Chapter III

DEMOCRATIC EXPERIMENTS IN MANIPUR IN 1940s AND 1950s

The form of government in Manipur prior to the establishment of full responsible government was a mixed one. It was neither purely monarchical nor aristocratic nor democratic. Elements of the three forms of government were there both in plain and in the hills. Emergence of the real democratic form of government was there by the middle of 1940s. The period between 1940s and 1950s happened to be one of the most important periods in the history of modern Manipur. Many social and political changes had taken place.

On the eve of Indian independence uprising of identity crisis among the hill tribes, formation of political parties, emergence of various political parties to form into larger political parties, etc., were there in Manipur.

Catastrophics Socio-Political Development Among Tribals in Manipur on the Eve of Indian Independence

Social and political awakening among the tribal community became intensified with the overall process of socio-political changes in Manipur
on the eve of Indian Independence. Problem of tribal identity was the major feature both in the hill and plain. The search for the real identity can also be considered a part of modernization of the history of Manipur. During the course of searching for the real identity small and distinct groups combined to form into larger groups. They tried to form a common nomenclature. Some tribes tried to unite themselves through the creation of social and political organisations.

During identity movement in 1940s large numbers of Kuki-Chin groups were united under the nomenclature of "Mizo" in 1946.\(^1\) Zemei, Liangmei, Rongmei including Puimei form a common nomenclature, "Zeliangrong", in the same year. Khulmi union was an association of various kindred groups like Anal, Monsang, Lamkang, Koireng, etc., formed during 1947-1950.\(^2\) Other associations like Vaiphei national organisation, Hmar association, Mizo integration council, etc. were formed during 1944-1945.\(^3\)

Important tribal-based political parties formed on the eve of Indian Independence and after the Indian republic were the Naga National League, the Kuki National Assembly, the Mizo Union, and the Manipur Zeliangrong

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\(^2\) Ibid.

\(^3\) Ibid.
Union. These political parties contested election of the electoral college in 1952.4

It is obvious that common nomenclature and socio-political organisations among the tribal groups came into being basically on linguistic affinity, racial origin, cultural ties, etc.

Since a tribe is formed by a numbers of clans having certain different characteristics at the level of clans, existing nomenclature, union or association, etc. were not satisfied to all the clans.5 It, later, became an important factor for disunity, factionalism, clanism, partism etc. in tribal society.

**Demand for Responsible Government in Manipur**

The birth of the first political party "Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha" in Manipur in 1934 was related to the demand for responsible government in Manipur. As it was the principal organisation it worked in collaboration with Manipur Praja Sanmilan, Manipur Krishak Sanmilan, Manipur Youth

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League and Manipur Students Federation. Selected representatives of the said organisations participated the joint meeting in 1940.\(^6\)

A new political party called Praja Sangha Party (PSP) was establishment in 1945. The fundamental objectives of the party were for the achievement of independence of Manipur and immediate abolition of the feudal system in Manipur. Establishment of responsible government, introduction of universal adult franchise, creation of classless society in Manipur were the ultimate aim of the party. Manipur Krishak Sabha, the only peasant-based political organisation in Manipur was formed on 16 May 1946. The party was also in favour of PSP. Besides, this party strongly stressed for the unity of the people in the hills and the plain. The party also demanded for the transfer of cultivable land to the peasants.\(^7\)

Another important landmark in the history of movement for responsible government was the formation of Manipur State Congress Party (MSCP) on 4 October 1946.

Joint meeting of the various political parties was held at the Aryan Theatre on 4 October 1946. It was initiated by Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha.

