the clan dies without a male issue.8

In Vaiphei society, the ‘Phungpi-Uupa’ is immensely regarded and respected. Of course, great respect is shown to him by all his clan members residing in different places. By virtue of his being the head of the clan, when a member from his clan kills a wild beast, he is given the sliced flesh from the spine of that killed animal. Such offering is called ‘Sating, or Sa-jung’ which is more compulsory than obligatory.

This, ‘Sating’ or ‘Sa-jung’ is the only privilege or award entitled to him as the head of the clan. However, in regards to powers and functions, he is much authoritative as the father or the first born son in a family. He has various powers and also several functions to perform. Indeed, the clan is a composition of many family and like any other big family it has various problems of its own. The clan members also have many duties
towards each other at the time of marriage, death, harvests, etc. Marriage would mean planning the feast and festivities in detail; death mean observing 'Inn-Thiansak' and 'Thi-An-sia' and helping with burial and erection of a memorial; and small families or families with no young boys and girls may require help for harvesting crops.

Any plan or scheme concerned with the whole clan member is carried out only with the consent of the head of the clan. The decision or decree of the head of the clan is profusely venerated by the clan members. Cases such as adultery, divorce, theft, murder, land disputes, etc., within the clan are settled by the clan head with the assistant of elderly and sagacious members of the clan. Naturally and traditionally, as the Vaipheis have a common trait of obeisance and great respect for their elders, the clan head occupies an august place in the society.

Usually, the clan meetings are held in the evenings around a fire in the house of the Phungpi-Uupa or clan head. He is both the host and chairman. He is also the main spokesman. He ascertains the viewpoints of his man and is speaking on behalf of his clan members later at the village meeting. This saves much time and confusion which needs must follow if every man wishes to speak for himself. There are occasions when the village Chief holds a meeting of all the heads of the clans of his village. He may have some news, information or instructions to give to the villagers. He conveys this through the clan heads who in turn convey it to other member of their clan when a meeting is held. Thus the clan head is also the vital link between his clan and the rest of the village and indeed between the clan and Village Chief too.

Truly speaking, the clan is a friend in time of need. If someone's house is burnt down, the members of his clan would not just sit or stand there looking only sympathetic. They would set about with one accord to build a new one for him. If his harvests have been poor, instead of barren sympathetic shrugs, he is given grain for his family. If
a theft has occurred in his house, his entire clan would worry and try to hunt out the thief. Indeed, it is his clan that would aid him in every distress not only during his lifetime but also in the event of his death. It would look after and even adopt his children if that is the best thing in the circumstances. Suppose, if the wife of the death husband remarries, the second husband may take upon himself the guardianship of the children. But, if he does not and neglects them, the clan head usually provides a foster home for them within the clan. Thus the clan play a vital role in the social and political life of the Vaipheis.

Before we curtail our course, let us note an interesting fact, which is also a very important one. To speak unreservedly, if one is purely the flesh and blood of a particular or one of the clan of Vaiphei, automatically he is a member of that clan. But in the case of Vaiphei tribe, there existed a number of naturalised clan or naturalised members. In regards to naturalisation, there are two types. The first type is termed ‘SA-PHUN’ or ‘IN-CHENG’ or ‘TOU-KAI’ and second is ‘KI-JAWL’ or ‘JAWL-AH-KIMAN’ or ‘SUAPI-LAIJAWM-AH-KI-EN’.

Usually, the conditions of the first type ‘Sa-Phun’ are as follow: (i) They retained or carried on the name of their heirless master (whom they claimed as their progenitor) as their clan name: (ii) They claimed to be the descendants of one who was issueless but not retained his name as their clan. The word ‘master’ is used because most of these naturalised clan members were slaves, servants, refugees, orphans, etc. Whatever the case may be, Vaiphei elders, as cited already in chapter - II, were too conservative and reserved that no one within the Vaiphei community could traced out anymore the exact community from where these naturalised people came from and which one is (are) naturalised clan (s). The only information we could pick out from resourceful and knowledgeable elders is that almost half of the Vaiphei population is sprouted from unknown progenitors. Though this description may be a little too emphatic, it may hold some truth in it. Even Pu. KhualChin (former Chief of Nampalaung, Kabaw-valley), once stated to the
author that “though many of us claimed to be the descendants of Suantak, almost half of us are fake (naturalised)”.

