CHAPTER III

THE ROLE OF CHIEFS, YOUTH AND CHURCH

In Manipur, regular elections have been conducted since 1952 on a similar pattern followed in the rest of the country. It is seen that apart from political parties, there are a number of other organizations and institutions that play an important role in mobilizing people during elections. Thus, it is essential to study these groups role in electoral politics. These include the Chiefs, the youths, and church among others. The various groups involved in the elections such as the Chiefs and churches are found mainly in the hills, as these institutions are prevalent more in the hill areas. The youth organizations, which are known by different names such youth club, youth fellowship, and the youth associations, are common to both the hills and the valley. These organizations too played an equally useful role in the elections.

Many times, it is said that the Indian society lacks voluntary associations\(^1\). This might be true in certain fields of life. However, a careful look at the electorate in action might reveal that in addition to the political parties, there are a number of organizations that are involved in the electoral process. These organizations are mainly of socio-cultural types. The leaders of such organizations have a position in the neighbourhood and his word commands respect. Thus, he can influence the voting of the neighbourhood. Other organizations take care of

organizing and celebrating certain public socio-religious functions. The parties and candidates endeavour to enlist the support of such organizations that can mobilize the voters during the elections, especially on the polling day. There are also other organizations of an entirely different kind. These are based on caste or tribe and religion. They become politically active during elections. The caste\tribe leader can influence his groups through informal and formal communication. Political parties make special efforts to cultivate the caste/tribe leaders and religious leaders and keep them on their side.

Perhaps one of the foremost functions of these groups is to transmit the culture of the wider society of which they are a part. Social class, religious and ethnic sub-cultures are transmitted through such groups. In modern complex societies, great varieties of organizations link the individual to public institutions. This may be called political socialization.

Political socialization refers to the process by which the institutions of society-the church, family, peers, the schools, and the mass media-influence the extent to which members participate in the governance of society, especially through voting. The purpose of political socialization in a democracy is to develop citizens who are politically knowledgeable and who actively participate in the decision-making process. This participation primarily involves taking part in the electoral process. It is now recognized that individuals do have innate differences that affect them, such as intelligence and motivation. Nevertheless, the emphasis in the study of political socialization continues to be on how

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2 Ibid.

external institutions such as the family, peer etc influence the individual. Political socialization involves the study of certain agents of influence and change on the individual as he or she learns to participate in the governance of society.

In Manipur, Organizations such as Churches and Youth clubs and institutions like village chiefs play an important role in political socialization. These groups hold discussions from time to time about the political system prevailing in the state as well as in other parts of the country. These discussions have an impact on the individuals and they learn a great deal of knowledge and experience out of contact with group mates. Thus, it would not be wrong to say that these groups play an important role in mobilizing people during elections.

TRADITIONAL POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

MacIver and Page used the term Institutions as an established form of procedure characteristic of group activity. According to them, whenever associations are created in society, certain rules and procedures also must be created for the dispatch of common business and for the regulation of members to one another and such forms can be called as Institutions. According to Malinowski, for achieving any purpose or to reach any ends, human beings have to organize. Organization implies a very definite scheme or structure. The main feature of any organization is universal and is applicable to all groups in their typical form. For a unit of such organization, Malinowski uses the term

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Institutions, which implies an agreement and a set of traditional values for which human beings come together. The term institution is commonly applied to customs and behavior patterns important to a society, as well as to particular formal organizations of government and public service. Institutions are structures and mechanism of social order and cooperation governing the behaviour of a set of individuals within a given human collectivity. Institutions are identified with a social purpose and permanence, transcending individual human lives and intentions, and with the making and enforcing of rules governing cooperative human behavior. Thus, when men agree amongst themselves to submit to some men or assembly of men voluntarily on condition to be protected against all other and to satisfy his needs it is called political institutions. The political institution of the tribal people in Manipur has been the village system that differs from one village to another.

In Manipur out of the total area of 22,437 square kilometers 20,126 square kilometers with a population of 7,13,813 according to 2001 census constitute the Hill Areas inhabited by 32 different tribes with varying population-strength, starting from Thadou, Tangkhul and Mao, to Moyon, Monsang and Thangal. Broadly speaking, the tribes may be classified into two classes, the Nagas and the Kukis. In the Naga group are included the Tangkhul, Mao (Memai and Poumai), Kabui (Rongmei and Puimei), Kacha Naga, Maring and Maram

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The Kuki group includes Thadou, Hmar, Zou, Anal, Simte and Gangte. In addition, other tribes do not fall into any of these two categories of tribes. Tribes such as Paite, Simte, Mizo, Zoumei, Kom, Tedimchin, Vaiphei, Thangkhal, etc., do not wish to be put under any of these ethno-political categories. The customs of the Naga group resemble those of the other Naga tribes of Nagaland, while the customs of the Kuki group resemble those of the tribes living in Mizoram. Traditionally every tribe of Manipur had a unique political system of their own. All types of political systems were found among the tribal people in the past. The hill people of Manipur remained independent of any external domination. Each village grew in isolation and was ruled by a hereditary Chief. The authority of the Chief was unquestioned. The Hill tribes had a distinct social life, law, customs, and method of governance of the people.

