PARTIES AND POLITICS IN MANIPUR

(1985-2000)

Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial

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MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

Submitted by

KSHETRIMAYUM KENNEDY SINGH

Centre for Political Studies

School of Social Sciences

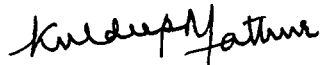**Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi-110067**
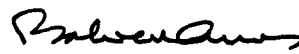
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Prof. Kuldeep Mathur

(CHAIRPERSON)

CHAIRPERSON
Centre for Poltical Studies
School of Social Sciencei-II
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067

Prof. Balveer Arora   21 July 2000

(SUPERVISOR)

Dedicated to my
Late Grandma, who loved me most
And to my Father, who has taught me how
to face defeats in life...

Acknowledgement

This Dissertation involves a number of people who have rendered sumptuous assistance in each and every possible ways.

I am indebted to Prof. Balveer Arora, my Supervisor for his unfailing guidance and support throughout the course of my work. Discussions with friends and constructive criticisms are of immense helpful. In this regard, I am thankful to Bijoy and Rishikesh; interaction with them fructified a lot. Particular thanks are due to Shaji and Lalboi Haokip who have remained at the beck and call for me. I acknowledged my deepest thanks to my family for their unceasing support and encouragement.

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I hold myself responsible for any errors, misrepresentations of facts or omissions in this work.

Kh. Kennedy Singh
Kshetrimayum Kennedy Singh

CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS:

A.C.	Arunachal Congress
A.D.	Anno Domini
A.D.C.	Autonomous District Council
A.G.P.	Asom Gana Parishad
A.I.A.D.M.K.	All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Khazagam
A.I.R.	All India Radio
A.M.P.C.	All Manipur People's Convention
A.N.S.U.M.	All Naga Students of Manipur
A.P.H.L.C.	All Party Hill Leaders' Conference
B.J.P.	Bharatiya Janata Party
C.M.	Chief Minister
C.P.I.	Communist Party of India
C.P.M.	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
C.S.D.S.	Centre for the Study of Developing Societies
C.S.P.	Congress Socialist Party
D.D.K.	Doordarshan Kendra
F.P.M.	Federal Party of Manipur
H.S.P.D.P.	Hill State People's Democratic Party
I.C.S.	Indian Congress Socialist
I.L.P.	Ireipok Leishem Party
I.N.C.	Indian National Congress
IND.	Independents
J.D.	Janata Dal
J.D. (S)	Janata Dal (Secular)
J.D. (U)	Janata Dal (United)
J.N.P.	Janata Party
J.P.	Janata Party
K.N.A.	Kuki National Assembly
L.K.D.	Lok Kranti Dal
M.D.A.	Manipur Democratic Alliance
M.H.U.	Manipur Hills Union
M.L.A.	Member of Legislative Assembly
M.N.F.	Mizo National Front
M.P.C.	Mizo People's Conference
M.P.F.	Meghalaya Parliamentary Forum
M.P.P.	Manipur People's Party
M.P.P.(K)	Manipur People's Party (Kangleipak)
M.S.C.P.	Manipur State Congress Party
M.U.	Mizo Union
N.C.P.	Nationalist Congress Party
N.C.P.(D)	Nationalist Congress Party (Doungel)
N.D.A.	National Democratic Alliance
N.D.M.	Nationalist Democratic Council Movement
N.E.F.A.	North East Frontier Agency

N.I.C.	Naga Integration Council
N.N.C.	Naga National Council
N.N.O.	Naga Nationalist Organisation
N.P.C.	Nagaland People's Conference
N.P.P.	Naga Peoples Party
N.S.C.N.	National Socialist Council of Nagaland
N.S.C.N.(IM)	National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah)
P.I.F.	Progressive Independent Front
P.I.G.	Progressive Independent Group
P.P.A.	People's Party of Arunachal
P.S.P.	Praja Santi Party (Manipur)
R.J.D.	Rashtriya Janata Dal
R.M.C.	Regional Medical College
R.S.P.	Revolutionary Socialist Party
S.D.F.	Secular Democratic Front
S.D.F.	Secular Democratic Front
S.J.P.(R)	Samajwadi Janata Party (Rashtriya)
S.P.	Samata Party
S.S.P.	Samyukta Socialist party
T.C.	Trinamul Congress
T.U.J.S.	Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti
U.D.F.	United Democratic Front
U.F.	United Front
U.F.M.	United Front of Manipur
U.L.F.	United Legislature Front
U.L.P.	United Legislature Party
U.M.F.	United Minority Front
U.M.P.D.F.	United Meghalaya parliamentary Democratic Forum

" POWER- the first love of every politician is a treacherous beloved. Like those of a pretty woman of little virtues, her wooers are many and her loyalties shifting". *

INTRODUCTION

Parties have become closely identified with democracy and democracy in turn is commonly identified as a universal good. In order to understand better the world in which we live in, we need an increasingly better understanding of the essential nature of the party phenomenon. What do parties have in common and why do we become especially conscious of parties when we are concerned with democracy? In the light of these questions, it is pertinent here to study the nature and functions of political parties in a democratic set-up.

The present task is to look at political parties so as to understand them in order to affirm their distinctiveness and to increase our understanding of them. Let us consider political parties as "social formation". Since social formations are distinguished one from the other by structure, function and object, differences in any of these may distinguish between types of such formations. Therefore this study is built up on the assumption that political parties are social formations which denote some distinctive phenomenon and thereby determine the nature of government vis-à-vis its stability and coherence.

Political parties constitute a basic element of democratic institutional apparatus. They perform the function of articulation of interests and aspirations of a substantial

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*S. C. Kashyap, *The Politics of Defection*, New Delhi, The Institute of Constitutional and Parliamentary Studies, 1969, p. 1.

segment of the citizenry, usually in ways contended to be promotive of the national weal. Political parties in combination with other institutions and procedures provide means for handling the problem of succession to authority more or less peacefully. Politics in the real sense of the term means the art and science of conflict resolution in society. As conflicts are inevitable, people ought to have a conflict resolution mechanism acceptable to all the sections of society. Political parties provide a forum to express the aspirations of different sections of society. Thus, a political party becomes a mechanism which performs the function of resolving conflicts by participating in the process of governance. It is in this context the study of political parties becomes quite important.

An unusually complex scenario is unfolding in India in the recent past, institutions are in a state of decline, leadership is in retreat and losing itself in a jugglery of numbers and the manipulations of caste and communities. Several changes in the economic and societal sphere have come to influence the political institutions of the country. At the same time, the idea of democracy enraged the imagination of those who are hitherto kept out of the mainstream and thus mobilization of marginal groups have put a new dimension in the polity of the country. Furthermore, the democratic electoral process aroused great enthusiasm among the people and gave an impetus to the political consciousness of the people. Consequently, a very different doctrine seems to be emerging namely, that stating their claims in the democratic process will lead to a truly participatory and decentralized development. And this notion in the final analysis paves the way for the emergence of various social and political groupings/organizations based mainly on region, caste and community lines.

After the downfall of the Congress party or one party dominance, the role and the function of such social and political groupings increases manifold. With the development of multi-partyism and the increasing political consciousness among the people, the regional parties have started playing a vital role thus reducing the importance and role of national parties in the state politics. And consequently, in the national politics the role of the regional parties takes a new turn and in the era of coalition politics one cannot underestimate their importance. It is thus, interesting here to study the role and functions of the regional parties.

Despite the federal character of the Indian Union, regional parties and other small parties have long been unable to make their presence felt in the national politics of the country. The regional parties of the north-east states are always having a low profile in the making and un-making of the government at the centre. However, with the decline of the one-party majority rule (of the Congress) and the entry of the era of coalition politics in the political system, their importance becomes indispensable. It is thus necessary to explore the rise and emergence of regional and small parties and to evaluate their functions and performance in the context of governance. It is again important to find out the factors that facilitate the emergence of multi-party party system which in turn have changed the course and content of the Indian politics. Thus it is with this urge that the present study is undertaken.

In the following chapters an attempt has been made to explain what is a political party and its fundamental characteristics, scope and functions, etc. In the light of the decline of one-party dominance and the consequent rise of the multi-partyism, it also discusses the increasing importance of the regional parties in the context of the small

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states of the North-East in general, and Manipur in particular. The study covers a span of fifteen years from 1985 to 2000 A.D. so as to understand contemporary political change in the state of Manipur. The study however, seeks to understand the political dimension of a socially and culturally complex society through the electoral periscope.

In the first chapter, a theoretical framework of the origin and development of political parties and the party systems is presented. It also seeks to analyse the development of multi-party system from a one party dominance in the Indian political context. Further, it deals with the political parties in the North-Eastern States (sans Manipur since its political parties and their role and nature are separately dealt in other chapters), their scope and nature of functioning. An attempt has also been made here to ascertain how far the parties in this region are successful in providing "responsive" as well as "responsible" government.

The second chapter deals with socio-political processes in the politics of Manipur and the factors which explain the final outcome of the battle of ballots. To understand the configurations and trajectories of the parties in and out of the government, three Assembly elections of 1984, 1990 and 1995 are highlighted. Further, an effort is being made to detect the factors that motivate the people, and the strategies that political parties adopt to persuade the electors, in a socially and politically diverse society like that of Manipur.

The rise and the growth of political consciousness among the people of Manipur, the course of integrating the State in the Indian Dominion and the subsequent emergence of political parties of all hues are dealt in chapter three. One of the most popular and the oldest among the existing regional parties in the State – the Manipur Peoples' Party

(MPP) - which has been a strong political force in the politics of Manipur and has been at the helm of affairs several times is studied in some detail. The MPP is chosen for the sole reason that it has been the most powerful and the most popular among the regional parties in the State during the said period and also to enable us to analyse its position in the changing political environment in recent times. Besides it is the only regional party which has been at the helm of affairs in the political history of Manipur during the period upto 1985, which is covered in this chapter.

Considering the federal characteristics of the Indian Union and keeping in mind the relative positions of the political units, the Centre-State relations in general and federal dimensions of the political process in Manipur are discussed in chapter four, particularly in terms of the special provisions in the Constitution for Manipur and other states of the North-East. Indian federalism faces plenty of problems but the overriding problem has been the tendency of central governments to over-centralise power. This is most clearly apparent in the excessive use of article 356 of the Constitution which allows New Delhi to dismiss state governments and assume direct control. The Government of India in this way, has intruded into spheres allocated to the states. Article 356 has over the years had become a device in the hands of the party in power at the Centre to dislodge governments in the states, particularly if they happened to be governed by a party different from the one at the Centre. And therefore, this article has developed into an area of tension between the Centre and the States. From this perspective, two instances of President's Rule (1993 and 1994) in Manipur are dealt with to understand the politics behind the use of this provision of the Indian Constitution.

Political parties represent the people of a particular society and their wishes are supposed to be carried out by these parties in a democratic political system. Political parties in turn depend on the electorate for their existence and sustenance. In a democratic polity, only through elections can political parties acquire the legitimate power to govern. It is therefore necessary for a political party to be able to feel the pulse of the people so that they can live upto the expectation of the people. It is against this backdrop that in the concluding chapter of the study seeks to evaluate the problems and prospects of political parties in Manipur in particular, in the light of the growing disillusionment with parties by the general public. It also makes an effort to unearth the areas where the political parties of Manipur in particular should plunge in in order to make themselves acceptable by the general public and in harmony with their hope and aspirations.

CHAPTER ONE

PARTIES AND POLITICS: AN OVERVIEW

I. The Study of Political Parties:

(1) Why Political Party?

Political parties are considered to be indispensable for the successful working of democracy. Yet, the basic question which confronts us is the very meaning of political party itself. "A political party is first of all an organized attempt to get power"[1]. Schattschneider goes on to define power as control of government and to point out that the aim to get control of government is what distinguishes a party from a pressure group. Any organization, according to him, become a major party or real party when it is in control of the government or is able to create and maintain a widespread expectation that it will take over the government. Mc Donald, considers political parties as a kind or class of social formation and regards them as "determinant organizations". In his words, "to regard political parties as determinant organizations with reasonably defined boundaries, which are potentially capable, as formations, of taking over the government much as a contractor would take over a construction task, is a rather natural way to consider such a social formation"[2].

Ostrogorski, on the other hand, finds the dominant position of the organizational qualities of the political parties in their functioning. In his great pioneering work,

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[1] E.E. Schattschneider, *Party Government*, New York, Rinehart, 1942, p.35.
[2] Neil A. Mc Donald, *The Study of Political Parties*, New York, Random House, 1963, p.15.

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"Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties" he regards parties ideally as bodies deliberately organized to mobilize and express mass opinion in connection with public questions, and he also finds weakness in the strong tendency of any temporary organization to try to become permanent and to create an interest and an opinion of its own. According to Mc Donald, as a kind of social formation party may be regarded in a variety of ways. Some referred to political parties as "sprawling, loosely knit organizations, relatively quiet during the off election years..." [3]. There are other senses in which the term party is used. In one sense the term may refer to a group of more or less professional political workers or at times party denotes groups within the government. Both analytically and operationally the term party most of the time refer to several types of groups, and it is useful to keep relatively clear the meaning in which the term is used.

"A fundamental difficulty about the term political party is that it is applied without discrimination to many types and near groups".[4] Thus, the meaning to be given to the term political party is extremely varied. Duverger while writing on political parties finds himself venturing into a virgin territory, and into especially difficult territory. Obtaining precise information about parties, even on elementary points, was not an easy task. Thus, it is no accident that Duverger provides no definition of parties and that he limits himself to saying that "a party is a community with a particular structure".[5]

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[3] Augus Campbell, Gerald Gurin,and Warren Miller: *The Voter Decides*, Evanston, Ill. Row Peterson and Company, 1954, p88.

[4] V.O.Key Jr., *Politics, Parties and Pressure Groups*, New York, Havard University, Thomas Y. Crowell Company, Fifth Edition, 1969, p.163.

[5] Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State*. New York, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1954, p. xv.

Political parties are thus defined in various ways. However, in the overall analysis, by a "political party" we mean an organized body of people who stand for certain principles and policies in the political life of the country as a whole. Burke defines a party as "a body of men united for promoting by their joint endeavours the national interest upon some particular principle in which they all agreed".[6] For him, a political party must have certain principles and a clear programme without which that political party is not worth the name.

Political parties are a basic element of democratic institutional apparatus and are inevitable, for without them it is impossible to operate a democratic government. J.Lapalombara and Myron Weiner suggest that the political party emerges whenever the activities of a political system reach a certain degree of complexity, or whenever the notion of political power comes to include the idea that the mass public must participate or be controlled. "The emergence of the political party clearly implies that the masses must be taken into account by the political elite, either out of a commitment to ideological notion that the masses have a right to participate in the determination of public policy or the selection of leadership, or out of the realization that even a rigidly dictatorial elite must find the organizational means of assuring stable conformance and control".[7]

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[6] E. Burke, as quoted in Iain Hampshcr-Monk, *The Political Philosophy of Edmund Burke*, London & New York, Long man, 1987, p.16.
[7] J. Lapalombara and Myron Weiner (ed.), *The Origin and Development of Political Parties*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1966, p. 4.

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(2) Emergence of Political Parties:

The term political parties emerged in the nineteenth century with the development of representative institutions and the expansion of suffrage in Europe and the United States[8]. The emergence of political parties can be seen as a useful institutional index of the level of political development. Political development implies among other things a measure of political participation by large number of people who do not belong to the dominant political elite.[9] Thus, it appears that wherever the political party has come into, it performs certain functions in a wide variety of political systems. Nonetheless the circumstances under which parties first emerged in a developing political system clearly have an important effect on the types of parties which emerge subsequently. Lapalombara and Weiner suggest three types of theory of party origins, firstly the institutional theories focusing on the relationship between early parliaments and the emergence of parties; secondly historical-situation theories that focus on the historical crisis or tasks which systems has encountered at the moment in time when parties developed; and thirdly developmental theories that relate parties to the broader processes of modernization.

However, Duverger emphasizes on a particular origin of parties, and suggests that party grew out of political assemblies as their members felt the need of a group to act in concert. As the vote was subsequently extended these committees began to organize the electors. Thus Duverger's theory, in the final analysis postulates stages in party

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[8] Joseph A. Schlesinger, "Political Parties" in David L. Sills (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of Social Science*, Vol. 10., New York, London, Macmillan, p. 428.
[9] J. Lapalombara and Myron Weiner, *op. cit.* p. 4.

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development. First there is creation of parliamentary groups, then the emergence of electoral committees, and finally the establishment of permanent connections between these two elements[10]. Thus, going by the observations, it can be well said that salient events in a nation's history may have an enduring impact on the type of system that develops and that differences among systems can often be explained on the basis of these experiences. Furthermore, historical crises not only provide the context in which political parties emerge but also tend to be a critical factor in determining what pattern of evolution parties take later. It is also suggested that the origin of political parties is deeply associated historically with crises and is also closely bound up with the general process of modernization. It would thus appear that it is the occurrence of political crisis of systemic magnitude at a point of time when sufficient modernization has taken place to provide conditions for party development that causes parties to emerge.[11] M. Duverger, however, observes that parties originate from two distinct aspects of the electoral process viz and parliamentary and extra-parliamentary. D.W.Brogan termed it as "interior" and "exterior" parties.[12] In other words, the first type described corresponds to the creation of political parties in a country where no system of organized parties yet exists. As soon as system is at work, the second type of creation becomes the more usual. Duverger is of the view that externally created parties tend to be more centralized than those that are created internally, more ideologically coherent and disciplined, less subject to influence from the legislative contingents of the parties. This is largely because of the circumstances under which they arose and the observation is valid in most of the developing areas, for

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[10] Maurice Duverger, *op. cit.* p. xxiv.
[11] J.Lapalombara and Myron Weiner, *op. cit.* p. 14-21.
[12] Maurice Duverger, *op. cit.* p. vii.

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example, India where nationalist movements typically took complete control of the governmental framework when the colonial rulers withdrawn from the political system.

Therefore, whatever the nature of its emergence, we always find that political parties are characterized by some common functions in a variety of political systems at various stages of social, political, and economic development. "Any social formation may be distinguished by the distinctiveness of the functions and the distinctiveness of the method or mode by which it performs them".[13] Thus, in any political system, it is of much importance to study the functions of parties since the way a party functions may make a difference in forming an image of the party model.

In modern times, when an ever larger proportion of the people share in the process of governance, the political parties which developed with democratic ideas by undermining the foundations of the old order becomes the instrument for the organization of popular support in societies founded on the doctrine of the consent of the governed. The idea of popular displacement of governments and the substitution of other rules preferred by the people can be made only through competition among political parties. Democratic orders merge into a single ritual a substitute for older techniques of determining the heir to authority and a functional equivalent for the varieties of ways by which people rid themselves of unwarranted rulers. The role of political parties in all these process is significant and thus analyzing the functional aspects of a party is inevitable so as to wholly understand the very nature of the party.

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[13] Neil A. Mc Donald, op. cit. p. 19.

(3) Functions of Political Parties:

Political parties in a democratic polity help to articulate the opinions of the electors articulate in various ways. Parties are expected to help in making the government strong and stable. Their main functions include management of succession of power, as well as participation in the process of getting public approval to the course of any public policy. They mobilize enough support to buttress the authority of governments, or, on the other hand they attract or organize discontent and dissatisfaction sufficient to oust the government. According to V.O.Key Jr. "political parties are lineal descendants of two sorts of groups that recur in the annals of governance: those that conspire to overthrow the government and those that rally around to defend and maintain the regime".[14] Thus, articulation of the interest and aspirations of a substantial segment of the citizenry has become one of the vital functions of political parties.

Edmund Burke's famous definition of a political party emphasizes party as a group bound together by common and shared principles. This definition has obscured Burke's stress on the importance of party as connection. Further, in the same vein, C.A. Beard also regards parties as mainly agencies of interest but also capable of drawing interest together in such a way as to become a motor or an independent force.[15] Party literature also reveals that parties or party systems are variously regarded, in a functional sense, as a connector, manager-operator, media-broker, nominator and organizer. In most writing, it is needless to say, it is a matter of party being regarded as predominantly, not

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[14] V.O.Key Jr. op. cit. p. 69.
[15] C.A. Beard in Neil A. Mc Donald, op. cit. p. 27.

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wholly, one or the other of these function performers.[16] In the final analysis, it can be said that not only does party operate as an influencing agent on the electorate but it also articulates and help in shaping the decision of public officials. With the development of democratic institutions, the role and functions of the political parties in the social, economic, and other functions of political life of the people has also increased manifold.

In a nutshell, it can be put forward that political parties perform functions essential to the operation of a democratic order. And consequently, any political party may be distinguished by the distinctiveness of their functions. In some degree, the structure of a party may remain constant but functions and mode of functioning may vary, which thus differentiates a party from one another. Thus, it is imperative here to discuss the different kinds of political parties which functions in a political system.

