Chapter -II

Traditional System of Village Administration

The tribal people live in the villages. The concept of the village as the administrative social, cultural and development unit is built into the traditional tribal polity. The tribal people of Manipur, both the Nagas and the Kuki-Chins had developed their own polity. However, their polity did not grow beyond their village. They did not develop into tribe-level polity formation. Therefore, the village is the autonomous political, social, economic and cultural unit.

The political life of the tribals of India reflects a paradoxical situation in which democracy and monarchy co-exist. Every head of a community at different levels like clan, village and territory is generally honoured, obeyed and accepted as the head of the group. His office is hereditary. The supreme and final authority is in the hands of a single person. Every tribal has a share in the political ties of the village and the region. It exists for the majority; it is born of it and embodies it. The tribal leader governs the community only because he is backed by the majority or the whole of the group.

There are two kinds of polity. Among the Nagas, there is a sort of democratic type of political system, which was described by the colonial writers as “small republic”. Among the Kuki-Chin, the chieftainship is the

main political system. The rulers of Manipur recognized this traditional polity during the pre-colonial period. During the British rule, the laws of Manipur diluted the traditional polity but the people themselves still continue to profess their custom and traditions, which form the core of their polity. The traditional polity has a clear-cut boundary of the village, there was a well regulated land ownership system, a judicial system and other social institutions based on customary laws. The land ownership includes the community land, clan land and individual land among the Nagas. There is the chief’s ownership of land among the Kuki-chins. The traditional polity has eroded due to the Indian legislation relating to forest and revenue and with the emergence of private property in the tribal society. The tribal customary laws are very powerful guiding principles in the perpetuation of the polity in the tribal villagers. But it is found that there are chieftainships amongst the Nagas also though it might not be as well-defined as that of the Kuki-Chin.

Naga village state is an independent unit and accordingly enjoys the right of sovereignty. Every village-state pursues an independent foreign policy and implements its own customary laws on all walks if its citizens. Every village state has its own defence system. Administration is indigenous and independent.

Every village possesses a well-defined area of territory, not only of wet cultivated land, but of jhum and waste land as well. The boundary lines can be

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4 Ibid. p. 175.
ascertained with either natural or with stones to indicate the actual line of control.\textsuperscript{6}

Naga society found in the village is a compact and well-knit society where rigid customs and discipline are observed. Any violation of these brought heavy punishment. The laws of the land are not only to be respected but also to be feared. As the village is an independent unit, the customary laws are supreme and dispensation of punishment is quick.\textsuperscript{7}

Each village is run by its village council composed of various members with the headman or the chief at the supreme position. Some Naga tribes prefer to call the chief as Ningthou (King). These are many criteria on which chieftainship is claimed and the basis on which the council members are selected.

2.1 Basis of chieftainship

Chieftainship is an important factor in the Naga polity. Every tribe has a chief who is the head of the village. In the normal course, the leader of the first settlement would become chief. According to tradition and custom, the would be chief is required to obtain the sanction of goods to acquire the position of a chief, by carrying out prescribed test and ordeals.\textsuperscript{8}

\textsuperscript{7} Shimray, RR. Op.cit. p.44.
Traditionally the Ruangmei people considered the one who first settled in the village as chief. It was he who performed the ceremony for settlement in the new village. According to the traditional songs, a married man who desired to find his own village would do so by organising helper under him in tracing new land unoccupied by others. If he could find the land he was considered as chief (Nampou) by the villagers. And if a group of persons went in search of a land for a village, the chief had to be chosen from among them by observing omens.\(^9\)

But the divine method of choosing the chief was performed by means of finding whose cock crowed first. Each person could sleep with a cock kept in the cage beside him. If the cock of a particular person started to crow first the owner of the cock was considered as chief.\(^10\)

The chief would erect the village ‘gate’ (Raengh). There would be two gates for the village which the chief would own both or one but sometimes another person or headman would also own another gate if it fell on his own private land.

In order to please the god, the owner of this gate would first dig out pit and offer wine, egg, ginger, etc. to the God. Whether he owned one or both the gates the chief identified himself before the villagers that he owned the village, as such he was to be taken as the real master of the land. But at community level the emergence of chieftainship was differently considered. Accordingly to

\(^10\) Ibid.
V.V. Rao, a scholar of regional studies, the chieftainship originated in the physical and intellectual power of any person. In other words, any person who had the ability to organise a force could become a chief.\(^{11}\)

### 2.1.1 Position and privileges of the chief

Every Ruangmei village was ruled by its own chief called Nampou (Khullak). The chief was given a prominent position at all social and religious gatherings and festivals of the village. The words of the chief were obeyed respectfully and promptly.\(^{12}\)

He was considered as the leader in war, the owner of the village land and protector of the village.\(^{13}\) He was entitled to a portion of the meat of all animals killed in the village during the festivals. The youths of the village helped him in cultivating his fields, and in the construction of his house. He was always offered the best rice beer (Zou-Ngao) during the festivals.\(^{14}\)

### 2.1.2 Succession of the chief

The Ruangmei tribe recognized a hereditary tradition of chieftainship.\(^{15}\) According to R. Brown, “Every village has three hereditary officers, namely, Khullakpa, Luplakpa and Lampu, any officers besides these are elected.”\(^{16}\) Chieftainship was hereditary in most of the Naga tribes except for

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\(^{11}\) V. Venkata Rao, A Century of tribal politics in North East India, 1874-1974, New Delhi, 1976, p. 108.