The institution of Chiefship has been a common traditional feature in many tribal societies in different parts of the world. The institution of Chiefship has existed from times immemorial almost among the tribal in North East India. The chiefship are known by different name. The Mizos called Hal, the Garos called Nokma, the Tangkhul called Awunga, and the Kukis called Hausa, although the names are different, one common feature about Chiefship is that, generally they possess independent powers and functions though of varied degrees and nature. The Chiefs in Manipur, however are considered to be the supreme in the jurisdiction of their own villages which are autonomous units governed

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8 J N Das Opcit, p 23
9 Ibid p 5
10 Ibid
11 M Horam, Naga Insurgency, Cosmo Publishing, New Delhi, 1988, p 17
by the Chief. The Chiefs in Manipur in olden times were considered the owner of all lands and nobody could occupy any land without his permission\textsuperscript{12}.

Chiefship in Chin-Kuki society is hereditary. From clan to clan, the customs differ as to whether the youngest or the eldest son inherited the office of the father. In most cases, however, the eldest son inherited the Chiefship. The chief may have been wanting in qualifications and there may be many other family members who were superior in ability, but unless he was physically or mentally unfit there was no danger of him being supplanted, and the usual course was for the elders and advisors to assist him in his rule\textsuperscript{13}.

In the Naga society too, the village chief is prominent at all social and religious gatherings and festivals of the village. The chiefs are called by different names. The Tangkhul called their chiefs Awunga, the Angamis called Kemovo, the Aos called Sosangs, the Lothas called Ekyungs, the Semas called Akekao and the Konyaks called Kedange\textsuperscript{14}. Among the Nagas, village administration is run by the village council constituted by the elderly representatives of the clans or households in the village. The village council performs both administrative and judicial functions\textsuperscript{15}. In the Naga village system the village chiefs enjoy little hereditary authority or rights over land.

Among the Kuki-Chin tribes, Chiefs are powerful whereas among the Nagas, though there are Chiefs, he enjoys little hereditary authority or rights over land.

\textsuperscript{12} J N Das. \textit{Op cit}, pp 124-125
\textsuperscript{13} Vumson. \textit{Zo History}. Aizawl, 1989, pp 8-9
\textsuperscript{14} M Horam, \textit{Naga Polity}, B.R Publications, New Delhi, 1975, p. 80
\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid}, p 97
There usually is a council of village elders to govern the village and resolve disputes. Naga chiefs are more democratic and the villagers are ruled by councilors. The election of councilors is popular and it is customary to give representation to all the clans residing in the villages. Clan heads usually become councilors.

The institution of Chiefship was strongly rooted in the early history of Mizo people. The Mizos are scattered in every hill district of the state particularly in Churachandpur district. The chief was the guardian of his people, the leader and defender in times of attacks by the enemy. He was the provider of food in times of scarcity. In battle, he would lead his warriors. Fugitives in war would seek refuge in his house. He settled disputes within a family or between persons. Their own chiefs ruled each village and most of the chiefs belonged to the Sailo clan, which had established it as the most dominating ruling clan before the British took over the hills. In traditional Mizo society, the chief ruled the village according to the customs and traditional practices. Thus, the concept of rule of law was alien to the people. The chief was aided by the council of elders or upas in the administration of the village. Clan was an important unit of the village in the traditional Mizo society.

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In a traditional Paite village the Chiefs was the head and under him, the councilors called Upas carried out the administration smoothly. The councilors were advisors in reality and the Chiefs took himself the final decisions. In judicial matters, he was the fountain of justice. He decided cases according to customs of the land with the help of his councilors. The Paite belong to the northern Chin sub-group of kuki-chin locally known as Zoumi.

The Thadou are a sub-group of the Kuki of Manipur. However, in Manipur state they prefer to be addressed as Kipgen and Haokip, which according to them are more appropriate terms of identification since these are indigenous terms and have a definite connotative meaning. This community is mainly concentrated in north Manipur, south Manipur, Tengnoupal and west Manipur bordering the north Cacher hills district of Assam state.

The Thadou village Chief was called Hausa, which literally denotes a person who possesses great wealth in the form of land, cattle, etc., and who is well versed in all types of incantations and music. He should have captured many slaves in battles. He should belong to a powerful and well-known clan. Such persons became the village Chief. Hausa was a powerful lord of the village. He might also bring other villages under his control. He distributed the land of his village to the people for cultivation and for other purposes. Every cultivator was required to contribute a basketful of paddy to the Hausa after every harvest. This taxation was called Changseu. It was also obligatory for any hunter to offer

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23 Ibid, p 34
25 Ibid, p 211
to the *Housa*, the head and the right hind-leg of any eatable animal killed by the hunter. The *Hausa* finally decided all civil and criminal disputes. He had the complete judicial and executive powers. When a *Hausa* attacked another village, the conquered village became his subject.\(^{26}\)

The chief rules every Zeliangrong village with the assistance of the village council members and the elders of the village\(^ {27}\). Each village has a chief whom they consider as the highest authority of the village according to their tradition and customary law\(^ {28}\). They also have inter-village, district and inter-state court where all complicated problems are discussed strictly based on their customary law. Succession through hereditary system was strictly observed in the past. Chief is the sole authority for each of the village affairs. However, today in some of the villages, chief is elected democratically\(^ {29}\).

Among the Lothas, a chief known as *Ekyung* assisted by an informal council of elders ruled the village. The chiefship was hereditary in the family of the man who originally founded the village but did not at all necessarily pass from father to son. The most suitable man becomes chief by force of character. His main function was that of a leader in was\(^ {30}\).

