Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The study of the Political Process in Manipur has been taken in order to assess the real state of socio-political and economic affairs of the state. As far as political process in concerned, it consists of all spheres of political development, modernization and the whole range of transformation of the political institutions and practices in the state. With the ever increasing of the growth of modern political institution, the political practices or the functional activities have assumed new dimension in term of acquisition and exercise of power under plural or singular political authority. Now what is important in a democratic polity is its functional political process-organisation of political parties, periodical elections, formation of government, etc., which must be studied for the reason that they are responsible for the success or failure of democratic politics.

Though the study focuses on the emergence of political processes in Manipur during the period 1947 to 1995, it also provides a critical assessment of the background polity of the state which may be divided as
follows: a monarchical system (33 A.D. to 1891), Regency period (1891-1907), Regency to Durbar (1907 to 1919), and the beginning of democratic experience (1919-1947).

Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study is to analyse the growth and development at the democratic polity in the state as a continue process through socio-political compulsions. The proposed study also aims at proving the politics of Manipur which is characterized by political instability. Defectionalism is the main threat to political stability of the State. Opportunism, self aggrandizement, principlelessness, lack of political parties with ideological commitment, etc., precipitate defections among the political parties. Finally, the present study aims to prove that political instability is responsible for slow socio-economic development in the state when the government fails to deliver the goods.

Methodology

The methodology adopted for the study is based on both primary and secondary sources. The thesis is largely historical, and descriptive. It is also analytical as well. Historical records and chronicles have been studied to explore the system of law and administrative system of ancient Manipur. Manifestoes of political parties, government’s departmental publications,
seminar papers, archival sources, statistical reports of Manipur, etc., have been systematically studied. Relevant materials available in the unpublished Ph.D. and M.Phil dissertations have been tapped. Published books in and outside Manipur related with the work have also been studied.

**Research Frame-Work**

The Thesis has been divided into Seven Chapters. The First Chapter is the introduction. In this Chapter the theme of the proposed study is given. It also comprises objectives of the study, methodology and research frame-work. This chapter mainly deals with land and the people, the origin of different ethnic groups, and their socio-political life.

The Second Chapter discusses about the patterns of administrative system which were evolved in Manipur before and after the establishment of the British rule in 1891.

The third Chapter analyses the process of socio-political change in 1940's and 1950's. This period is one of the most important periods in the history of modern Manipur. The Chapter discusses about the first democratic experience in Manipur with the passing of the new constitution known as “the Manipur state Constitution Act 1947.” The major issues which are examined in this Chapter include the first Manipur Assembly elections based on universal adult franchise, merger of Manipur with the
Indian Union and the administration of the state of Manipur under part 'C' state of India.

The fourth Chapter studies the political process undergone after the attainment of the Union Territory and upto the time when the state became full-fledged state on 21 January, 1972. It contains the process of how the state of Manipur which was once experienced the rule of responsible government under the Maharaja of Manipur with a Legislative Assembly was listed as one of the Union Territories of India. The Chapter also examines the emergence of various political parties in the state, ministry crisis, coalition experience, imposition of president’s rule and the political instability in the state. The Chapter also deals with the mass participation in the civil disobedience movement launched by the “Statehood Demand Committee” Manipur became a full-fledged state on 21 January 1972.

The Fifth Chapter examines the political process after Manipur become a full-fledged state on January 21, 1972 upto the study period, 1995. With the attainment of the full-fledged state, Manipur entered into active participation under Indian Constitution through elected representatives. The Chapter deals with the election results and formation of government during the period 1972-1995. The Chapter includes the
detail of the birth of Federal party as the local party of Manipur which emerged as one of the most influential local parties in the state.

The Sixth Chapter forms the analytical study of political defection and coalition politics; Its threat to the democratic Constitutional system; it poses obstacle to the socio-economic development of the state. The Chapter critically analyses the potential resources of the state to prove that "The state is economically poor in the midst of resource plenty". And it also aims at proving that political instability has practically disadvantaged the process of socio-economic transformation in the state.

The Seventh Chapter forms the conclusion which summerises the entire thesis. It also includes the major findings made in the course of the study.