\(^{14}\) V. Venkata Rao, op.cit, p. 118.

\(^{15}\) Dr. H. Bareh, Gazetteer of India, Nagaland, Kohima District, Nagaland, 1970, p. 186.

some other tribes like Ao and Lotha tribes of Nagaland.\textsuperscript{17} L. Gouragopal Singh commented that, “Among the Marings there were two hereditary officers: Khulpu (the earliest man of the earliest clan, to settle the village) and Khullakpa. The Chiru villages, though were small, usually had three officers, the Khullakpa, the Khulpu and the Lampu, the first two being hereditary.\textsuperscript{18}

Traditionally the son succeeded his father after his death. The one who would succeed the chief was supposed to be shameless and fit physically and mentally and be a married man. If the legitimate son of the ruling chief was found to be incapable of holding such responsibilities due to physical or mental disability or if the chief happened to be without any male issue the succession would pass on to the next nearest male relative.\textsuperscript{19}

2.1.3 Powers and functions of the chief

The Ruangmei chief enjoyed enormous powers. He was considered as the supreme authority in almost all affairs of the village. He was responsible for administration of his village and for the welfare of his subjects.\textsuperscript{20} A village council composed of the elders of the village assisted the chief of the village. The administration of justice, enforcement of executive function, maintenance

\textsuperscript{17} Shimray, RR. op.cit., p. 52.
\textsuperscript{20} Alana Golmei, op.cit., p. 139.
of social practices and customary laws including performing religious rites were the areas under the institution of powerful chieftainship.\(^{21}\)

2.1.4 Legal power

The chief executed all legal functions and exercised his power as the highest authority in the village. In traditional society, no written documents were required but his verbal declaration based on customary laws was taken as final and binding. The Chief settled the village disputes, no doubt the village council of elders assisted him. He settled the disputes according to traditional customary laws. Penalty was imposed according to the gravity of the offences by him.\(^{22}\)

In some village the chief had a dual function as the religious and secular head of the village. As the religious head, the chief was the first man to sow seeds, the first to plant and the first to harvest.\(^{23}\)

Although the actual religious worships and sacrifices etc. were performed by the village priest, yet his presence in any religious ceremony was taken as essential. The executive functions of the chief were greater in number than the religious functions. Some of the important functions were: He was responsible for the effective defence of the village,\(^{24}\) allotment of lands for cultivation among the villagers, settlement of disputes with other neighbouring

\(^{21}\) A Seminar paper presented by Dr. T.S. Gangte, on “Retrospection of Land use System under Chieftainship among the Tribals of Manipur”, Organised by Manipur University Tribal students Union, Imphal, 27 February, 2001, p.1.

\(^{22}\) V.V. Rao, op.cit., p. 475.


\(^{24}\) V.V. Rao, op. cit., p. 118.
villages, etc. The whole village affair remained under the control and command of the village chief.

2.1.5 Limitation of his power

The overall administration of the Ruangmei villages was run by a hereditary chief in consultation with council of elders. Unlike the Kukis who had a strong chieftainship system, the Ruangmei chief had relatively limited powers and while exercising his powers the village chief was checked by the council of elders.25

There was no legal provision for removal of the chief as there was no tenure in the traditional system. His removal could be of course, mooted and executed on the ground of mental and physical inability.26

2.2 Peikai (Village council)

The village council or Thoubei called peikai is the highest decision making body and seat of authority of the village. It consists of devoted elders and is chaired by the elder who hosts the pei. He is called peipouc. The pei is also the village court. There is no matter that cannot deal with by the pei. The decision of the pei is all binding and also is honoured by the state authority or government. The decisions and practices of the pei become the customary laws

26 Alana Golmei, op.cit., p. 140.
or precedence to be followed. The pei is also competent to make rules or orders relating to any matters or issues in the interest of the villagers.\textsuperscript{27}

2.2.1 Basis of membership and composition

For the membership of the village the size of the village was to be taken into consideration. There was proportional representation from all the clans. Women are debarred from the membership of the village council. The composition of member powers and functions of the council varied form village to village. But the basic structure remained more or less the same and uniform.\textsuperscript{28}

2.2.2 Right of hereditary

The customary system of holding ‘peikai’ was in hereditary and succession by promotion on the basis of traditional seniority and not by election. Since the office of peikai under the custom of hereditary, there was on limit of the term for holding the executive post of the village council i.e., they used to continue as long they could discharge their duties and functions till their death or removal.\textsuperscript{29}

2.2.3 Powers and functions

The village council possessed administrative powers of the village. The village council or pei was a legislative organ of the village. General

\textsuperscript{27} G. Makuga, The Rongmei Customary Laws (in English) A collection of Ancient Rongmei Traditional and Social usages, Custom and Culture, Dimapur, Nagaland, Unity Printing House, 2007, p. 58.