The second type ‘Ki-jawl’ or ‘Suapi-Laizawm Ah-ki-En’ is simply sprouted from bonded friendship. There are only two such clan, namely- Hanniang and Thangngeu. These clans, though embraced the tribe Vaiphei linguistically and culturally from time immemorial, they preserved and maintained their distinct genealogy.

According to oral history, how Hanniang and Thangngeu (who were said to be the offsprings of CHANGSAN) become members of Vaiphei is related like this: It begins in Khaw-Zim. Once, while the chief of Khaw-Zim (TINVUK) was out into a distant deepwood with the volunteers of the village, the Pawi warriors raided his village and killed his widowed-mother in the most heinous manner. A large twig was thrust into her private part even after they had chopped her to death. As a result, Tinvuk made public that his treasured ‘Falcon and Brine-Spring’ shall be rewarded to whosoever could take the revenge of his mother. On hearing the proclamation, Mauvum (Sialiap clan) and Vang Seng (Thangniang) sets out from Khaw-Vaiphei, and the two brothers Hanniang and Thangngeu followed suit. Fortunately, the four companions brought a nob of an enemy to Tinvuk after few days hunt. However, in accordant to the custom, the four-membered squad rendered their rewards (Falcon and brine-spring) to the ‘Phungpi-Uupa’ (the chief of Khaw-Vaiphei).

Thereat, Vang Seng (Thangniang-clan), the eldest of the four said, “Now, as we had rendered our gallantry-awards to our ‘Uupa’ we are left empty with nothing to share among ourselves. But let not any element in the universe severed the tie of our friendship. Let no road departed us. Shall we share our joys and sorrows like brothers from one blood-one womb until the Ngun-Tui (Manipur river in Chin Hills) reversed its course”. From thereon, Hanniang and Thangngeu brothers adopted all the characteristics of Vaiphei except their genealogy. And, all the Vaiphei clans treated them too like their own kindreds.
In fact, it was on this account that a number of the Hanniang and Thangngeu clans are still absorbed within the Vaiphei nomenclature or community though some of them had been absorbed by Hmar, Thado-Kuki, etc.

So we see from the above legends or stories that there are a number of naturalised clans or naturalised clan members framed from varied conditions. Thus, Vaiphei is an integrating factor for diversified clans. Nevertheless, it is a tribe framed by three descendants of Suantak, namely, Neilut, Paute, and Vanglua.

Now, we had had enough of the Vaiphei clan so let us deviate our focus on the Village Chief.

The Village Chief:

In the words of V.V. Rao, ‘There is immense diversity so far as indigenous political institutions are concerned. The political organizations among the tribal communities.....may be broadly divided into three categories, authoritarian, republican and in between the two there is another type in some areas’.

In regards to the Vaiphei Chieftainship, the third model or the third type mentioned above existed until the dawn of the 19th century. And the first type, existed from the second quarter of the 19th century. We have already seen cogent examples of the existence of the third type in the case of Khaw-Zim villagers and as well as the last inhabitants of Khaw-Vaiphei. Frankly speaking, the Vaipheis, as stated in our previous chapters - II, III and IV, were distinct in nature from their kindreds (i.e. other Zo tribes). They determined seniority (in age or Birth) rather than the physical strength and the efficiency of a person for the Chief-ship.

Before the dawn of the 19th Century ‘Khaw-Pa’ (head of Village or father of the Villagers) was looked upon as the chief or head of the village in lieu of ‘Hausa-Pu’ or ‘
Inpi-Pu’ (Chief of the Village). This elected/appointed/selected or nominated ‘Khaw-Pa’ used to be the eldest among the clans who set up the village. However, like in the modern Parliamentary form of government he is a titular head. The administration of the village is maintained by the ‘Siamangs’ and Pa-chongs’ (Village Council members and regent) in consultation with the Khaw-Pa.