(4) Nature of Parties:

Classification between parties can be made according to the substantive character of the basic organizational units or organizing nucleus. Mc Donald discusses and distinguishes parties in terms of what he calls "doctrinal" and "non-doctrinal" parties. A party based on doctrine is characterized by the fact that its leaders and its basis of appeal function largely in the realm of principles and moral argumentation. Whereas parties whose appeal and organizing basis rest upon a shared interest or identity constitute the bulk of party based which may be regarded as essentially non-doctrinal in nature.[17] Mc Donald further, states that region or section may furnish a party basis, and the regional or

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[16] Neil A. Mc Donald, *op. cit.* p. 23.
[17] Neil A. Mc Donald, *op. cit.* pp. 31-32.

sectional homogeneity may, be an important aspect of either a doctrinal or non-doctrinal element in a party. Marriages of convenience between competing groups usually involve a de-emphasize on doctrine and give rise to a party or party alliance based upon a shared desire to govern.

Duverger distinguishes parties in terms of direct and indirect structure and in terms of whether the basic organizational unit is a caucus, a branch, a cell or a militia-type unit. Parties with direct structure are those whose members or affiliates are related directly- that is, a party which has individuals as members. In direct parties are those which are built upon other social formations as their basic component units. In this type, the individual comes to his party membership or affiliation by virtue of his membership in a non-party agency. Duverger classifies parties into three different types on the basis of strength:- a) parties with a majority bent, that is, party which command an absolute majority in parliament; b) major parties; and c) minor parties.[18]

Political parties can also be characterized in terms of the region or state where they operate. The state level parties often differ markedly from the national level parties. In India, there are two types of parties : the first category is of those that are broad based and functional, and the other include those parties which are local in character, are based on primary groups, or are centered around personalities. Thus, even in a particular political system, we find different parties based on certain principles and at the same time having varied aims and objectives and therefore their nature and functions also different

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[18] Maurice Duverger, op. cit. p. 283.

in many ways. These factors contribute to the emergence of different modes of party functioning and it is in this backdrop that the study of party system becomes inevitable.

(5) Types of Party Systems:

The term system refers to a party complex composed of all parties that are closely related one to the other or to a common entity, such as a given nation-state. Each national state has its own party system and it is possible to classify and compare countries by the types of party system they possess. However, the most obvious distinction rests upon the number of parties in each country.[19] The number of interacting units, in fact, is not just the foremost but the sole dimension on which most existing studies distinguished party systems. No doubt, the number of parties is a basic and obvious dimension along which party system vary. Thus, party system can be classified into three major categories: One party, Two- party and Multi- party systems.

To begin with, one party system signifies a system where there is only one party that represents a cleavage between those who are regarded as being within the party and all others. However, some writers find it difficult to digest the concept of one party system. Their argument is that "if party system involves interactions among party units in the process of electoral competition, then the idea of a one-party system is logically absurd, for one cannot have a competition or an interaction with only one actor".[20]

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[19] Neil Mc Donald, *op. cit.* p. 34.
[20] Hary Eckstein, "Party Systems" in David L. Sills (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences,* Vol. II. *op. cit.* P. 439.

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Even the conditions for the emergence of one party system vary. Some arise in the form of a governing elite, others developed in terms of doctrine and tradition. Duverger tries to distinguish between a one-party system which stabilizes the regime of which it is a part, and another which tries to keep it stirred up. Having a different view, J. Lapalombara and M. Weiner, opine that one-party situation developed usually after some major crisis had occurred in the competitive party systems and it is associated with certain conditions and one of the most profound condition being the emergence of a strong externally created party with an explicit mission to "discipline"(i.e. to repress) all other political parties.[21] Occasionally, one party system is subdivided, particularly to distinguish dictatorial from representative structures.

However, Duverger states that one-party systems are not necessarily totalitarian. It may provide an arena in which ordered conflict can take place, and it may be limited in its aspirations. Strong emphasis upon either social or national unity leads to a notion that only one party can be tolerated in the interest of achieving the goal. Emphasis upon national unity suggests a fascist-type party system whereas emphasis upon social unity indicates a communist system.[22]

Thus, the existence of different kinds of one party system depending on the mode of their functioning is quite evident. Even if so, in the modern political systems, where the study of party is in the context of electoral competition, it is difficult to find a one party system with all its validity. The same conceptual lacuna seems to be there with the two-party systems which in the literal sense are extremely rare. But unlike the one party

[21] J. Lapalombara and Myron Weiner, *op. cit.* p. 24-25.
[22] Neil A. Mc Donald, *op. cit.* p. 35.

system, this category is not logically absurd. Even Great Britain, usually considered as the paragon of bipartism does not really fills the bill for there are minor parties always operating alongside major ones. Therefore, when one talks about two-party systems, it requires one to choose what units to include in and exclude from a party system, and such choices "if made without sensible and explicit criteria, will once again lump together a very heterogeneous set of cases, difficult or impossible to generalize about".[23]

The concept of a multi party system also even poses a logical difficulty. If taken literally, it is a classification that does not classify, for virtually all party system fall under it. Multi party systems, according to Duverger's analysis, arise either from splits or overlapping in a natural two-way division. Multi-party systems, at times, would comprise some systems in which single party can win and have won outright majorities; systems in which single party consistently come close to that point; system in which no party even approaches a majority; system in which effective party alliances are easy to form and harder to preserve; system in which party cooperation is virtually non existent; system in which parties collaborate on the parliamentary level almost as much as distinct party factions in some so-called party systems collaborate in elections etc. Multi party system, thus, in itself, is a complex phenomenon indeed.

The eventual outcome of the study of party systems can be put in a way that if the categories: one party, two party, and multi party systems are taken at their face value, they yield a classificatory scheme that simply does not classify. Thus, to classify and to characterize party system, one need to establish the technical precision about the number

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[23] Harry Eckstein, *op. cit.* p. 440.

of competing party units so that the numerical dimension can be precisely used and proper emphasis should be given to other dimensions of variability.

Conclusion:

In the overall analysis, be it the nature of its origin, scope or function, or the kinds of parties or party systems, political parties, wherever it emerges, has been playing major role at the various levels of social, political and economic development of a variety of political systems. In the words of Sartori, "parties are the central intermediate and intermediary structure between society and government".[24] Alongwith the process of democratization, parties became means of expression and through them supplied the channels for articulating, communicating, and implementing the demands of the governed. As V.O. Key Jr. puts it, "political parties are basic institutions for the translation of mass preference into public policy".[25]

In a similar tone, Schattschneider, declared that " the only organization that can translate into fact the idea of majority rule is the political party"[26]. Thus, political parties perform functions essential to the operation of a democratic order. They also seek to build majority coalitions powerful enough to control the government (if one particular party is not in majority). Political party is said to be the only institution through which responsible government could be made "responsive" too. Before we move on to see how far the political parties in the North-East and particularly in Manipur, are contributing in providing a "responsible" and "responsive" government, it will be worthwhile here to

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[24] G. Sartori, *Parties and Party System: A Framework for Analysis*, Cambridge University Press, 1976, p.ix

[25] V.O. Key Jr. *Public Opinion and American Democracy*, Knopf, 1961, p. 433.

[26] E.E. Schattschneider, *The Struggle for Party Government*, University of Mayland, 1948, p. 10.

The Indian National Congress provided the forum as a national movement functioning for a common cause with various political groups within it. This national movement passed through three stages of development: first it was a pressure group, then a national movement and finally a political party. There was a critical phase as the nationalist movement was becoming a political party.[29] This was a critical transitional phase. Keeping in mind the gravity of the situation, Huntington has rightly observed that , "usually an organization is created to perform one particular function, when that function is no longer needed, the organization faces a major crisis. It either finds a new function or reconciles itself to a lingering death".[30] However, after the transfer of power, the Indian National Congress was able to adapt itself to governing after a long history of agitation. Indian National Congress thus emerged as a political party in post-independence India. The Congress enjoyed two full decades of dominance in the post-independence India and was able to extend its base into almost every parts of India . Its formal structure suggests a highly centralized or oligarchic model but in practice, methods were elaborated and multiplied whereby a highly diversified mass membership could be consulted on policy and organizational issues. In fact, the Congress leadership was acutely aware of the need to develop and observe procedures which would permit and ensure the democratic functioning of the party in itself and as a responsible element in the society at large.[31] There has been a constant trend towards broadening the social base of the party. New elements have been accommodated in the leadership as the base of party supporters gets

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[29] Myron Weiner, *op. cit.* p. 13.
[30] S.P. Huntington "Political Development and Political Decay ", *World Politics*, XXVII, April 1965, p. 398.
[31] Stanley Kochanck, *The Congress Party of India: The Dynamics of One Party Democracy*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1968, p. xx.

diversified. The resulting diversity of Congress leadership and the party's ability to aggregate the demand of a highly differentiated base has been an indispensable source of Congress strength.[32]

The Congress party in India is unique in the sense that no political party in the democratic countries in the world had enjoyed such a dominant position as the Congress party enjoyed. Keeping in view its dominant position, while India by no means has a single party system, Congress stands as the largest and most powerful party in India.[33] Before the British left India, the Congress was functioning more or less as a parallel government with an organization extending into most parts of India. The Congress machine acquired this configuration in 1920 under Gandhi, who believed that a mass organization commanding the loyalty of the Indian people could challenge even the power of the British Raj.[34] Since its social base has been extended to almost every caste, region and community, the Congress party, more than any other party, has considerable tolerance for divergent views and functions. This tolerance and intra-party diversity are what gave the Congress party its national character.[35] However, the tolerance and diversity are not as comprehensive as in the days of national struggle and thus in itself had a disintegrative affect in creating circumstances which gave rise within the Congress party to intra-party factionalism as a powerful source of internal conflict, criticism and change. The greatest threat to the Congress so far has not come from ideological differences/conflicts but from other divisive tendencies - communalism, casteism and

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[32] *Ibid.* p. xxv
[33] Myron Weiner, *op. cit.* p. 280
[34] Stanley Kochanek, *op. cit.* p.xxi.
[35] Myron Weiner, *op. cit.* p. 283.

provincialism - along with the drive for status and recognition by the leaders of all shades. The factional strife within the party had serious consequences and it came to the fore and reached its logical culmination in the split of 1969.

(1) The 1967 Debacle and the Downfall of Congress

The decline of Congress, however, was sharply reflected for the first time in the 1967 General Elections when non-Congress formations made their debut in many states. The results of 1967 elections produced a shock wave throughout the Indian political system. In that electoral upheaval, both the Congress and India as a whole, had reached a turning point in post-independence development i.e., for the Congress would have to adjust to its loss of hegemony. In fact, twenty-years of one party dominance had come to an end, while the Indian political system adjusted to a shift from one-party dominance to multi-partyism.[36] Several other factors also have contributed to the Congress reversal and one of the most important factors is that the central leadership was unable to perform its traditional function of moderating and neutralizing factional splits within the party which in turn resulted in a near disintegration of the Congress organization in many states. It was quite possible from what had happened that according to Kochanek the Congress debacle in 1967 was because of their internal problems, "for the post-Nehru leadership failed to perform what had become the central leadership's most vital function – the mediation of intra-party disputes and divisions".[37]

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[36] Stanley Kochanek, *op. cit.* p. 408.
[37] Stanley Kochanek, *op. cit.* p. 410.

The 1967 General Elections marked the beginning of a transformation of the Indian political system from a dominant one-party system to multi-partyism. Yet, despite the loss of its hegemony, the Congress remains the largest, the highly organized and the only all-India party. Its success as a whole, is solely not because of the charisma of Nehru or even to the magic tradition of the nationalist movement. It must be, according to Kochanek, attributed to the ability of the Congress to adapt to the conditions of governing and to the changes which have been taking place in the Indian environment.[38] Despite the loss of hegemony the Congress parties in the States remained relatively intact and the leaders have attempted to use the new opportunities created by the 1967 election shake-up to strengthen their position within the party organization. No doubt, the 1967 General Elections have broken the near monopoly of power enjoyed by the Congress for two decades, but the evitable result is that Indian political system will witness a greater variety of political participation and behaviour. Indeed, the eventful sixties constituted the most defining decade so far in the realm of Indian politics- the decline of Congress and the emergence of non-Congress formations. Subsequently with the decline of the Congress, a large vacuum was left behind and it was sought to be filled by the regional parties, apart from BJP, the Janata Dal and the Left. The inability of various parties to successfully fill the gap left by the departure of Congress from the centre-stage has facilitated institutional decline, weakening of democracy and political anarchy. During this phase, state parties have emerged in a big way and the changing patterns of party system in India have shown a trend towards a continuous decline in the support base of the national parties. The last time we had a clear majority (of Congress) in the Lok-Sabha was in the election of 1984, when Rajiv Gandhi got a massive mandate of 400 seats in a

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[38] *Ibid.* p. 428.

House of 556.[39] but the present trend in Indian politics now clearly shows that in the near future no party is going to have a majority in the Parliament and thus the only government we could have is a minority government with outside support or a coalition government.

In a pluralistic country like India with so many diversities, with so many pull and pressures, it is difficult in fact to have a one-party government. Even the Congress party itself was called as one-party coalition because of its broad ideological spectrum covering the Left to the Right.[40] India, thus in the final analysis, after the decline of the Congress party, the one party dominance in the political life of the country has come to an end thereby making path for the non-Congress parties to enter into the new political environment. The people having experienced the democratic electoral process which gave them an impetus to the political consciousness of the people gradually realizes that stating their claims in the democratic process will lead to a truly participatory and the decentralized development. This motion takes away to the emergence of various social and political groupings mainly based on region, ethnic, caste and the community lines. The lost of Congress hegemony helped in the emergence of regional and local aspirations and subsequently we found different shapes of political parties entering the political arena. Since no party gets the majority in this multi-party system, coalition government becomes the order of the day. Thus, in view of the changing political situation in the country, both the Congress and the non-Congress parties have to adjust themselves in the changing times by entering into coalitions of one form or another whichever suits them at

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[39] Subhas C. Kashyap (ed.), *Coalition Government and Parties in India*, New Delhi, Uppal, 1997, p. 2.
[40] Karan Singh in Subhas C. Kashyap (ed.), *op. cit.* p. 4.

a particular period of time.[41] During the Congress rule everything was tightly centralized. The Indian state is being weakened, not strengthened by centralism.[42] More democracy is called for in the situation which can be described as a crisis of centralism. It was only when the Congress hegemony began to creep in the late sixties that the other political forces began to emerge. The gradual politicisation of masses helped the emergence of these countervailing forces. Thus, India can't be strong if federal democracy is weak.

In the context of a multi-party polity, multi-level federalism appears to offer the greatest scope and possibilities for meeting the indispensable coherence requirements of a strong and united Indian state.[43] Thus, it can be rightly claimed that the decline of the Congress party gave way to multi-partism thus bringing the country into a coalition era where the role and the functions of the state or regional parties are acknowledged and thereby giving a federal character to the polity of the country. Nikhil Chakravaty rightly comments that in the case of India, " there is not a ghost of a chance to go on for one party rule. The coalition politics has just become inescapable".[44] With the coalition politics there have been a change in a national level due to the fact that there have taken place a growing regionalisation of politics. This regionalisation of politics brings about the change in the coalition politics of India. "The Indian coalition framework has forced both 'the Hindutva framework of BJP' and 'the dynastic framework of the Congress' towards moderate position because of the new political compulsions of carrying various

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[41] B. Pakem, *Coalition Politics in North-East India*, New Delhi, Regency Publications, 1999, p. 16.

[42] Nirmal Mukarji and Balveer Arora (ed.), *Federalism in India*, New Delhi, Vikas, 1992, p. 274.

[43] *Ibid.* p.273.

[44] Nikhil Chakravaty, "Coalition Politics and the Impending Poll", *Mainstream*, New Delhi. Vol. XXXV, No. 52 December 6, 1997, p.3.

allies with them".[45] This moderating force also keeps "the Congress from total collapse" and "the BJP from its earlier extremist stance".

With the Congress losing its hegemony in the sphere of governance, the relation between the Centre and State has also considerably changed. Kothari has rightly remarked "coalition model was still operating but now as a more moderating force than before, one in which large national parties were being forced to accept the need for alliances and accommodation with a variety of both old and new parties and the individuals. And above all that with regional parties whom they were earlier prone to brush aside".[46] Thus, coalition politics requires delicate adjustments, accommodations and the compromises. North-East India, though geographically isolated from the rest of the country, is no exception when it comes to coalition politics. The region has been experiencing coalition politics and governments for a very long time. Historically, coalition politics has the usual pattern of the various communities of North-East India.[47] Therefore, in the light of the coalition politics and the emergence of the regional and other small parties, it is imperative to look into the nature and functions of parties in the small political units of the North-Eastern region in particular and their roles in the government in the States.

III. Political Parties in the North-East:

One of the highly picturesque parts of India, the North-East region, is also one of the most strategically placed region sharing international borders. This region has a

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[45] Rajni Kothari, "Messages in Ballots", *The Telegraph* (Calcutta), March 15, 1998.
[46] *Ibid.*
[47] See B. Pakem, *op. cit.*

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diverse composition of its population. "Nowhere in India are there such a large number of tribes as in the North-East India. And nowhere in the world is the composition of the population so diverse as is this region"[48] in the words of B.K. Roy Burman, "North-East India is a mosaic of diverse racial types, cultural forms, languages and dialects. Besides different ethnic groups have different traditions of origin....when this historical facts are mentioned, it is by no means suggested that the people of these areas are or can be less Indian."[49]

The North-Eastern states are quite different in political experience, in terms of social and economic conditions from the rest of India. However, in the recent years, in the era of coalition politics, the role of regional parties become significant and the political importance of the parties in this region have also multiplied to a great extent. Thus in the light of this development and considering the political gap between the region and the mainland India, it is important here to study the nature of political parties in the North-Eastern states of India in realm of electoral politics.

(1) Arunachal Pradesh:

Arunachal Pradesh comes very late in the political spectrum of North-East India. But within a decade after Indian Independence, "it has picked up the process of electoral politics very fast, perhaps even faster than the other states and communities in the

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[48] V.Venkata Rao, *A Century of Tribal Politics in North-East India (1874-1974)*, Delhi. S. Chand & Company, 1976, p. 15.

[49] B.K. Roy Burman, "Issues in North-East: An Appraisal" in B.L. Abbi (ed.), *North-East Region: Problems and prospects of Development*, Chandigarh, 1984, p. 175.

region".[50] In 1971, Arunachal Pradesh, formerly known as the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) was constituted into a Union Territory.

The first General Elections in the state was held in 1978 and there were two main political parties - the Janata Party which secured an absolute majority of 17 members and the People's Party of Arunachal (PPA) with 8 members – besides the Independents which got 5 seats in the House of 30.[51] The presence of Janata Party was because of the joining and rejoining the ruling or prospective ruling party at the Centre by state units of national parties and regional parties.[52] The Congress party could not open its account in this election.

In the 1980 General Elections, the People's Party of Arunachal (PPA) and the Indian National Congress (INC) were seen as serious contenders for power. Interestingly both parties secured 13 seats each with 4 Independents. The Congress party however engineered defection of some members including the Independents and formed the government headed by Gegong Apang. Ever since this election, the Congress party had been able to retain its dominance.[53]

In 1987 Arunachal Pradesh became a full-fledged state and consequently the number in the Legislative Assembly raised to 60 members. With a new trend in the state politics, the dominance of the Congress party was further strengthened. This trend

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[50] B.Pakem, *op. cit.* p.132.
[51] Arunachal News, Vol. 7, No. 6, October 1978, pp. 38-39.
[52] A.C. Talukdar and Pura Tago, " Assembly Elections in the North-East: A Case Study of Arunachal Pradesh" in Girin Phukan, and Aditul Yasin (ed.), *Working of Parliamentary Democracy and Electoral Politics in North-East India*, New Delhi, South Asia Publishers, 1998, p. 65.
[53] B.Pakem, op. cit. p. 66.

according to Talukdar and Tago, is the strong tendency on the part of the opposition MLAs to join the ruling party in the state as soon as the election is over irrespective of their previous party affiliations.[54] In the 1995 elections, the Congress came out successfully with 43 seats followed by independents with 12 seats. However, in 1996 due to the intra-party differences and mainly because of the foreigner's issue, Chief-Minister Gegong Apang resigned from the Congress party and formed a new party called the Arunachal Congress (AC) on 20 September, 1996 and formed a new government. The Congress ministry thus become overnight the Arunachal Congress ministry. As stated above, there has been a tendency to join the ruling party by the members of the Assembly and therefore the politics in the state moves around the ruling party at the Centre and the state.

In Arunachal Politics the Congress party has been a dominant force except for a brief period when Gegong Apang decided to leave the parent party and formed a regional bloc. But Congress was back to its fold when Mukut Mithi, who came to fame for toppling the Gegong Apang government by staging a coup d'etat against the Arunachal strongman and finally joined the Congress party *enbloc* and brought back the Congress to power by winning 53 in a House of 60 members in 1999 Assembly elections. The two Lok-Sabha seats were also won by the Congress. However the return of the Congress in the state cannot be counted as a very unusual episode considering the Party's continuous role in the state.[55] Arunachal Pradesh in terms of political stability is comparatively

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[54] A.C.Talukdar and Pura Tago, op. cit. p. 65.
[55] *North-East Sun*, October, 15-31, 1999, pp. 8-11.

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better than the other states of the region. Yet, indications are there that this state too may join the course of coalition politics like in the other states.