However, the Sumi chiefship is mostly hereditary unless the heir is incompetent to succeed. However, the youngest son of the chief can also become chief in


\(^{28}\) *Ibid*.

\(^{29}\) *Ibid*.

the adjoining areas subject to the availability of land and having a good group of royal followers. The basic strength of the Sumi chief lies in the ownership and control of land and resources. The Sumi chiefs have been mostly very autocratic.

The village was the highest unit of political organisation among hill-dwellers. Each village itself was a collection of clans claiming a common descent. Inter-village contacts were limited, most villages being usually at war with each other. The Naga village system was broadly democratic with village heads enjoying little hereditary authority or rights over land. There usually was a consultative council of village elders to govern the village and resolve disputes. Each village had its own sovereign chief, there being no higher authority to which villages owed allegiance. Land belonged to the village settler (nampou) who was usually not the village head (khulakpa). Nevertheless, the nampou was not a landowner in the traditional sense of the word. He received only a token rent from tillers. Village headmen and council members were men of influence but not necessarily the wealthiest people. The Kuki system, in contrast, was centralised with Kuki chiefs being heads of the villages and owners of all its land. Chiefs were also entirely supported by their subject villagers for their day-to-day requirements. Villagers usually cultivated the chief's fields, giving him a share of the game and presents during marriage or childbirth. Kuki Chiefship was strictly hereditary. Apart from these systems there are also several other systems of smaller tribes like the Hmar's where the

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33 Ibid.
34 Ibid, p. 555.
entire village community owns the land, but in practice has to give the Chief a portion of their paddy or hunted animal as the case may be. However, common to both the Naga and Kuki system was the autonomy of village institutions. Even the Manipuri Maharaja's control over the hill chiefs was informal\textsuperscript{35}.

The British annexed Manipur in 1891 and soon initiated administrative changes, most significantly in land revenue and judicial systems. Reformed land revenue administration led to permanent settlement of agricultural land, involving the issuance of land documents to tillers and payment of revenue in cash by them to the state. Taxes on homestead lands were also introduced. In the judicial realm, special courts were abolished and the system of courts was streamlined. Legal codes that the British had introduced in the rest of the country were introduced in Manipur as well\textsuperscript{36}. All these changes consolidated the colonial hold in the state. In 1907, the authority of the \textit{maharaja} was restored. He was put at the head of the newly constituted State \textit{Durbar} made up of six Manipuri members with an English officer as its Vice President\textsuperscript{37}. However, as elsewhere in colonial India, veto power remained with the British Political Agent, while the state ruler held a subordinate position. An outcome of this arrangement was competition between the two centres of state authority, the Political Agent and the Maharaja.

These colonial interventionist measures were confined to the Valley and did not extend to the surrounding hill areas. These were generally unattended, being

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Ibid}, p. 120.
\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Indian Penal Code} (1860), \textit{Criminal Procedure Code} (1898).
\textsuperscript{37} For a survey of administrative changes in this period see ‘The Administration of the State of Manipur from 13-9-1891 to 15-5-1907’, Manipur State Archives File (Manipur SA) # R-1/S-C. 317- Political.
left to the Political Agent and Vice President of the state *durbar* to conduct periodic expeditions in order to keep peace. The state made no effort to incorporate the hills into the state-wide judicial or land-revenue system or to encourage hill communities to be represented in the newly established state-level governing institutions. Subsequent measures to enhance the state's presence in the Hills also fell short of penetrating far enough to establish effective control through centralised\(^{38}\). Each village was left to its autonomous self-containment, guided and governed by its own sets of customary laws and codes. The British kept its formal presence in the Hills thin and relied on pre-existing centres of power to do its bidding. It authorised local chiefs to maintain order in their jurisdiction and to collect taxes from their subjects, allowing a small part of this to be retained by the chief.

In the Hills, the British reliance on local chiefs and its allocation to them authority to tax and police the public prevented the state from consolidating its own authority and control. The policy helped to reinforce the authority of the chiefs and other traditional local centres of power. Throughout the colonial period, village chiefs remained in positions of strength in Manipur. Old rewards, sanctions and myths remained intact and could not be replaced with state-wide common reward structures.

With the dawn of Independence in 1947, the Government of India chose to depend for most of its administrative expansion on the old power structure of local chiefs and their advisors. The parliament passed the Manipur Village

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\(^{38}\) Rules for the Administration of Hills 1919, Government of Manipur.
Authority (Hill Areas) Act, 1956, for the administration of the hill areas in the state. The Act determined the number of a village authority based on the number of tax-paying houses\textsuperscript{39}. A total of 725 village authorities were constituted under the Manipur Village Authority (in the Hill Areas) Act, 1956\textsuperscript{40}. This Act introduced the controversial provision for elections to the village authority. The members of the village authority were elected based on adult franchise. The chiefs in Manipur oppose this Act. The Act also placed limitations on the powers of the chiefs. Before the Act was introduced, the chief along with the village authority functioned as the village court. However, under the Act, the head of the state was authorized to appoint two or more members of the village authority to function as the court. However, though these were elected bodies, unelected village chiefs led them\textsuperscript{41}.