The difference between ‘Khaw-Pa’ and ‘Hausa-pa’ is that the former is elected on the ground of seniority and as such he need not be necessarily outstanding physically and mentally. On the other hand, a person became a Hausa-Pa (Pu) on the ground that the village was raised under his leadership and also, he is elected due to his physical strength and intelligence. Moreover, the decrees of a village Chief (Hausa-Pu) are venerated due to fear of undesirable penalty, whereas the Khaw-Pa’s decrees are venerated like the order of an old wise-man. Albeit, unlike other Zo races, dictatorship does not find a place in the history of the Vaipheis in regards to Chiefdom or Chieftainship. The ideological principle of Khaw-Pa was carried on at all time. Except for the names (Khaw-Pa and Hausa-Pu/PA) and the electoral procedures (or rules), both have the same characteristics or say, common feature. So, from now on we shall use only the name Village Chief or Hausa-Pu in our study.

**Origin of the Vaiphei Chieftainship**: No doubt, from the above observation it is a fact that the Chieftainship of Vaiphei tribe originated from respect and regards for eldest clan member rather than physical and intellectual power. Oral history maintained that though the eldest of Neiku clan was the chief of Phaiza or Khaw-Vaiphei (the first capital of the Vaipheis), the whole affairs i.e., internal or external of the village was maintained by the elders of the younger clans namely: Vanglok (Vanglua), Thangniang and Sialiap. With the dispersal of the clan members from Khaw-Vaiphei to set up their own villages and the outbreak of inter-village wars by the first quarter of 19th century, the person who established the village with all his energy and income became the Chief.
Succession - The Chieftainship is hereditary. The eldest son succeeded his father. In case the eldest son of the infirmed or deceased chief suffered from permanent mental or physical disability, as to make him incapable of holding a chieftainship, then the office shall be passed on to the younger brother (next to the eldest son).

If the chief died without male issue, his office shall be passed on to his younger brother and so on. In the same manner, if the eldest son or son is still a minor by the time the chief retired or expired, the younger brother of the chief shall occupy the chieftainship. However, when the minor became a major, the chieftainship shall be passed on to him again.

In case, if the retired or expired chief was with no brothers or sons, his office shall be passed on to his immediate male relative:

According to the custom of the Vaipheis, an illegitimate son (Thai-Kem-Cha or Inchuam-Cha or Zau-Cha) has no right to inherit the office of his father. So, inspite of handing over the office to him (Thai-Kem-Cha), it is usually handed to the close relatives of the retired or infirmed chief.

Privileges of the chief - The Chief is entitled to certain privileges. First, the BU-SUN, a traditional paddy tax. There is no fixed quantity. It is negotiable and also, it is fixed according to the harvests of each households. Varied quantity of paddy from each household was paid to the chief annually.

The second, SA-LIANG, a traditional flesh tax. The saliang was the forelegs of every animal killed or trapped by the villager. Failure to pay saliang resulted in a considerable fine or penalty.
The third was Khuaï-Sia, a honey tax. That is one who collected wild honey from the woods, within his jurisdiction must give certain quantity of the honey.

The fourth Chi-Khuk Sia, a salt tax. One who collected salt from a brine-spring within his jurisdiction, must give the chief certain quantity of the salt he collected. However, in Vaiphei villages such nature's gift are rendered to the Chief.

Apart from these taxes, the Chief is entitled to free labour from the villagers for the construction and repair of his house. Also, free labour for weeding, hoeing, planting and reaping on his field.

Abusing of powers and privileges vested in them was a common feature and frequent occurrence in the case of other tribes, but such despotism was and is, never found in the case of Vaipheis. They lived their life based on peace, love, harmony and stability.

**Functions of the Chief** Among some tribes the Chief plays a dual role being both the secular and religious head of the village. In regards to the Vaipheis, the Chief had no religious functions which were entrusted to a 'Thiam-Pu' (Priest) who was subject to the control of the Chief.