(2) Assam:

"Assam had been under the Congress ministries since India's independence and the Congress party was the single dominant party in the state till 1978".[56] From 1952 to 1978, the opposition parties inspite of their various attempts for a strong and effective coalition had miserably failed to dislodge the Congress party from power. One good reason for the opposition's failure, according to Pakem, is the strength of the Congress party at the Centre. To put in Pakem's words, "The opposition parties could have easily exploited the weakness of the state Congress party had it not been for the strength of the Congress at the Centre".[57] From many angles in Assam after independence, the national forces succeeded in giving a lead to socio-political change although chauvinistic and regional feelings did not die but were kept under the manageable propositions.[58] The involvement of the people in the freedom struggle and efforts to improve socio-economic conditions under the aegis of the Congress made them view themselves in an all-India framework of values and aspirations. However, the agitation over the alien issue in the Brahmaputra valley during 1979-85 has fully exploited the xenophobia inherent in the Assamese psyche, and the weakness of the Congress in these years has allowed the people to undergo an intensely regional experience. "The failure of the all-India parties to assert themselves in the Brahmaputra valley as effective spokesman of the genuine fears

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[56] B.Pakem, op. cit. p. 67.
[57] B. Pakem, op. cit. p. 69.
[58] B.P. Singh, The Problem of Change: A Study of North-East India. New Delhi, OUP, 1987, p. 78.

of the people further strengthened the regional forces in Assam".[59] The various organizations and the regional parties spearheading the agitation over the aliens issue share the belief that a regional party can only but serve Assam's interest as an equal federating partner of the Indian Union and free from the colonial exploitation by the Centre.[60]

In the late seventies the linguistic, ethnic and political struggles had gained momentum under the students' leadership. Politicization on ethnic lines had gone unchecked and social cohesiveness suffered grievous injuries. As the events were unfolding, in 1985 the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) was born at Golahat on 5th October and as a response to the political challenge posed by the formation of AGP, the United Minority Front (UMF) was launched on November 10 the same year at Hojai, a sub-division town in Nowgong district.

The 1985 elections resulted in an outstanding victory for the AGP. P.K. Mahanta, a 32 year old bachelor and still a student became the leader of the new Party and Chief-Minister of the state. Thus, the group of students who had been agitating since 1979 were overnight converted into a political party and then equally dramatically voted to power.[61] Now, the biggest challenge facing the youthful cabinet according to B.P Singh, is turning an inexperienced party skilled in running an agitation, into a cohesive government. The demands of day-to-day governance compel the leadership to be totally involved with

[59] *Ibid.* p. 80.
[60] *The Assam Tribune*, Gauhati, 3 September, 1983.

[61] B.P. Singh, *op. cit.* p 188.

seemingly prosaic and mundane issues which are intricate and stubbornly crisis-ridden. And in the process, internal infighting in the ranks and files of AGP started.

In May 1998, P.K. Mahanta in order to quell rebellion by a motley group of AGP dissidents, he had to expand his ministry. The dissident s in the AGP, however, were quite formidable and led by former PWD Minister Atul Bora and Mahanta's confidant turn foe Bhrigu Kumar Phukan.[62] Thus the popularity of AGP started declining. And this could be easily ascertained from the results of the 12th and 13th Lok-Sabha elections. Like in 1998, once again the AGP scored a duck in the 13th Lok-Sabha election. Among many reasons the most immediate one is the inability of the AGP government to respond to the needs of the common people. Not only have they failed on different issues but in fact they have turned their back towards the infiltration problem which actually put them in power.[63] Thus, these elections has indicated that regionalism -which peaked the advent of AGP in 1985- is now on its death bed. However, it is yet to be seen how the AGP government would face the ever changing political situation in the state in its remaining days of the tenth Assembly and fight the elections which is due in 2001 A.D. till then every one has to keep their fingers crossed.

(3) Nagaland:

"Nagaland has been the principal center in North-East India of narrow ethnic loyalties and secessionist thinking".[64] The Naga Nationalist Organization (NNO) led by Shilu Ao formed the first government in Nagaland in 1964. However, the elections and

[62] *Indian Recorder*, Vol.5, No. 38, September 17-23, 1998, p. 3931.
[63] Krishna Das, "*No Trumpet for AGP*", North-East Sun, October 15-31, 1999, p. 10.
[64] B.P. Singh, *op. cit.* p.81.

consequent formations of government did not usher in either a fully participating democracy or peace in Nagaland.

In the first General Elections of February 1952, the electoral process could not take place in Nagaland. At the instance of Phizo, "the Naga people did not seek election to either to the state assembly or the Lok-Sabha".[65] The second half of the 1950s witnessed a fierce armed conflict between the underground Nagas and the security forces it was also a phase when a meaningful search towards enlargement of their democratic rights by the Naga people was going on. An honourable solution was found by the Central government, supported by the nationalist moderate Nagas, by granting a separate state to the Nagas. Accordingly, Nagaland was carved out of Assam and made it a state on 11 December 1963, even though it then had a population of 0.3 million only.

The first Assembly elections of 1964 produced mixed results. In the words of B.P. Singh, while the forces of democracy had used the tradition of democracy in Naga society to make it participation in elections, the forces of insurgency articulated the proud and independent character of the Nagas thus produced a mixed result.[66] According to him, the most crucial test for the survival of democracy in Nagaland took place immediately after the results of the February 1974 elections were announced. In this election, the United Democratic Party (UDF), a party composed of NNO dissidents and persons who were sympathetic and in touch with the undergrounds emerged as the single largest party. There were several powerful interests which generally felt that it was advisable for the Centre to impose President's Rule rather than risk the National security

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[65] *Ibid.* p. 82.
[66] B.P. Singh, *op. cit.* p. 82.

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by appointing a UDF ministry.[67] The Governor of Nagaland had a most difficult decision to make, placed as he was placed between the claims of his oath to the Constitution and a possible harsh verdict from history for having played with the integrity of India. The gravity of the situation was described by the then Governor L.P. Singh in the following words: "How could I pre-judge the possible behaviour of the UDF when their leaders had been declaring for months that they would act within the limits of the Constitution an the law? It happened to me that it was better to act honestly in the spirit of the Constitution and to find later on that one's trust had been misplaced, than to discover later that it had been a serious mistake to act on distrust. It seemed to me that our duty being to get the Indian Constitution and its democratic process, fully accepted by the Naga people, it would be utterly self-defeating if I, having taken the oath to uphold the Constitution, were to give a deadly blow to the Constitution in Nagaland of all places."[68]

The politics of Nagaland is towards a two-party system . In the beginning, it was between the NNO and the Democratic Party of Nagaland (DPN). However both parties being regional had no strong opposite ideologies. Later on, even when the two party system was between the regional party and the national party, the latter was still not free from regional consideration.[69] Nagaland over the years has become a bastion of Congress. During the 1999 Lok-Sabha election, the Congress candidate Mr. A.K. Sangtam convincingly defeated the Nagaland People's Conference (NPC) and Nationalist

[67] *Ibid*, p. 83.
[68] B.P. Singh, *op. cit.* pp. 83-84.
[69] *Ibid* P. 121.

Democratic Council Movement (NDM) candidate confirming Chief Minister S.C. Jamir's say in Nagaland politics[70] and the dominant position of Congress party in general.

The prevalence of two-party system- the ruling party and the opposition party-speak immensely of the political maturity and sagacity of the Naga people as a whole. The next Assembly election, whatever the results will be definitely depending on whether the process of electoral politics is free and fair enough.

(4) Tripura:

Tripura politics has always been dominated by the national political parties.[71] With the Tripura Merger Agreement, it became a part 'C' state of Indian in 1949.[72] the Congress was dominating the political scene of Tripura ever since its accession to the Indian Union.[73] Over the years, it has been observed that in Tripura, the trend is towards developing a two-party system- the Congress and the communist.[74] Of course, the other regional parties and independents at times, plays the role of a balancer by enabling one political party or be order to come to power. The most popular regional party being the Tripura Upajati Juba Samity (TUJS), it plays its role of a balancer, when the two main national political parties are equally poised, thus leading to the formation of coalition governments.[75]

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[70] Shantanu Nandan Sharma, Yesterday Once More, in *The North-East Sun*, October 15-31, 1999, p. 8.

[71] Nalinin Ranjan Roy Choudhuri, "The Historical Past" in Jagdish Gan Choudhuri (ed.), *Tripura: The Land and its People*, Leela Devi Publications, Delhi, 1998; p. 32.

[72] B. Pakem, *op. cit.* p. 125.

[73] B. Pakem, *op. cit.* p. 129.

[74] B.P. Singh, *op. cit.* p. 86.

[75] B. Pakem op. cit. p 129.

In Tripura politics, till 1972 the Congress was a force to reckon with but since 1977 the CPI (M) had emerged as a strong contender for political power in the state. Only for a brief period in 1977, the Janata Party coalition governments of Prafulla Das and Radhika Ranjan Gupta could break the monopoly of power by only one of the two main political parties.[76] The ethnic problems in the hill areas has of late, put both the Congress and the communist in a very difficult situation. According to B. Pakem, "the recent pattern of electoral politics in the state is that either one or the other of the national parties could capture power depending on which ruling party would at the Centre".[77]

Pakem goes further saying that at the instance of neither of the national parties would be in power at the Centre, either by sheer-coincidence or by design, the ruling party in Tripura would follow the West Bengal pattern of coalition politics among the leftists. Thus, in the present set-up and from its earlier experiences, the ruling left-front may continue in completing its full term till the next Assembly elections in 2000 A.D. If we go by the 1999 Assembly election results and performances of the political parties, then it is indeed a warning to the Tripura Unit of the Congress that if the party does not seriously review its position, its existence can be swept away in to as it used to happen in case of Congress in Uttar Pradesh.[78] The new political force of the state, the BJP-TUJS-TC (TC), could in the long run become a force to reckon with. Given the nature of the coalition government at the Centre it is out of one's imagination to draw even a slightest picture of Tripura's politics in the days to come.

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[76] *Ibid.* p. 129.
[77] *Ibid.* p. 130.

[78] Shantanu Nandan Sharma, *op. cit.* P. 9.

(5) Mizoram:

On February 20, 1987 Mizoram formerly known as the Lushai Hills, was upgraded from a Union Territory into a full-fledged state. The traditional Lushai administration centered around the village which has a hereditary Chief. However, with the spread of education and Christianity, the anti-Chief sentiment ran high and "the commoners consolidated themselves and by a resolution of a meeting on 9th April 1946 the first political party under the frame the "Mizo Union" (MU) was born".[79] The Congress party came into being on 11 April 1961 but could not make any headway. During the famine in 1959, the Mizo cultural society was converted into Mizo Famine Front. "After the end of famine, this relief organisation was transformed into a political party called the Mizo National Front (MNF), under the Presidentship of Laldenga which carried out hostile activities since 1966."[80]

Ever since Mizoram became a Union Territory in 1972 there were ups and downs in the fortunes of the regional as well as of the Congress party. From 1972-84, the regional parties, Mizo Union and People's Conference, had an edge over the Congress party. The Congress could capture power only in May 1984 only to be replaced by the MNF, another regional party. Ever since the 1989 General elections, the Congress party had been commanding the confidence of Mizoram due to the alleged failures of regional parties. But in 1998 the regional parties came around to criticize the failures of the

[79] P. K. Bandopadhay, "Elections in Mizoram: A Note", in P.S. Dutta (ed.), *Electoral Politics in North-East India*, Delhi, Omsons, 1986, p. 168.
[80] *Ibid.* p. 169.

Congress (I)'s ten year rule and consequently on December 3, 1998, a coalition government of regional parties between MNF and Mizo People's Conference (MPC) was formed with Zoramthanga as the Chief-Minister. [81]

In the 1978 and 1979 elections, the turn out was quite impressive considering that Mizoram came into being as a Union Territory only recently (21st January 1972) - "a process compressed into a short span of a few years". The participation of the people and their political consciousness shows that democratic traditions have taken roots in the state and people are quite interested in the electoral process. But the "insider-outsider" syndrome has always generated considerable heat and occasional violence in Mizoram. Because of this, induction of national parties into Mizoram's polity was difficult and therefore the regional forces continue to take the center-stage in the political life of the state. However, "the Congress was given a clear mandate to rule Mizoram in 1984 elections".[82]

Besides all these, the politics of the state centered around personality and community considerations rather than on political ideology. This has forced individuals to identify themselves with particular segments of society for the promotion of their interests. Thus, the complex character of the society makes it difficult to forecast the status of political parties in the state of Mizoram.

(6) Meghalaya:

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[81] B. Pakem, *op. cit.* p. 114.
[82] B.P. Singh, *op. cit.* p. 88.

The area of present day Meghalaya was a part of Assam and it was only in 1969

that the Assam Re-organisation (Meghalaya) Act was passed in the Parliament and

created the autonomous state of Meghalaya within Assam and it was upgraded into a full-

fledged state, with a legislative Assembly of its own under the North-Eastern Areas

(Reorganisation) Act, 1971.[83]

The first General Elections to the new 60 member Meghalaya Legislative

Assembly were held on March 9, 1972. The Congress (I), All People's Hill Leaders

Conference (APHLC) and the then unrecognized Hill State People's Democratic Party

(HSPDP) mainly contested the election. Despite of the pre-poll alliances between the

APHLC and the Congress(I), the APHLC formed the ministry all by itself with 39 seats

in the 60 member House.[84] However, on November 22.,1976 the single party ministry of

the CoOngress was formed for the first time after the APHLC group led by Captain

Sangma merged itself with the Congress.[85]

Meghalaya had the distinction of having a lottery government and a 50:50 sharing

of power. On may 1978, the United Meghalaya Parliamentary Democratic Forum

(UMPDF) coalition ministry was formed with B.B. Lyngdoh (APHLC) as Chief-

Minister for two years only. There was a "solemn, serious agreement" which provides

that after two years, Captain Sangma (Congress) would take over as the next Chief-

Minster for the next two years. "The 'solemn, serious agreement' was honoured by all

[83] B.P. Singh, op. cit. pp. 97-98.
[84] Ibid, p. 98.
[85] V. Venkata Rao, Barrister Pakem and Niru Hazarika, A Century of Government and Politics in North-East India, Vol.II.(Meghalaya) 1874-1983, S. Chand New Delhi, 1984 p. 121.

the UMPDF partners, including the HSPDP which would continue to hold the post of

Deputy Chief-Minister for four years, till the next general elections".[86]

In Meghalaya's politics political instability has been a dominant feature. Perhaps, Meghalaya is the only state in India, if not in the world, which has the unique distinction of continuously having coalition governments for over 25 years ever since its inception.[87] Sharing his personal experience about coalition government P.A Sangma stated that "If I go by my personal experience led a coalition government of eight political parties in my state and I don't think it is good for the country. It is not healthy for the country but we can still wait and see."[88] Stating that running a coalition government is difficult, if not, impossible, Sangma said that "if somebody ask me to head a coalition government, I will never accept it".

In Meghalaya the February 16, 1998 election had again produced no majority. One significant development in this election is that the BJP for the first time opened its account though earlier there was an independent who joined it.[89] After the elections, the Congress (I) formed the government led by S.C. Marak. However, it lasted for only 12 days therby creating a history of the shortest tenure in the state's politics. Later on a new ministry under the leadership of B.B. Lyngdoh assumed office on March 10, 1998.[90] But immediately after, defections and re-defections caused instability, and it was in such a situation that B.B. Lyngdoh resigned on July 27 1998, and on the same day a new UDP-

[86] V. Venkata Rao, op. cit. p. 126.
[87] B. Pakem, op. cit. p.106.
[88] P.A. Sangma, Former Speaker Lok-Sabha in Subhas C. Kashyap (ed.), Coalition Government and Politics in India, Uppal, New Delhi, 1997.
[89] B. Pakem, op. cit. p.105.
[90] India Recorder, New Delhi, Vol.5. No. 15, April 9-15, 1998, pp. 3566-67.

Congress (I) coalition called the "Meghalaya Parliamentary Forum" (MPF) was installed with Lyngdoh himself as Chief-Minister and D.P.Lapang (Congress (I)) as Deputy Chief-Minister on a 50:50 basis of power share.[91]

In March 2, 2000 a parliamentary party meeting was called at the instance of the UDP pro-changers including its President E.K. Mawlong and after that marathon meeting, the grand old man of Meghalaya politics, B.B.Lyngdoh resigned therby paved the way for Mr.Mawlong to become the Chief-Minister in the present Assembly which has completed only two years.[92] Thus, it may be well said that transition of power dominated the political scene in Meghalaya and it is yet to be seen how many times these features will be repeated until the next General election in 2003 and in future as well.

Conclusion:

A brief description of the politics and the political events of each political units of the North-Eastern Region of India revealed that the political life in this region is marked by political instability where politicians shift their loyalties as often as they could. Given the social and cultural diversities and its consequent impact on the political life, one party government is a far cry and coalition government thus becomes the order of the day. However, the stability of the coalition ministries depends on many factors. "Apart from the consideration of insurgency activities, ethnic movements and pressures of castes and

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[91] B.Pakem, *op.cit.* p. 106.
[92] Rajib Chowdury, "Power Play in Meghalaya", *North-East Sun*, March 15-31, 2000.

communities, personalities also play an important role in the stability or otherwise of any coalition ministry".[93]

In the politics of the region, the regional parties plays a very decisive role and for the national political parties the Congress had been able to spread its support base upto a great extent and thus having an edge over the other national .parties. Like in any parts of India, the regional parties in North-East India are also prone to break-up like many national parties. According to B.P. Singh, the reason of such break-up is that "the regional political parties are deprived of a remote central body like the high command of a national party, which plays a decisive role in maintaining party unity in the face of personality clashes, the regional parties break-up more easily and become weak and ineffective".[94]

However, regional parties and the regional forces are not injurious to national integrity if there is, in themselves, a convergence of thought between the regional and the national consciousness. In regionalizing and decentralizing power, one hopes healthy limits would be kept in mind considering the needs of national oneness and integrity.[95] But, the Centre's efforts to infuse a sense of Indianness among the tribes are not fully made. Their growing desperation and self-imposed ostracism has been further

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[93] B. Pakem, *op. cit.* p. 132.

[94] B.P. Singh, *op. cit.* p. 90.

[95] V.C. Agarwal, National Dilemma: Regionalisation of Politics and Power, in Subhas C. Kashyap (ed.), *op. cit.* p. 33.

encouraged by the regional insurgents whose demand for autonomy is gathering momentum.[96]

Finally, politics is gaining ascendancy in relation to other forces in the North-East India. The electoral process is gaining respectability even in areas where the sacred character of the ballot box was in doubt.[97] There is a widespread feeling among the people that the local leadership of the all-India political parties pays little attention to local problems. "It is believed that the Central leadership, pre-occupied with national and international issues, has little knowledge or appreciation of regional interests, no matter how important these interests might be for the cultural identity of the region or its economic growth. [98]

But of late, the various governments in the region have come to believe that the local people's sanction alone is not sufficient to sustain the validity of their rule unless there is sufficient backing from the Central government. Moreover, "parties of North-Eastern states have traditionally demonstrated flexibility and have readily adapted the changes in the, power structure at New Delhi by supporting or even affiliating themselves with the ruling party of the moment".[99] A recent study points out that " regionalism in Indian politics has generally been regarded as anti-system, anti-feudal and against the basic interests of a well integrated and well developed polity".[100] Regionalism, however,

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[96] B. Rahamathulla, "Obsolescence of Nationalism: An Appraisal of Autonomy Forces in North_East India", in S. Bhatnagar and Pradeep Kumar (ed.), *Regional Political Parties in India*, Ess Ess Publication , New Delhi, 1998, p. 17.

[97] B. P. Singh, *op. cit.* p. 93.

[98] *Ibid*, p. 80.

[99] Balveer Arora, Regional Aspirations and National Cohesion: Federal Coalitions in the 1998 Lok-Sabha Elections, *West Bengal Political Science Review*, Vol. I. No.1-2, January-December, 1998, p. 66.

[100] G. Ram Reddy and B.A.V. Sharma, *Regionalism: A Study in Telengana*, New Delhi, 1984, p. 4.

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is not a source of exclusivism and exclusionism and its certainly not a first step towards secessionism.[101]

Regional parties play a significant role in Indian politics and particularly in North-East India where they are particularly in abundance. These regional parties have exercised immense political influence by way of successfully challenging the national parties. Whatever may be the situation, with the breakdown of one party dominance, in a multi-ethnic, multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-linguistic society like that of North-East India and with its lop-sided economic development, it seems, all these factors will provide a fertile soil for the growth of regional sentiments and the regional parties will definitely utilize this opportunity and thus remain influential in the political life of the region.

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[101] *Ibid.* p. 3.

CHAPTER TWO

SOCIO-POLITICAL PROCESS IN MANIPUR

(1985 – 2000)

Traditionally, democratic politics are classified according to the number of parties

operating in the system. Different party system - one party, two party or multi-party -

have far reaching consequence for the voting process and even more so for governmental

decision making . "A classification along these line (according to the number of parties)

therefore, proves to be quite suggestive and essential".[1] Maurice Duverger also opines

that "the distinction between single-party, two-party and multi-party systems tends to

become the fundamental mode of classification contemporary regimes".[2] Duverger

believes that in a two-party system, one finds a "decrease in the extent of political

divisions" which serves to restrict the demagogy of parties whereas in the multi-party

system there is "an aggravation of political divisions and an intensification of

differences" coinciding with "a general 'extrinization' of opinion".[3] Thus, there is a

close relationship between the number of political parties and democratic stability. It is a

well established proposition in political science that it is difficult to achieve and maintain

stable democratic government in a plural society. "Social homogeneity and political

consensus are regarded as prerequisites for or factors strongly conducive to, stable

democracy".[4] However, conversely, the deep social divisions and political differences

[1] Sigmund Neumann, "Towards a Comparative Study of Political Parties", in Sigmund Neumann (ed .) *Modern Political Parties: Approaches to Comparative Politics* , Chicago , University of Chicago Press , 1950, pp.402-3.