Moreover, through the Manipur Hill Areas Acquisition of Chief’s Rights Act, 1967\textsuperscript{42}, an attempt was made to abolish Chiefship in the hill areas of the state by paying compensation. The Act, however, has not been implemented. Chiefship prevails with all its rights and privileges in the hill areas of the state. The state’s initiative to abolish the system of village chiefship failed despite an act to that effect having been passed in 1968 in the State Assembly. Evidently, the state’s political bureaucracy had not been able to muster adequate authority to confront entrenched interests. Failure to abolish chiefships meant links with the traditional past were not severed; and by putting the hereditary chiefs at the top of the elected village authorities, their traditional authority was enhanced.

\textsuperscript{39} Village Authority (in Hill Areas) Act, 1956. Government of Manipur.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{41} Village Authority (in Hill Areas) Act, 1956. Government of Manipur.
\textsuperscript{42} Manipur hill Areas Acquisition of Chiefs Rights Act, 1967.
Having been incorporated in the administrative structure of the state, and being the channel through which development funds flow, yet lacking in accountability, Village Authorities in the Hills have become sites of contestation for control between different social forces. Their appeal has been on identity lines. This has affected not only on elections to village authorities, but also on the larger character of tribal politics, which has become predominantly identity-based.

Soon the ambit of their authority was expanded to include power to implement and monitor development programmes in the village. However, elections to village bodies soon took on more traditional forms with each clan nominating a member to the council. The Village Authority Act and subsequent developments created a parallel power structure in the village. Though this act made a start in integrating customary courts into the official system, its successes were modest. The old system of village courts continued, and is community-specific, emphasising the salience of tribal institutions and their specific identity.

Land reforms introduced in the state in 1960 were confined to the valley areas. The Hills, which account for 70 per cent of the state's area, were excluded from its purview. Tribal leaders were concerned about possible alienation of tribal lands to non-locals. Perhaps tribal leaders, mostly people with landed interests, were equally concerned about losing their traditional land.

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44 Interview, K. C. Bruno, member Tamenglong Khunjao Village Authority (Tamenglong Khunjao, 6 November 2004).
rights. Consequently, land laws in the hill areas are still governed by tribal
customs and practices. These exist outside the state's control and have not
even been codified. The Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms (MLR &
LR) Act is seen as being less definitive on issues such as land-ownership
ceilings and redistribution. The chiefs have interpreted the Government policy
on tribal land protection as a threat to the inalienable rights of the chiefs over
land. Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act 1975 and Manipur Hill
Areas Acquisition of Chief's Rights Act 1967 have not been implemented in the
hill areas of Manipur since it was strongly opposed by the traditional chiefs. The
chiefs have thus influenced from time to time the course of politics in Manipur,
though not with much successes particularly in view of the lack of unity among
themselves.

Due to this social and political importance, local chiefs could not escape their
responsibilities and hence whenever any critical situation arose they always
took the leadership. For instance, during the Kuki rebellion (1917-1919) when
the social and political fabric of the Kukis was threatened, the chiefs provided
organizational resistance. The importance of Kuki chiefs in the society could
be seen from the fact that the Kuki Chiefs' Association (KNA) formed in 1935-
36 was the first political organization of the Kukis. Later it took the shape of the
Kuki National Assembly (KNA) on 24 October 1946. In fact, KNA emerged from
the womb of the chiefship organization and almost all the office bearers of the
KNA either were the chiefs or connected with chief's family. In order to

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46 Kuki chiefs most vehemently opposed extension of MLR&LR Act to the hills. Today opposition to
Extension has become a symbol of tribal protest.
47 J. N. Das, *Op cit*, pp.139-140.
determine the political destiny of the Kukis, the Chiefs took recourse to territorial political demands. The issue of Territorial demand was conditioned by two necessities, to protect their land and cultural identity and to act as a barrier to the infiltration of the dominant valley culture. In its entire movement, there was a perceptible lack of properly defined ideal of a socio-political and socio-economic policy. In fact, the slogan for territorial self-determination for the Kukis only acted as a mechanism to spell false consciousness. The chiefs also failed to develop a regional identity by appealing to the people of the same stock living in the northeast. Under such circumstances, the movement led by the chiefs in Manipur seems to have little relevance for the fraternal tribes across Manipur.\(^49\)

Manipur including the hill areas became a part of Indian Union in September 1949. However, the tribal people in the hill areas of Manipur were apprehensive of the more numerous meeteis of the valley\(^50\). The Kuki chiefs also started mobilizing the support of the neighboring tribes like the Lushais and the Chins of Burma. Again, the demand for a separate district for the Kuki people was first voiced in the Kuki Chiefs' Zonal Council Meeting held on 3\(^{rd}\) of September 1970\(^51\). However, the demand for district autonomy for the Kukis has been facing constant and organized opposition from the Nagas of Manipur, particularly of the north district. They have been threatening to secede from Manipur and join Nagaland if a separate district is given to the Kukis.

\(^49\) *Ibid*, p. 251.
The Kuki chiefs and some of the Naga chiefs being the owner of the village land are in a position to influence the electorate in his village. Very often, the candidates give importance to the chiefs whose houses are selected for canvassing purposes. The chiefs also, issues press notes declaring their support to various candidates. They also appeal to the villagers in support of their own candidates. In the 1990 elections, when the Congress (I) government favored the extension of the Manipur Land Revenue Act (MLRA) to the hill districts, the chiefs discouraged their villagers to vote for the Congress (I) party. The chiefs were against the reintroduction/amendment of the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reform Act, 1960, by the congress government in 1989 as they would have lost control over their land. The chiefs actively campaigned against this Act and this had an adverse effect on the congress party in the hill areas, which ultimately undermined the position of the congress party in the hill areas.