The Chief was the head of the village, commander in wars, owner of the village land, guardian of his subjects, provider of food, clothing and shelter to fugitives or refugees. As such, he has different functions as enumerated below:

i). He distributes land for cultivation among the villagers in consultation with his Siamang and Pachong (Ministers and regent).
ii). He must keep the village gate in good condition;

iii). He hears and settled all cases of murder, rape, molestation, adultery, theft, land disputes, etc. in consultation with his ministers and regent;

iv). He fixes and summons meetings of the clan heads of the village, and presided over by him. He opens the discussion and presents the case. Since he was responsible for the promotion of general happiness of the people he frequently consult his ministers and regent to find out their grievances;

v). Visitors to the village must inform the Chief of the purpose of their visit to the village and its duration and pay him their respects. The Chief then welcome the visitor and guarantees his safety during his stay. The Chief also provides the visitor with food, drink and merriment;

vi). Any person who decided to reside in his village must approach him with a pot full of rice-beer (Zu-pi/Zu-ting) and sought his consent and also, any person who determined to emigrate from the village must do the same and avail his permission and words of valediction to leave the village;

vii). The Chief renders relief in consultation with his ministers and regent to those who were in sheer penury;

viii). The Chief has emergency powers in times of war. When the enemy approached the village, he issued a proclamation, ordered the closure of the village gates, and assembled the warriors;

ix). He sends and receives messages to and from friendly or hostile villages and disclose the nature of the messages to his ministers and regent and the village at large;

x). He must see that all the villagers contribute free labour for the construction of works of public utility;

xi). He must inquire and dealt with, if any of his subjects breached the traditional Vaiphei customary laws.
The Vaiphei Chief does not exercise unlimited powers like other tribes because the Vaiphei people are highly individualistic. He is expected to act according to the customary law. Moreover, the powers of the Chief are curbed and controlled by the Siamang and Pachong. However, the Chief has the power or right to receive and protect the fugitives who sought refuge in his house. By accident or unintentionally one may kill another. To escape punishment or revenge such persons sought shelter in the Chief's house. Again, the Chief also has the power to banish any of his subjects from his village and confiscate all his property, but not the power to sentence for death.

Vaiphei Chiefs do not wear any emblem indicating their position or power but their houses are built bigger in size than other houses in the village. Any 'SALAM-SAT' (butcher and feasting animal as fine in connection with Civil or Criminal cases) is done in the premises of the Chief. He is also the Chief-guest of all festivals and any special functions. From the dawn of the 20th century, a chief began to wear red woollen-blankets originally given by the British. All and sundry recognised the Chief's house as 'In-Pi' or 'Hausa-Pu In'.

Village Organisation and Administration:

Another socio-political institution of the Vaipheis which is of interest to us is the village organisation and its administration. Like the ancient Greek City-States the Vaiphei village is a politically organised association having a Chief, Pachong (Regent), Siamang (Ministers), Thiiksek-Pu (Village Blacksmith), TaangSam-Pu (Village crier/Publicity and information minister), Thiom-Pu (Priest) and Tuallai-Pau (Leader and Commander of the Youths).

The council of ministers (or Siamang-pachong) is the principal organ of the village administration. These ministers and regent are either selected or elected or appointed by the Village Chief in consultation with the elders of each clan in the village. In other words, the Siamang members and the Pachong (Councillors) are the back bones of the Village.
Chief. They are the one who assist and advise the Chief in all matters that concerned the development and welfare of the village.

**Functions of the Council of ministers** – The functions of the Siamang and Pachong were multifarious. It may be divided into three broad categories: (i) Executive; (ii) Administrative; and (iii) Judicial. Let us take the executive functions. The Council from time to time decides disputes which are of two kinds, namely, private and public. Private disputes are those in which two or more persons are involved, for instance, a boundary dispute between A and B. Public disputes are those in which the whole village is involved. For instance, damaging of trees in the village avenue or reserved forest of the village. The Siamang and Pachong are not only responsible for the settlement of all disputes, they are also responsible for the effective execution of their decisions. In case a person or a party fails to abide by the decision of the Siamang and Pachong, necessary action shall be taken against him. The Council (Siamang and Pachong) is vigilant on its decision whether it is carried out effectively. It does not tolerate defiance of its authority.