[2] .Maurice Duverger, *Political parties : Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State*, trans. Barbara and Robert North, London, Methuen , 1959, p. 393.

[3] *Ibid.* pp. 387-88.

[4] .Arend Lijphart,*op. cit.* p.1.

within plural societies are held responsible for instability and breakdown in democratic order. It is, therefore, in this context that the problems and prospects of socio-political process of Manipur is being undertaken to analyse the electoral process and stability of the government. It further seeks to reach to a meaningful solution to the unpredictable political climate of the state which most of the time leads to social chaos and instability.

Harry Eckstein defined plural society as a society divided by "segmental cleavages". He writes, "this exists where political divisions follow very closely and especially concern lines of objective social differentiation, especially those particularly salient in a society".[5] Segmental cleavages may be of religious, ideological, linguistic, regional, cultural, social or ethnic nature. In this context, Manipur, which has been a home to many ethnic and cultural groups of people could well be put under the category of plural societies. And a functional characteristic, already implied by Eckstien's definition, is that political parties, interest groups, media of communication, schools and voluntary associations tend to be organized along the lines of segment cleavages. The groups of the population bounded by such cleavages will be referred to as "segments" of a plural society.[6]

In a political system with clearly separate and potential hostile population segments, virtually all decision are perceived as entailing high stakes, and strict majority rule places a strain on the unity and peace of the system. In this back drop in a society like Manipur where there is the presence of diverse cultural and ethnic groups, it is of

[5] .Harry Eckstien, *Division and Cohesion in Democracy : A Study of Norway*, Princeton University Press, 1966, p.34
[6] .Arend Lijphart, *op.cit.* p.4

utmost importance to study how the democratic government functions and how stable they are.

Manipur, the extreme north-eastern border State of the Indian union , is a land of various ethnic, religious and cultural groups. It has a total population of 1,837,149 with a vast demographic variations where the Meities (Manipuri Hindus) have about 57.67 percent, the Christians 34.11 percent and the Pangals (Manipuri Muslim) shared about 7.27 percent of the total population.[7] With its demographic and cultural dissimilarities amongst the component units, Manipur is witnessing the rapid emergence of sectarian feelings. The majority Meities being the Hindu differs markedly from the tribal[8] and the Pangals. It is then not surprising that religious and primordial ties are of particular importance in the politics of the state. Apart from this factor, political personalities of a particular leader have also a significant role to play. More often than not, they seem to be of more important and inevitable than their parties. This is borne home even more forcefully by the defection-ridden politics, where the strength of the contending parties often hinges upon the continuance within the origanisation of some of its prominent leaders. Moreover some of these charismatic personalities have a very substantial measure of control over their organization, so that a large number of the members follow them during their periodic defections. [9]

But what is alarming is, political parties in Manipur, as elsewhere in the country, in their contest and competition for mass-support tend to identify themselves with one social group and differentiate themselves from others so as to develop a system for

[7] *Census of India , 1991* Series 1 part IV –B (ii) Table C- 9 .
[8] The term *"tribal"* here is used interchangeably with *"Christians"*.
[9] S.K.Chaube , *Electoral politics in North-East India*, Delhi, Universities Press (India), p. 103.

winning the election. This led to the further widening of gaps amongst the component units. The marked differences in religion and language together with cultural differences attendant on the difference in the mode of life of these peoples have weakened the feelings of integration and unity.[10] Besides this, opportunism, principlelessness, self-aggrandizement, lack of ideological consideration, defection etc, are also casting their shadows in the political picture of this small state. An attempt, therefore, has been made here to study and analyze the role of political parties through their electoral performances and to understand its relative impact in the political and social life of Manipur.

I. Motivation Strategies and Influence:

Before venturing to the electoral performances of the political parties, it is noteworthy here to touch upon one of the important aspects of election study i.e. the electoral campaign. There are various process and techniques to motivate and influence the electorates. The effectiveness of campaigning varies from place to place, and person to person. In the valley region, the election was influenced by the factors like party organization, personality and influence of the candidate, ideology of the parties whereas in the surrounding hills the voting behavior was much affected by the class prejudices and preferences.[11] The educated and enlightened voters are influences more or less by the policy issues, party manifestos and ideologies while the less educated or illiterate electors go by the their direct contacts with the candidates and the help and assistance they get from the candidates.

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[10] S.K.Chaube, *op. cit.* p.128.
[11] R.P. Singh, *The General Election in Manipur*-1972 , Imphal, D.M. College, 1974, p.217.

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Ever since 1972, when Manipur got the statehood, election are being held and in each election the people of the state are witnessing more or less the same nature and style of campaigning. There had been hardly any change in the campaigning style. But in the recent election there were instances of engaging professional artists and entertainers to campaign for a particular candidate or a Party.[12] "One specificity of Manipur is the large number of youth organizations and clubs dotted all over the area. Financing such clubs is one way of getting enthusiastic and youthful support".[13] By engaging in the campaigning process, all the political parties including the Independents had undertaken the task of the political education of the electorate. The means adopted were many depending on the financial position of the candidate and the party which nominated him to contest election.[14] However, some of the important aspects of the election campaigning are through the techniques and processes on the following lines :-

(1) Wall –Writing:

The youth supporters of the parties 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 areas. Later, flags and posters of the contending parties were put up at different public places. All these have not only the visual impact but also shows that a household if raised a particular party's flag in the courtyard of the house with consent is regarded as the staunch supporter or sympathizer of that party. This tactics benefits the candidates in their popularity drive and thus able to woo the floating or indecisive voters.

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[12] Personal experience during the February 2000 Assembly Elections.
[13] S.K.Chaube, *op. cit.* p. 217.
[14] V.Venkata Rao, A Century of Government and Politics in North-East India, Volume IV: Manipur, Delhi, S. Chand, 1991, p.271.

(2) Public Meeting:

Comparatively, public meetings are more effective than the "walling" and postering. Public meetings were held virtually at all important places. In some instances, meetings of rival parties are held on the same day at nearby places, the aim being to distract the public turn out. However, "the public meetings and the speeches therein did not greatly influence the average voter directly".[15] But, one fact is that a fair section of the electorate gauged the chances of the respective candidates on the basis of the attendance at their meetings and voted accordingly hoping to be on the winning side. Therefore, the political parties organized meetings and at the same time mobilize the public to attend in large numbers.

Public meetings were addressed by both local and national leaders. As a rule the attendance at the better organized meetings was quite substantial, although the audiences were far from partisan. The attendance however did not indicate that the masses would vote for the party concerned. Street corner meetings were also held as part of the campaigning process particularly in the urban areas. Usually one does not come across with any untoward incident in most of the public meetings in Manipur. There were also instances that the joint meetings of all the candidates in the fray were organized by some enthusiastic educated youths or by the clubs or organization of the concerned constituencies.

(3) Procession and Rallies:

Though its a costly affair candidates do try to take out procession and rallies in their attempt to attract more voters. The processions may be of different kinds but one of

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[15] S.K. Chaube, *op.cit.* p.129.

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the most common is the "cycle" rally. In Manipur it is easy to organize cycle processions since every family has a number of cycles.[16] One could find during the elections that jeeps are fitted with loud speakers and decorated with party flags and posters proceeds in the roads with someone enumerating the qualities of the candidates and thus asking the public to vote for them. And when the election is nearing one could hear late at night the voices (mostly of female) in a worrisome and emotional tone pleading for votes for different candidates.

(4) Door to door Campaign:

As far as affectivity of campaigning techniques goes, this type of campaigning ranks the top position. Candidates carries on door to door campaign with their supporters in order to have an informal face to face contact with their electorates. This contacts often proves more effective than any other methods. Party workers and youths specially takes the considerable part in this house to house campaigning and they apprised the voters the personality and capabilities of their candidates and at times cleared the doubts of the voters by interacting with them. This process and technique of campaigning have a great influence in the voting behaviour since it involves direct contacts between the candidates and the electorates.

(5) Group Feasting:

Out of the subtle and novel methods of campaigning, group feasting is one of them. Workers/supporters of a particular party tries to contact a particular section of the electorate over a lunch or a dinner and make an effort to touch the heart of the people present by presenting a positive image of their candidate. Accordingly to the importance of the gathering and its intensity, the candidates also sometimes attended such gatherings

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[16] V.Venkata Rao, *op.cit.* p.272.

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otherwise someone on behalf of the candidate does the business. Such feastings are most of the time organized separately for women, youths and elders of the community or the locality. Financially unsound candidates could not afford this costly affair but of late to their advantage one interesting trend started unfolding i.e., is more or less the same persons are found in different feastings organized by different political party's candidate. Thus it makes things more complicated for the candidates for they could not confidently count anyone as his or her true supporter. One good reason behind this trend could be that the electors have lost faith in their political masters and they don't know where they will be after the elections are over. Thus, they justified enjoying the candidates money and power at the time of elections.

(6) Mass Media:

The daily press in Manipur is far from non-aligned or objective. Most of the parties had access to at least one daily newspaper. For instance, the Congress could propagate its view through *"Simanta Patrika"* and the CPI through *"Khollao"*. Whereas the dailies in some measure reflected the multiplicity of views of contending parties, this was not true of the government-controlled mass media, the All India Radio (AIR) and Doordarshan Kendra (DDK) at Imphal[*]. It is quite obvious that the party in power has a natural advantage to the access of government t controlled mass-media. the partisan role of the government controlled media was countered by the opposition parties. The partisan functioning of AIR and DDK were amply demonstrated in broadcasting the policy and programmes and the performances of the government quite promptly, whereas the views of the opposition parties had a minimal coverage. The AIR and DDK on the other hand,

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[*]See also S.K. Chaube, *op. cit.* p.121.

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most of the time, did not report or covered the events in the periphery and the hill areas. It was literally confined to the Imphal area only. Thus it doesn't have a profound impact to the majority of the people living in rural and hill areas. This way of campaigning through electronic media proves fruitful only upto some extent among the educated urban population. Despite its partisan nature AIR and DDK has given to all the contending parties a stipulated time frame to express their views and opinions. Every party, irrespective of their status, has got a chance to speak on the radio and television. However, the public response to this method of campaigning is marginal.

(7) Electoral Finance and Money Power:

Manipur is no exception when it comes to charges of corruption and bribing during elections. It is indeed an all India affair. The party offices and the candidates were extremely tight-lipped about the source of their electoral finance. Voter bribing and the financial support that parties are getting from big businessmen and well-off people is an open secret yet no one spell it out. The role of money in the elections has assumed great importance not only for election campaign but to bribe the voters and local influential leaders. The role of money in elections also shows that the election campaigns have become very competitive and every major political party is involved in mobilizing huge resource to reach the voter. Candidates are alleged to have offered the voters money and materials in their bid to woo the electorates. What is more astonishing in the recent time is that the voters also started bargaining for their votes in financial terms. Such a bad trend has already gripped the political culture of Manipur and for a financially poor state like Manipur, heavy investment during the election is of no good sign.

(8) Women and Campaigning:

Historically, women in Manipur have taken active part in their political struggles.[17] In the political sphere women always stood in the forefront of every movement. Women wings of political parties and different women organizations in Manipur have a very important role in creating a sense of awareness in the minds of female electorate that they can be better represented by a women than by a man.[18] In early 1976, the Manipur women began to take to the streets of Imphal to enforce prohibition of liquors and those found drunk are beaten up or fined. Given this background and tradition of almost equal participation in major political events, relative to that of that of the Manipuri men, the major role played by the Manipuri women in the election were not surprising.[19] However, women's ability to produce an impact on the political process of Manipur has been negligible yet then influence as pressure groups has been fairly effective. If any political party undermines the role of women in elections, then it is to their own cost and thereby diminishing its chances of winning in the battle of ballot.

(9) Candidate's Social Base* and Personality:

Above all the process and technique of campaigning, the social base of the candidates and their personalities has an enduring impact in influencing the electorates in this multi-cultural and multi-ethnic State. However, an interesting phenomena that

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[17] S.K. Chaube, *op. cit.* p. 131.
[18] Ksh. Bimola Devi, "Manipuri Women – A Study", in Naorem Sanajaoba (ed.) *Manipur: Past and Present, The Heritage and Ordeals of a Civilisation*, Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1988, p. 172.
[19] S.K. Chaube, *op. cit.* p. 132.
*Social base of candidates are perceived in terms of family background and the community.

prevails is that the national issues do not obscure local ones and the elections witnessed struggles between the same elites that is, the same prominent political personage.[20] In fact any analysis of elections in Manipur must acknowledge the important role played by political personalities who often seems to be of greater importance than their parties and since politics as such in the State is defection ridden, the strength of the contending parties often rely upon the continuance within the organization some of its members. Most parties in Manipur solely depend upon the personality of some leaders for their survival and have no firm link with the masses because of their nature. Voters, in general, also hardly concerned about the parties and their ideologies . This is borne home by the results of the Assembly Election 2000. Most of the prominent leaders in the State returned in the Assembly but with a party tag different from their previous ones. In Manipur, as elsewhere in the country, the electorates used their franchise on communal lines too. The Muslims, known as "Pangals", numbering less than 10 percent of the population are widely believed to band together politically.[21] The Kukis and Nagas also behave the same way politically in the hill areas. All these factors affected the issues taken up and articulated by the vying candidates and the parties, the selection process of candidates and indeed, in a large sense, contribute to the final electoral results.

(10) Election Manifestos:

Many a time, it has been suggested that the Election Manifestos are a verbal rhetoric of political parties and every party forgets its manifestos and election promises after the elections. In Manipur, most of the political parties issue a manifesto immediately after the announcement of the date of election of Lok Sabha or the Legislative Assembly.

[20] S.K. Chaube, *Electoral Politics in North-East India,* Universities Press (India) Pvt. Ltd. 1985, p. 103.
[21] S.K. Chaube, *op. cit.* p. 103.

For the first time in the electoral history of Manipur, a manifesto was issued in 1948.[22]

The manifestos reflect the existing social, economic and political condition of the people of the State. One issue which dominated the political life of Manipur before 1972 was the Statehood of Manipur. Still, there are some differences between the manifestoes of the political parties, however, the fact remains that the differences are not fundamental. But the general people are not aware of all these and thus the impact of manifestos reside only in the urban educated section of the electorate. And therefore, the manifestos play a very limited role in influencing the voting behaviour of the people.

Thus, the various methods and techniques and above all, the personalities of the candidates and their social bases had helped the political parties in motivating and influencing the electorates to a great extent. And also all these factors play a vital role in deciding the faith of the candidates in the electoral battle.

II. Electoral Politics:

In a state like Manipur, where the average tenure of each Chief-Minister has been just over a year or so, every political party whosoever comes to power made an effort to use the resources provided by the "state" for their sustenance. Of late, 'State' has become unquestionably important for the survival of political parties, both in terms of the legitimacy which public office confers, as well as in terms of the resources and capacities which are either offered or regulated by the State itself.[23] Governing , even sporadically, is by now a standard experience for most parties in Manipur and the resources which this brings now constitute an important means for sustenance. Permutation-combination game

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[22] V. Venkata Rao, *op. cit.* p. 265.
[23] Peter Nair, 'Party Organisation: From Civil Society to the State", in Richard S. Katza and Peter Nair (ed.) *How Parties Organize*, Sage Publications, 1994, p. 8.

has been very important in a state like Manipur where politicians are known for their penchant for shifting loyalties. Commenting on the frequent changing of sides by the MLAs, one national daily puts " In Manipur...MLAs change their party more often than they do their underwear".[24]

In fact any analysis of the politics in Manipur must acknowledge the important role played by political personalities, who often seem to be greater import than their parties. Thus, it is at this backdrop that the electoral performance of political parties and the process of government formation need to be understood so as to ascertain a clear picture of the political culture of the State. It is towards this end, the last three Assembly elections of 1984, 1990 and 1995 were being chosen for the sole purpose of understanding the politics of this small but politically fragile State.

(1) Assembly Elections, 1984:

For the first time, General Elections to the Legislative Assembly and the Lok-Sabha were held simultaneously on December 27, 1984 in Manipur.[25] The state remained disturbed from 1980-81 with the result that the General election had to be conducted in a tactfully manner under elaborate security arrangements with the active co-operation of the different Central and State government Agencies as well as political parties. However, by and large, the poll and the electioneering went on peacefully except for a few sporadic incidents of local nature.[26]

The notification for the poll in all the 60 Assembly segments was issued by the Governor on November 20, 1984 on the recommendation of the Election Commission.

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[24] *The Indian Express*, April 11, 1973.
[25] *Report on General Elections* 1984, Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, Manipur, February 1985, p. 1.
[26]*Ibid.* p. 1.

The announcement of election took place all of a sudden with practically no time left to gear up the machineries at various levels. The simultaneous poll for Lok-Sabha and State Assembly with large number of Independent candidates resulted in late polling. In many places the polling parties could not wind up the poll within the schedule time. The counting of votes was started on December 28, for the inner Manipur Parliamentary constituency and on December 30 for the outer constituency. Two different dates were given as retrieval of ballot boxes from the hills was not possible thus the Election Commission decided to start the counting for outer Parliamentary constituency with its segments on December 30. The election results started coming from 31st December and coincidentally the people of Manipur celebrated their New Year in the midst of a mixed mood of winning and loosing the election.

The assembly election of 1984 was a keenly contested affair between the national and regional parties besides a large chunk of Independent candidates. The national parties and the Independents fielded quite a number of candidates as compared to the regional parties. (See Table:1)

Table: 1. Party-wise Performance in the 1984 Assembly Elections:[*]

SL.	Name of the Party	Seats contested	Seats won	Votes polled	% of Votes
A.	National Parties				
1.	I. N. C.	60	30	2,57,809	29.82
2.	C. P. I.	17	01	35,862	4.15
3.	C. P. M.	02	00	790	0.09
4.	B. J. P.	13	00	6,208	0.72
5.	J. N. P.	20	04	52,452	6.07
6.	L. K. D.	02	00	3,653	0.42
7.	I. C. S.	19	00	28,156	3.26
B.	State Parties				
1.	M. P. P.	34	03	93,421	10.81
2	K. N. A.	04	01	13,367	1.55
C.	Independents	193	21	3,72,800	43.12

* Source: Report on General Elections 1984, Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, Govt. of Manipur, Imphal, February, 1985.

In this election the Congress made an impressive come back by securing fifty percent of the seats it contested and polled about 30 percent of the votes polled. The Independents won more than one third in the sixty member Assembly and polled about 43.12 percent. Other parties failed miserably in this round of elections. The main and one of the most popular regional parties, the Manipur People's Party, could manage to win only three seats out of its 34 candidates. The CPI, another important political party in the state had to be contended with only one seat.

(2) Assembly Elections, 1990:

Elections were held in fifty eight of the sixty Assembly constituencies on February 12, 1990. The polls were countermanded in two Assembly segments - Thangmeiband and Ukhrul – due to the death of candidates. The election in which the ruling Congress(I) was challenged by a regional party, the MPP, and a host of national parties were keenly contested. The formation of the National Front Government at the Centre has had its immediate fallout in the faction-ridden politics of the state.[27] Six anti-Congress parties forged an alliance thus putting up a joint fight against the Congress. These parties include the MPP, JD, CPI, Congress (S), CPM and KNA. The BJP has been left out of this alliance. The MPP under the changed circumstances in taking the lead in recharging the opposition in Manipur.

The main issues of the February election comprises of many things ranging from the issue of "autonomy" in the hills, the extension of Manipur Land Revenue and

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[27] The Telegraph, Calcutta, January 9, 1990.

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Reforms Act, 1989 to the hills, to the inclusion of the Manipuri language in the 8th

Scheduled of the Constitution of India.[28] Besides these issues, insurgency and the

removal of Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958, were also surfaced in the eve of the

election. The Congress (I) candidates as part of their campaigning were touting on their

party's achievements, particularly claiming that their party provided political stability in

the last five years. The opposition, however, referred to the change of guard at the Centre

and has called upon the people to defeat the Congress (I). The outcome of the elections

has come as a further morale booster for non-Congress combine and individual parties.[29]

The result shows the decrease in Congress share of seats and the tremendous increase of

MPP, considered to be the second strongest force after the Congress (See Table: 2).

However, it is not to say that the Congress has lost ground yet what has made much of a

difference is the fact that taking a cue from the formation of the new government at the

Centre, all the non-Congress parties and groupings firmly put their heads together by

forming the United Legislature Front (ULF).

[28]Ibid, January 12, 1990
[29] *Patriot*, New Delhi, February 23, 1990.