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The meeting was presided by Rajkumar Bhubansana Singh and conducted by Y. Khoimacha Singh. They were the members of Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha. The meeting agreed to form a common political party. Representatives were nominated from different parties. But the president of the meeting of different parties strongly objected Irabot and excluded his name from the list of nominated members. It may have been on the ground of personal inconsistency between the two leaders. Even though majority of the audience raised their hands in favour of Irabot. The president had a firm determination against Irabot to be the member of the new party.⁸

Irabot could not tolerate the unrealistic atmosphere of the meeting and went out of the hall. Many like-minded people also departed the meeting. Thus a few people remained in the meeting hall and they agreed to form a new political party called Manipur State Congress. Rajkumar Bhubansana Singh and Khoimacha Singh became the President and the Secretary of the new party. This newly formed political party submitted a separate memorandum to His Highness, the Maharaja of Manipur on 7 November 1946. The most important point of the demand was self-responsible government of Manipur.⁹


⁹ Ibid., pp. 181-182.
The grouping of different political parties into a single party "Manipur State Congress" marked a great event in the political development of Manipur. They continued their demand for responsible government in Manipur.

On 1 November 1946 the Congress party in Manipur submitted a memorandum to the Maharaja of Manipur demanding for a royal declaration to establish legislative assembly in Manipur on the basis of democratic principal. The Maharaja also felt the increasing political development in India and the need of it in Manipur. On 12 December 1946 the Maharaja issued a royal order to form a constitution making committee to prepare a new Constitution for the state.\(^{10}\)

The Constitution making body was established with 16 members. There are three members including president of Manipur state Durbar. Two nominees of the Maharaja, one representative of the chief court, five each from valley tehsils and hill areas.\(^{11}\)

While the work of making Constitution was in full swing Maharaja did not prepared to implement the demand of the political parties. But he established interim government on 1 July 1947. Manipur State Durbar was

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\(^{10}\) N. Joykumar Singh, n.7, p. 154.

abolished in the same year and it was named as Manipur State Council which later did not fulfilled upto the expectation of the political parties.\textsuperscript{12}

The framing of the Constitution was finalized on 26 July 1947. The new constitution consisted of 11 chapters was submitted to the Maharaja for his approval. The Maharaja consented the same. The new Constitution inaugurated in 1947 which is known as the Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947. Another Act for the Administration of hill areas called the Manipur State Hill Administration Regulation Act, 1947 was also formed. Hill villages were divided into circles or subdivision. There was also village authority for every 20(twenty) tax paying house. Regarding the appointment and constitutional matter of the village authority the Sub-Divisional Officer was the final authority.\textsuperscript{13}

**Main Features of the Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947**

The new Constitution was called "The Manipur state constitution Act, 1947". Under the provisions of the Constitution, the Constitutional Monarchy was established as the constitutional head of the state. All rights, authority and jurisdiction which appertain of are incidental to the


Government of such territories are exercisable by the Maharaja subject to the provision of the Act.\textsuperscript{14} Regarding executive, it was delegated to and shall be vested in the council of Ministers.\textsuperscript{15} The Council shall have seven Ministers including the Chief Minister appointed by the Maharaja. Distributing portfolios among the ministers shall be done in consultation with the Maharaja. The Council of Ministers shall have a common seal and shall be jointly responsible to the Maharaja for administration of the state.\textsuperscript{16}

The State Assembly shall be elected for a period of three years and shall comprised representatives freely elected by the people on account of adult franchised and on the principle of joint electorate. The Act provided for a Legislative Assembly of 53 members, 30 from the valley, 18 from the hills and 3 from Muslims. Two members were nominated by the Maharaja.\textsuperscript{17}

For the transaction of business at a meeting of the council shall not be less than three including the Chief Minister. The Assembly may make rules for regulating its proceedings and the conduct of the business.\textsuperscript{18} The

\textsuperscript{14} Manipur State Constitution Act, part 1, Section 3.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., part 111, Section 10 Clause (a).