The major findings include the nature of primitive form of government in an ancient Manipur (particularly among the three major ethnic groups the Meitei, the Nagas and the Kuki-Chin groups), various changing socio-political phenomena which were transformed into a purely democratic form of government in the state, nature of elections and government formation, political instability in the state and its impact on the socio-economic development of the state, etc.
The Land and the People

Manipur is a native state in the North-East India. This beautiful tiny state is nicknamed by foreigners in many different ways. A Japanese soldiers described it as "A flower on the lofty heights". Lord Irwin called it "Switzerland of India". Jawaharlal Nehru proudly named "Jewel of India".\(^1\) In an ancient times Manipur was known by neighbouring states in different names - The Burmese called present Manipur "Kathe"\(^2\) while the Shans called it "Cassey".\(^3\) The Ahom called it "Makeli" and the Cacharies "Magli" while the old Assamese and the Shans called it "Moglan" and "Kasi" respectively.\(^4\)

Despite many different names given by foreigners Gangmumei Kamei has said that, though, these different names were occurred in the pre-Hindu literatures her indigenous names are-"Kangleipak", "Poireipak" and "Meitrabak". The name Manipur was officially introduced in the early

\(^1\) Nehru and Manipur, Published by State level Committee, the 40\(^{th}\) Anniversary of India's Independence and Birth Century of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Imphal, 1984, p. 6.

\(^2\) B.S.M. Sharma, and M. Kaoba Singh. A Brief History of Manipur (1508-1709) Imphal, Manipur Students Emporium 2001, p. 1

\(^3\) Ibid.

part of 18th century. It was during the reign of Garibniwaza. The literal meaning of Manipur means "the city or the land of Gems".\(^5\)

**Area of the Land**

(The land of Manipur did not have a constant boundary prior to the Anglo-Manipur war 1891\(^6\). The size of the territory varies according to the fluctuating powers of its rulers.\(^7\) As for the eastern boundary it was narrowed down with the transfer of Kabo valley from Manipur to Burma in the treaty of 1834 during the reign of Gambhir Singh.

The geographical area of the present Manipur is 22,327 sq. kms. Valley area encompasses a tract of land of 2,238 sq. kms while the hill area is 20, 089 sq. kms. The forest covers approximately an area of 15,154 sq. kms. The length of Imphal valley is 40 miles and the breadth is 20 miles.\(^6\)

Manipur is located between 23°50'N Latitude to 25°41'N Latitude and 93°10'E Longitude to 94°47'E Longitude.\(^7\) Manipur is a cape shape area bordering Burma is the eastern part of the country. She is bounded on

---


\(^7\) M.T. Laiba, *The Geography of Manipur*, Imphal, 1996, p. 46.
the north by Nagaland, the south by the Mizoram and on the west by Assam. In the east it has international boundary of China and Burma.

The People

The modern Manipur is a state of three major ethnic groups, viz., the Meiteis, the Nagas and the Kukis. Meiteis, the majority ethnic groups are the inhabitants of the fertile plain. The Nagas and the Kuki-Chin groups are living in the surrounding hill areas. Mc. Culloch wrote in his remarkable account of the valley: "From the most credible tradition the valley appears originally to have been occupied by several tribes". They are all mongloid by blood. Apart from these major groups there are also some sections of non-mongloid. Muslims, Aryans, Dravidians, etc. which are mostly concentrated in the valley.

The population of the present Manipur is a composite one formed out of an offshoot from several tribes. The later immigrants settled in the land and assimilated themselves into the Meitei community.

---


9 Gangmumei Kamei, n. 5, p. 15.

10 J. Roy, n. 4, p. 4.
The Meitei

The theory of origin of the Meitei is obscure and highly speculative one. Searching after truth through various accounts given by the foreign scholars may possibly be a continued controversial issue. However, due to lack of historical materials prior to the coming of Britishers and the subsequent scholars no later scholars can reject their records.

The ethnic name "Meitei" according to T.C. Hodson has been derived from "Mi" = Man and thei = Separate.\(^{11}\) Brian Houghton Hodgson observed that it is the combined nomenclature of the Siamese "Tai" and the Kachin Chinese "Moy" (Moitay=Meitei). This tribe was believed to be the great Moi section of the great Tai tribe. The Burmese called them Shan Vel Syan.\(^{12}\)

Some sections of the native people expressed their view that "Mi" means Image "Tei" means model=Meitei, which has been derived from modelled by God in his own image.

When we speak about the religion of the Meiteis, Hinduism is believed to be more or less belonging to them. But the fact is that it was

\(^{11}\) T.C. Hodson, n. 8. p. 10.

\(^{12}\) Ibid.
introduced in Manipur recently-during the reign of king Garibniwas.\textsuperscript{13} Since time immemorial Meiteis worshiped a numbers of gods and goddesses such as Lamlai, Umanglai, Imunglai, etc. But the most prominent being the Sanamahi.\textsuperscript{14} Worship of Vahnu and prevalence of Vaishnavism had been understood in the 8\textsuperscript{th} century A.D.\textsuperscript{15}

There are also the existence of worship of fire preserved in the most important room of the house. They preserved the same husk and valuable kind of firewood without a moment stop. They considered to be the sign of danger if the fire ceases to remain in the fire place.\textsuperscript{16} At present a few sections of Meiteis strictly follow the said traditional religion. The important fire place of Andro is worth mentioning in this regard.