Table: 2. Party-wise Performance in the 1990 Assembly Elections:*

Sl.No.	Name of the Party	Seats contested	Seats won	Votes polled	% of Votes
A.	National Parties				
1.	I. N. C.	60	26	3,33,765	33.71
2.	J. D.	51	11	1,96,207	19.82
3.	B. J. P.	16	00	18,549	1.87
4.	C. P. I.	14	03	41,012	3.14
5.	C. P. I. (M)	01	00	**	
6.	ICS	36	06	1,22,829	12.41
B.	Regional Parties				
1.	M. P. P.	47	11	1,92,075	19.40
2.	K. N. A.	08	02	25,867	2.61
3.	N. P. P.	05	01	7,762	0.79
4.	M. H. P. C.	10	00	8,820	0.89
5.	Independents	40	00	43,101	4.36

Source: Election Commission of India, New Delhi, Report on the General Elections to the Legislative Assemblies, Statistical,Vol. I., p. 71.

Note:-** Figures of votes polled were not available as the concerned records were burnt down in the early hours of February 14, 1990 of the following constituencies: 1. Khundrakpam 2. Heingang 3. Kshetrigao 4. Thongju 5. Langthabal 6. Naoria Pakhanglakpa.

Politically, the Assembly poll in Manipur has proved that while the Congress retained its strength, the other non-regional parties have started setting a foothold there for the first time. More interestingly, this time no independent candidates could win even a single seat. In the last election, independents got 21 out of the 60 seats.

A day after the election was marked by violence that led to the burning down of the Office of the Deputy Commissioner, Imphal, where the counting was going on because of the resentment against the state Home Minister I.Tompok Singh. The influence of the incident cannot be discounted easily. "The trend of the previous result reversed and the Congress which bagged 23 of the 46 seats declared earlier, could manage to get only three of the 12 seats where repoll was held".[30]

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[30] *Patriot* (New Delhi), 23 February, 1990.

After the election both the Congress and the ULF staked their claims to form the government (the ULF in fact came into being only after the results started pouring in and where the Congress still proving to be a strong force as it was). However, the Governor invited the ULF and with that the problem of government formation started appearing. The ULF failed to arrive at a consensus on who will lead the non-Congress government. that the united Front was purely a marriage of convenience to capture political power was reflected when serious differences surfaced among its constituent parties on the leadership issue. But finally after the intervention of National leaders and the long hours of meeting of the allies, R. K. Ranbir Singh of Manipur People's Party was elected as the head of the coalition and thus on February 23, the first non-Congress ministry - in more than a decade - was installed.

From day one itself, uncertainty prevails over the new government. the ULF strength of 32 against the Congress's 26 provides too narrow a margin in a state like Manipur where factionalism and defections are such hallmarks of politics. In April 1991, the Congress was left only with 12 legislators after former Home Minister I.Tompok split from the party with 13 other MLAs to form the "Manipur Congress". In the political milieu, five Janata Dal legislators deserted the Front on 5 January 1992, thus bringing the UF government to a minority and subsequently President Rule was imposed in the state on 7 January1992.[31]

In retrospect it is perhaps a measure of political acumen and shrewdness of R. K. Ranbir Singh that the ULF ministry lasted for nearly two years. The challenges before him arose when he attempted to expand the ministry where he had to find ways to

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[31] *The Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), January 9, 1992.

accommodate all factions within the alliance. The Ranbir ministry was repeatedly been in the throes of crisis because of the latent strains between the two major coalition partners, the MPP and the Janata Dal.[32]

After the short spell of President's Rule, in April 1992, a Congress (I) government was installed in Manipur under the Chief-Ministership of R. K. Dorendro Singh. It however, really upset the calculations of the ULF leader Ranbir Singh who was still hoping that he would be able to persuade the Governor to offer him chance to form another government. In May Dorendro Singh won the vote of confidence thus setting a record of sorts. Barring four members-three belonging to CPI and one to the Kuki National Assembly (KNA) – the rest of the legislators have supported the ministry. Dorendro Singh worked hard to garner support from all possible quarters and the first sign of success was when he convinced R.K. Ranbir Singh, the former Chief-Minister, to join hands with the Congress. Considering the support Dorendro had, political observers expressed that his continuance in office was no more in serious question. However, predictions proved wrong and Dorendro's ministry felt down on 31st December, 1993 and thus President's Rule greeted the New Year in the state. After almost one year another Congress ministry under Rishang Keishing was installed and he took the party to the next Assembly elections in February 1995.

(3) Assembly Elections, 1995:

The Assembly election was held in two phases on February 16 and 19, 1995 respectively. Polling took place in 39 of the 40 Assembly constituencies in three valley districts due to the killing of the MPP candidate in Lamsang Assembly constituency in Imphal district. The counting of votes in 59 Assembly constituency began on 21 February

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[32] *The Times of India* (New Delhi), February 13, 1991.

to decide the political faith of as many as 347 contestants. The final result shows that no party secured an absolute majority in the 60 member assembly (See Table:3). Yet, the ruling Congress emerged as the single largest party with 21 seats. The Congress an d the hastily formed United Legislature Front (ULF) staked their claims to form the government. the ULF comprises of six parties – The MPP with 18 seats, Janata Dal-7, CPI-2, Samata Party-2, NNP-2 and the Congress (S) with one seat. The Congress showing its political skill managed to lure as many as eleven legislators and finally formed the ministry headed by Rishang Keishing.

After the results were out, a hectic process for ministry formation began unfolding. Rishang and Ranbir were elected the leaders of the Congress and the ULF respectively. The political tug-of-war came to an end only when three members Congress ministry headed by Rishang Keishing assumed office on 25 February 1995. The MPP boycotted the swearing in ceremony thus giving a clear signal that the politics of Manipur is in for an unstable phase all over again.

In the month of August 1997, Keishing's cup of woes brimmed to the full in the wake of the declaration of the cease fire agreement between the Indian government an d North-East's most powerful rebel group- NSCN (IM) with effect from 1 August 1997. There were apprehensions among the people that the territorial integrity of Manipur is at stake with this development. Rallies, processions, dharnas were organized by different organizations to protect the territorial integrity of the state. It is no surprising then that the public pressures on the government and Keishing felt the heat. However, the final blow on Keishing ministry came when the two years an d ten months old ministry was reduced to minority following a split by 23 legislators under the leadership of the then Speaker W.

Nipamacha Singh. Nipamacha hurriedly formed a new political party called the "Manipur State Congress Party" (MSCP) and with the support of Federal Party of Manipur (FPM) and CPI, Nipamacha dislodge the Congress government and took oath as Chief-Minster along with 25 other Cabinet ministers. Nipamacha had created a sort of history by heading the biggest ever cabinet in the state. The jumbo size had belied the aspirations of the people and in the state where political leaders changes their colours like chameleon, Nipamacha had indeed showed his political astuteness as the head of the four party coalition government by holding ,office till the next Assembly elections held in February 2000.

Thus, going by the political history of Manipur, no single political party has been able to command an absolute majority since it attained state hood in 1972. after each election, coalition govern me n t was the only answer. Internal dissent and leadership struggle add to the woes of struggle and thus led to the premature death of the ministries. From the results of these elections i.e. 1984, 1990 and 1995, we can conclude safely that the Congress – once a dominant force in the state's politics – has been losing its ground. On the other hand the MPP is improving its position significantly from three in 1984 to 11 in 1990 to 18 in 1995. another mainstream party, the CPI, has been a fluctuating performance in the last three elections. One outstanding development is that of the losing ground of the independent candidates who used to play an important role in the fragile politics of Manipur. Their numbers of seats have been dramatically reduced from 21 in 1984 to 3 in 1995.

As mentioned earlier, with the fractured verdict and no party commanding even a simple majority to form the government, every time when a government is installed, it

was well anticipated that the stability of the government is at stake. Because of defections, changing loyalty, opportunism and lack of ideology considerations Manipur had experienced two spells of President's Rule in January 1992 and 1994 respectively. Yet, all in all, it did not surprise the people of the state where their leaders shift loyalties at any given opportunity.

In the politics of Manipur with the exception of the Indian National Congress other national parties have only a limited following, they are national only in so far as they are branches of respective national parties.[33] Thus, we can glaringly say that the performances of national parties in the state elections, is influenced by the change of guard at the Centre to a great extent. One thing that is always true is that any elected government has failed to read the pulse of the people and thus the expectation of the electorates has been never realised. The common people are always at the receiving end. The broad conclusion however, is that in Manipur, political instability is chronic and loyalty to the party and the leader is absent. There is the need of building and strengthening the exertion of political, administrative and governmental institutions with well-defined objects and rule. However, considering the smallness of the state - its small number of 60 legislators and political traits of opportunism, principlelessness, politics of defection *et al.*, political instability may continue to cast its shadow on the political life of the state in the years to come.

[33] L.P. Sinha, "The Politics and Government of Manipur", *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 48. No.4, October-December 1987, p. 491.

Table: 3. Party-wise performance in the 1995 Assembly Elections:*

Name of the Party	Seats contested	Seats won	Votes polled	Percentage of votes
MPP	55	18	2,71,247	23.67
NPP	05	02	30,417	2.65
MPC	01	00	2440	0.21
FPM	22	02	56,300	4.91
INC	60	22	3,28,362	28.65
BJP	20	01	38,405	3.35
JD (U)	40	07	1,36,594	11.92
CPI	23	02	64,026	5.59
CPM	02	00	2327	0.20
ICS	13	01	44,797	3.91
SMT	23	02	70,887	6.19
JP	04	00	1611	0.14
SJP (R)	06	00	7194	0.63
IND.	67	03	88,526	7.73

*Source: Statistical Report on General Election, 1995 to the Legislative Assembly of Manipur, Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

CHAPTER THREE

GROWTH OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN MANIPUR:

MANIPUR PEOPLES' PARTY (1968-85)

I. Political History

The process of development of Manipur as a political entity was not a joy-ride for

the people of the region. Before the British conquest of the state, it was under the

monarchical system with the King as the head. History records Manipur as an

independent Princely State from 33 A.D. to 1949 having a rich and chequered tradition

and culture. Once described as a "flower on the lofty heights" by R. Constantine, it is

now one of the most violent states, next only to Kashmir.[1] The State has become a hot

bed for insurgency and is torn by conflicts and ethnic fights. But what is surprising is the

abysmal ignorance about this state, as most Indians are quite ignorant about its existence

as a political unit of the Country.

In the pre-British period, the people were completely ignorant of their political

and civil rights due to the lack of education and communication. Political consciousness

among the people was very low. Anglo-Manipuri relations started during Shri Jai Singh's

reign as he realised that the only effective measure to check Burmese inroads into

Manipur was by taking help from the British. In 1819 Manipur lost her independence and

was placed under the Burmese suzerainty for seven years. This period under the Burmese

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[1] S.K. Chaube, 'Manipur Prospects- Manipur Assembly Elections', in *Frontline*, February 24, 1995, pp. 42-43.

rule is popularly known as "**Chahi-Taret-Khuntakpa**" (Seven Years Devastation). The Burmese occupation of Manipur ended in 1826 by the Treaty of Yandaboo signed between East India Company and the Manipuri Raja and this treaty left him as a semi-independent ruler of Manipur. This was the beginning of the end of the sovereignty of the Manipuri Monarchs and thus the region was incorporated to British India only after 1826.

It was in 1891 that it surrendered its independence to the British rulers that also in the most befitting and honourable manner.[2] By then the whole administration of Manipur was taken over by the British and a form of administration known as "Native Rule" was established by a proclamation issued by Queen Victoria with Churchand as the Rajah. Thus, from 1891, Manipur entered into a new phase where the administration of the state was under the close control of the British government. Even though Manipur was ruled by a Prince, its administration was handed over to a Durbar consisting of eight members with the Maharaja as its president. It made a very drastic reduction in its status or rather, Manipur was put on an entirely different footing.[3] The revival of the Lallup* by the then political agent Lt. Colonel H. St. Maxwell in 1904 led to the outbreak of the violent agitation and demonstration in the town by thousands of women to protest against the order.[4] Towards the end of 1913 there was a widespread agitation against the system of 'Pothang' (compulsory labour). 'Practically every villages in the valley except the Imphal villages which were exempted from the system of compulsory labour by the Durbar a few

[2] Ng. Kumarjit Singh, *Emergence of Regional Parties*, Vol. I. North-East India, Imphal, Published by Manipur Peoples' Party, 1986, p.16.

[3]R.K. Jhalajit; *A Short History of Manipur*, O.K. Store, Imphal, 1965, p.296.

*Lallup is a system of compulsory labour to the State served by all men between the ages of 17 to 60 years for 10 days out of every 40 days. See R. Brown; Annual *Administrative Report of Manipur 1868-69*, Selection from the Record of Government of India, Foreign Deptt. No. LXXVIII., p. 37

[4] J. Shakespeare, 'Administration Report on the Political Agency, Manipur for the year 1904-1905', Shillong, p. 1.

years ago combined in a passive resistance against the system'.[5] Thus the socio-economic movements preceded and marked the development of organized political movements and parties in Manipur. In the 1930's with the struggle for freedom by the Indian National Congress against the British suzerainty, the weakness of the administration and the perverseness of an unscrupulous section of the state officials helped the people aware of their political rights and thus led to the growth of their political consciousness.[6]

Before 1934 there was no political organization in Manipur. The formation of an organization called the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha under the Presidentship of Maharaja Churchand Singh in 1934 marked a turning point in the political history of Manipur because the agitation for the constitutional reforms emanated from the same platform.[7] The Mahasabha was initially a social organization but after the "Chinga Session" in 1938, it became the first political party of Manipur. However the Mahasabha followed the "ideology and policy" of the Indian National Congress, but the programme had to be modified to suit local conditions.[8] The Mahasabha extended its network among the people and tried to impress upon them the long-standing necessity of democratization of political power and state machinery. The Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha had become the most important political organization in Manipur under the leadership of Irabot Singh.[9] The first stage of Women's movement or agitation, demanding the ban of rice export from Manipur and to stop all rice mills in the state, was led by this Mahasabha. Later on there was a difference of opinion in the working committee of the Mahasabha and the

[5] H.C. Higgins, 'Administration Report of the Manipur State for the year 1912-1913', Calcutta, 1913, p. 1.
[6] *Ibid.* p.301.
[7] Bimal J. Dev and Dilip K. Lahiri; *Manipur Culture and Politics*, Mittal Publications, Delhi, 1987, p. 114.
[8] R.K. Jhalajit Singh, *op. cit.* pp. 301-2.
[9] *Ibid.* p. 115.

leader of the movement, Hijam Irabot Singh joined the 'Praja Sammelini' as President to lead the movement.[10] The Mahasabha in due course of time with their inclination to the ideology and policy of the Indian National Congress developed to be the Congress Party in 1946.[11]

On the eve of the implementation of the independence Act, the British Government made special preparations for the native states for the transitional period between the "Transfer of Power" and the "Finalisation of the Constitution" of free India. A Standstill Agreement was brought out which most states, with exceptions of few states signed. The Manipuri Maharajah Bodhachandra Singh also entered into such agreement on the 2nd July 1947. On 11th August 1947, he signed the Instrument of Accession and accordingly, Manipur acceded to the Indian Dominion in three subjects, namely Foreign Affairs, Defence and Communication and in all other subjects she enjoyed full autonomy and was in no way under the Indian Government. Analogous to the interim Government at the Centre an Interim government was also constituted on the 14th of August 1947.[12] And with this the first step towards democracy and egalitarian society was started by ending the history of monarchical system.

On the 15 August 1947 when India attained independence from the British rule, the paramountcy of the British Crown over the native states also came to an end. Alongwith the lapse of suzerainty, all treatise and agreements in force were ceased to operate as a result, Manipur was free to accede to either Pakistan or India. However in

[10] Th. Bira Singh, *Comrade Irabot*, C.P.I. Office, Imphal, 1974, p. 7.
[11] *Ibid* p. 11.
[12] R.K. Maipaksana, 'Constitutional Development of Manipur in a Nutshell' in *Manipur Today*, volume XI, No. 3, 1991, Imphal, p. 20.

view of the wishes of the people and the pressures from social and political organizations, the Maharaja declared that he would introduce a fully democratic and constitutional form of government in Manipur and thereby announced the formation of a "Constitution-Making Committee" consisting of seventeen members; six non-officials from the hills, six non-officials from the valley and five official members.

While the constitution making process was going on, the Maharaja, to give effect to the contemplated changes in Manipur, formed an Interim Council in August 1947. The Council consisted of four officials, one representative of Maharaja and five non-official representatives of the hills. However, the Maharaja is the ultimate authority in all important matters and the Interim Council merely helped and advised him. The constitution-making committee formed two sub committees, one for drafting the constitution of Manipur and other to draft the Hill Regulations known as the Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947 and the Manipur State Hill People's (Administration) Regulation, 1947. They gave an idea on how the state was to be governed on constitutional lines. A Government report while appreciating the constitution-making committee writes: 'It was a great credit to this committee that they could in such a short time bring out an agreed constitution. Manipur and her people will owe to them a great debt'.[13] The Manipur Constitution Act, 1947 laid down the Constitution, powers and functions of the three organs of Government- Legislature, Executive and Judiciary. The Manipur State Hill People's Regulation, 1947 gave responsibility for administration in the hills to the Maharajah in Council and exercised in accordance with the Constitution Act of the State and the provisions of this Regulations.

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[13] Government of Manipur, 'Administration Report of Manipur State-1946-47', p. 2.

However, the Constitutional Monarchy established under the Manipur Constitution Act,1947 did not last long. During the period between August 1947 and October 1949, Manipur enjoyed full autonomy in the administration except in those three subjects of Foreign Affairs, Defence and Communications. However, New Delhi evolved a plan to integrate all the native states to counter a move for Balkanisation of the country. Under this scheme, the Merger Agreement drive was brought out which was to be entered into with the rulers including the Manipuri Raja. The Manipuri king was one of the few rulers who refused to sign the agreement but later he was reportedly coaxed and compelled to sign on 21st September 1949 following which, he ceded to the Dominion Government all his administrative powers.[14] On September 21, 1949 an agreement was arrived for merging the state of Manipur with the dominion of India between the Maharaja and V.P.Menon, Adviser to the Government of India in the Ministry of States on behalf and with the authority of Governor general of India, with Shri Prakasa, the then Governor of Assam, as witness.[15]

The signing of the Merger Agreement endorsed the formal merger of Manipur to the Dominion of India on 15 October 1949 and this day marked an important day in the history of Manipur, as its administration was taken over by the Government of India on that very day. The Manipur State Congress has been demanding the abdication of the Maharaja and immediate integration of the State with the Centre.[16] The Congress' stand was vehemently opposed by the Royalist Group who propagated against abdication. The

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[14]Kumari Chingakham Shachi, *Centre State Relations: A Case Study of Manipur*, Dissertation submitted to University of Delhi, 1995, p. 64.
[15] Government of Manipur (Law Department),*The Manipur*, Part-(i), Imphal, 1963, pp. 265-67.
[16] Bimal J. Dev and Dilip K. Lahiri, *op. cit.* p. 125.

popular sentiment in Manipur has been that the Maharaja was forced to sign the "Merger

Agreement" in Shillong. The Maharaja and his brother Captain Joy Singh of Assam

Rifles with the help of other MLAs and Ministers made an all out effort to highlight the

"evil-effects" of integration and the tribal chiefs were told that the loss of privileges along

with abolition of Chiefship would be the inevitable consequences of integration.[17] This

bears the testimony that the Maharaja was under duress when he signed the agreement. In

his message to the people of the State *inter allia* the late Maharaja Bodhachandra said

'This day, the 15th of October 1949, sounds full notes for a new era. I am confident that it

will be the sincere and constant endeavour of the Indian Government to look to the best

interest of the people of Manipur'.[18] The transfer and the abdication of the State to the

Dominion Government had created a deep scar in Manipur politics and the surrender by

the Maharaja had also many to weep.[19] Consequently and with the enforcement of the

constitution of India on January 26,1950, Manipur became a Part 'C' State of the Indian

Union hence, it remains under the direct control of the Central Government.

When the Indian Union was formed, the political units of the Country were

classified under four categories according to the stage of their political development as

Part 'A', States who were former British Indian Provinces; Part 'B', States who were

mostly big Princely States; Part 'C', States who were petty states and which were

incredibly backward and far behind the other states and Part 'D', States which was

comprised of the islands of Andaman and Nicobar. Manipur attained Statehood in 1972

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[17] Bimal J. Dev and Dilip Kumar Lahiri, *op. cit.* p. 126.

[18] Rajkumar Sanahal, 'Post-Merger Political History of Manipur' in N. Sanajaoba (ed.) *Manipur: Past and Present (The Heritage and Ordeals of a Civilization)* Vol. I. Mittal, Delhi, 1988, p. 175.

[19] Bimal. J. Dev. and Dilip K. Lahiri, *op. cit.* p.127.

from a mere Part 'C' State status after having her own share of bitter experience. The Legislative Assembly founded by the Maharaja was dissolved and the Part 'C' States Act made new provisions for the legislatures and Council of Ministers for the state of Manipur. During her Part 'C' state status, in 1952, the first general election on the basis of adult franchise was held for the election of two members of the Lok-Sabha (one each from the hills and the Valley) and 30 members of the Electoral College. These members recommended the names of five advisors for the advisory Council of the Chief Commissioner but have no executive powers except giving advice to the Chief Commissioner in matters of administration.