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., section 12.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., part IV section 17.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., section 20.
State Assembly may debate all matters concerning the Government and well being of the state which in the opinion of five members of the assembly, it is in the interest of the public to debate.\textsuperscript{19} The law making authority in the state shall consist of the Maharaja in Council in collaboration with the State Assembly acting under section 18 above.\textsuperscript{20} When the Assembly consider that a law shall be enacted the council shall cause a Bill to be drafted, which shall be laid before the Assembly. The Chief Minister shall submit the Bill in its final form for the assent of the Maharaja. On the receipt of the Maharaja's assent, the Bill shall be published in the state Gazzette and shall become law.\textsuperscript{21}

Regarding finance, the Minister in charge of finance shall prepare an annual budget showing the estimated receipts and expenditure for the ensuing year and shall submit it to the Assembly within fifteen days of meeting for the Budget session. The Assembly shall after considering the Budget, shall submit it to the Maharaja for approval.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., section 18.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., part v section 26.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., section 27.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., part section 33, 34.
The Act further provided that there shall be a complete separation of the judiciary from the executive. The Chief Justice of the state and two Puisne judges shall be appointed by the Maharaja.\textsuperscript{23}

Any provision of this Act may be subject to amend by the Maharaja in Council provided that such amendment is laid before the Assembly and receives the support of at least 80 percent of the state Assembly present and voting when such amendment is debate.\textsuperscript{24}

The Manipur State Constitution Act 1947, did not provide a full responsible democratic form of Government in the state. A responsible form of government is one where the head of the state is elected. But in this case the Council of ministers was collectively responsible to the Maharaja who was not elected. There was no provision for the member to move a non-confidence motion against the Council as a whole. The Maharaja has the power to appoint the Chief Minister, to interfere in distributing portfolios, to proclaim emergency, etc. So the king was absolutely the dominant factor in the political system of the state. However, under this Act there were provisions to the people participate in the administration to all people justice, social, economic and political under part x.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., part ix section 42.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., part xi section 56.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., part x, section 52.
**Manipur Assembly Election in 1948**

Under the Manipur State Constitution Act \(^1\)47 the first assembly elections in Manipur were held in 1948. It was no doubt the first election in India held on Universal adult franchise.\(^2\) This election to the Manipur Assembly under constitutional monarchy was boycotted by the Naga National Council (NNC) as well as by the Mizo Union.\(^3\) Irabot also objected to certain provision of the new constitution. But most of the Manipuri leaders took part in the polls.\(^4\)

The election were held in phases. It began on 11 July and continued upto 27 July 1948. The results were also declared in batches. The final lists came on 20 August 1948.\(^5\)

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\(^{26}\) P. Bharat Singh, n. 4, p. 4.


\(^{29}\) P. Bharat Singh, n. 4, p. 4.
THE PARTY-WISE BREAK UP OF THE ELECTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>No. of elected members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Manipur State Congress</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Socialist Party</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Hill areas</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Independent</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Manipur Krishak Sabha</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Nomination</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>53</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Phanjoubam Tarapot, n. 28 p. 36.

On 18 October 1948 the first Assembly was opened at Manipur Durbar Hall. No party could secured absolute majority to form the government. A coalition government was form including Manipur State Congress.30

The people of Manipur experienced for the first time to exercise their right of adult franchise. They also enjoyed certain political rights and liberties. However surprisingly on 30 June 1949 the lone opposition party, Manipur State congress, launched Satyagraha movement demanding abdication of the Maharaja and immediate integration of the state with the Indian Union. The hill Members Legislative of Assembly strongly opposed

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30 Phanjoubam Tarapot n. 28 p. 36.
the Congress struggle to merge with the Union. Irabot also vehemently objected the Congress stand.\textsuperscript{31}

\textbf{Merger Agreement}

The period of 1947-1949 can be described as the transitional period in the political history of Manipur. It was the period during which the Ministry of Home Affairs of the Government of India started annexing the princely states which remained independent.\textsuperscript{32} Manipur was also a state enjoying self responsible government with His Highness Maharaja of Manipur. Maharaja Buhachandra was pressured by the Indian Government to come to the agreement of merger with India. But "almost cent percent of the people of Manipur were against integration or merger."\textsuperscript{33} Except the Manipur State Congress the general public was in favour of preserving its own constitution and Council of Ministers with Monarchy.\textsuperscript{34}

Pandit Nehru, the first Prime Minister of the Republic of India wrote to the Maharaja of Manipur on 22 May 1947: "I appreciate fully the importance of Manipur state in the Union of India from the geographical

\textsuperscript{31} Bimal J. Dev and Dilip K. Lahiri, n. 6, p. 125.