Ritual act and sacrifices with due ceremonies are performed by the Meiteis since early period. There are also existence of priests and priestesses called "Maibas" and "Maibis" who assumed the charge of religious ritual duties. They were also responsible for healing the sick.

**The Nagas**: The derivation of the term 'Naga' is obscure. It is a generic term for cluster of tribes. Each Naga tribe has it own name. Whatever the


\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{15} Gangmumei Kamei, n.5, p. 121.

theory of derivation of the term may be, the name Naga was given to them by the British administrators with their policy of identifying and classifying the tribes of Nagaland and Manipur. ¹⁷

The Naga tribes of Manipur are the Zeliangrong (Zemei, Liangmei, Rongmei including Puimei) the Tangkhul, the Mao, the Maram, the Maring, the Lamkang, the Anal, the Moyon, the Monsang, and the Thangal. Besides these tribes there are some Naga tribes like the Tarao, the Chothe, the Chiru, the Koieng, the Kharam, etc. ¹⁸ Tribe-wise distributions are the Tangkhul living in Ukhrul adjacent to Burma. The majority of Zeliangrong live in Tamenglong district. The Mao, the Thangal and the Maram settled in Senapati district. The Maring, the Anal, the Moyon, the Monsang settle in Tengnoupal district of Manipur.

The origin of the Naga and their migration to Manipur is not cleared. There are legendaries about their origin and migration. Besides there are folklores, hymns and song preserved in their traditions tell more about their origin and migration to Manipur. ¹⁹ There is a Tangkhul tradition of

---


¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Gangmumei Kamei, n.5, p. 23.
migration from "Thuangdut" in the Kabo valley.\textsuperscript{20} The Zeliangrong had their legend of origin from mythical cave called "Mahou Taobei".\textsuperscript{21} In course of time they move to Makhel and Ramting kabin and then to Makuilongdi. Thus, Makhel is considered an important point in the history of Naga migration to the present Manipur. There is a mythical legend of the Maring that the Nagas were living in the underground city.\textsuperscript{22} Thus almost all the Naga tribes have more or less traced their origin from the cave or hole in the earth. It is said that English people too have their oral tradition of living in the cave.\textsuperscript{23}

The administrative system of the Naga is a unique one. The basis of the Naga system of administration is the village organisation. Like the Greek city state, the Naga village-state appeared to be a traditionally independent unit. The administration was carried on in general by the village chief-in-council elected by the people.\textsuperscript{24} Such a polity and state of society, and democratic life is unlikely found in any part of India. Democracy in its purest form exists among the Nagas.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{20} Gangmumei Kamei, n.17, p. 30.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., p. 31.
\textsuperscript{22} RR. Shimray, \textit{Original and Culture of Nagas}, New Delhi, Samsok Publications, 1985, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., p. 16.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
Religion: As the world professes animism from time immemorial, Nagas were also not against it. But the essence of the traditional animism is a belief in the existence of one omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient God, which had a similarity with the belief of Christianity. The Naga also had the belief in the existence of gods and goddesses including demons. Various forms of rites and animal sacrifices were done and offered to the evil spirits appearing the same and thereby got rid of evils.\textsuperscript{26}

Nagas also had the belief similar to that of Gandhiji which says that "Religions are different roads converging to the same point".\textsuperscript{27} Complete freedom of religion and worship is obvious in the Naga village.\textsuperscript{28}

One may think that head-hunting system prevalent among the Naga community is evil and even disliked by others. But one of the essence and sacred of head hunting is that it contributes strict control of moral laws. Since during the days of head-hunting immoral activities like rape, stealing, selfish desires, etc., brought bad luck to the young man.

In the light of facts stated in the foregoing paragraphs, we know that before the advent of Christianity no foreign religion could predominate any

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., p. 33.

\textsuperscript{27} SS. Madan Singh, \textit{Thought of Gandhiji, Nehru and Tagore}, New Delhi, Bright Carriers Institute. 1968. p. 38.

\textsuperscript{28} R.R. Shimary, 22, p. 129.
religion of the Nagas. There were no religious dispute among the Nagas. The entire population usually kept strict observance of food gennas, taboos, and various ritual ceremonies. Hence the Nagas got social value in the religion.

