CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

Political parties are one of the most essential requirements for meaningful functioning of a representative democracy. Nowadays, no democracy can function without them. They are expected to act as instruments for stimulating political consciousness among the masses and help in the expansion of popular participation in a democratic framework. The actions and interactions they share constitute the essence of party system inside a state. In other words, party system refers to the competitive interaction patterns among party units or, as Duverger pointed out, “the forms and modes of their coexistence.”

The history of the emergence of political parties in Manipur dates back to the British period. It was against the backdrop of the British Rule that political consciousness developed among the people which ultimately led to the emergence of political parities inside the state. The first

---

political party was the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha (1938). This was followed by a number of other political parties like the Manipur Praja Sanmelani (1940), Manipur Praja Mandal (1946), Krishak Sabha (1946), Manipur Praja Sangha (1946), Manipur State Congress (1946), etc. All these parties emerged under the patronage and guidance of Hijam Irabot Singh. Another landmark in the emergence of political parties during this period was that of the Congress party. These political parties without exception emerged in the context of the demand for socio-economic and political reforms inside the state during the 1930s and the mid 1940s. Some of the prominent issues raised by various parties during this period were those of the demand for a popular legislative assembly comprising elected representatives of the people, universal adult franchise, a government responsible to the legislature, amalgamation of the hills and plains administration, abolition of feudal taxes, etc.

---

2 Soyam Satradhari Singh: Manipur ithasta Hijam Irabot, [Soyam’ Publication, Imphal], 1974, p. 46.
The parties during this period may be grouped into two categories – the Manipur State Congress on the one hand and the various other groups which were established under the patronage and guidance of H. Irabot.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 56-70.} While the formation of the Manipur Sate Congress heralded the emergence of new political elite who were influenced by Indian national movement and its ideals, and were for the merger of Manipur into the Indian Union, the other parties were more or less in favor of preserving Manipur as a separate political entity. Besides, while the Congress emerged as a political forum for the newly emerging bourgeois at a time when the monarchy was on the way out, the other parties were conspicuously inclined towards the uplift of the socio-economically exploited people in general and the rural poor in particular. With a basic divergence in their aspirations, the relationship between these two groups of parties was not a cordial. There were often conflicts, and both used to criticize each other time and again.
The 1950s and the 1960s saw the emergence of socialist groups and a number of regional parties of the state from time to time, both in the hills and the valley. While the socialists were able to sustain themselves considerably during this period, most of the regional parties came and went without making much impact till the coming of the MPP (1968). From her merger into the Dominion of India till she became a full fledged state within the Indian Union, the demand for the right to self government was the most important slogan in the state. The people had already enjoyed this right under the Manipur State Constitution Act 1947 and they were very disappointed when it was so unjustly taken away from them because she was reduced to the status of a Part C State without a legislature of her own.

One can see a significant difference in the stand between the Congress on the one hand and the rest of the parties on the other during the first two decades of her merger into India. The Congress was in favor of giving some more power to the Territorial Council\(^4\) at first and to the

\(^4\) *Prajatantra*, 26.11.1959, p. 2.
Territorial Assembly later. Otherwise, the party was not in favor of granting statehood to Manipur till it agreed to grant the same to Manipur and Tripura in principle on 3 September 1970. On the other hand, all the other parties stood for the grant of statehood to Manipur without any further delay. As a result the two sides were often in conflict over this issue.

The grant of a Territorial Assembly to the state in 1963 more or less coincided with the beginning of large scale defections in the state. The party system which emerged in Manipur till then was one of multi-party system where no party ever won a majority in the legislature. Defections followed without any check and it resulted in the absence of political stability inside the state. Besides, as already mentioned in previous chapters, many small parties emerged and faded inside the state every now and then without making much impact. All these meant that the

---

parties lacked a true social structure and they were neither strong nor stable in character.

Regarding the period from 1972 to 1985, coalitional alliance among parties with a view to form the government has been one of the most pronounced and permanent features of party system in Manipur. This was only to be expected in view of the failure of the parties to win even for once a majority of the seats in the state assembly elections. This is true not only for the period of the present study. In fact Manipur has a long history of coalition government prior to 1972 as well. Indeed, the first ministry which was formed in the state in 1948 was a coalition ministry.