The people, on the other hand, were discontented with the rule of the bureaucrats and they started agitations demanding the restoration of a responsible government. With pressures from all sections of society, the Government of India was to concede to the rightful and legitimate demands of the people of Manipur. Thus, the status of Part 'C' state continued till 1956 when the States Reorganisation Act 1963 was passed and Manipur attained the status of a Union Territory and continued till January 21, 1972, when she finally became a full fledged State of the Indian Union under the provisions of the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act 1971. The Governor who was to be aided and advised by the Council of Ministers was made the Head of the State.

Thus, the political history of Manipur, right from 1947 to 1972 was a gradual transformation from one type of "state" to another. At first it was a Princely State having a responsible Cabinet with its own Constitution, then a Part 'C' state, then a Union Territory and finally a full-fledged State. The attainment of Statehood in 1972 was not came in a gold platter. It was only after a series of demands in the form of Hartal,

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Satyagraha etc. that actually changed the attitude of the Centre towards Manipur. The Chinese aggression of 1962 came as a blessing in disguise for the simple reason that it opened the eyes of the Centre .[20] Even though the State is strategically located, its importance as a border state came to the realization of the Central leaders only after the Chinese aggression. Finding the state economically unproductive and coupled with the difficult terrain inhabited by distinct ethnic groups; the Centre remained contended to leave as it is till the state boiled with violence and brought to the Centre's attention that the State is very much a part of the Indian mainland and that the immediate attention for its overall development is called for.

The Historical fact that Manipuris were never a part of the mainland till the Britishers came, the Centre's unkindly treatment, their own pride and ego in asserting their identity; all these made it hard for most people to reconcile to the fact that they are also Indians.[21] The Sino-Indian War (1962) turned the Centre's attention towards the long neglected region of the North-East and realized its strategic importance in so far as the Country's security is concerned. Not only this, it also realizes that something has to be done to bring emotional integration of the people of these small but significant political units with the mainstream people. And thus in 1972, taking a step towards this end, Manipur was given the status of a full-fledged State and it was indeed a turning point in the political history of this small political unit of the Indian Union.

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[20] Ng. Kumarjit Singh, *op. cit.* p. 9.
[21] Kumari Chingakham Shachi, op. cit. p. 66.

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II. Growth of Regional Parties:

The Indian Party System with the Congress party ruling in both the Centre and the States for the initial two decades after Independence has undoubtedly led to the domination of the Centre. Because of this, erosion of federalism takes place thereby weakened the will of the State Government for autonomy, which was the sole factor in the growth of predominance of the Centre. The strains and imbalances in the federal structure was due to the Congress Party's dominant position in the polity, particularly the Gandhi family, whose political needs, it was presumed to be contrary to those of the Regional Parties and their aspirations, and also which discouraged local initiatives and participation.[22] It was believed that once this monopoly is eroded, a balanced political environment will be created and when such an environment prevails, the regional parties would be able to demand an appropriate distribution of federal powers. However, the existence of one single party system for a fairly long time has unified the system.

Nevertheless the country witnessed the rise and success of regional parties viz the AIADMK, the AGP etc. In the North Eastern region, there have been a number of similar political formations, for instance the Naga National Council (NNC) in Nagaland, the Manipur Peoples' Party (MPP) in Manipur which are content to play at best a marginal role in the state level politics. The rise of these regional parties coincided with the growing dissatisfaction with the Congress Rule in many regions and which lowered the ability of the Congress party to absorb and assimilates various small groups. It may also be due to the uneven or lopsided pattern of economic development in India since

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[22] Harish Khare, 'Regional Parties: Reduced Efficacy', in *Politics Today*, Seminar 399, November, 1992, pp. 33-35.

Independence, in which some regions have experienced faster economic growth.[23] These

parties are rooted in regional grievances and aspirations. They have been inspired not

merely by primordial sentiments but also the existing economic conditions of the various

regional and ethnic groups. They are a result of a complex integration between regional

consciousness and political and economic development in India. Thus, the birth and

growth of regional parties in the Indian political scene has different dimensions. Some

political thinkers have opined that the emergence of regional parties will weaken our

federal political structure and is likely to create fissiparous tendencies which will not help

in the integration of the country.

However, the concept of regional party is not altogether absent in the immediate

post independent political history of India. The Indian National Congress which has ruled

the country almost uninterruptly since independence till recent time has become most

vocal and vociferous in condemning the growth of regional parties. The Party's defeat in

the hands of the regional parties has almost unnerved the leaders of the Congress party.[24]

What has worried the political pandits is the spectacular and phenomenal rise of these

parties of regional character.

With the attainment of freedom people have high hopes for fulfillment of their

aspirations and also a strong feeling that such condition will have to be created and make

all sections of society feel that they are really free. However, frustration and

disappointment is looming large in the face of a larger section of the people of this

country (after so many years of Independence) especially in the North-East. Post-

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[23] Sudha Pai, 'Regional Parties and Emerging Pattern of Politics in India', *Indian Journal of Political Science*, Volume 51 No. 3, July-September, 1990, p. 399.
[24] Ng. Kumarjit, *op. cit.* p.1.

independence India witnessed an unimpressive and irrational social, economic and administrative response by the ruling elite to the rising tides of progressive aspirations of ethnic, linguistic and cultural personalities of various regions.

With the universalisation of the franchise, politics become more participative and representative than it had never been before and thus the aggressive entry of the Centre in the sphere of State's power has caused grave disappointment to the people. 'This created instability in the states and people were disillusioned. The way their electoral verdict was defaced or distorted, the way in which Chief-Ministers were reduced to the status of "tenants at will" brought about a climate of change in the states which ultimately gave rise to regional parties'.[25] As a matter of fact, the regional parties in India have born out of utter neglect by the Centre on the one hand and the people's strong desire to vindicate their rights and privileges as free men. The regional parties are not out to destabilise the country but to ensure that the hopes and aspirations of the people are fulfilled. The strength of the country will largely depend on a strong and stable units. Therefore, regional parties should not be taken otherwise but should be conceived as a part of the political development.

The context and purpose of the emergence of the national and regional parties in Manipur differ both in terms of theory and practice. Theoretically, the national parties are controlled and directed by the leaders at the national level whereas local or regional parties are formed independently to protect the interest of a particular section of society or for the state as a whole and they regulate their policies and programmes at their own will. Practically, the differences are insignificant since most of the regional parties are

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[25] H.N. Bahughana; cited in Ng. Kumarjit Singh, *op. cit.* p. 4.

formed by the defectors from the all India Parties. Many political parties of national and regional importance exist in the political life of Manipur. Besides these, there are also other social organizations which have also occupied an important place in the political history of Manipur. The most important national political party that has contested all the general elections and most of the seats available for contest was the Congress which was formed in 1947.

In October 1946, all the political parties in Manipur came together and formed the Congress Party. The parties that merged with the Congress were the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha, Krishak Sabha, the Praja Sangha, the Praja Sammilani and the Anouba Nonghok Maran.[26] The Praja Sangha left the meeting owing to differences of opinion between Irabot Singh and other leaders. Next to the Congress is the Communist Party of India (CPI) which was formed in 1948. Then comes the Socialist Party. At first it was Congress Socialist party (CSP) and its leaders felt that they were being dominated by the old guard. Being in minority they could not be strong, powerful and influential. So they left the Congress and formed the Socialist Party. Later on they became a part of the Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP) and it also did not survive for long and finally in 1997, the Socialist merged themselves with the Janata Party.[27]

Among the regional parties, the Manipur Peoples' Party (MPP) is the most important. There were also other regional parties such as the Praja Santi Party (PSP), the All Manipur National Union, the All Manipur Peoples' Convention (AMPC), the Ireipok

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[26] V.Venkata Rao, *A Century of Government and Politics in North-East India*, Volume IV: Manipur, Delhi, S.Chand, 1991, p. 265.

[27] V. Venkata Rao, *op. cit.* p. 265. For Parties in Manipur, See Also, S.K. Chaube, *Electoral Politics in North-East India*, Delhi, Universities Press (India), 1985.

Leishem Party (ILP) and the Progessive Independent Front (PIF). In the hill areas, there were the Naga Integration Council (NIC), which promised the integration of all contiguous Naga inhabited areas now lying in different states of Assam,Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland, the Kuki National Assembly (KNA) which promised to protect and promote the interest of the Kukis. However, all these small regional parties, in course of time, either merged with the other major parties or it just fades away with the changing political waves.

The nature of the cleavages or contradictions in a given society and the general level of its economic development largely influence the type of party system that would prevail in that society. The social composition, comprises of those divisions in the society which are based on variables such as religion, language, race, caste, economic class, and the like, on the one hand and economic development on the other are the two most crucial variables or sets of variables that determine a party-system. Thus, a party-system is but a by-product of the social system. It can, therefore, be safely concluded that all sorts of parties have made their presence felt in a particular political moment in the political history of Manipur, and also defections, shifting of loyalties has been an inherent character of the political parties of the State. The Manipur Peoples' Party is no exception. It is in this backdrop that the study of Manipur Peoples' Party (MPP), once a strong political force in the state, and its political fortunes become imperative. The MPP built up its foundation in a very ambitious footing. In its election Manifesto of 1972, it promised to establish a socialist state. This analysis restricts itself to the emergence, evolution and electoral performance of MPP during the period 1968-85.

(1) The Manipur Peoples' Party

The Manipur Peoples' Party was born out of extreme necessity to have a regional political party to safeguard the ethnic identity of the people, to protect the territorial integrity, to check economic decadence and to promote the regional interest in general.[28] Thus, the main purpose of the formation of MPP was to safeguard and uphold the interest of the people and for their advancement in socio-economic and political spheres. The party stands for regionalism and greater autonomy of the state. Like any other regional party in the State, the MPP was also an offshoot of the defectors from the Indian National Congress. The Party was formed on 26 December, 1968, at a meeting convened by Shri Chaoyaima Singh, Shri Nilachandra, Y. Yaima Singh and S. Tombi Singh.[29] The Constitution of the party defines the Manipur People Party as : " It is a voluntary organization of the people who live in Manipur and who espouses the cause of Manipur. The goal of the party is to establish by democratic and peaceful means the well-being and advancement of the people of Manipur and to establish an egalitarian Society based on democratic socialism ".[30] The MPP, therefore , stands for safeguarding the interest of Manipur, for its political, economic and social upliftment and preserving its cultural and racial identity within the constitutional framework of the country. The party is also committed to protect the territorial integrity of the state and areas in the North-East and the ethnic and cultural identity of the different sub-nationalities in consonance with the spirit of the Indian Constitution.

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[28] Ng. Kumarjit Singh, *op. cit.* p. 36.
[29] Ksh. Bimola Devi, *Political Development and Integration of Manipur*, 1950-1977, Dissertation submitted to the Centre for Political Studies, J.N.U., New Delhi, 1978, p. 45.
[30] 'The Constitution of Manipur Peoples' Party', Imphal, 1984, p. 1.

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The first Conference of the Party was held on 27 January,1969, in Imphal at the Aryan Hall.[31] In the early Seventies, the MPP attracted many students and members of the younger generations. However, the number of students, teachers and female members are negligible in all the parties. Like any other party, the MPP is supported by the combination of all sorts of sections of the society. Even the Congress which is considered as the largest single party in the state has very few members in the hills and they too are nearly all social workers.[32] Peasants and agriculturalists do not support the same party nor do the businessmen the urban middle class or workers. Thus, the social base of the parties are subject to wide fluctuations and no political party can claim to have a cleary defined social support base valid for all parts and sections of the state.

The MPP is like any regional party, which is interested with certain group or group's welfare than with the general welfare, whose scope of operation is restricted to the articulation of a limited set of interest; whose area of influence is confined to a particular area and which depend on the political support of the people who live in a relatively compact geographical area. It is very much regional party and is sort of represented only the valley areas and failed to reach the hill areas.[33] The non-Manipuri businessmen and traders viewed the MPP as an anti-outsider "rabidly pro-Manipuri Party" biased against the non-Manipuri sections of the elite.[34]

The party stressed on the point of its being the real and only alternative in the State. It emphasizes its own regional character claiming that it alone could bring

[31] Y. Yaima Singh, 'Eeikhoigi Wakhal' (In Manipuri), 8th Annual Conference of MPP, 26 December, 1975. p. 11.
[32] Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee, Constitution, 1975-76, Imphal, Manipur.
[33] Kumari Chingakham Shachi, op. cit. p. 94.
[34] S. K. Chaube, Electoral Politics in North-East India, Delhi, Universities Press (India), 1985, p. 131.

prosperity to the Manipuris. It demanded greater autonomy for the state so as to enable it to struggle for safeguarding the identity and culture of the Manipuris. The MPP have highlighted certain problems both in the society and polity by championing various issues from time to time even though the party could not bring any consistent and logical approach towards the State's problem. In the absence of any substantial issue, the Party performs like any other small party, confining itself to a particular sub-region because of its topographical and cultural legacies. Even though it has been trying to absorb dominant political groups, the party is not free from the process of fission and fusion.[35]

(2) Electoral Performance

The Manipur Peoples' Party for the first time entered onto the arena of electoral competition in 1972. Almost all the parties in Manipur threw a challenge to the Manipur Pradesh Congress and rallied round the banner of anti-Congressism. It contested the 1972 Assembly election with a very ambitious programme of actions in forty-two constituencies. It pleaded before the people a 27- Point Programme which includes ceiling on urban landed property, nationalization of all companies in Manipur, rural electrification, the establishment of a University for Manipur, a medical college, free education upto matriculation, inclusion of Manipuri language in the Eight Schedule in the

[35] Mohan Lal Sharma, 'The Troubled North-East: Towards Understanding Anomie in Terms of Social Communications'. in Iqbal Narain (ed.) *State Politics in India*, Meenakshi Prakashan, Meerut, 1976, pp. 437-432.

Indian Constitution, general amnesty to the detenues of the Revolutionary Government of Manipur and so on.[36]

There was a tremendous excitement in this contest since it was the first election after the conferment of statehood to Manipur. And the Congress banked with confidence upon the image that 'the conferment of statehood to Manipur is a glorious achievement of the Congress'.[37] Local issues dominated the election scene. The whole Manipur was divided into sixty single member constituencies, forty in the valley and twenty in the hill areas. In this election the Congress won 15 seats and lost its dominant position which it held hitherto to the Independents which won 19 seats.

However, the MPP which contested the general election for the first time won 15 out of the 42 seats it contested. It polled 20 percent of the total votes but won 25 percent of the seats available to contest. The Party was, as such, not very strong but still it managed to win 15 seats and was able to compete with a party like the Congress Party. It utilized the fractured verdict and thus formed a coalition government with the help of Socialist Party, Congress (O) and the Independents. A ministry headed by Md. Alimuddin under the name of United Legislature Party was installed on 20th March 1972.

However, dissensions soon cropped up in the government and on 31st July 1972, all the three members of NIC and two independents joined the Congress Legislative Party. This was followed by the defection of one MPP member, reducing the strength of ULP but it was able to raise to 36 in August,1972 giving it a comfortable majority. On 15th March 1973, nine members including 2 ministers and the Deputy Speaker of the ULP

[36] V. Venkata Rao, *op. cit.* p. 268.
[37] Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee, *Election Manifesto*, Imphal, 1972, p. 66.

denounced the actions of the ULP ministry and defected to the opposition. One of the defectors joined the Congress and the rest formed the Progessive Independent Group (PIG).

Later on, the Congress, CPI and PIG unitedly formed the Progessive Democratic Alliance on 15th March, 1973 and a no confidence motion was moved against the Government on 23rd March, and on 26th March 1973 Alimuddin submitted his resignation.. Subsequently, the Assembly was adjourned *sine die* by the Speaker the same day. On 28th March,.1973 President Rule was imposed in Manipur and the State Assembly was dissolved.[38]

The programme of action of the MPP was an ambitious one but it did not realize the fact that such a programme can be implemented only when two conditions exist namely, sound financial position and political stability. But, these two conditions did not exist in Manipur. The Party was in power for just one year. It was thrown out by the defectors.[39] However, the Party justified its existence by the works done during the short period. The party could feel proud of its achievements while it was at the helm of affairs of the State. Of the works done by the Party, mentioned may be made of the following:[40]

In the field of education, the Jawaharlal Nehru University Centre which has, now, fully bloomed into a full-fledged University was founded. The Regional Medical College (RMC) which was started in 1972-73 is another remarkable achievement. As a part of the policy for industrialization of the State, stress was given for starting some large-scale industries. In pursuance of this policy, the first spinning

[38] Government of Manipur, 'Administration Report-1972-73', p. 3.
[39] V. Venkata Rao, *op. cit.* p. 269.
[40] Ng. Kumarjit Singh, *op. cit.* pp. 38-40.

mill was established at Loitang Khunou village. Another glaring act of the party was the grant of general amnesty to the so-called insurgents who fought for an independent Manipur under the banner of the Revolutionary Government of Manipur thereby bringing the revolting youths in the national mainstream. Another achievement of historical importance was the laying foundation of the War Memorial at Khongjom where the last battle for freedom was fought against formidable odds. It will not be an exaggeration to say that the MPP did much more works than the Congress governments did in the last 37 years.

For the Mid-term election held in 1974, the MPP presented an 18-Point Programme. It included all the items of 1972 Manifesto plus the construction of the Railway line and the acquisition of Somoa Tract and the Kabaw Valley. The inclusion of the last two items was intended to rouse the emotional feelings of the Manipuris and to win the electoral battle. The Congress entered into electoral alliance in this election with the CPI in order to check the rising danger of regional sentiments propagated by the local parties, the show of money power by a large number of independent candidates and supporters of the regionalist forces. The Congress Party called the last MPP led government an unholy alliance, demonstrating the internal weakness of the regionalist party by indulging in massive corruption, acts of nepotism and high handedness.[41]

After this election, the MPP hold the dominant position by winning 20 seats leaving the Congress only with13 seats thus reducing its position from the previous elections. The MPP on the other hand have improved its position by getting five more

[41] Manipur Pradesh Congress committee, *Election Manifesto*, Imphal, 1974, p. 2.

seats. It contested 40 seats but won fifty percent of the seats contested and one third of the seats available for contest. The Independents lost the position which they held previously. The Manipur Hills Union (MHU), a regional party, which contested the election for the first time had a tremendous success at the polls by returning with 12 seats of the 16 candidates it put up to contest. But the fact remains that no party was able to secure an absolute majority in the House. Political instability continued to plague the Manipur politics as before.

After the elections both the MPP and the Congress tried to win over different groups and independents in order to form the government. Meanwhile the MPP with the support of the SSP, MHU and some Independents under the name of United Legislature Party (ULP) formed the government on 4th March,1974 headed by Md. Alimuddin. Interestingly, just before the swearing-in-ceremony, a section of MHU led by Shri Yangmaso Shaiza left the ULF. But the ULF, because of the joining of more MLAs, instead was able to increase its strength. Meanwhile the opposition parties i.e. the Congress, MHU, CPI, and Independents formed an alliance called the Progessive Democratic Front and sent feelers to as many members of the ruling party with promises of positions and benefits. On 8th July, 1974, in the course of the Budget Session, six members of ULP crossed the floor. More defection followed in the evening of the same day resulting in the resignation of the Ministry in the afternoon and the Assembly was adjourned *sine die*.

After this, between July 10, 1974 and May 16, 1977, there were three coalition governments without the MPP. The first one being the Democratic Front Ministry headed by Yangmaso Shaiza and the second and the third one headed by R. K. Dorendro Singh

under the Congress-ULP coalition and the Congress-CPI coalition respectively. Soon after the formation of Janata Government at the Centre, there arose divisions in the Congress Legislature Party. By the middle of May, R. K. Dorendro's government was reduced to a minority as more MLAs continued to join the Janata Party and finally President's Rule was proclaimed on May 16, 1977. But soon after on June 29, 1977 a new Janata Ministry under Yangmaso Shaiza was installed. All the members of the Congress Party and the MPP, quite surprisingly, joined the Janata Legislature Party and thus its strength raised to 55 in the House. The CPI with four members was the one and only Opposition Party.[42]

In 1980, the Manipur Peoples' Party, for the first time witnessed an unusual experience. There was a steep decline in the position of the Party. In the Election to the Legislative Assembly in 1980, the MPP could win only 4 seats. It won 10 percent of the seats contested, and secured 6 percent of the total votes polled. The Independents raised their number, battered all the political parties and thus dominated the political scenario. The 1980 election indicates the decline of most of the parties. One of the regional parties, which performed tremendously in the 1974 mid-term elections, the MHU disappeared. And if it is of any indication then the faith of parties in the political life of Manipur is very uncertain and fragile.

In the Assembly Election of 1984, the MPP not only reduced in the number of seats it contested but also its electoral performance declined considerably. Out of 34 seats it contested, it could gain only three seats in the Assembly. The Congress Party made an impressive come-back by winning fifty percent of the seats. The Independents also

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[42]K. C. Chaudhuri, 'Where defections are a way of Life', *Sunday* (Calcutta), 21 May, 1978, p. 39.

improved their position by winning 21 seats. All other political parties are swept away by the deluge. The regional parties failed badly in this electoral battle.