**Kukies:** Kuki is a genuine term given by the outsiders to an ethnic groups living in the North-East India and some parts of Burma. This ethnic name Kuki is not very old. However, as yet the origin of derivation of this words is not known. Some believed that the term "Kuki" has been derived from the Baluchistan word "Kuchis" which means wandering race. Others say that it comes from the English word "Kooki" translated as peculiar or unusual people. But the commonly accepted view is that Kuki is believed to be a Bengali word meaning hill men.

Scholars who wrote about the Kuki usually divided the tribe into two groups - the old Kuki and the new Kuki. It was divided on the basis of their arrival in the North-East India.

Groups of Kuki-Chin family migrated to this region prior to 18th century is known as "Old Kuki" the groups of new Kukis are those who

---

29 Gangmumei Kamei, n.17, p. 34.


came to the North-East India in the 18th century and after 18th century. It is believed that some Kuki tribes migrated to Manipur hills in the pre-historic time. But the large exodus occurred from 18th century onwards.\(^{32}\)

The Old Kukis are the Aimol, the Chotha, the Chiru, the Koireng, the Kom, the Purum, the Anal, the Lamkang, the Moyon, the Monsang, the Gangte and the Vaiphei.\(^{33}\) Some of them are identified as such perhaps for their linguistic affinity to the Kuki-Chin family. The New Kukis are the Thadous, the Haokips, the Doungel, the Sitolou, etc.\(^{34}\)

Besides, according to Grierson, Mizos are also belonged to Kuki-Chin linguistic family.\(^{35}\) Mizo is a generic term covering major tribes like Vaiphei and Ralte. There are also sub-tribes like Chauthe, Nganthe, Pauhe, Rawite, etc.\(^{36}\) But according to T. Gougin, Mizos have their distinct ethnic identity. He refused to include Mizo in the Kuki-Chin groups.\(^{37}\)


\(^{34}\) Khaihotinthang, n.31, p. 1.


This newly immigrant ethnic groups from the South formerly inhabited the hill south of Cachar, later on proceed towards the hill tract of Manipur.\textsuperscript{38} The cause of their influx on this region was that they were driven northward by "the powerful people". Since then numbers of Kuki came and settled in Manipur.\textsuperscript{39}

Originally, the traditional administrative system of Kuki is based on hereditary Chieflainship. Unlike democratic council of the Kabui Naga, the Kuki chief exercise despotic chieftaincy. "Housa" is the Chief who is all in the Thadou Kuki village affair. His house is the village court. He presides in all discussion. His discussion is absolutely final in all cases. For his help he appoints mantries called "Semang Pachong" at his own wisdom. The numbers and size are varied from village to village determined by the population of the village. The mode of appointing mantries are not in the principle of hereditary.\textsuperscript{40} The Chief himself was the appointing authority.\textsuperscript{41}

Thus the form of government of the Kuki village is purely monarchical type. Each village is an independent unit. The government of the village is in the hand of the Chief.


\textsuperscript{39} Alexander Mackenzie, \textit{The North-East Frontier of India}. Delhi, Mittal Publications, 1979. p. 146.

\textsuperscript{40} Khaikhotingthang Kipgen, n. 31, p. 76.

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Ibid.}
According to Ngulkhohao Lhungdim, the socio-religious life of Kuki is related with that of Isrealities. He further says that the Kuki had a firm belief in god that can heal human ills and sufferings if appropriate sacrifices could be performed at the proper alter. This system was prevalent among the people of isreal before the coming of Lord Jesus Christ. A spotless Lamp sacrificial work was done in a religious ritual of Passover or Kut.

From observing various accounts of the Kuki-Chin groups, it is cleared that Kukis are also more or less the believers of animistic religion. The form of sacrifice is in no way different from that of other animistic hill tribes particularly the Naga. They had also the belief in the existence of good and evil spirit. Ritual sacrifices was usually done for the evil spirit which disposed illness from human being.

Besides the above three major groups, namely, the Meitei, the Naga and the Kukis other sections of community like the Muslim, the Loi, the Bishnupriya are also settled in Manipur. These ethnic groups have their

---

43 Ibid., p. 152.
different theory of origin and migration. A brief discussion about the theory of their origin and social life are given below:

The Muslim: Muslim are the sections of the people who came to Manipur in and around 14\textsuperscript{th} and 15\textsuperscript{th} century. They have their migration mainly from Bengal. They are also called Pangals. According to the Puyas of Manipur, they were war prisoners captured by Meitei King Khagemba. The king provided a suitable land for them to settle in the fertile plain of Manipur within his administrative domain.\footnote{B.S.M. Sharma, and M. Kaoba Singh, n. 2, p. 10.}