The trend of multiparty system where no party emerged as a clear winner was also there right from the start. It was only in case of the present Assembly that a party has won a majority after elections. This too was after by-elections in three ACs. Otherwise, Congress won only 30 out of 60 in the 9th State Assembly Elections, 2007. This was only the second time that a party won half the seats of the state assembly. The earlier instance was when the
Congress won 30 seats during the Fourth State Assembly Elections 1984.

All the while, the relationship among the parties inside the state was characterized by a lack of mutual trust, coordination and unity. By and large, it was one of conflict and not of cooperation. It was true for the relationship between the Opposition and the Ruling groups, among coalition partners and parties in Opposition. In other words, an absence of unity, solidarity and cooperation was an obvious feature of the relationship which the parties inside the state shared among themselves.

The composition of the parties in both the Ruling and the Opposition sides fluctuated every now and then due to numerous defections. This means lack of stability in the composition of parties and the strength of MLAs in both the Ruling and the Opposition side. Yet such a lack of mutual trust did not matter at all while looking for allies to reach the desired number to form a ministry. Indeed, the dictum that politics makes strange bedfellows can never be truer than it is in the case of Manipur during this period.
Problems started only after the formation of the ministry mainly on account of conflict over sharing the ministerial berths. This led to the constant break down of ministries.

Fragmentation of parties has also been a long established tradition starting from the pre-Independence period. For instance, Irabot left the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha to establish a number other political organizations. The Manipur State Congress was also divided into two — Tomal Congress and Tompok Congress. This tradition was also kept alive by parties during the period under study. The MPP and the MHU got split into factions at one time or the other during the period under study. These factions, sometimes, after sitting in opposite sides of the floor will come together again within no time. This further added to the lack of stability of the political parties in terms of the number of MLAs they have in the legislature as well as in terms of the composition of the Ruling and Opposition groups. In such a situation, it is not surprising that personalities often turn out to be of greater import than

---

4 Th. Gokul Singh: Defection in Manipur, Imphai, p. 53.
that of their parties. This, along with the lack of ideological commitment on the part of these persons, was one more factor contributing to failure of many parties to be stable and strong over a long period of time.

Inter-party relationship among coalition partners and among parties in the Opposition had more or less similar features. In the beginning the practice of going for a common minimum program was not there among the parties when they decided to form a coalition ministry. It was only their all consuming lust for power that hurried them to enter into the alliances. There were occasions when they did not have it even after the formation of a ministry. This adversely affected inter-party relationship as coalition partners. The same was true for parties in the Opposition as well and this greatly contributed to the lack of unity and cohesion among them.

One also finds a tendency among the major parties both in the Ruling and the Opposition trying to absorb smaller parties within their fold. This obviously resulted in further manipulations among the parties. Such efforts often
led to the downfall of ministries or changes of ministries. The smaller groups, lacking ideological commitment and with MLAs ever willing to change their political affiliations for promises of ministerial berths, obliged them most of the time.

Intra-party conflicts were another permanent feature of the relationship among the parties. This was true for the relationship between the Ruling and the Opposition parties and for parties within a coalition ministry and in opposition. In addition to this, most of the parties, big and small, were not free from intra-party conflicts as well. These problems meant that the parties could not devote much time to strengthen their solidarity as coalition partners or parties in Opposition.

It is also significant to note that the line which divided the Ruling and the Opposition sides was always a thin one. It often got blurred. This is not so much because of any coalitional or cordial relationship between them but because of the constant defections from one side to the other. Instances of former enemies becoming allies and allies
becoming enemies happened all too frequently. Apart from adversely affecting the stability of the government, this also meant that the contest between the two was not so much in terms of ideologies and policies and programs as it was over the exclusion or inclusion of someone in the ministry or the Ruling party at the expense of some others.

Both sides were also often involved in encouraging defections from each other's side with a view to either further consolidate their position of power or to overthrow an existing ministry and replace it by an alternative government of their own. All these meant that the overall situation was not conducive to the growth of new parties which would have lasted long. New parties came and went before they could make any significant impact and secure a social base of their own.

