Preface

The theory of democracy tells that the people rule. But in practice there is a minority group called political elites, who rule the people. In reality, every society is governed by an elite, either chosen or non chosen. Abraham Lincoln’s most often quoted line ‘government of the people by the people and for the people’ now stands replaced by ‘government of the people by an elite sprang from the people’. The political elite structure of a society represents not only its political value but also the extent to which the value finds a concrete expression in the power structure and decision making process of the society. Political elite structure generally constitutes the most important segment of the elite structure of a society since they have direct access to political power which is overriding among all other forms of power. What motivates the political elites to play an active role in politics is their inevitable and irrepresible urge to come to power. It is mostly through the process of elections that the political elites establish their popularities and obtain the legitimacy to exercise power in society. They take important decisions with regard to diverse fields and their decisions make far reaching impact in the society. Among other things, people look to their political elites to ensure that the state’s economy remains in good shape and its benefits are distributed with fairness to all. They also look to them as guardians of laws and symbols of state/national values, for constructive management of the state’s affairs and for justice and a measure of inspiration.

A society faces various problems and crises one after another because of the irresponsibility of so many men and women in power- the product of the lack of intellectual preparation on the part of leadership. There is no denying the fact that the contemporary Manipur is experiencing an acute leadership deficit. The need and necessity of political leaders/elites is less in times and places where the state and society are in good working order. The state of affairs in Manipur from the very time it merged into the Indian union has been in a pathetic and deplorable situation. Manipur is really in need of able and dynamic political leaders/elites who can lead the state and its people in the right path with a vision of making the state one of the developed states in the country. Though Manipur became a full fledged state in 1972 and is now politically at par with other states, no concrete and systematic study has so far been done on the political elites in Manipur. This leaves a huge lacuna in terms of academic and intellectual
exercise in the state. The present study is a first ever and humble attempt to fill this gap by addressing the emergence, the nature and characteristics of political elites and their role and impact in the contemporary Manipuri society.

The present study relies primarily on primary data collected through personal interview method. The respondents who are included in the study as samples of sitting MLA and MP were/are the members of the 9th State Assembly, the 14th Lok-Sabha and Rajya Sabha. Now, the 10th State Assembly has been formed and some of the respondents who were sitting MLAs could not return to the House as people’s representatives while some of Ex-MLAs and defeated candidates got elected and are sitting MLAs now. I started collecting the primary data in two phases – first in the early part of 2008 and the second was concluded in 2010 with the addition of one respondent in the early part of 2012. Due care and attention was given on the population structure of Manipur so that political leaders/elites representing different social groups or communities were included as samples in the present study. Some political leaders not only appreciated the present study but also extended their full cooperation when I approached them for personal interview. Mention can be made of Yumnam Yaima Singh (Ex-MLA&MP), Holkhomang Haokip (Ex-MLA & MP), Wangkheimayum Kulabidhu Singh (Ex-MP) and Radhabinode Koijam (Ex-CM & Sitting-MLA) who not only provided me the opportunity for personal interview pertaining to the study by sparing their valuable time but also generously availed me relevant information (their memoirs and others) pertaining to the study. There are also political leaders/elites who understand the importance of academic research that they gave priority to my request for personal interview when I introduced myself as a research scholar. Particular mention can be made of Rishang Keishing (Ex-CM & Sitting MP), R.K. Dolendra Singh (Ex-CM /MP), Late W. Nipamacha Singh (Ex-CM), O. Joy Singh (Sitting-MLA), Gangumei Kamei (Ex-MLA), Dr. L. Chandramani Singh (Ex-Deputy CM), Sosho Lorho (Ex-MLA), Valley Rose Hungyo (Defeated candidate), Th. Debendra Singh (Sitting-MLA), Gaikhangam (Sitting-MLA), Md. Helaluddin Khan (Sitting-MLA), Thangso Baite (Ex-MLA & Sitting MP), Y. Erabot Singh (Sitting-MLA), Thangminlien Kipgen (Sitting-MLA) etc. Few of them spent their valuable time in providing relevant information in spite of the fact that they were suffering from general weakness because of their old age. On the other hand, academic research work has not been given any importance by some of the political leaders in Manipur as they out rightly rejected my request to give me personal interview by saying that they are busy
and have no time to spare for the purpose. For instance, I approached Hon’ble MLA, Manga Vaiphei, at his official residence, Quarter No. 5/Type-VI, Lamphel, and seek an appointment for personal interview on 1 March, 2009 with an introduction as a research scholar with proper credentials. However, he not only did not accept my request for personal interview but also did not give appointment on a later date when the same was sought for. The same thing happened in case of Salam Damudar Singh (Ex-MLA) when I seek personal interview on 18 April, 2009, my second visit to his residence at Sagolband as I could not meet him in my first visit on 15 April, 2009. Another sitting MLA, R.K. Anand Singh, adopted the method of postponing the date of personal interview, when it was sought for. I approached him for the first time on 17 July, 2009 but I was asked to come again for the purpose after one week. To serve my purpose, I approached him on 26 July, 2009 but I was again asked to come after few days. Accordingly, I tried twice to meet him for personal interview but met with no positive result. Another problem that I have experienced during my filed work occurred when I approached another Sitting-MLA, K. Raina, on 19 June, 2009 at his official residence. His private secretary asked me to come again on some other day. I did accordingly but the security personnel posted at the gate of his residence did not allow me even to enter the gate, forget about availing personal interview, when I approached the Hon’ble MLA twice on 22 and 26 June of 2009 respectively. The most unfortunate and unforgettable experience that I encountered during my field work occurred when I approached Smt. W. Leima Devi who has had the record of becoming the first woman cabinet minister and first woman elected twice in the political history of the state. I went to her residence at Laienjam Awang Leikai for the first time to get personal interview of her on 25 July 2009 but I was told to come again for the purpose after 28 July, 2009. But my second and third attempts on 31 July and 9 August of 2009 respectively were avoided by citing one reason or other. All these were not what I, as a research scholar, expected from them. They could not even spare few minutes for a research scholar who approached them for academic purpose. This shows how (un)concerned they are for and about the development process in Manipur. It was also revealed during the course of field work that some political elites in Manipur are not in good terms and in loggerhead against one another despite the fact that they belong to the same political party. Some of the respondents also revealed that there are certain factors which compelled them to do certain things which they did not like to accomplish in the larger interest of the state and general public. They did such things and made certain statements just to avoid the disturbances that they and
their party workers would face at the time of election. This in one way indicates that some political leaders are more concerned with fulfilling the demands, including unreasonable ones, of the constituents which often act against the interest of the state and the general public. Vote mathematics is more valuable to them than the interest of the state. It is not a good thing that some organizations, both legal and illegal, are found to resort to the practice of selection rather than election of the representative of the people just to fulfill their latent and manifest goals. This practice contradicts the democratic values and principles as well as the cause and interest of the whole state.

Spread over six chapters, the present study is an attempt to bring out in great detail the socio-political picture of political elites in Manipur by adopting behaviouralist’s approach with main emphasis on the attitude, perception, orientation and performance of the political elites in the political arena in particular and in social milieu in general. The present study focuses on the geographical, socio-religious profile of Manipur, its political history since 33 A.D., socio-economic and political background of political elites, their interactional linkages and their role perception and performance vis-à-vis crucial issues of the state.

I will consider my labour spent in the present study to be reasonably awarded if the present study satisfies some of the basic and present curiosities about who are the political elites in Manipur, what are their role, role perception and performance and their significance in the contemporary Manipur society.