\textsuperscript{28} Personal Interview with Namshwang Kamei, Village (Peipouc), Neikanlong Village, Imphal, Manipur, on 05.05.2006.

\textsuperscript{29} G. Makuga, op.cit., p. 58.
administration and formation of policies were by council. The council preserved cultural, customary and conventional laws. It had power to amend customary laws and incorporate new laws.\(^{30}\) The powers and functions of the village council could be broadly divided into the following categories: (a) Executive, (b) Legislative, and (c) Judicial.

2.2.4 Powers and functions of executive

The village council was the most powerful executive body in the village administration. The decision of the council on all important matters was binding and final. It maintained inter-village relations.\(^{31}\) The council members were the sole authority to enforce customary law and amend the unwritten customary laws which they followed. The council members commanded villagers in their village jurisdiction, executed orders, took action against any village for violation of the order. The council was responsible for maintaining peace, harmony and unity of the village.\(^{32}\)

Administration of the village was carried out by the village council. In case a person failed to abide by the decisions of the council, the council had to take necessary actions against the person concerned as there were innumerable taboos in Naga society. Customary laws had such far reaching effects aiming

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\(^{32}\) G. Makuga, op.cit., p. 64.
the Ruangmei people that they dare not trespass the sanctions of the customary laws.\textsuperscript{33}

Napmupou is in-charge of food and agricultural rites. The traditional life of the Ruangmei people centre round their agricultural activities, and so the functions of Napmu-pou are numerous and indispensable.\textsuperscript{34}

The village council administered justice, allocated land for cultivation, decided the time for annual festivals, sacrifices and generally, directed all the villages activities-social, religious and economic accordingly, to their traditional laws and customs.\textsuperscript{35} It had a supreme defence power concerning hunting, fishing, etc. The village council also dealt with the financial matters (of two individuals who would be responsible for collection) within the village. Rents of a village were to be paid in kinds, by collecting paddy from every household. Paddy in lieu of money or money in lieu of services were to be collected from the villagers. Also, any fine imposed on an individual was to be reserved for the council’s fund.\textsuperscript{36}

In the religious side, the village council was not taken as the real authority of religious rites and rituals but it had certain rights in this field too. The religious head of the village was the village priest and elders of the village constituted the council. The priest always consulted the village council on

\textsuperscript{34} Tingkao Ragwang Chap Riak, p. 13.
\textsuperscript{35} L. Gouragopal Singh, op.cit., p. 43.
\textsuperscript{36} Kamei, Thenbilung “Social and cultural life of Zeliangrong with special reference to Rongmei Naga, Unpublished M. Phil. dissertation, Manipur University, 1988, Imphal, p. 52.
matters of religious festivals and performed all the traditional rites and rituals. The council enforced the villagers to maintain strict observation of taboo.\textsuperscript{37}

2.2.5 Legislative functions

The council being the general body framed laws and customary rules and regulations from time to time. Such rules and regulations were made when all the villagers attended the council in full strength. Sometimes, it was observed that the council could adopt even new laws concerning marriage, theft, property and lands to meet the demand of time and situation. In the legal system of Ruangmei people, there was no capital punishment as such. The hardest punishment was imposition of fines and banishment of individual from the village. Though there was no written law. The Ruangmei people strictly adhered to time tested customary laws handed down by their predecessors. These customary laws worked effectively in the minds of the people for these were inherent in their lives and society.

2.2.6 Judicial functions

The village council of elders also worked as the chief judicial court of the village.\textsuperscript{38} The chief who was the supreme judge in deciding all civil and criminal cases of the village headed the council.\textsuperscript{39} The village council was the single court of justice and heard cases and disputes and passed verdicts. If the nature of the case was small only few members could settle it. But if the case

\textsuperscript{37} T.H. Baba Chandra Singh, op. cit., p. 95.
\textsuperscript{38} Mangthoi Thaimei, op. cit., p. 407.
\textsuperscript{39} Chinkholian Guite, op. cit., p. 61.
was serious such as adultery, murder or death involving some perpetrators, the entire household representatives were to be called to attend the meeting.

The Ruangmei society like all other Naga tribes was based on the unwritten customary law. Imposition of fines, punishment and justification of any case was done on the basis of the Ruangmei customary laws. All kinds of disputes and differences between families of the same clan were as far as possible decided by the clan elders. But if they could not solve the problems, the cases were brought to the village court.\(^{40}\)

Both criminal and civil cases were tried by the council which passed final judgments. These decisions were given by well experienced elderly representatives of all clans.\(^{41}\) If the cases were vague and could not be solved peacefully, then the village council resorted to taking of oath and ordeal. In boundary disputes, theft, etc. witnesses were to be produced.

2.2.7 Procedure of petition in peikai or village court

i) Filling petition- Filling a complaint petition is to be made to the peikai. The procedure is simple. A case of suit is begun as soon as an individual or group verbally brought a complaint petition in the form of one jar of rice beer or a bottle of local wine which is locally known as Zoulai Puanloumei to the village court with a request to investigate into the matter and settle the case.