Again, few days ahead of the polls, a particular day was appointed as the day for the meetings of the political agents in which a grand feast usually followed. In the sampled constituencies, almost all the chiefs were invited to attend the meetings. The Chiefs were usually given time to deliver a speech in favouring of a particular candidate or party and highlights the prospects of the candidate or party.

The chiefs, functioning in isolated villages have thus attempted to influence from time to time the course of politics in Manipur. The chiefs are no doubt free

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52 Interview with the chief of Gangpijang.
54 Interview with respondents.
to mobilize people politically. It can be said, that the concept of the traditional political institution among the tribal people in Manipur (especially Kuki) have by and large, remained intact, though changes have taken place especially with the advent of Christianity, education and the introduction of electoral politics. However, despite such factors, the institutions of Chiefship and the village council have been a cementing force for the tribal people. The institution of Chiefship in particular has been jealously guarded since it signifies the traditional culture, though great erosions took place concerning its functions and importance\(^55\).

In the tribal belt, the electoral behavior was more on community lines. The tribal councils influence the voters and in many cases, they fielded their own candidates\(^56\). Among the Kuki the Chiefs-association could be seen involved in active politics. One popular mode of vote campaigning in the hill areas of Manipur is ‘Boiling tea’ in the Chief’s residence. The monarchical administration of the Kuki Chiefs and their despotic rule is still very different from democracy. Thus, the chiefs play a crucial role in the electoral politics of the state. Leaders and local influential persons mould the voters’ decision\(^57\). This is particularly true for the voters in tribal community like in the hill areas of Manipur where ‘in group’ solidarity is strictly maintained. Hence, a significant proportion of voters are influenced by their leaders.


\(^{56}\) R. P. Singh, Op cit, p.55.

Some typical Chiefs still followed the path of the age-old despotic rule. Thus, the democratic principle of adult franchise seems to be a mockery in the hands of some of the typical Kuki Chiefs. The need of the hour for the masses is a form of democracy where free and fair voting could be held. Therefore, democracy and abolition of the institution of Chieftainship is the need of the hour. However, until such a thing happens the Chiefs will no doubt continue to play a decisive role in the electoral politics especially in the hill areas of Manipur.

YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS

It is difficult to accurately assign lower and upper age limits for youth because, this vary from time to time, and from society to society. The United Nations identifies the age 15-24 as “youth” which has been adopted in many countries of the west. In India, the age 15-34 is recognized as youth. The period of youth stands for growth, development, action and leadership.\(^{58}\)

Before the advent of Christianity in the state, the youth of the northeast had their dormitory where all the young men of the village slept together. In Manipur, Tangkhul called it Longshim, Rongmeis’ called Khangehnu, Hmar’s Buonzawl, Zous’ Sawm. In Arunachal Pradesh, especially in the Siang District there existed a bachelor’s dormitory called Kebang. In Nagaland, they called it Morung, the Garos in Meghalaya called Nokpante, and the Mizo in Mizoram called it Zawlbu. Among the Nagas, the girls also had a house or dormitory for

\(^{58}\) Ibid
sleeping together. Among the Kuki-Chin tribes of Manipur, such places of sleeping together for the girls were not common.

Zawlbuk of the Mizos served many purposes. In olden days when villages were constantly at war with each other, the young man in the village were required to sleep together in one place so that they could be marshaled together quickly in case of an emergency. However, slowly this developed into a most important institution in the life of a Mizo youth. In this institution, mostly wrestling and trial of strength were done to keep the young ones fit.59

The Garos are a tribe in Meghalaya, India and neighboring areas of Bangladesh, who call themselves A-chik Mande. They are the second-largest tribe in Meghalaya after the Khasi and comprise about a third of the local population60. In the Garo habitation, the house where unmarried male youth or bachelors live is called Nokpante. The word Nokpante means the house of bachelors. Nokpantes are generally constructed in the front courtyard of the Nokma, the chief. The art of cultivation, various arts and cultures, and different games are also taught in the Nokpante to the young boys by the senior boys and elders61. Nokpante also acted as Village Guards and formed the main body of fighting force in wars. No girl was allowed to enter into the Nokpante. However, with introduction of schools and Christianity, Nokpante culture was outdated.

60 Garo (tribe) –accessed through Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.htm. Dated 12-09-05.
61 Ibid.
The Morung, or the bachelor dormitory system, used to be an essential part of Naga life. Apart from the family, it was the most important educational set up of the Nagas. The Morungs are grant buildings, constructed at the village entrance or a spot from where the village can be guarded most effectively. On attaining the age of puberty, young boys and girls were admitted to their respective dormitories. The Naga culture, customs and traditions, which were transmitted from generation to generation through folk music and dance, folk tales and oral tradition, wood carving and weaving, were conveyed to the young in the Morungs. Announcements of meetings, death of a villager, warnings of impending dangers, etc., were made from the Morungs with the beating of log drums. With the onset of modernity, the Morung system is no longer in practice among the Nagas.