The Council is also entitled to punish one guilty of breaching any time-honoured law of the village. Every Vaiphei is believed to be conversant with the traditional laws, customs and usages. Ignorance of the same is no excuse. There are innumerable taboos (ZEK or Thiang-leh-Thianglo) in the Vaiphei society too. Any violation of them will seriously affect the society. Therefore, it is imperative that the observance of the customary laws is strictly enforced.

The ‘administrative’ functions of the Council include the maintenance of the village water supply and foot-paths; construction of new paths and bridges across streams and rivers which are swollen during the rainy season or are otherwise very difficult to cross. Assisting the Chief in the distribution of land for cultivation among the villagers annually,
reception of the Chiefs from the neighbouring villages and visitors to the village. Dates of all festival are fixed by the council in consultation with the Thiem-Pu (Priest) and the Village Chief. The day for mass ‘hunting’, mass ‘fishing’, and mass ‘harvesting’ are also fixed by the council. It fixed the date for the commencement of jhum cultivation. The Council is also in charge of the grazing ground for cattle and supply of planks and bamboos for the construction of houses. In fact, the Council is consulted by the villagers on matters ranging from the observance of festivals to sites for houses.

Judicial function of the Council is another important responsibility. The Village Chief and the Council of Ministers constitute what is known as Inpi-Vaihawm (the village court). All disputes and differences between families belonging to the same clan are, as far as possible, decided by the Phumng-pi (clan elders) or at least all such quarrels except the ones which these elders fail to decide satisfactorily are referred to the village court. The various disputes and cases, e.g. theft, murder, divorce, rape, seduction, slanders, adultery, to name a few, are settled according to the customary laws of Vaiphei. Though these laws are unwritten and are maintained by oral tradition, they are not flexible. Indeed, they are as rigid as any written codes could be. They are hallowed by time and usage.

There is also a kind of Village Court fee to be paid or borne by the appellant. A pot of rice-beer is accepted as registration-fee. And, the guilty one is usually punished with a fine of one pot of rice-beer and killing of a reasonably big swine. Such penalty is termed ‘SALAM’. If the case is of more serious nature, in addition to the above fines, one mithun is to be added. Such hefty fine of killing a swine and a mithun is collectively known as ‘SIALPI-LE-SALAM’.

The period or term to hold the office of this Village Council has no fixed date or year. It depend on how long the member or minister commands the confidence of the clan or the villagers which sent him as its representative. He may hold the office for a long period but the office is by no means hereditary.
A Siamang or a Pachong may be set aside for incompetence or maladministration even within a short period of holding his office. In other words he may be recalled at any time.

These Siamang and Pachong must have certain qualifications. Any attached person; attached being a sign of maturity, is eligible to hold the office of a Siamang-Pachong. But he must be influential, broadminded, well-informed, honest, and he must be able to speak well and boldly. There is no remuneration sanctioned to the office of the Siamang-Pachong or Village Council. They worked in an honorary capacity but sufficient respect is paid to the office to render it covetable. They are also deemed and referred to as 'the wise men' of the village and must be honoured by others. Normally, the advice and suggestions given by them are accepted and executed by the disputing parties unanimously. Beside being regarded as the most esteemed, respected and coveted officials next to the Chief, these Siamang-Pachong were exempted from Bu-Sun. Also, most of the time the Chief distributed to each of them a chunk of meat sliced from the Sa-Liang he received.

Thiiksek-Pu (the Village Blacksmith): The main function of the Village Blacksmith is to mould implements of daily necessity or mend the old ones of the villagers. In return for his services, the villagers make an annual contributions of a certain measure of paddy at the time of harvesting. Sometime a chunk of meat is also rendered to him.

Taangsam-Pu (The Village Crier): The main function of the village crier is to announced the orders of the Chief to the Villagers, carried messages to the Siamang-Pachong and other officials. He is also responsible to arouse or warned the villagers in times of dangers or emergencies. He is paid a paddy in kind by the villagers. He was, regarded as an ex-officio member of the Siamang-Pachong.