\(^{40}\) Alana Golmei, op. cit. p. 147.

\(^{41}\) M. Thaimei, op. cit., p. 407.
ii) Nampou or village Head in consultation with Namsinpou, Napmupou and other responsible members fix a convenient date for the hearing.

iii) Both the petitioner/plaintiff and the accused/defendant are intimated and summoned to appear before the court (pei) on the scheduled date for hearing through a messenger (Chengluai).

iv) In case a party/individual failed to appear before the court without prior information to the Pei Authority, a fine would be imposed in terms of 2-5 bottles of wine or jar of rice beer with a pig of five spans (Gak Kupangu) to the defaulters.

v) If the accused is found guilty, he is liable to pay a fine as well as the compensation to the plaintiff.\(^{42}\)

2.3 Oath and ordeal

Oath and ordeal were practiced by the Ruangmei people for settling any disputes and cases. They used to resort to the divine justice means ordeal of God. The elders of Ruangmei believed that a person is guilty unless he or she proves his/her innocent by undertaking an ordeal. Because an ordeal was the only method of determining the justice practiced in the society in order to decide the right or wrong or guilty of an accused person. In cases where facts were difficult to find and impossible to solve them the last resort was to leave the parties to be tried with the help of supernatural power.\(^{43}\)

\(^{42}\) G. Makuga, op. cit., Pp. 81-82.

\(^{43}\) G. Makuga, op. cit., p.79.
2.3.1 Practicing of oaths for the submission of correct facts

The person concerned had to take an oath before the village elders or chief and then he was supposed to submit the facts. It is believed that whatever the person said was based on truth. If he would tell a lie, the anger of God would destroy and punish the liar. An oath was taken in the following form—an accused was brought to swear by holding a fire brand taken out from furnace and said, while dipping the fire brand into a pot filled with water that he would extinct or die like the fire if he would tell a lie. This form of oath was known as oath with fire and water.

Oath by consuming iron powder was taken by swearing that punishment would be made by the divine power if he was wrong. Oath by holding unnatural objects like thunders bolt or earth were collected from a site of landslide. These two objects were often used by the Ruangmei people while taking an oath because it was believed that lightning and landslide were caused by divine power and thus the wrong or accused person would be punished by the same power.

2.3.2 Practicing of ordeal for correct evidences

Biting the teeth of tiger (Kamang Neih Kaimei) was one of the methods of ordeal. Both the parties were compulsory to bide the tiger’s tooth before Peikai Gandai (village authorities) and give evidence. They made a pledge and

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44 L. P. Vidyarthi, op. cit., p. 199.
45 Alana Golmei, op. cit. p.149.
swore that wrong one would be bitten and eaten up by the tiger.\textsuperscript{46} Another ordeal known as immersion (Dui Khou-Lupmei) was a very common type and was frequently practiced by the Ruangmei people. The two parties had to dive into deep water simultaneously.\textsuperscript{47} They had to immerse in the water for a period of time. The one who could not immerse and come out first from the water would be declared wrong, while the other one who remained longest in water without returning to the surface was declared right and won the case.\textsuperscript{48}

It sometimes happened that two villages that were at war with one another agreed to cease hostilities, and maintain a permanent peace.\textsuperscript{49} This served as a means of voluntary submission of the two to law. It was obeyed mainly because of the fear of the anger of the Supreme Being. The punishment awarded were generally a fine in cash or in kind or both depending upon the seriousness of the crime embodied in the customary laws.\textsuperscript{50}

The functions of village council were more of executive and judiciary and less of legislative. There was seldom need of amendment of customary laws and more so in respect of legislation. Thus the legislative function of the village council was insignificant and almost unknown to the members of the council. The village council was characterized more by the administration of the village, and council of other villages had no right to interfere with the village administration and against the decision of the concerned village.

\begin{footnotes}
\begin{enumerate}
\item G. Makuga, op. cit., p.79.
\item Ibid, Pp.79-80.
\item Ibid.
\item L.P. Vidyarthi, op. cit. Pp. 199-200.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotes}
council. All disputes were settled at a meeting consisting of village elders and presided over by the chief. The decision of the meeting was considered to be binding on the parties concerned. There were no appeals against the decision of the village council. As for the village council there was no known limitation of its functions.

In the past, the numerous tribal groups living in Manipur had been placed under the administrative of their respective customary laws. These were gradually replaced partially by ordinances for better effective administration at the threshold of Indian Independence; the Manipur state Hill People (Administrations) Regulation was enacted in 1947. However, it is understood that customary laws were not totally abandoned, but the same were retained to deal with various tribal social and political problems as the lowest law enforcement agencies at the village level. This was subsequently improved by another act by another act called the Manipur Village Authorities in the Hill Areas Act, 1956.