The Morung was an important educational institution for the boys. There were regular ranks through which boys passed until they attained adulthood and were admitted to full membership. Normal activities at the Morung were never organised; they were spontaneous and members responded naturally. Much of the Naga culture, its customs and traditions have been transmitted from generation to generation through the media of folk music and dance, folk tales and oral historical traditions, carvings of figures on stone and wood, and designs on clothes. Much of this teaching-learning process took place at the men's and women's dormitories.

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62 J:\Chapter\Naga people - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.htm. dated 12-09-05
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
Som inn or the bachelors' dormitory is one of the institutions of the Kuki, which fostered and nurtured the youths into a responsible and matured person in the society. The bachelors choose a leader from amongst them and it was customary for the inmates to obey their chosen leader. The dormitory leader mobilized the youth and rendered free and compulsory services to the society. All male youths of the village who had attained the age of puberty were made to sleep in the dormitory in the night. The village dormitory served as a sleeping place, recreational centre for unmarried. It was also used for imparting and training the young boys. It also served as an inn for a man from another village.

From the above discussion it can be summarized that the dormitory serves as a kind of an informal school where the youngsters learned the art of doing things such as basket making, comb making, cane works and spinning from the seniors. The main functions of the dormitory were defense of the village. All boys attaining puberty must live in dormitory until they were married. It was the village guardroom and the centre of social, religious, and cultural life of the tribe. The institution made all-important announcements. It also entertained important visitors to the village; they were to arrange any village feast. They collected firewood, fetch water, and distribute meat. It was in these institutions that discipline and the elder members of the institution inspired honour for the elder people. Again, through these institutions the feeling of collective unity for their own society was deeply enriched in the minds and thoughts of young people. The dormitory was empty during the daytime but came to life after

sunset only. The villagers financed the bachelors' dormitory. The girls were strictly prohibited from entering the boys' dormitory\(^6\). Thus, the dormitory system of the tribal people in the hill areas played many important roles in the village administration. It was the only institution for the youths in relation with the social and political life.

Of all the forces that contributed for the decaying of this important tribal institution was the coming of Christianity along with the introduction of modern education. In fact, bachelor's dormitory had lost its importance and value among the tribal people soon after the British administration took control of the socio-political administration from the late nineteenth century, followed by the arrival of the Christian missionaries and the subsequent introduction of the modern system of education among the people of this region\(^7\).

With the advent of Christianity and education, the olden days youth dormitory could no longer exist in the original form and were being substituted by different organizations, unions and associations. All Tribal Student's Union Manipur, as its apex body, today's youth organizations like the Kuki Student's Organization, Hmar Student's Union and Komrem Student's Union are seen as playing a significant role in the electoral politics of the hill areas of Manipur, though they declare that the concerned organizations will not make any alliance with any political party. In the villages and organizational set-up of the youth community known as youth club, youth Union or youth fellowship have their own way in politics.

\(^6\) Ibid.
\(^7\) Garo (tribe) – accessed through Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.htm. Dated 12-09-05.
The youths of Manipur take active part in the politics of the state. Naga students campaigned for affiliation of schools in the four hill districts of Manipur to the Nagaland Board of School Education. The district units of the students' union staged demonstrations at the district headquarters of Ukhrul, Senapati, Tamenglong and Chandel. The demand by NGOs and student organizations is meant to add strength to the NSCN (Isak-Muivah)'s demand for the integration of all Naga-inhabited areas of Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam with Nagaland. The Zeliangrong Students Union of Nungba Area, Nungba Youth Organization and Nungba women body demanded that infrastructure including x-ray machine and medical facilities be provided for the Primary Health Centre at Nungba sub divisional headquarters.

The sampled constituencies have a large number of youth organizations and clubs all over the area and they play an important role during elections. By engaging in the campaigning process, like arranging election meetings and vehicles, the youth organization undertakes the task of giving political education to the electorate. Youth clubs in the constituencies also played an important role as a source of information during elections. The same age groups, classmates, co-workers have intimate bond of ties among themselves. They share, exchange and discuss various problems including political ones. During the time of elections, they try to influence each other's vote-choice in favour of their respective candidates.

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69 http://www.e-pao.net/naga students. Dated 12-6-09.
70 Interview with respondent.
71 Interview with a member of a youth club.
The youth clubs and party workers undertook the task of wall writing. The names of the contending candidates, their party symbols, party’s name, their catchphrases etc. were printed on the walls of buildings and shops in their area. Later, flags and posters of contending parties were put up at different public places. All these were done by the youth organizations of the respective constituencies. In every hill constituencies, massive impersonations were witnessed, although it is against the model code of conduct. At the poll, the highest voter impersonation was seen from the youths. In an interview, one youth club leader revealed in confidence that he had casted 32 votes. In all the sampled constituencies, youth clubs of the village carry out some election works. Leaders of youth clubs assist party workers in giving out manifestoes, shouting slogans, arranging vehicles, pasting of party posters and arranging election meetings\(^2\). While conducting house campaigning the candidates are generally followed by leaders of the youth clubs of the locality. Sometimes during election campaign, candidates make promises to certain educated youths that they would be given well-paid Government jobs if they were elected\(^3\). Therefore, the youth organizations take keen interest in the election campaign of some candidates. The voters in the sampled constituencies do not consider voting as a political right, which will be exercised on their own individual decisions.