\textsuperscript{33} Phanjoubam Ttarapot, n. 28, p. 37.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p. 38.
and strategic points of view. Also Manipur has a distinct cultural entity which I should like to preserved as such entity. You know rapidly the situation is developing in India. It is quite possible that big changes might take place long before June, 1948. There is no time left for any one in India just to wait and see what happened. The future of Manipur state obviously lies with the Union of India. In other ways too the Union would, no doubt, help Manipur state to develop itself in many ways while retaining its cultural entity."\textsuperscript{35}

In the meantime, the Government of India put an eye to interfere in the internal administration of Manipur at any cost. The hasty intention of Indian Government to integrate Manipur with the Union of India may be under many reasons. But most probably to prevent from the apprehension of Communist uprising in the neighbouring state of Burma.\textsuperscript{36}

On 17 Sept. 1949 Maharaja Budhachandra arrived at Shillong to discuss with the Assam Governor, Shri. Prakash, regarding the relation between the Manipur Government and the Dewan. Major General Amar Singh was the Dewan of Manipur at that time. He was an agent of the

\textsuperscript{35} Nehru and Manipur, Published by State Level Committee, the 40\textsuperscript{th} Anniversary of India's Independent and Birth Centenary of Nehru, 1989, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{36} Phanjoubam Tarapot, n.28, p. 37.
Indian Government. At the time of Budhachandra's visit to Shillong "his Loyalty (Dewan) was not with the Maharaja". 37

Assam Governor and other authorities of the Indian Government pressurized Maharaja to sign the Merger agreement. 38 "Maharaja's proposal that he wanted to go back to Manipur and discuss with his council of Ministers was politely turned down." 39 Sardar Patel instructed the Governor of Assam that the agreement must got signed during the Maharaja's visit to Shillong.

After the three days of discussion at Shillong the Maharaja had to signed the agreement on merger of Manipur on 21 Sept. 1949. 40

The signing of merger agreement was in fact one of the most important and controversial events in the History of Manipur. "If one refers to the original merger agreement, it would indicate that the agreement was signed by the advisor to the Government of India in the Ministry of states and the Maharaja of Manipur; that the agreement bears the date of 21

37 Ibid., p. 39.
38 Ibid., p. 39.
39 Ibid., p. 39.
40 Ibid., p. 39.
September 1949 and that any of the signers of the agreements did not write date on it."\textsuperscript{41}

Revolutionary Peoples Front (RPF), and underground outfit of Manipur, mentioned that "The Manipur Maharaja was physically and mentally forced to sign Manipur merger agreement on 21 September 1949 under duress and coercion. The Manipur Maharaja had formally communicated to the representative of the government of India at Shillong that he was no longer functioning as a plenipotentiary of Manipur, since the political powers have been totally transferred to the people of Manipur and he being a constitutional monarch did not have any power to sign any effective valid agreement or treaty with the government of India".\textsuperscript{42}

Shri. Prakash, the governor of Assam once said that there was no question of merging Manipur into India and the appointment of Dewan in place of Dominion agent would not affect the integrity and entity and prestige of the Maharaja. He further insisted Maharaja to hand over the Dewan, all activities relating to the administration of the state.\textsuperscript{43}


\textsuperscript{42} \textit{A Brief Account for Demanding Sovereignty of Manipur}. Published by Revolutionary Peoples Front (RPF) on 25 February, pp. 5-6.