Originally, the Muslim have the separate ethnic identity. But later on adopted Manipuri language, culture, etc. and fully developed into the Meitei Society.\footnote{Ibid.}

The Loi: The Lois are also another section of people in Manipuri society. They are considered as degraded, subdued, dependent, outcaste and low caste people.\footnote{Mangoljao Maibam, \textit{The Loi of Manipur}, Unpublished M. Phil. dissertation submitted to Manipur University, 1997, p. 1.} According to some scholars, the Loi is originated from Chakpas. However, this view is rejected by Khurkhul Loi which they claimed to have migrated form Burma.
The Loi were originally settled at the foot hills of Nongmai Ching. In course of time they were scattered at a different places, viz., Phayeng, Sekmai, Kameng, Andro, Sugnu, Chakpa, etc.\textsuperscript{48}

The Loi have small independent monarchical units of administration governed by the autocratic king. Legend informs that the method of appointing their king was unique. It was not based on hereditary. They had a traditional system of showing physical strength or capability to be a ruler. This was usually done in the presence of village elders. The trial of the strength was in the form of race, catching mithun, catching bull, longjump, etc. His reign and tenure continued as long as he is winning the competition held from time to time.

The socio-economic system of the Loi during those time was remarkable. Strict form of moral laws were prevalent among the Loi. They were living on different occupations. The most important was salt manufacturing and making pf pottery.\textsuperscript{49}

T.C. Hodson stated that the Loi villages are among the most prosperous in the villages in the state. Deportation to this village took place during the reign of king Garib Niwas with his policy of conversion of

\textsuperscript{48} B.S.M. Sharma and M. Kaooba Singh, n. 2, p. 10.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., p. 10.
Hinduism.\textsuperscript{50} Others say that deportation of a Loi village was a punishment for not paying tribute to the Meitei kings.

\textbf{The Bishnupriyas:} Apart from the people belonging to Mongoloid stock living in Manipur, Bishnupriyas are also another section of the people who are believed to be non Mongoloid; but the descendent of Indo-Aryan origin. The origin theory and early settlement in Manipur has become highly controversial. B.K. Roy Burman stated that linguistically the Bishnupriya is relevant with Sanskrit and strong affinity with Bengali and Assamese.\textsuperscript{51}

According to A.C. Arunkumar, the original name of Bishnupriya was Kalisa/Khalisa, which ahs been derived from "Kha-La-Chais" means "children of he wilder lake". They were said to be a mixed people originally living in Bangladesh. After the formation of a mixed culture a section of them went to the east for settlement in the land of Manipur in the 7th century A.D.\textsuperscript{52} Then the next new immigrants of Bishnupriyas from some parts of Bengal arrived. These people were treated as inferior caste by Bamôns, Kshetri-Meiteis in the Meitei socio-religious stratification.\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{50} T. C. Hodson, n. 8, p. 10.

\textsuperscript{51} B.S.M. Sharma and M. Kaoba Singh, n. 2, p. 11.

\textsuperscript{52} Proceeding of the Second Session of Manipur Historical Society, Vol. 1, Published by Manipur Historical Society, 1995, p. 107.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., p. 108.
From the above mentioned historical processes, one can find that there is a need for further examination regarding ancient names of the state, origins of the different racial elements, their early socio-political life on the soil, etc. for achieving ultimate truth about them.

Manipur is inhabited by different ethnic groups and the process of migration is there from different directions. The major groups are Meiteis, the Nagas and the Kuki-Chin groups. Therefore Manipur is also known as 'Tri-ethnic nation state. Later on the Muslims, the Nepalis the Biharis, the Marwaris and other minor tribes are also settled in Manipur. From historical account it is a fact that the Meiteis and the Nagas has a records of settlement in the state since pre and early historical period and the Kuki-Chin groups came later. The Muslim, the Biharis, the Nepalis, etc. came much later.

Each ethnic group has it own different indigenous polity. In early Meitei society monarchical form of government was in practice. Among the Naga groups the Kabuis and the Maos have a democratic village council whereas the Tangkhul has a limit chieftainship. The Kuki chief exercise absolute authority. It has been asserted that, "In general the Naga Political organisation institutions were more liberal than those of the Non-Nagas".  

---

In respect of socio-cultural and religious life of both the Meiteis and the tribal in the hills there were close similarities between them. Before the advent of foreign religions in the state, the people of the state professed animistic religion. Restriction against the belief of any religion was seldom.

Thus Manipur has a pluralistic society with multi-social element, multi-racial, multi-religion, multi-language, etc. The history of Manipur based on composite culture and the growth and development of democratic polity is a continued process.