Another significant observation one can make here will be that of the leadership crisis, both in a coalition ministry and the Opposition: This was also one more reason for the failure of all the coalition ministries to last long. In fact at an average, the eight coalition ministries during the period
under study lasted less than one year each. The Opposition fared no better in this regard. There was hardly any one on the side of the Opposition who could emerge as the unanimous leader during this period. This made the situation all the more conducive to defections bringing not only instability to the government but also lack of strength and stability in the composition of both the coalition partners and Opposition parties.

The influence of geography of the state and the ethnic composition of the people of the hills was also obvious in the nature of political parties in the state. With the exception of the Congress, the other parties remained more or less confined to either the hill or the plains. For instance, while the MPP remained mainly confined in the valley, the MHU was exclusively confined in the hill areas of the state. Even the other national parties like the CPI and the CPI (M) also remained confined to the valley only. This does not help in bridging the gap among the different groups of people inside the state, and between the hills and the valley.
The political weather at the Center also significantly influenced the course of actions which the parties in the state followed while interacting among themselves. The most vivid example of this was seen in 1977. By the end of June this year, following the coming of Janata Party into power at the Center, as many as 55 MLAs in the state assembly became members of Janata Party. This was in spite of the fact that there was no Janata candidate contesting the elections during the 1974 Mid-term assembly elections. There were also instances of Congress (U) MLAs defecting to the Congress (I) in 1981 after the failure of the former in the Lok Sabha Elections, 1980.

It may be also noted that absence of stringent anti-defection laws earlier have significantly contributed to the sad state of party system in Manipur during the period from 1972 to 1985. Because it encouraged the unscrupulous MLAs to defect from one side to another all the while without the slightest botheration for the moral obligation

---

they have to the voters or to the parties on which ticket they
got elected. It created a climate of extreme political
uncertainty in state politics and obstructed the growth of a
well structured, effective and meaningful party system
inside the state. It did not help in the development of a
stable relationship among coalition partners as well as
among the parties in Opposition. The composition of parties
both in coalition and the Opposition was never stable. They
were in an extremely fluid state as the MLAs in both sides
changed there political allegiance again and again. All these
adversely affected the proper functioning of parliamentary
practices inside the state.

One can also make a note here about of the CPI.
Throughout the period from 1972 to 1985, except for two of
its MLAs, no other MLA of the party ever indulged in the
game of defection. They were also responsible for keeping
the banner of the Opposition alive during the middle of
1977 when every other party had defected from their
respective parties to join the Janata Party. The Opposition
then comprised only four MLAs of the party.
Over all, the party system during the period from 1972 to 1985 was one of a multi-party system where no party was in a position to form the government on its own strength immediately after the general assembly elections. Defections and more defections affecting seriously not only the stability of government but also the stability of parties was the norm during this period. In other words, the party system in Manipur during this period was more or less akin to that of the unstable multi-party system model mentioned by Maurice Duverger.

The need for stringent anti-defection laws during this period could have never been overemphasized. Indeed, the 52nd Amendment of the Constitution (1985) adding the Tenth Schedule to the Constitution was a great landmark in the history of parliamentary democracy in India. It was an extremely important and essential step. The 91st Amendment of the Constitution (2003) has further improved the situation. The positive impact these measures had on the parliamentary practices in the state can be seen from the fact that after the Eighth State Assembly Elections
(2002), for the first time in Manipur a coalition ministry could last its full term of five years. It was a coalition of the Congress (I), MSCP, NCP and CPI. It had only 35 MLAs with Congress (I), MSCP, NCP and CPI having 20, seven, three and five MLAs respectively.

The present coalition ministry comprising the Congress (I), the CPI and the RJD having the support of 38 MLAs (Congress 31, CPI four and the RJD three) is also not facing any threat from defections. Except for possible changes in the leadership of the Congress, it is also likely to last the full term. This has been mainly because of the anti defections laws which have become all the more stringent after 91st Amendment of the Constitution. These developments may be considered as conducive for the emergence of new and healthy trends inside the party system of Manipur in future because the prospects of strong and stable parties are brighter now than ever. At present, the state is having a multi-party system where the Congress is emerging as the dominant party with no other second party in sight to
significantly challenge its position of power. The trend is not likely to change in the near future.