\(^2\) Interview with the President of Ichailamlan Youth Club.
\(^3\) Interview with the Presidents of Gangpijang Youth Club
CHURCH

The designation ‘church’ defines an autonomous corporate institution hierarchically organized and served by a professional priesthood. Churches that conform to all these specifications are found only in Christianity; the structural arrangements of other religions are best referred to as religious institutions. The church is a religious non-political organization. It is the community of those who believe in Jesus Christ. In the New Testament the word ‘church’ always refers to people, never, as it often does today, to a building.\textsuperscript{74}

There are impacts and influences on politics, which are caused by the church.\textsuperscript{75} In many ways, the church has its political influence on the society. The church and politics are entirely two different systems. The church being a religious institution cannot be bound to any political community, or any political system. Yet the church cannot but take interest in social and political structure within which it has a mission to bring the gospel to the people. Though the political community and the church are distinct and independent of each other, they are linked because both are devoted to personal and social vocation of humanity under different titles. Religion is a powerful motivating force in human life, including political life.\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{74} Talcott Parsons, Christianity in David E. Stills (ed.), \textit{Op cit.}, p 502


\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Ibid}
Rev William Pettigrew introduced Christianity in Manipur in 1896. The British and other European missionaries were responsible for the spread of Christianity in Manipur and especially in the hilly regions. They initiated the spread of modern education among the tribal people. They used English and the local languages as the medium of instruction. At present, almost all of the hill tribal populations are Christians. The Bible is available in Vaiphei, Paite, Tangkhul, Thadou, Lushai and Meitei dialects. Christianity is the second largest religion in the state, accounting for 35% of the population. The hill tribes were largely converted to Christianity in the 19th Century, although some sections of Naga tribes like the Kabui and Rongmei retain their traditional tribal religions. The acceptance of Christianity and the spread of English education marked a departure from many of their tribal customs and traditions.

Christianity has also been a factor for bringing political development in the hill areas. This religion has often been described as a ‘primary agent of change among the hill tribes’. B. Pakem is quite assertive when he says that Christianity has laid the foundation not only of evangelization but also of civilization. He further claims that of all the agents of societal changes in the hill areas of the North East India that of the church is the most important. It was bent on raising the intellectual level of the people. Further, it opens up the avenues for the purpose of modernization to operate in an otherwise educationally and economically backward area. The members of the church

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77 Manipur - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.htm dated 6-5-09
78 S.K. Chaube, op. cit, p. 76.
79 Frederick S. Downs, Christianity in North East India, ISPCK, New Delhi, 1983, p.183.
80 B. Pakem, Christianity in North East India. Problems and Aspirations of the Hill tribes of North East India, Consultation on Christianity and the problems of Hill tribes in North East India, 21-24 July, 1992. Shillong, pp.1-11
feel that it is their duty to work for the all-round development of the community. It would not be an exaggeration to say that these churches provide a sufficient platform for developing leadership qualities. The various organizations within the church like Women Society, Youth Fellowship etc. do play a vital role in the process of political socialization. These organizations act as a more effective information centre than other sources.\(^1\)

In the sampled constituencies, the churches neither encourage nor discourage any political involvement. Beginning party meetings with a church service or prayers was a common feature. Appeasement of the religious leaders was another political tactic of the parties e.g. giving housing loans to such religious leaders.\(^2\) In short, the political parties tried to get as much of political mileage as is possible through their connection with the church organizations.

The nature of education and encouragement for leadership provided in the church organizations resulted to growing awareness of political, economic and social rights among the tribal people in the hill areas of Manipur.\(^3\) It also has an impact on the status of women and children. Earlier, women did not take interest in politics. Therefore, participation was out of question. Now, women insist on attending the assemblies to represent their interest.\(^4\) This is a clear example of their inclination towards politics.

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\(^1\) Interview with respondents.
\(^2\) Interview with respondents.
\(^3\) Interview with the church Pastor of Ichailamlan village in Saikul constituency.
Some of the people in the hill areas of Manipur are ignorant and illiterate about electoral politics and elections due to lack of information and instruction. The uneducated persons just do what a trustworthy person tells them to do. The church leaders, being usually educated know much about the process and they do help in making people aware of the democratic process of elections. On the other hand, neither the national nor the regional parties conduct any programmes to instruct the people on the implications of their rights and duties of the electoral process. They are left to fend for themselves. A curious citizen in remote areas ask the pastor or church elder, who in turn, might give correct or biased information on the matter. A church leader is taken for granted that he is dependable. Hence, some people approach them for guidance.

Overall, the churches and pastors do not involve themselves in promoting the interests of a political party. However, a tacit consent and support to the candidates of their choice, say of one's own tribe seems to be inevitable. It is said that in the 1990 state Assembly elections, some Presbyterian Church leaders openly supported their candidate hailing from their tribe, Zou. They even forced a village chief to issue the necessary orders so that the entire village might vote for the candidate of their choice. There are also instances where a tribe or sub-ethnic groups has elected candidates belonging to the tribe. For example, the paite-dominated area in Thanlon constituency has been electing Mr. Pungzathang several times from there, who is a Paite. In the

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85 Ibid
86 Interview with the church pastor of Ichailamlan village in Sankul constituency.
electoral politics it could be sometime seen that a particular church favours a particular candidate and mainly if he happens to their own church. However, it was not done openly and cannot be found in a written documentary form except some appeal letters.\textsuperscript{89}