Thiam-Pu (The Village Priest). The first duty of the Village Priest is to perform all kinds of ceremonies of national importance. Not only playing the Chief role in all kinds
of ceremonies or rituals. He is also the only medical doctor of the village. In fact, he is the Priest, Medical Officer, and the Prophet holding high office next to the Chief and his ministers. He used incantations and animal sacrifices, namely, chicken, dog, swine, goat, &c. to cure various diseases or when he performed some rituals. For his service, he received a day’s labour from every household in the village, if not a certain quantity of paddy annually.

*Tuallai-Pau* (The Chief-Commander or Leader of the village youths): This is another important office of the village. The *Tuallai-Pau* is elected for his personal qualities, such as bravery, industry, self-less, and sagacity. All the young men and young women are under the supervision of the *Tuallai-Pau*. The village youth were trained in various arts and crafts, dance and music, morality, discipline and especially the young men are trained the arts of hunting, offence and defence. Under this office there are different units working for the welfare of the village, namely, *Lawn-lian*, (an unit comprising of Bachelors and Spinsters), *Lawn-Thak* (Consisting of Youth from the age group 14 to 25), and *Lawn-neu* (consisting of children from the age group 9 to 13-14).

The Chief and his ministers gave much regards to the *Tuallai-Pau*. Every public works are ordered or proclaimed only after consulting his office. The welfare and development of the village in the field of social, political, economy, etc. depended mostly on the efficiency of the village *Tuallai-Pau*. Indeed, the *Tuallai-Pau* was the backbone of the village Chief and the Siamang-Pachong in every walk of life in the village. He is, also, the middleman between the village Councillors and the village youngsters and bachelors.

Let us consider another important political and administrative officer, of a Vaiphei village, called *Pa-Zang*. His position can be compared with Civil servants of modern government. Such office is seldom established where there are few households. Only largely populated village opened such office. And usually the number of *Pa-Zang* does not exceed more than three persons. Any person (an attached) who is diplomatic, intelligent and energetic can become a *Pa-Zang* with the consent of the Village Chief and his ministers.
The Pa-Zang members are the mouth-piece of the village Chief and the Siamang-Pachong. Though they did not enjoyed much privileges like the Siamang-Pachong they are as much important as the Siamang-Pachong in the socio-political administrations. They are the ones who implemented the executive and administrative functions of the Siamang-Pachong. In other words, they are the limbs of the village Chief and his ministers. They are the main receptionist of official and non-official visitors. In some cases they acted as an interpreter for the Council members. Though they were neithersanctioned emolument nor slackened from taxes, they hold a covetous position in the village socio-political institution.

Another unique position or status in the socio-political organisation of the Vaiphei villages is the status of a 'Meithai' or a Widow: In a Vaiphei society, a widow is much sympathised not only by her relatives but also by the whole neighbourhood. She is the only non-official of the village exempted or slackened from payment of taxes to the Village Chief. If she is left issueless by her deceased spouse, or if the children were still minors, she is liberated from compulsory social works too. She is also assisted and helped by the youths of the village in weeding, sowing, harvesting, and building her house or in repairing her house. However, she has an obligatory duties towards the Village Chief when there are festivals or rituals, and when there are non-official or official-guests. At such event, she assist the ladies of the Chief residence in fetching water, pounding and husking rice, cooking, serving meals, cleaning up the interior and exterior of the Chief's house are few we could name.

Many a time, such women abused the sympathy and liberty they were rendered. They become care-free and often breached the hallowed customary laws. However no one dared to insult or slighted her for being aware of her pitiful condition. Sometime she would create hullabaloo amongst the menfolk who were in a drinking-spree. Though it
was regarded taboo to join among men in a drinking-spree, no man would spank or chided her. Thus many women in many parts of the world may well envy the women and widows of the Vaiphei society their high status and their free and happy life or their unfathomable liberty.