2.4 Manipur State Hill People (Administration Regulation, 1947)

In Manipur, the Manipur State Hill People (Administrations) Regulations were enacted in 1947, containing provisions for administration of justice in the Hill areas. The regulation provided a democratic constitutional monarchy. It provided that the criminal and civil justice should be administered

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52 V. Venkata Rao, op. cit. p. 127.
by the court of a village authority, the court of the circle Authority, the Hill Bench at Imphal and the Chief of Manipur State.

The court of a village Authority was empowered to try any criminal case, involving the offence of theft, mischief and cattle lifting, simple hurt, assault, using criminal force or illegal slaughter of cattle.

In civil matter the village authority could try any suit of values below Rs. 501/-. The circle could exercise the powers of a Magistrate of the first class.

The Hill Bench at Imphal exercised the powers of the session court. It was composed of a judge of the chief court as chairman with two hill men as judges.

2.4.1 Except the village Authority the other court had appellate powers

The provisions about powers, procedure, etc. under 1947 Regulation were more or less the same as those in 1937 and the series of Rules for the Hill District of Assam.54

The Village Authorities Act of 1956 framed by the parliament provided a provision for a village which has 20 and above house tax paying households. The village Authority stands for the maintenance of law and order, collection of hill tax and administration of justice through the village court under the

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customary laws. The Act introduced democratic element in then the constitution of the Authority. The Act also legitimized the feudalistic and hereditary Chiefship and Khullakpaship. This ex-officio chairmanship of the authority resumed for the Chief or the Khullakpa is against the democratic ethos.55

The village Authorities set up under this act had failed to command the same respect as the earlier traditionally village authorities. The act is not operated properly. The villages Authorities do not function properly. This act was further amended and the same was called “The Manipur Hill Areas Acquisition of the Chiefs Right Acts, 1967”. This Act provided for:

(i) The abolition of the Chiefship among the Kuki-Chin villages.
(ii) Payment of compensation to the Chiefs whose rights are to be acquired by the state
(iii) The introduction of the MLR and LR Act 1960.

The effort of the government to belittle the customary laws was clear and it can be seen in subsequent years. The amended Act in 1967 made more stringent provisions to make it ‘a more firmly empowered act’. However, it weakened the rights of the chiefs hitting directly on customary laws.

Coupled with this, introduction of the District Council Act 1971 have failed to meet the needs of the tribal people. The Hill Areas Committee (HAC) of the Manipur Legislative Assembly is empowered by the constitution to

monitor the law making and the administration for the hill areas. Besides its many functions, the scheduled matters which are under the jurisdiction of the HAC are:

(i) The power and functioning of the Districts councils
(ii) Development and Economic planning
(iii) Allotment, occupation or use on selling a part of land
(iv) Management of Forest (other than Reserved Forest)
(v) Use of land and water resources for the purpose of agriculture
(vi) Regulation of the practice of jhum or other forms of shifting cultivation
(vii) Establishment of village Committee or Councils and their power and other matter relating to village administration
(viii) Public health and sanitation
(ix) The appointment or succession of chief or headman
(x) Inheritance of property
(xi) Marriage and divorce
(xii) Social customs
(xiii) Any other matters which assembly may by resolution declare to be a matter which shall come within the provision of Hill Areas Committee.  

The HAC is found to have taken over the chief or headman in the village administration. Though the HAC comes with lots of promises, it has not been able to protect the tribal interests. The tribal people live in the village. The concept of the village as the administrative, social, cultural and development
unit is built into the traditional tribal polity. The existing village Authority Act is simply inadequate and it suffers from many defects.

2.4.2 Power of Attorney

The term “Power of Attorney” is clearly defined in section 182 of the Indian contract Act, 1872. Any person who is competent to contract and who is of sound mind may appoint an agent, the appointment may be expressed in writing or it may be oral. Where the appointment is made by a deed, it is called a “Power of Attorney”. So the “power of attorney” is given by the head by writing a deed. Oral appointment is not usually followed. The person who has been appointed with the power is called an agent and the person who made such an appointment is called the principal.

Section 183 of the Act provides who may employ an agent. It is given that any person who is of the age of majority according to the law of the land and to which he is subject, and who is of sound mind, may employ an agent.

On the other hand the agent cannot appoint other sub-agent under him to make the contract on his behalf indirectly or in the name of the principal directly (section 190 of the act).

In the context of the village Authority of hill Areas of Manipur, many a time such an agent is appointed to run after the administration of the affair of the chief or the principal by given such power of attorney. The agent has the full capacity to make any other contract on behalf of the principal what the agent or the attorney does is done on behalf of the principal. The main reason
for such attorney is that the head usually is illiterate and thus a younger one who is literate and has a basic spirit to act as an agent is usually deputed.

In critical condition of conflict and other non-civil matter, decision is usually taken by the head and other seniors of the village. Usually the agent has no such role in it. Their subject of concern is related with matter of developmental work and other affairs of governmental bodies.