\textsuperscript{43} N. Joykumar Singh, n. 7 p. 187.
Almost all the political parties in the Manipur Legislative Assembly reacted against the merger policy with the Indian Union. But leaders of the Manipur State Congress Party adopted a strong resolution to facilitate the merger of Manipur.\footnote{Ibid., p. 187.}

The political condition of Manipur went into a state of chaos as a consequence of conflict between the supporter and anti-merger political parties and public.

On the part of the Dominion Government, Prakash, the Governor of Assam took up possible steps to fulfill the policy of merger. To carry out his proposal into action, "Military personnels were posted in the surrounding areas of the red-lands' where the Maharaja used to live in".\footnote{Ibid., p. 188.} Even when the Dominion government pressurised repeatedly Maharaja stressed the importance of peoples concern since sovereignty of the state has been vested in the people.

Finally an agreement was signed between the Maharaja of Manipur and Shri V.P. Menon, Advisor to the Government of India in the Ministry of states with Shri Prakash, the then Governor of Assam as a witness.\footnote{Nehru and Manipur, n. 35, p. 61.}
Accordingly it came into forced on 15 October 1949. On that day the Praja Shanti Sabha coalition government was dissolved. With the integration of Manipur into the Indian Union, the Dominion government decided to form the state of Manipur into Chief Commissioner's province. The Government passed the part 'C' state Act to Manipur on 22 January 1950.

There are two important factors which were responsible for this political development. One was the rule of the leader of Manipur State congress and the other was the pressure of the Indian Government to merge all the independent sovereign states to the dominion Government.\(^47\)

The merger agreement "agreed that the maharaja would cede to the Dominion full and exclusive authority, jurisdiction and powers for and in relation to the governance of the state".\(^48\) It was also agreed that the Maharaja would continue to enjoy "the same personal rights, Privileges, dignities titles, authority over religious observances, customs, usages, rites and ceremonies and institution of Manipur".\(^49\) The Maharaja agreed to receive for his privy purse the sum of Rupees three lakhs for lifetime form the revenue of the state annually. His Highness's family members shall be entitled to all the personal sights, privileges, dignities and titles enjoyed by


\(^{48}\) Nehru and Manipur, n. 35, p. 61.

\(^{49}\) Ibid.
them whether within or outside the territories of the state. The government of India shall undertake to preserve various laws, customs and conventions prevailing in the state regarding the social, economic and religious life of the people.  

The merger of sovereign independent state of Manipur to the Dominion Government marked the end of an independent era of Manipur. It was the beginning of constitutional state of India.

Just after Manipur was handed over to the Indian Government, popular democratic form of Manipur state Legislative Assembly and the Council of Ministers were dissolved; the chief court was dissolved; the administration of Manipur was directly taken by the Chief Commissioner of Assam; Merger state (tax) Act was applied which came into force on January 1950, with the enforcement of Indian Constitution; Manipur became part 'C' state on 26 January 1950; Council of advisors consisting of Chief Commissioner was constituted in place of Council of Ministers and legislative assembly.  

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51 Nehru and Manipur, n. 35, p. 61.
Manipur as Part 'C' State

After the integration of all the princely states under the Dominion of India, India was declared a republic on 26 January 1950. The Indian constitution came into force on this day. Parliament passed part 'C' state Act in the same year. Sixty one states including Manipur were converted into part 'C' state under which the Legislative power would be administered by the Central Government. The administration of all the states included in part 'C' states had been entrusted to the President of India who would carry on through the Chief Commissioner appointed by the President. To assist the Chief Commissioner there were council of advisors in each states.

Though the people of Manipur were not satisfied with the constitution of the Advisory council the first Advisory council was inaugurated on 9 October 1950. The council consisted of advisors representing different political parties like Praja Shanti, Manipur State Congress and some local hill areas parties. Shri N. Ibomcha Singh of Praja Shanti Party was the President of the first Advisory council. The Congress party had two advisors in the council which later resigned as a consequence

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of different of opinion between the Congress Advisors and the then Chief Commissioner.\textsuperscript{54}

The first Parliamentary elections and the state assembly elections of free India were held in January 1952.\textsuperscript{55} In Manipur there were no assembly elections but election for electoral college was held.