The early missionaries who were foreigners did not show much interest in the political developments of the state. Besides, they were also harassed by the political bigwig of the time for one reason or the other. Hence, they kept themselves away from any direct interference. They followed a policy of neutrality. In the process, Christians at large have understood politics as something dirty and therefore they should have nothing to do with it.\textsuperscript{90}

During the time when the political atmosphere was heating up, all the churches played a very important role for the avoidance of violence and use of unfair means in the election. The role played by the churches was very evident in the 2002 Assembly Elections. A special prayer campaign is usually organized for peaceful conduct of elections in the state. A night of fasting and prayer was called at Imphal on 29 May 2002 for all Christians irrespective of denominations. It is an initiative undertaken by All India Christian Council (AICC) in collaboration with different churches, missions and NGOs. The church felt that the Government of India has failed to solve the situation especially under the Arm Special Powers Act (ASFPA) over last 50 years.\textsuperscript{91}

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\textsuperscript{89} ibid
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\textsuperscript{90} http://churches in Manipur accessed through news.indiansart.com dated 7-6-04
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\textsuperscript{91} http://indianchristians accessed through manipuronline.com dated 7-6-09.
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In addition, religious affiliation and race may account for more important determinants of voting behavior in some political system, and not only may they be more important, but polarization along these lines instead of class divisions may be more dangerous to the stability of those system, since there is less to bargain over in the political market place. However, the dividing line between class, religions and ethnic origin is not a firm one. Voters very often vote on religious considerations. The selection of candidates is done with an eye upon the presence of a religious majority in a particular constituency. The candidate does not hesitate to seek votes by playing the religious card with co-religious voters and the secular card with members of other religious communities.

Although the influence of church in the electoral politics of this state is not as significant as in other states like Nagaland, still the role played by the churches cannot be ignored.

Women's role during the elections is also no less significant. They took part in different ways of campaigning, slogan shouting and in voting. Many of them were seen working in the election offices as helpers in the domestic affairs of the office like cooking food and serving tea etc. Historically, women in Manipur have taken active part in their political struggle. In the political sphere, women always stood in the forefront of every movement. Women wings of political parties and different women organization in Manipur have a very important role.

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in creating a sense of awareness in the minds of the female electorate that women can better represent them than by a man.

However, women’s ability to produce an impact in the political process of Manipur has been negligible. In Manipur, women political leaders are limited. Before statehood, only few women were nominated in the territorial assembly. However, women in Manipur have been actively involved in politics very few women have won election so far. It shows that involvement of women in politics is very low. A few women have fought for elections. Women of Manipur have been participating in the political process since 1952 held under the constitution of India. In addition, women voters always outnumbered the men voters in every election held up to 2002. Records have shown that from the year 1952 until 1998 only four women had contested in the parliamentary elections. Out of these, only Kim Gangte came out successfully and represented the state in the House of the people. Assembly election records shows that, till today only three women candidates were elected in Assembly elections and these women were the wives of the MPs, MLAs or Ministers. As reservation of women seat in local bodies came into act women are encouraged to participate in politics at Panchayat and Municipal level. However, the electoral behavior in Manipur over the last many years shows that women are not likely to win election in good number.

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97 Election Report, Legislative Assembly Election. Imphal 2002
98 Ibid
For the rural women in Manipur political participation is far distant dream. Although there are provisions for reservation of seats for women under the Village Authority Act, it has not been implemented. The Village Authority comprised of the chief and his councilors where women membership is nil. On the other hand, women in the hill district generally are not concerned with this problem except for a few enlighten women who discuss the matter occasionally in an informal discussion. Above all, women have not demanded their rights for inclusion in the village local decision-making body.

However, their influence as pressure groups has been effective. If any political party undermines the role of women in elections, then it is diminishing its chances of winning in the battle of ballot. In the hills, the Naga women and the Kuki women are the guardians of their respective tribes. They played a pivotal role during Naga-Kuki clashes. It was at that moment that these women went long stretches in the hills (sometimes-walking 3-4 days continuously) to meet their respective armed militias and underground outfits to tell them to stop killing each other. The Kuki Mothers' Association is formally known as, "The Kuki Mothers' Association for Peace and Social Reformation." During the recent clashes in Churachandpur District between the Paite and Kuki communities, the women of both the communities went out into the open and worked for peace.

At the same time, they stand against drug abuse, prostitution, alcoholism, gambling and the like vices affecting their communities. Tangkhul Shanao Long

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99 Interview with respondents.
(All Tangkhul Women’s Association) was honored with the Award given by the Indian Federation of Small and medium Newspapers in Sept. 1995 for their courage and struggle in bringing peace and development in the state. In the present scenario, there is strong women’s front in every community in Manipur. Among the Meitei community, it is the Meira Paibis, the Naga women’s association amongst the Nagas and the Kuki women’s association of the Kuki community. Since the various women’s groups wield enormous influence in their communities, almost all the organizations, political parties including the underground organizations try to get their support. Even the security forces being aware of their influence try to win to their side. Unlike the women’s groups in the valley, the activities of the women’s groups in the hills who are mostly Christians are bound by Church rules. The influence of the tribal customs is also equally strong. Traditionally women are treated as inferior in the tribal society.

After studying the role of chiefs, church and youths in mobilizing people during the elections, an attempt will be made in the next chapter to study important election issues and people’s reaction on the issues.