Section 203 of the Act provides the procedure for termination of the agent. The principal may revoke the authority given to the agent at any time before the authority has exercised so as to bind the principal.57

2.5 Functionaries of the village

The village priest (Tinku) and other officials was given a very important and respectable place in the Ruangmei society. There were some areas where he was more prominent than the chief. The office of the priest was not hereditary.58 He was selected irrespective of his clan but for his knowledge and supernatural ability. He was supposed to be well-versed with all the traditional customary laws or practices. He had to act as a prophet and high priest in the village or region.59

There was60 another junior or assistant priest called “Tinku Kiakja”. He performed the duties of high priest in his absence or at the demise of the high

58 C.A. Soppit, op.cit., p. 428.
59 Alana Golmei, op. cit., p. 141.
60 Dichamang Panmei, op.cit., p. 48.
priest. He was to be chosen from any clan. He usually succeeded the high priest. “Banja” was another elderly group of people of the village who represented all the clans of the village. Their responsibility was to maintain orderliness in the religion as well as other aspects of the village community.

2.5.1 Role of the Priest

The priest plays another important functionary of the village selected for the purpose of performing all kinds of spiritual or religious functions like sacrifices, ceremonies, and worship of God or spirits, all prohibitions of the village from time to time. He was supposed to be well known of knowledge of physician, spiritual and ritual works for healing the sick. His main duties are to look after rites, and ritual ceremonies. Tingku was assisted by other local Amuh (Maiba). In some big village if there were two or three Tingkus, the senior most Tingku would be treated as Head Tingku known as Muhjung. As a traditional practice, the village authority used to select Tingkuh of the village irrespective of clan. Any capable elder from any clan if he have good knowledge in the religion, custom and other traditional practices may be become the Tingkuh (village priest). He has the power to predict or vision about somebody’s fortune or future. He can also decide the things that will happen to a person and other religious practice through supernatural enablements. The Tingkuh can predict the lost object through the process of Mang Banhmei, the revealing of something through different Gods that came in dream during his sleep.  

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61 G. Makuga, op.cit., p. 65.
2.5.2 Chengluai

Chengluai is the administrative assistant in the village. It is the duty of Chengluai to pass on information and other news to the members of the pei and other important functionaries of the village administration. He is the messenger of the village.\(^62\)

2.5.3 Dormitory system (Morung)

Dormitories were well-organised traditional social institutions in Ruangmei society. Every tribe had its own dormitory system. It is a place where all the married, unmarried youths usually used to sleep at night and have social interactions.\(^63\) Dormitories were the life-vein of Ruangmei social and cultural activities. In this social institution, both boys and girls were disciplined and their tribal values were promoted.

The number of these social institutions depended on the size of the village. In case of a big village it had three or four dormitories. According to western anthropologist Ursula Graham Bower, dormitories were an admirable institution which disciplined and educated the young, and united the householders.\(^64\)

2.5.4 Khangbuan kai (Assembly of married man)

Khangbuan kai is the important social institution of the village functioning under the control and direction of Peikai. Khangbuan kai means

the house or assembly of Khangbuans who are matured and married, and promoted from Khangchu kai by way of customary practice on the basis of their seniority. They are very active and responsible to enforce and execute the orders of peikai in maintaining peace, unity, law and orders in the village.  

2.5.5 Duties and responsibilities of Khangbuan kai

The institution of Khangbuans had no particular fixed house for their assembly in the village since they had no business to present or attend every day for discussion whenever they were compelled to discuss some important issue or problems. They used to assemble in the house of Khangbuan kai, i.e., head of Khangbuans (matured manhood) or they used to meet at peikai, the house of village council, if the issue involved the problems of village administration. As a customary practice, members of Khangbuan kai were usually promoted from Khangchu kai (youth’s dormitory) on the basis of seniority. In some big villages, Khangbuans were placed under the control of two senior most Khangbuans as head of the Khangbuan kai to convene meetings as and when it was felt necessary for discussion for any problems of the village. The institution of Khangbuans was important on account of their manifold activities like active service, physically strong, mentally matured with wisdom and experiences. As a matter of fact the village executive –Authority largely depended on the active services of Khangbuans and Khangchu kai in maintaining the peace, unity, law and orders in the village.

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66 Ibid, op. cit., p. 66.
Khangbuans are responsible for enforcement and execution of all orders of village council (peikai). To carry out the decisions of the village council, and to maintain law and orders, peace and unity in the village form time to time. In the meantime since Khangchu kai was under the control of Khangbuan kai, the senior Khangbuans were responsible to guide the young boys and girl in matters of co-curriculum activities and to have discipline, obedience, politeness, humble behaviours, manners of dealing with old men and old women, village authorities, senior and leaders etc.\(^{67}\)

2.5.6 Khangchu kai (Boys dormitory)

Khangchu kai means the dormitory of young boys (unmarried) who attain at least an age of 12 years. This is the social and traditional institution of each Ruangmei village in which all unmarried youths are to attend and sleep compulsorily under the custom of Ruangmei followed from time immemorial and from generation to generation.\(^{68}\)

Khangchu kai has a leader known as Gaanpi (head of the bachelor) who was responsible to look after the boy’s dormitory. He was the source of all activities.\(^{69}\) The boys in the dormitory obeyed the elder members and acted according to their decision and institutions. One could not go directly to the boy’s dormitory. He had to be there for some years and when he attained puberty, he was taken out of that dormitory and placed in a grown up dormitory. Even a boy becomes a full-fledged member of the dormitory.