Parties contested in the electoral college election were the Congress Party, All Manipur National Union, Praja Shanti Party, Gandhi Sewak Sanga, Praja Socialist Party, Achumba Pamba Congress, Naga National League, Historical Research Society, Communist Manipur, Mizo Union, Manipur Zeliangrong Union and independents.\textsuperscript{56}

\textbf{Party Wise Position in the Election}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>No. of elected members</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Congress Party</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Socialist Party</td>
<td>01</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Communist Party</td>
<td>02</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Independent</td>
<td>17</td>
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<td></td>
<td>30</td>
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\textit{Source: P. Bharat Singh, n. 4, p. 7}

\textsuperscript{54} Nehru and Manipur, n. 35, pp. 62-63.


\textsuperscript{56} P. Bharat Singh, n. 4, p. 7.
# List of the Members of Electoral College in Manipur 1952

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Smt. M.K. Binodini Devi</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>L. Achou Singh</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>T. Ibotombi Singh</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Md. Tomba Mia</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Anousana Singh</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Kh. Chaoba Singh</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>S. Chatradhari Singh</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>H. Dwijamani Sharma</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>S. Tombi Singh</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Y. Megho Singh</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>R.K. Maipakshana Singh</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>N. Tomchou Singh</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>Girimohan Singh</td>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>M. Koireng Singh</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>M. Thonglen Singh</td>
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<td>P. Tomchou Singh</td>
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<td>S. Chourajit Singh</td>
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<td>19.</td>
<td>Chouyaima Singh</td>
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<td>20.</td>
<td>Md. Alimudin</td>
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<td>21.</td>
<td>Alnam Anal</td>
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<td>22.</td>
<td>Zarem</td>
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<td>23.</td>
<td>Suisa</td>
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<td>25.</td>
<td>Hepuni Kaiho</td>
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<td>Athuibou</td>
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<td>Keiben</td>
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<td>28.</td>
<td>S. Bijoy Singh</td>
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<td>29.</td>
<td>Khuma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>Sumkhothen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: P. Bharat Singh, n. 4, p. 8-9*

The elected 30 members of the electoral college recommended the name of the five advisors for the members of the advisor council of the Chief Commissioner. Though they held different charges, they were giving no executive power except giving advise to the Chief Commissioner in matter of administration. The advisors were (1) Shri, Dwijamani Dev. (2)
Shri S. Krishna Mohan Singh (3) Shri Salam Tombi Singh (4) Dr. Kampa and (5) A. Daiho.\textsuperscript{57}

In the first Parliamentary elections of India held in 1952, the Naga National Council (NNC) organised a total boycott in the Naga inhabited areas. It was because the government of India did not recognised the report of plebiscite on the question of being independence or remaining in India. The thumb prints in two volumes of almost al the Nagas were sent to the President of India through the government of Assam which was not recognised by the Government.\textsuperscript{58}

Thus, in the light of facts stated in this chapter the period between 1940s and 1950s marked the great changing phenomenon in the History of Manipur. Various important historical events had taken place such as Tribal identity crisis both in the hills and the plain, establishment of political parties, emergence of democratic form of government, etc. The most important event was the process for the integration of Manipur into the Indian Union.

As a result of various socio-political movements the early mixed form of government in Manipur was transformed into a democratic form of


\textsuperscript{58} SK. Chauhe, n. 1, p. 118
government in 1948. But under the proposal for integration of all the princely states of North eastern states to Indian Union the Maharaja of Manipur was agreed to sign an agreement on 21 September 1949. Thus, in consequence, the existing democratic constitutional monarchy was abolished but the state began to be directly administered by the Governor of Assam through the Chief Commissioner appointed by him.