Table : Manipur Peoples' Party's Electoral Performance*

Year	No of Seats Contested	No of Seats Won	Votes Polled	% of Votes Polled
1972	42	15	91,148	20.17
1974	40	20	1,34,493	22.55
1980	40	4	48,196	6.59
1984	34	3	93,421	10.81

From the above electoral analysis, it can be concluded that the faith of political parties keep fluctuating and after each and every election the people witnessed a quite different and contrasting outcome. There is no consistency in the performance of parties, national or regional. It also speaks in volumes about defections and how the political leaders are lured by power and position. As far as the relationship between the regional and national parties is concerned, there is a close relationship since many of the political leaders could be seen crossing the fence from a regional party to a national party and vice versa according to the intensity of the political situation and political opportunities that can be availed thereof. In some cases the MLAs elected on local party tickets joined the national parties even by abolishing the local party itself, for e.g., the United Naga Integration Council merged with Congress in 1976 and yet in another

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*V. B. Singh & Shankar Bose, *State Elections in India, Data Handbook on Vidhan Sabha Elections, 1952-85*, Vol. 3., The East & North East.

incident in May 1977, bulk of MPP legislators joined the Janata Party. All these show that there is free access to any party. Moreover, most of the politicians do not value their party's principles and they are, more often than not, guided by their own interests and ambitions. They do not consider the general welfare of the people as the primary goal of party.

The MPP, as a regional party and by claiming itself as the real alternative to the Congress, had a good beginning in the initial years but since 1980 its political debacle started. And it is still fighting to come out of shambles and to show that it really represents the interests of the people of Manipur. However, the MPP remained a regional party which do not have any comprehensive ideology but had certain specific interest which are sought to be promoted or certain grievances which are to be redressed. It is still not a mass-based party and also its influence in the hill areas of the state is very limited.

However, being one of the oldest local parties, the Manipur Peoples' Party should try first to rejuvenate the party organization, which has been dwindled down over the years, and also strive to adopt a clear approach to the problems facing by the state. As a whole. One of the most important things is that it should make an effort to reach its influence in the hill areas of Manipur so as to become a mass-based party. Only then, its main objectives such as, protecting the territorial integrity of the state, preserving and safeguarding the ethnic and cultural identity of its people and promoting the welfare and the regional interest of the people could be achieved. In its Election Manifesto of the 2000 Assembly Elections, reminiscent of its earlier ones, it commits itself to enrich the quality of life of the people besides many political, social and economic programmes are

also spelled out. In the Assembly Election 2000, the party had jointly fought the battle of ballots under the banner of a pre-poll alliance called the "Secular Democratic Front" (SDF) together with CPI, Janata Dal (S) and its traditional rival, Indian National Congress, in a bit to defeat the ruling Manipur State Congress Party (MSCP).

However the outcome of the elections has shocked the party. Out of the 29 seats it contested, it could win only four seats. Later on, to the utter disappointment of the Party and what could be termed as the downright betrayal, three of the elected MLAs changed their political colour even before taking oath as Member of the Legislative Assembly. Thus, it is imperative for the party to review its policy and programmes and must also look at the existing political environment minutely before entering into any kind of pact or alliance with any party. Thus, by doing so, the Party has nothing to loose but to gain in their struggle for power.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE FEDERAL DIMENSIONS AND THE NORTH-EAST

I. Centre-State Relations and the North-East:

A federal state is a political mechanism intended to reconcile national unity and power with the maintenance of States rights. It is a union of a number of independent states whose territories are contiguous and whose citizens have certain affinities, either racial, ethnological or traditional, who have a common historical background or heritage, a community of economic interests, and feel a craving for spiritual and national unity, but at the same time are anxious to maintain the identity and independence of their states. Thus, federalism springs from the necessity for the union of a number of independent states which are not strong enough individually to protect themselves from outside danger, and whose union is requisite for their safety and the promotion of their economic interests, but which are not prepared to surrender their independence completely. "The federal form of government is not deduced from a theory or *a priori* reasoning, but is a historical product or a necessity arising under certain political conditions".[1] K.C.Wheare, a renowned British authority on federalism, classified India as "a unitary state with subsidiary federal principles rather than a federal state with subsidiary unitary principles".[2]

India, the land of multi-cultures and abode to diverse ethno-racial groups, has been maintaining its diversities in a unified manner by espousing the idea of "unity in diversity". The Indian Constitution is federal in structure with a strong unitary basis.

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[1] B.L. Fadia, *Indian Government and Politics*, Agra, Sahitya Bhawan, 1992, p. 105.
[2] K.C. Wheare, *Federal Government*, London, 1963, p. 27.

during normal times. There is a constitutional distribution of powers in the legislative, administrative, financial and executive spheres between the Centre and the States. Yet, the nature of the polity does not permit, despite the existence of a "strong centre", any final decisions except by consensus. Hence pluralistic decision-making processes play a significant role in finding solutions.

Federalism is very much a political reality in India, notwithstanding the "strong centre" tilt of the Constitution and the near unitary style of functioning during the years of single party rule. "The process of adapting federalism to Indian conditions began when the Constituent Assembly set aside the classical models then in vogue and opted for an unorthodox distribution of powers. However, it must be recognized that loosening the centralist straitjacket of a unitary colonial regime required exceptional courage in the post-partition context, when many feared that too federal a constitution might encourage fissiparous tendencies".[3] A federal polity in India was envisaged for the first time under the Government of India Act, 1935, with a Central Government and Provinces deriving their jurisdiction and powers by direct devolution from the Crown. The organization of the Central Government in British India in 1946, when the Constituent Assembly was set up under the Cabinet Mission Plan, was on the lines of the Government of India Act 1935. As per the Cabinet Mission Plan, a Union of India was constituted which could comprise British India and the Indian States where subjects like Foreign Affairs, Defence and Communications were to be with the Union and all residuary powers were to be with the Provinces. The rulers of the States welcomed such a structure because it offered

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[3] Balveer Arora, "Adapting Federalism to India: Multilevel and Asymmetrical Innovations", in Balveer Arora & Douglas V. Verney (ed.), *Multiple Identities in a Single State: Indian Federalism in Perspective*, Delhi, Konark, 1995, p.71.

them the best chance of retaining their autocratic powers, and on the other hand the leaders of the political struggle thought that it offered the best possibility of an early realization of their goal of political freedom for the whole of India. When the actual framing of our Constitution was taken up the main model to draw up a federal framework was the model provided under the 1935 Act.[4]

The aftermath of Partition and the subsequent creation of Pakistan called for the integration of Princely states in the new body politic and the need to control the disruptive forces necessitate the creation of a Centre-oriented federal union. India's federal democracy, functioning in the specific context of its considerable size and diversity, has evolved in response to the challenges arising from increased political awareness manifested periodically in electoral mobilization. Democratization of political process has had a profound impact on the electorate, in discovering the multiple meanings of democracy. The demands of states for more powers and greater participation in the national policy processes were voiced with increasing insistence.

Federalism, that is to say the constitutional distribution of powers between a national government and a number of state or provincial governments, would seem most appropriate for a large country as well as diverse societies such as India.[5] The need to accommodate socio-cultural diversities within a single state political unit has generally been a major motivating factor in the preference for federal forms of government. Nirmal Mukarji and Balveer Arora opine that "the preference for a federal ordering and articulation of diversities arises from the need for political recognition of territorially-based social pluralism, where it is understood that the denial of articulation of opportunities would be tantamount to denying diverse

[4] Nirmal Mukarji & Balveer Arora (ed.), *Federalism in India: Origins and Development*, Delhi, Vikas. 1992, p. 106.
[5] Balveer Arora & Douglas V. Verney (ed.), *op. cit.* p. 1.

communities the right to exist, the right to continue as distinctive entities".[6] However, the persistence of federal systems depends on the degree of success they achieve in strengthening the strands of unity which run through all pluralistic societies

The existing structure of the States of the Indian Union is the product of two historic processes – the integration of former Indian States and the reorganization of States. The object of the framers of the Constitution was to build a strong central authority which could resist external aggression and check internal disruptive forces. Jawaharlal Nehru ardently stated that, " the soundest framework for our constitution is a federation with a strong centre ". [7] However, federal polity is not merely certain types of institutional structures and arrangements relating only to the organization of power. It implies also, and perhaps more importantly, a certain process having as objective the creation and maintenance of a federal nation. The core of the federal principle is democratic since it attaches a special value to linkage by mutual consent and the uniting of separate socio-political entities within a system that provides for dispersal of power, thus ensuring the maintenance of distinctive identities.

In India, the Indian National Congress, which had emerged from the struggle for freedom exercised dominance in the politics of the nation and most of the states since Independence. This lasted until 1967, when other parties began to emerge from its shadow. Thus, since the late 1960s, competition among the India's parties has hastened tremendously and the emergence of regional parties with their demands for more autonomy has changed the entire political system. In Nehru's time, politics was characterized not only by Congress dominance, but by the pre-eminence, in both government and opposition, of parties which appeared to be national rather than

[6] Nirmal Mukarji & Balveer Arora (ed.), *op. cit.* p. 2.
[7] K. M. Panikkar, *The Foundation of New India*, London, 1963, p. 236.

regional in nature. As James Manor pointed out that, "the rise of regional parties should not be seen as a political pathology, but partly as a natural development and partly as a symptom of the fundamental problem that has lately afflicted the federal system: over-centralization by national leaders and governments". [8]

In 1967, after the collapse of Congress dominance, when the non-Congress parties formed governments in the States, there was a twist in Centre-State relation and thus the "politics of consensus" tended to be replaced by the "politics of confrontation".[9] It was only after 1980, when a growing number of non-Congress parties came to power in the states, that efforts were made to redefine Centre-State relations to make the Constitution truly federal. The study of federalism in India thus, became increasingly important in the 1980s, as evidenced by the establishment of the Commission on Centre-State relations.

A three-member commission headed by Justice R. S. Sarkaria was constituted in 1983 to examine the powers, functions and responsibilities of the Union and the states; it submitted a very comprehensive report and its recommendations are still awaiting implementation.[10] Indian politics subsequently entered an era of coalition politics both at the Centre and the States, and the ruling party at the Centre has had to soften its stand on Centre-State relations. There is more tolerance of other parties and regional/state parties have also increased their bargaining power.

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[8] James Manor, "Regional Parties in Federal Systems: India in Comparative Perspective", in Balveer Arora and Douglas V. Verney (ed.), op. cit. p. 111.

[9] H. A. Gani, Centre-State Relations and Sarkaria Commission, Issues, Institutions and Challenges, New Delhi, Deep & Deep,1990, p. 2.

[10] Government of India, Home Ministry, Report of the Commission on Centre-State Relations, New Delhi, Government Press, 2 Volumes, 1987 and 1988.

(1) Centre-State Relations:

A federal scheme involves dual governments and distribution of powers. The success and the strength of a federal polity depend upon the maximum co-operation between the Governments of the Union and the States. Centre-state Relations in India can summarily be discussed in three main spheres – Legislative, Administration and Financial.

a) Legislative Relations: A three fold classification of the distribution of powers between the Centre and States is provided under article 246 of the Constitution. There are three legislative lists namely, i) the Union List – with 99 items gives the Centre exclusive authority to act in matters of national importance; ii) State List – with 61 items includes matters like law and order, local government, public health, education, agriculture etc.; iii) Concurrent List – having 52 items among which legal system trade and industry, economic and social planning are included. Both the Union and State governments exercised concurrent jurisdictions with respect to matters in the Concurrent List.

However, in case of overlapping of a matter as between the three Lists, predominance has been given to the Union Legislature. Thus, "the power of the State Legislature to legislate with respect to matters enumerated in the State List has been made subject to the power of Union Parliament to legislate in respect of matters enumerated in the Union and the Concurrent Lists, and the entries in the State List have to be interpreted accordingly".[11] Besides, the Constitution vests the residuary power, i.e., the power to legislate with respect to any matter not enumerated in any one of the three Lists, in the Union Legislature (Article 248), and the final

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[11] D.D. Basu, *Introduction to the Constitution of India*, (Seventeenth Edition), New Delhi, Prentice-Hall, 1995, p. 308.

determination as to whether a particular matter falls under the residuary power or not is that of the Courts.

b) Administrative Relations: In Emergency situations the Union government under the Indian Constitution functions in the line of a unitary government. however, even in normal times the Constitution has devised techniques of control over the States to ensure that the state governments do not interfere with the legislative and executive policies. Some of these avenues of control arise out of the executive and legislative powers vested in the President relation to the state, for example, the power to appoint and dismiss the Governor (articles 155,156) , the power to appoint other dignitaries (articles 217,317), veto power in respect of other state Bills reserved by the Governor(Article 200, Provision 1).[12]

This is to be noted that the Constitution prescribes a coercive sanction for the enforcement of the directions issued by the Union government. Article 356 provides "where any has failed to comply with, or to give effect to, any directions given in the exercise of the executive power of the of Union under any of the provisions of this Constitution, it shall be lawful for the President to hold that a situation has arisen in which the Government of the State cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution".

There are also certain All India Services which are common to the Union and the States. Under article 312 (1), Parliament may by law provide for the creation of one or more all-India services and regulates the recruitment, and the conditions of service of persons appointed to any such service. The object behind this provision is

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[12] D.D. Basu, *op. cit.* pp. 324-25.

to impart a greater cohesion to the federal system and greater efficiency to the administration in both the Union and the States.

c) **Financial Relations:** No system of federation can be successful unless both the Union and the States have at their disposal adequate financial resources to enable to discharge their respective responsibilities under the Constitution. "The transfer and devolution of resources from the Centre to States are essentially via three channels. First, there are statutory transfers (comprising tax sharing and grants-in-aid) through Finance Commission recommendations. Second, there are plan grants through the Planning Commission guidelines. Thirdly, there are also "discretionary" grants through central ministries, primarily for centrally sponsored schemes".[13]

Under article 360 the President of India is empowered to make a declaration of financial emergency whenever there is a threat in regard to the financial stability or credit of India or any part thereof is concerned. During such a proclamation, the executive authority of the Union shall extend to giving direction to any state with regard to observance of financial propriety.

The parliament also at any time, under article 271, may increase any of the duties or taxes by a surcharge for purpose of the Union and the whole proceeds of such surcharge shall form part of the consolidated fund of India. Article 269 in the Constitution lists the taxes levied and collected by the Union and lay down that the net proceeds therefrom are to be assigned to the States. Under this article no tax except estate succession duty in respect of property other than agricultural law has been levied by the Union. However, "article 269 has not so far been fully availed by the Centre to raise resources for the exclusive purpose of the States".[14]

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[13] Gulshan Sachdeva, *Economy of the North-East: Policy, Present Conditions and Future Possibilities,* New Delhi, Konark, 2000, p. 62.
[14] *The Commission on Centre-State Relations Report,* Part-ii, p. 373.

Thus, from the above discussion, it is clear that the Centre has a predominance over the States in the Legislative, Administrative and the Financial spheres in both normal and emergency situations.

(2) Federalism Applied to the North-East:

The North-Eastern region of India occupies a strategic position. The region has a heterogeneous character and each one of the States is not only a political unit but has also its own distinctive political texture and cultural identity. The North-Eastern States with their historical, geographical and cultural complexities and their economic underdevelopment as compared to the other mainstream Indian States, have a tendency towards alienation. It is often argued that the step-motherly treatment meted out to the people of the North-East is the only cause for the uprising in the region. The people have a serious feeling that the centre looks upon the North-East with some amount of distrust.[15] The dependence on central subsidies and financial privileges also accentuates feelings of frustration, when confronted with a centralized and unresponsive bureaucratic apparatus.

As far as the Centre-State relations are concerned, they cannot be understood without reference to the context. This is not only because of the strategic location, general political backwardness and geographical or ethnic differences of the North-Eastern States, but also because of the manner in which the States are grouped politically. The states of the North-East differed in their historical origins and their political development, and therefore special provisions had to be made, such as the Part B States (representing the former Indian states), the Part C States (representing the Centrally Administered areas) and some smaller Territories in Part D.

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[15] Ch. Mahinar, *Souvenir*, 19th Foundation Day of the Manipur People's Party, 26 Dec.1987- 1 Jan. Imphal, 1988, p. ii.

"Historically, successive legal and administrative decisions taken between 1874 and 1935 gave the areas of North-East a distinct identity. The British administration initially treated the hill areas as "Non-Regulated Areas", then declared them as "backward Tract" and, lastly, "Excluded Areas" and "Partially Excluded Areas"."[16]

The North-East is on the extreme corner of the country and so subject to the usual complexes of border areas- a sense of alienation, of being discriminated against, of being a "colony". "Besides, the link with the central heartland tends to be weak, whether geographically, economically, socially or culturally".[17] Keeping the country's vast and diverse culture in mind and the problems associated in integrating the whole units into one nation, the Constitution framers made an ardent effort and laid down certain special provisions for certain strategically located and socio-economically backward states. Article 371 of the Indian Constitution makes special provisions with respect to the states of Assam, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram.

The Indian Constitution, while the unitary bias of the original design was unmistakable, a remarkable degree of flexibility and pragmatism was also worked in. "It recognized the virtues of asymmetry in bringing about and maintaining union, particularly when it came to integration of states and people who had enjoyed considerable autonomy under the previous regime of central (British) paramountcy".[18] It must also be remembered that the new India was an amalgamation of "British India" and over five hundred princely states, and that institutions of governance were unevenly developed, particularly in remote and inaccessible regions. Thus in a social

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[16] Gulshan Sachdeva op. cit., New Delhi, Konark, 2000. p. 1.

[17] K. Saigal, *Federal Democracy and Pluralism in the North-East*, in Nirmal Mukarji and Balveer Arora (ed.), op. cit. p. 215.

[18] Balveer Arora, op. cit. pp. 71-72.

system characterized by what Francine Frankel describes as "asymmetrical obligations among unequals", special status and multilevel arrangements encountered no conceptual objections".[19] According to Balveer Arora, the whole debate on special status is a basic asymmetry arising from the simultaneous operation of the federalizing process in two different directions: a) provinces which were part of British India gained a federal existence through the decentralization process, as a unitary state rearranged itself into its ethno-linguistic components and b) states which were having a prior sovereign and quasi-sovereign existence, who interpreted their accession as being a voluntary compact, accepted as much for geopolitical reasons as for the promised nature and scope of the association.[20]

The North-East because of its geographical isolation and scant financial resources has accentuated the dependence on centrally assisted development. The repeated assurances and the promise of financial packages (which have never seen the light of day) only serve as catalysts in compounding political alienation. In this seemingly intractable situation, the restoration of confidence will require a firmer commitment in the federal principle. Thus special status, unique relationships to meet specific needs and non-uniformity should be given top priority in the overarching requirements of cohesion of the North-Eastern states.

"The concept of special status was extended and given a permanent constitutional niche by the Thirteenth Amendment (1962) which formally introduced 'special provisions' for the north-eastern state of Nagaland under article 371 A." [21] Apart from conferring validity and protection to pre-existing laws, the main features

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[19] Francine Frankel and M. S. A. Rao (eds.), *Dominance and State Power in Modern India*, Delhi, OUP, 1989, Vol. 1, p. 1.
[20] Balveer Arora, op. cit. p. 80.

[21] *Ibid*, p. 80.

of this provision were the protection of local identity through restrictions on immigration and a preferential financial regime. Specifically, Naga customary law, religious or social practices, and ownership of transfer of land and its resources could be modified only with the approval of the Naga legislatures. The Thirty-Sixth Amendment (1975) made use of article 371 to carve out special provisions of Sikkim. Initially Sikkim was incorporated in the into the Indian Union under the Thirty-Fifth Amendment (1974). Special provisions for Mizoram to provide for the safeguard of Mizo customary law and religious/social practices is enumerated under article 371G.

Under article 244 of Indian Constitution, there are two distinct charters of decentralization, one for the tribal areas of North-East India (the Sixth Schedule) and the other for the specified areas elsewhere (the Fifth Schedule). The Sixth Schedule, which covers Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram, is a much more elaborate arrangement for establishing councils for self-government in autonomous districts. However, according to Balveer Arora, "while they formally constitute a veritable third tier of government, their full potential has not been realized in practice".[22] In a similar tone, Roy Burman writes that it "represents more of a political rhetoric than systemic devolution of power and functions".[23] He considers that the Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) have contributed little towards democratization and the Sixth Schedule itself, on the whole, seems to have served as a social fridgidaire. Above these, the downward extension of the federal principle in the recent times have gone beyond Sixth Schedule on crucial points of administrative and financial autonomy, thereby drawing further attention to its shortcomings.

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[22] Balveer Arora, in Balveer Arora and Douglas V. Verney (ed.), op. cit. p. 85.
[23] Roy Burman, "Federalism in Perspective: Problems and Prospects for North-East India". Mainstream, August7, 1993, p. 9.