As a concluding part of our present topic, let us add and observe another two important and an indispensable activities in the socio-political life of the Vaiphei people in the olden days. First, let us consider ‘PAMLOU-LEL’. This was one of the most important session of the Chief and his ministers which was held every (on the month of January) new year without fail. The main subject or agenda of this session was ‘Pam-Lou’ (jhuming cultivation). In this session the Chief and his ministers dicussed over the place and site for the year’s shifting-cultivation. During the session they consumed a pot of rice-beer which was their way of holding such solemn meeting. Until this session is held and the site for cultivation is approved or confirmed, the villagers are forbidden to look for new place or continue cultivating in the previous site. Without the proclamation of the Chief and his ministers none in the village have the liberty to choose the site for cultivation. It was only after the Council had confirmed the area and distributed the site for each household that weeding and sowing began. Thus we see that ‘PamLou-Lel’ (ordiscussion over the site for Jhuming cultivation) was one of the most important and compulsory session of the Village Council in olden times.

When the Pam-Lou-Lel session is over, the Councillors in consultation with the village priest, a particular day is declared as holiday called ‘UMMIT-NI’ i.e. a day of total rest. On this day, each household is directed to mould tiny image of a mithun from clay. These images of mithun were collected only by the Councilors (Siamang-Pachong) because no one was allowed to stalked out of their house. A distant away from the entrance of the village, a gate made of twigs is raised collectively by the Siamang-Pachong under
the instruction of the *Thiampu*. Below the gate, a small platform is arranged to lay the images of mithun. In fact, the village *Siamang-Pachong* collected these clayed-mithuns from each house after they finished construction of the gate and the platform. Beside such weird arrangement, a wooden-tub filled with water is kept at a distance of four to five feet from the gate. This water was meant for bathing. Any outsider or visitors who happened to visit the village on that day are compelled to take bath lest they brought contagious diseases or bad-luck. On the other hand, each and every one must be confined in their respective houses as they were 'Zekchang' (Forbidden to do any work except under the direction of the priest).

One remarkable feature of this day was the putting out of all the live-fires in every house of the village. This was a mark of putting or throwing away all the diseases and misfortunes of the villagers in the previous year. The priest performed a solemn ritual at the spot where a twig-gate and a small bamboo-platform covered with the image of mithun were arranged. He is accompanied by all the *Siamang-Pachong*. After the ritual is over by dusk, a new fire which is believed to bring a good year is first made at the residence of the village Chief by means of 'MEI-TUK' (Tribal lighter). It was alighted by the Priest with the help of *Siamang-Pachong*. Thereof, a new fire is taken by all the villagers who started a fresh fire in their respective houses.

This socio-religious ceremony was called 'KHAW-BAWL' or 'KHAW-HOU'. It was one of the most important socio-religious duty of the village chief and his *Siamang-Pachong* for being the one and only principal organ of the village administration. In fact, all the Vaiphei villages, in the days before Christianity or Westernity absorbed the people, was not only a socio-political unit but also religiously and economically a distinct unit. Of course, the village was an independent unit.
Table V:1
BRANCHES OF ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANS OF VAIPHEIS

KHAWPA/ HAUSA (CHIEF)

PACHONG
Revenue & Finance Minister

SIAMANG (Council of Ministers + Judiciary)

PA-JANG (Secretary to Chief + Tary to Council)

THIAMPU (Religion + Medical Officer)

TANGSAMPU (Public Information Officer)

THIKSEKPU (Industry Executive Officer)

TUALLAIPAU (Youth Affairs + Defence Minister)

PHUNGPI-UPA (Clans Heads)

KHAWSUNG-UPATE (Village Elders)

SAWM LAWU UPA/ SAWM LAMKAI (Bachelors' Chief + Volunteer Commander)

SAWM (Bachelors/ Volunteers)

SAWMKUNGPI (Female Club President)

LAWM-LIAN (Bachelors' Club)

LAWM-THAK (Teeny-boys' Club)

LAWM-NEU (Little-Boys' Club)

LAWM-LIAN (Spinsters' Club)

LAWM-THAK (Teen-Girls' Club)

LAWM-NEU (Little-Girls Club)
Footnotes:

2. Ibid : p-47-
5. Ibid : p-50
11. Based on an interview with Thangniang elders recorded by Paoneikhai, Tuibuang.
12. Rao, V.V. : *A century of Tribal Politics*, Delhi, p-103.