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\(^{67}\) Ibid, Pp. 66-67.

\(^{68}\) Ibid

\(^{69}\) K. Daimei, op.cit., p. 475.
Members of boy’s dormitory had to perform a simple ceremony with a word of blessing at the time of his entrance into the new dormitory. Though he used to feel shy and refuse to wear if at first, he was forced to wear it by the senior members of the dormitory. As he used to wear the prescribed dress he boys dormitory used to howl and beat drums to encourage him. As a new member of the dormitory he slept there till he got married.

2.5.7 Duties and functions of the boy’s dormitory

The duty of the boy’s dormitory was to extend voluntary social services to the villagers for their welfare. They guarded and defended the village against intruders or whenever there was attack from outside, or attack from wild animals. They also guarded the village during emergency of war, accidents, in times of natural calamities like earthquakes, floods, draught, epidemics, etc. In boy’s dormitory all kinds of traditional practices and activities were taught by its members.

They were also taught to sing different types of songs in different occasions. They were also given training in dancing and war dancing, art of warfare, games and sports. Also they received training in the art of handicraft like basket making, wooden craft, carpentry, bamboo, cane and other embroidery works. The dormitory boys took part in hunting, fishing, house building and in the fields at the time of sowing seeds and harvesting.

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70 Alana Golmei, op.cit., p. 38.
72 R.H. Gonmei, op. cit., p.5.
73 V.V. Rao, op. cit., p. 137.
The boys had to face all kinds of competitions in the boy’s dormitory. Nourishment (Malanmei) and hero-ship was also practiced in the dormitory. For showing muscle power, the boys were given the best food for many days. The members of boy’s dormitory used to give all kinds of punishment and awards to the deserving boys. The boys spent the whole of their time in the dormitory for doing different types of activities. They came to their homes only for taking meal or whenever they felt seriously ill.  

2.5.8 Punishment for violation of rules of discipline

If any boy who fails to comply with their rules of discipline was to face a great hardship and to get severe punishment for violation of rules of discipline. Because the rules of discipline were very strictly and hard enforced in the ancient society, punishment of disciplinary action for violation of discipline adopted in Khangchu Kai (boy’s dormitory) was the practice of whipping on the bare back of the delinquent boy bearing heavily with three or four forked sticks for 5-10 more times varied according to the nature of indiscipline was committed by him. There was no mercy nor was payment of fine for indiscipline allowed. Even the parent of the delinquent boy was helpless because no parent could interfere within the affairs of Khangchu kai under the traditional custom of Ruangmei followed from generation. During the old days the Gaanpis of the boy’s dormitory had certain arbitrary and discretionary powers in enforcing the corrective measures of discipline in controlling the indisciplined boys of Khangchu Kai.  

74 Ursula G. Bower, op.cit.,p.82.  
75 G. Makuga, op.cit. p. 70.
2.5.9 Luchu Kai (Girl’ dormitory)

The girl’s dormitory is known among the Ruangmei called Luchu Kai. All the young girls stayed together in girls dormitory. This was the place where the girl was made acquainted with social life of a village. Like that of boy’s dormitory the girl’s dormitory had a leader called Tunapi (head girl) who looked after the welfare of the girls. Initially, they had to go to a junior girl’s dormitory. During this period, the young girls were not authorized to keep their hair long. They shaved their hair till they reached the age of puberty. Once the girl attained maturity, she was transferred to the senior dormitory. From that day onwards she had to sleep in the dormitory till she got married. She was authorized to keep long hairs as soon as she becomes a full-fledged member of the senior dormitory.\textsuperscript{76}

2.5.10 Duties and functions of the girl’s dormitory

There were lots of differences in respect of functions and duties of girl’s dormitory as compared to that of boy’s dormitory. In the morning, girls were asked to work at home. The girl’s dormitory looked after the welfare of the villages by contributing voluntary services in the form of collecting firewood and water for the poor and deserted widows during the daytime. She was authorized to use their dormitory only at night time.\textsuperscript{77} The girls were imparted training in arts and crafts, spinning, weaving, singing, dancing, maintenance of

\textsuperscript{76} Personal Interview with G. Lurupi, Village elder, Neikanlong, Imphal, Manipur, on 07.05.2006.
\textsuperscript{77} Ursula G. Bower. op.cit., p. 82.
children and families in these dormitories. Women were, however, not allowed to use musical instruments.\footnote{Z.V. Paathing, Status of Tangkhul Women, (Imphal, 1994), p. 27.}

2.5.11 Laakpui Kai (Married women’s house)

Laakpui Kai means the assembly house of all married women of the village. It is one of the important social institutions of the village, particularly of women society. According to the traditional custom a girl after her marriage becomes woman hood, and if so, she would become automatically the member of Lakkpui Kai. From the beginning Laakpui kai was usually accommodated in the house of one respectable –elderly woman with the concern of her husband.\footnote{Personal Interview with G.Lurupi, Village elder, Neikanlong village, Imphal, Manipur on 07.05. 2006.} It is said that women of the Laakpui kai used to assemble at least twice in a year, particularly during the two annual festivals, namely, Gaan Ngai and Nahnu Ngai with a view to discuss the problems of women society, to chalk out programmes of common feast (Naptu Karumei) fashion show of female garments (Pheibaan Karumei), imparting dance training (Laakpui Laam Khang) etc. The women of Laakpui kai used to meet in the Laakpui kai and when a meeting was convened by their leaders to discuss some problems regarding matters of women society on the status of women in village, custom, usages and society etc.\footnote{G. Makuga, op. cit., Pp. 73-74.}

2.5.11.a Laakpui pi

As a customary practice, two senior most elderly women were chosen as their leaders known as Laakpui pi. Laakpui pi means head or leader of the
women assembly house in order to guide, train and control the young women, to convened meetings of women as and when it is felt necessary to issue instructions or direction to the women members for their present, participation, performance of certain duties and functions. The women leaders (Laakpui pi) would continue to hold their traditional post until they were promoted to the status of Karaapei (old womenship) or replaced by another senior woman due to some circumstances or death.81

2.5.11.b Duties of Laakpui pi

The women leader are to guide, train and control the young women in matters of social manners and morality such as beahviours of dealing, talking, serving in the social functions guide them how to sing folk songs, folk dance, how to preserve good morality, moral conduct, sincere faith in God, to be humble and polite in dealing with elderly men and women, advised to love and respect husband, mother-in-law, father-in-law including Laakpui kai bang pei (hostess) and kaibangpou (host) of women assembly house.

2.5.12 Karaapei kai/Kianjapui (old women house)

Karaapei kai means the house of old women, who generally attained about seventy years and above. As a customary practice karaapei was constituted with the old women promoted by virtue of their ages from the assembly house of womanhood (Laakpui kai), and the Karaapei was one of the

81 Ibid.
social institutions of the village usually accommodated in the house of respected old women.\textsuperscript{82}

2.5.12.a Traditional function of Karaapei (old women)

The old women used to meet together with the old men in the village during annual festival of Naanu Ngai (piercing festival) of children and they would perform certain traditional function such as:

(i) Naanu Ngai- to join in the entertainment of Naanu feast with old men and children including the parent of children.

(ii) Naanu Dui Jumei- To fetch fresh water from the village pond or stream, (in bottle of court for sanctification of child).

(iii) Naanu Nukuan Roumei- The old women were engaged for piercing the ears of baby children.

(iv) Naanu Tamcha Puan Khou- To attend in the function of charity exhibition show of children during the Naanu Ngai.

(v) Ragwang Thuankupui Lu Khatni Laam- Singing and dancing, praising god for giving new children.\textsuperscript{83}

2.6.1 Lwangmai (Noney) village case study

Lwangmai (Noney) village is situated in National Highway-52, Tamenglong District, Manipur under Nungba Sub-division. Mr. Rugwangpou Gangmei was the Khullak/Chief of Lwangmai village and the ex-officio chairman of the village authority. He was the approved leader of the whole

\textsuperscript{82} Personal Interview with G. Amathoi, Village elder, Majorkhul, Imphal, Manipur, on 08.07.2006.

\textsuperscript{83} Personal Interview with G. Namkhuomliu, Village elder, Neikanlong village, Imphal, Manipur, on 09.07.2006.
villagers as per the customary law and practices of the Ruangmei people. But, since he was illiterate a ‘power attorney’ was given to one of his sons Mr. Lansingam Gangmei to act as an agent to the government offices. Thus, all facilities and developmental works were undertaken and deal in his name. But, later he was accused of misusing his ‘power of attorney’ given to him. He was found guilty of misusing few lakhs of rupees which were meant to be distributed to the villagers as labour wages for the work done under MGNREGS. Despite, given many summon and chances to explain and prove his innocence before the village court (pei) and the villagers, he disappeared from the village. Since he could not prove and give evidence of his innocence and make the matter transparent before the people of the village his whole family was out-casted from Gangmei clan. And the power of attorney given to him was let withdrawn for misusing the power of the clan. It was an unusual and a special case that the eldest member of the clan (the head of the village) committed serious crime working against the interest of the clan in particular and the village as whole. And thus, the Khullakship was led held by the next eldest member of the Gangmei clan and the Lwangmai (Noney) village.\textsuperscript{84}

\footnote{84 Personal Interview with Pouhiam Kamei, Village Elder, Noney (Lwangmai) on 10-05-2011.}
Khangchu Gaan and Luchu Tuna
(young boys and young girls of dormitory)

Gaan-Tuna Gaaling pinmei
(young boys and girls playing a game with nut-beads of jungle creeper)

Luchu Kai Khou Tunapui Zoukaguatmei
(Steering of rice beer in the girls’ Dormitory house)
Pei Gandai (Pei elders) Kakhulong Village

Laakpui (Married women) Lagailong Women Society
Karaapei (old woman)

Laakpui Pi (head of the women)