Indian federal system took a new turn in the 1980s when the Centre felt increasingly constrained to intervene directly in one state after another. The gradual erosion of the capabilities of states to cope with internal challenges through indiscriminate central interference led to the growth of extra-constitutional forces and arenas of conflict. Referring to demands for greater autonomy from Punjab and elsewhere former Prime Minister Narasimha Rao is reported to have said: "If some people think that within the Indian Constitution an amount of autonomy which meets their aspirations is possible, then that is what we have to explore".[24]

The historical and cultural complexities of the North-Eastern states, with their tenuous economic and terrestrial links with the rest of India, further heightened the trends towards alienation. "The attitude of 'us' and 'they' very much prevalent in the existing attitudes, has to change into a cooperative and systemic attitude where a deliberate attempt has to be made to depart from the British 'divide and rule' to 'unite and serve'.[25] Thus attempts have to be made to look closely into the future and discover the kinds of India, and its North-Eastern part, that are likely to emerge. Towards fulfilling this end, the broad historical forces which are at work, and the peculiar facts of the social, cultural and political reality of the North-East should be given top priority. Only then can the federal polity, acting in decentralized and contextual paradigm, make of the North-East a vibrant and dynamic entity of the nation.

II. President's Rule in Manipur:

Regional parties echo one of the demands of traditional federalism, i.e. State's rights. They call for a reformulation of Centre-State Relations. Many of the political

[24] Cited by Nirmal Mukarji, "Punjab: Problem or Opportunity", *Mainstream*, October 24, 1992, p. 9.
[25] K. Saigal , "Federal Democracy and Pluralism in the North-East", in Balveer Arora and Douglas V. Verney (ed.), *op. cit.* p. 233.

parties maintained that the crisis in the North-East is due to the overcentralised federal system of India.[26] However, the cause of tensions between the Centre and the North-East is almost similar to that of other States. The main causes may be the manner in which power is distributed between the Centre and the States where the Centre has overwhelming powers over the States. The Emergency Provisions or the Centre's special powers have been a very powerful instrument in increasing the powers of the Centre and making the Indian Government more unitary than federal. These provisions can be categorized as: i) National Emergency (Article 352), if the President of India is satisfied that a grave emergency exists, whereby the security of India or of any part of its territory is threatened, whether by war or external aggression or internal disturbance, he may by Proclamation make a declaration to that effect. Such proclamation of Emergency may be made before the actual occurrence of war or of any such aggression or disturbance if the President is satisfied that there is imminent danger thereof; ii) Failure of the constitutional machinery of the state and the imposition of President's Rule thereof under Article 356. This provision of the constitution is one of the most controversial issues in Centre-State relations; iii) Financial Emergency (Article 360), if the President is satisfied that a situation has arisen whereby the financial stability or credit of India or any part of the territory thereof is threatened, he may by a proclamation make a declaration to that effect.

The proclamation of emergency has thus reduced the powers of state governments since the executive power of the Union extends to giving directions to the states. During this period, Parliament can make laws on any subject included in the State list. During Emergency, it undermines not only democratic rights but also

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[26] C.P. Bhambri, *Politics in India 1992-93*, Delhi, Shipra, 1993, p. 149.

obliterates the federal character of the state and thus the federal traits of the Constitution are almost overshadowed. Madhu Dandavate feels that there has been complete destruction of the federal structure of our Constitution with the proclamation of emergencies.[27] It is therefore evident that there is a tremendous concentration of powers at the Centre, especially during emergencies. K. R. Bombwall observed that political institutions do not necessarily operate in complete and strict conformity with the terms of the constitution which create them and the Indian federal system is no exception to this general rule. Its actual working has aroused fears and provoked criticism in many quarters.[28] It is against this backdrop that the imposition of President's Rule under article 356 of the Indian Constitution in the context of Manipur is discussed.

Article 356 of the Indian Constitution is one of the most controversial issues in the Centre-State relations. Under Clause (1) this article, if the President of India on receipt of a report from the governor of a state or otherwise is satisfied that a situation has arisen in which the state Government cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the constitution, then he may by Proclamation:

a) assume to himself all or any of the functions of the Government of the State and all or any of the powers vested in or exercisable by the Governor or any body or authority in the state other than the Legislature thereof;

b) declare that the powers of the Legislatures of the state shall be exercisable by or under the authority of the Parliament of India;

c) make incidental and consequential provisions as appear to him to be necessary or desirable for giving effect to the objects of the proclamation,

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[27]Madhu Dandavate, "Anatomy of Centre-State Relations", in K. L. Johar & S. P. Rana (ed.), *Centre-State Tensions: A Study*, Delhi, Harman, 1992, p. 9.

[28] H. A. Gani, *op. cit.* p. 2.

including provisions for suspending in whole or in part the operation of any provision of the constitution relating to anybody or authority in the state.[29]

Thus, the ample powers vested in the Union to supersede a constitutional government in a state have far reaching implications and are opposed to the basic principles of federal democracy. The Sarkaria Commission Report has also drawn a very firm and clear conclusion that in a number of occasions where President's Rule was imposed under Article 356, it was brought in not due to the failure of the Constitutional machinery, but because for the partisan purposes and objectives of the ruling party at the Centre.[30] It is generally felt that this power has not always been used for legitimate purposes instead it has been used mostly to satisfy the power objectives of ruling parties whosoever, at the Centre.

In Manipur, President's Rule as such was imposed not only to serve the Centre's partisan purposes but also because of the constitutional crises that had come up due to the prevalence of political defections. President's Rule was for the first time imposed in Manipur on 25 October, 1967 even before the state become a full-fledged state of the Indian Union.

What happened in 1967 may be regarded as typical of Manipur politics. In September, the Congress ministry led by Koireng Singh lost its majority due to the defections of some of its supporters. Koireng Singh resigned. The newly formed United Legislature Front (ULF) by the Opposition members with the help of Congress defectors claimed a majority and a ULF ministry headed by Thambou Singh was sworn in. the durability of the new ministry was in doubt right from the beginning

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[29] D. N. Banerjee, *Some Aspects of the Indian Constitution*, Calcutta, World Press, 1962, pp. 103-4.
[30] Madhu Dandavate, art. cit. in K.L. Johar and S.P. Rana (ed.), *op. cit.* p.7.

owing to its delicate balance. Even before it could be put to test its strength, the Congress party claimed the return to its fold of a couple of defectionists and gave notice of no-confidence motion against the Thambou ministry. Meanwhile, the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker, both belonging to the Congress, resigned. So did the panel of Presiding Officers. No alternative candidates to hold these key posts were forthcoming. The result was that the Assembly was unable to meet.[31] This was when the 32 member House was equally divided in two groups, the Congress and the other, and none of the parties were prepared to put up the candidate for Speakership.

In 1969, Manipur again came under the President's Rule mainly because of the conflict among the Congress Legislature Party members. In September, eleven members from the ruling party defected to the Opposition camp and consequently, the opposition moved a no-confidence motion which was supported by 19 members. The opposition was not allowed to form the Government after the defeat of the Koireng Singh ministry on the plea that a state Government is not possible.[32] It was a case of dissolving the Assembly on partisan grounds when the ruling party at the Centre felt that it would be in a position to form alternative Ministry either by maneuvering defections or otherwise.

Thus, it proves that the august office of Governor is subjected to the political wishes of the party in power at the Centre. The governor being the Constitutional Head of the State and a representative or an agent of the Centre has an important role to play especially in maintaining the smooth relationship between the Centre and the State. However, there has been incidents whereby this high office has been misused a number of times causing strains in the Centre-state relations and blatantly denouncing

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[31] Sudhakar Bhat, *The Challenges of the North-East*, Bombay, Popular Prakashan, 1975, p. 53.
[32] J.R. Siwach, *Politics of President's Rule*, Shimla, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1979, p. 206.

the ideas of federal democracy. Therefore, over the years, a general impression has been doing the rounds in the Indian political system, that the "Centre" irrespective of the parties in power had misused the office of Governor in its attempt to control over the state Governments, more particularly in times and situations arising out of political differences between the Centre and the States.

The Sarkaria Commission also pointed out that the Governors in general are unable to shed their political inclinations, predilections and prejudices while dealing with different political parties within the state. And the result is that their decisions appear partisan and intended to promote the interest of the ruling party at the Centre. Dr. Ambedkar who fondly hoped in the Constituent Assembly that the Article 356 would remain a "dead letter" would have been horrified at the spectacle of imposition of President's Rule indiscriminately. Thus, it is not surprising when the Commission on the Centre-State Relations recommended that the "Article 356 should be used very sparingly, in extreme cases, as a measure of last resort, when all available alternatives fail to prevent or rectify the breakdown of the constitutional machinery. All attempts should be made to resolve the crisis at the state level before taking recourse to the provisions of Article 356. the availability and choice of these alternatives will depend on the nature of the constitutional crisis, its causes and exigencies of the situation".[33]

In a number of situations of political instability in the states, the government recommended President's Rule under this Article without exhausting all possible steps to induct or maintain a stable government. At the same time the Centre's intolerance to the recalcitrant regional parties reflected through the actions of the Governors only augmented to the problems of Centre-State relations.

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[33] *The Commission on Centre-State Relations Report*, Part-I, p. 178.

(1) President's Rule, 1992:

After the Assembly Elections, 1990, both the Congress and the newly formed United Legislature Front (ULF), comprising of non-Congress Parties, stake their claims to form the Government. however, the Governor invited the ULF and subsequently on 23 February, a new ministry was sworn in under the leadership of MPP stalwart R.K. Ranbir Singh marking and event in the political history of Manipur of being the first non-Congress Government in more than a decade. But doubts have been expressed on the question of "stability", given the past experience of coalition governments. From day one uncertainty prevails over the new government and testimony to it was the refusal of the Congress (S) nominee, one of the alliance partners, to take the oath of office on the Swearing Day itself. Meanwhile, the Congress hope to form an alternative government by means of defections and political maneuverings was devastated when its leader and former Home-Minister I. Tompok split from the Party with 13 other MLAs under the banner of "Manipur Congress".

Finally, in December 1991, the political situation was full-grown for another spell of President's Rule. Utter confusion prevailed in the Manipur Assembly and after more than a fortnight of expulsions, disqualifications and revocations of orders, it appeared that the 22 month old Ranbir Singh ministry is on the losing of its majority. Given the political intrigues and the Speaker's refusal to abide by the order of Supreme Court setting aside the disqualification of seven Congress (I) MLAs, the imposition of the President's Rule was the only way out of the constitutional crisis.[34] The session of the assembly scheduled to commence on 8 January was postponed.

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[34] *The Hindustan Times*, Editorial, January 9, 1992.

This left open two possibilities: time for both sides to manipulate fresh floor-crossing and perhaps a few days for the CM to consider calling for dissolution of the Assembly. The Governor had reportedly suggested to the Centre both the options of dissolving the Assembly and keeping it under suspended animation. The best course would have been for the Governor Chintamani Panigrahi, to call for a session of the House to provide for a trial of strength. But not allowing this to happen, and by imposing President's Rule, the Centre has exposed itself to the charge of playing partisan politics and enabling the Congress (I) to make a bid for power in the State.[35]

The Centre chose the President's Rule and kept the option of restoring popular government at an appropriate time. Finally on 7 January 1992, under the provisions of Article 356, President's Rule was imposed in Manipur and brought to a pre-mature close the reign of the ULF government. The immediate cause, however, was the desertion by five Janata Dal MLAs and also there was no sign of any party in position of forming an alternative ministry. Nonetheless, the imposition of President's Rule does not come as a surprise as recent developments in the State had steadily pointed towards this. It is the spectacle of politicians criss-crossing the floor of the Assembly in the pursuit of selfish aims that provides the justification for a spell of President's Rule.[36] It was a period during which the Government headed by R.K. Ranbir Singh was rocked by internal squabbles, scandals and large-scale corruption. But within months, a Congress (I) ministry under the leadership of R.K. Dorendro Singh was installed in power much to the surprise of the United legislature front leader R.K. Ranbir Singh, who was hoping that he would be invited by the Governor to form a new Government. Thus, the President's Rule was short lived and lasts only till 8

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[35] *The Indian Express*, Editorial, January 8, 1992.
[36] *The Statesman*, January 9, 1992.

April, 1992. Considering the support R.K. Dorendro had, he also somehow convinced the former CM R.K. Ranbir Singh of the Manipur People's Party (MPP) to support him, his tenure as CM was more or less a smooth sailing. But predictions proved wrong and Dorendro's ministry fell down on 31 December, 1993 and the people of Manipur were gifted with the President's Rule by the Centre on the eve of the New Year.

(2) President's Rule, 1994:

Manipur was placed under the President's Rule on 1 January, 1994 and the Assembly placed in a state of suspended animation following a spurt in Naga-Kuki clashes and worsening of law and order situation. That the New Year has brought such a step is an indication that the Centre has finally grasped the gravity of the situation existing in this sensitive border State.[37] It was the failure of the Mr. R.K. Dorendro Singh who was the Chief-Minister to deal effectively with the extremists and prevent the ethnic clashes between the Kukis and Nagas that finally led to the Centre's takeover of the State keeping the Assembly in suspended animation.

This was not the first time that a popular government had to be dismissed since the 1990 elections. We saw above that President's Rule was imposed in 1992, it was the spectacle of politicians criss-crossing the floor of the assembly in pursuit for selfish aims that provided the justification for such a drastic step.[38] R.K.Dorendro was himself heading a coalition of sorts and there was no guarantee that he could be in a position to ensure stability. Despite of his success in keeping his folks together, his continuance in the office, in the final analysis would depend on the speed with which he restored normal conditions in the State. The Kuki-Naga feuds had assumed serious

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[37] *Patriot*, January 3, 1994.
[38] *The Hindu* (Madras), Editorial, January 6, 1994.

proportions. There have been reports that in his efforts to contain the Naga-Kuki schism he did not get full support from his Cabinet colleagues who were only waiting for an opportunity to let him down.[39] The State Administration had a hard time in dispersing and rehabiliting thousands of refugees already living in the camps. The Government had failed miserably to prevent the massacre of innocent persons although it was the contention of Mr. Dorendro Singh that the Centre did not respond to his plea for more para-military forces to deal with the situation promptly and in the desired measure.

Nevertheless, the Centre had to think twice before taking drastic action for it was a Congress (I) Government that was ruling the State and there was no certainty either that when once President's Rule was revoked the same party would be in a position to form the Government. but then the Centre could not be a passive spectator for ever. The Kuki-Naga clashes have left over 270 dead during the year and hit about 100 villages. Minister of State for Internal Security Mr. Rajesh Pilot, who had been visiting Manipur to oversee the situation was apparently exasperated by the state of drift and virtual inaction by the State Government in containing the insurgency.[40] Thus the declaration of President's Rule was necessitated by the dismal failure of the six-party coalition Government led by the Congress (I) to arrest the rapid deterioration in law and order in the State. Central intervention was in fact widely expected when it become clear that the faction-ridden Dorendro Singh Ministry was thoroughly incompetent to deal with either the bloody Kuki-Naga ethnic conflict in the hills or the frequent outbreak of violence elsewhere.[41] The Centre seems concerned over the deteriorating law and order situation which ultimately led to the imposition of

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[39] *The Hindu* (Madras), Editorial, January 6, 1994.

[40] *The Pioneer*, January 1, 1994.

[41] *The Indian Express*, Editorial, January 3, 1994.

President's Rule in Manipur. Almost the first thing that the Governor of Manipur, Lt. Gen. V.K. Nayar, has done soon after the imposition of President's Rule was to order a massive crackdown on the insurgents in all the five hill districts.[42]

The general opinion however, at that time was that the President's Rule inevitable though may be to bring stability to a State in circumstances where the Government did not govern and extremism is rife, yet every attempt must be made to restore a broad-based popular government as early as possible.

However, when there was no sign of any improvement in the law and order situation and the Congress (I) also had not yet demonstrated that it has the will and the capacity to govern when once the President's Rule is over, the Parliament had approved the extension of President's Rule for another six months with the belief that the extension should give an opportunity to the Governor to restore normality without political interference.[43] But finally, after almost a year, the revocation of the President's Rule came on 13 December1994 with the formation of a Congress Government headed by Rishang Keising and lasts till the next Assembly elections in February 1995.

The ambiguity of the expression if "a situation has arisen in which the Government of the state cannot carried on in accordance with the provisions of the constitution" has led to the Article's (356) persistent misuse by all governments at the Centre.[44] This is evident from the fact that the President's Rule has so far been imposed more than 100 times, having its own share by almost all the states of India. Over the years and especially after the demise of the era where the Congress party used to rule both at the Centre and the States, the use and misuse of Article 356 under

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[42] *The Hindu* (Madras), Editorial, January 6 1994.
[43] *The Hindu* (Madras), Editorial, May 13 , 1994.
[44] B.L. Fadia, *Indian Government and Politics, op. cit.* p. 155.

different political and social situation have tremendously increased. Thus, the concept of this Article provided by the framers of our Constitution, as an exceptional power and should be used only as a last resort stands unattended. The Article has not only become an area of tensions in the Centre-State relations but also one of the most abused and criticized one. In S.R. Bommai's case the Court has cleary subscribed to the view that the power under Article 356 is an exceptional power and has to be resorted to only occasionally to meet the exigencies of special situations.[45]

In the above two cases of President's Rule in Manipur, the situations were of different nature. In the first case, it was due to the defections that led the ministry to a minority. The ministry was also not given the opportunity to prove its strength on the floor of the House. However, the installation of a Congress led Ministry within few months speaks in volume about the partisan role of the Party at the Centre materialized through its agent in the State i.e. the Governor. The second case where the President's Rule was imposed was on the ground that the ministry has not been able to solve the ongoing ethnic clashes between the Nagas and the Kukis and the relative failure to maintain the law and order. Mr. V.K. Nayar may have kept the august office with dignity by resigning from the post but the revival of the Assembly and the installation of Rishang Keishing (the Governor in his report stated that Rishang Keishing had links with the Naga militants) as Chief-Minister brings to the point that the Congress Party, the Party in power at the Centre tried to bulldoze its way into power so as to preside the February elections at a time when the Congress lost its base in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka.[46]

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[45] Durga Das Basu, *Introduction to the Constitution of India*, VII Edition, Delhi, Prentice-Hall, 1995, p.344.

[46] Kumari Chingakham Shachi, *op. cit.* p. 77.

Thus, the Governor as a representative of the Centre has an important role to play especially in relation to the smooth functioning of the Centre-State relations. However, there has been unfortunate experiences and this high office has been misused a number of times causing friction resulting in strained relations between the Centre and the States. One possible reason for the repeated abuse of this article could be that the Governors were not able to shed off their political inclinations or affiliations. And this has helped in creating a general impression over the years that the Centre irrespective of the parties in power had misused the office of the Governor in its attempt to exercising its control over the state governments. Whatever the case may be, one could not undermine the provision of article 356. It is evident from the fact that despite its bitter historical experiences the Commission on Centre-State Relations has not recommended the deletion of this article. It has emphasized that the article 356 should be used very sparingly and as a measure of last resort in case of genuine breakdown of constitutional machinery in the state.[47] In order to restore some elements of constitutional morality which is the imperative need of the hour, article 356 – "a giant which should be watched carefully"- need to be taken and used in the spirit espoused by the framers of our constitution as a "dead letter" and a "last resort", then only this article could show its side of human face.

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[47] Soli J. Sorabjee, "Sarkaria Report and Central Rule", *The Indian Express*, (New Delhi), February 9, 1988.

CHAPTER FIVE

ELECTION 2000: A FUZZY VERDICT

Whether one likes it or not, virtually no one is completely beyond the reach of some kind of political system. Everyone is involved in some fashion at some time in some kind of political system. Politics has become an unavoidable fact of human existence. For whether humankind will be blown to smithereens or will design political arrangements that enable our species to survive is now determined by politics and politicians.[1] A political system may have a wide range of parties, there might exist one-party, two-party or multi-party system. Parties are the single most important factor in any political system. However, political systems in which diverse parties compete freely for mass electoral supports are increasingly hard to find in the less developed nations but India, despite hair-raising traumas and persisting threats to open competitive politics, still qualifies.[2] Thus, in India we find parties at the center of Indian polity, as they are all in other major democracies. However, parties vary greatly in their support base and in their performance. Parties may be rooted in the religion, region, and caste or in specific issues or in general ideologies or based on leadership charismatic individuals.

India has experienced every type of party.[3] Political parties have expanded their reach since it represented an articulated the public opinions. And elections have acquired a political salience in democratic politics in India, all the political aspirations, demands and competing claims to power must be mediated of elections are one of the few reliable

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[1] Robert Dahl, *Modern Political Analysis*, Prentice Hall International Edition, Fourth Edition, 1984, p. 1.
[2] James Manor, "Parties and the Party-System" in Partha Chatterjee (ed.), *State and Politics in India*, New Delhi, OUP, 1998, p. 92.
[3] David Butler, Ashok Lahiri and Prannoy Roy, "India Decides: Elections 1952-1995" in Partha Chatterjee (ed.), *op. cit.* P. 144.

indicators to read public opinion and to measure the changes in the larger environs of politics.[4] And thus, election has become the backbone of parliamentary democracy.

As all the institutions which mediated between political power and the people have collapsed one after another, the institution of elections continued to be one of the few bridges available for political traffic.[5] Elections are considered as the indicators to measure changes in politics and to read the public opinion. And it is against this backdrop that the February 2000 Assembly election is discussed and analysed here to understand the complexities of the relationship between election and politics. The regional parties have played leading roles and there is a strong conviction that the national parties cannot serve the interests of the people of the state. The dominance of local concerns in the calculations of smaller state-based parties is not unusual, nor is it wholly restricted to them. It is important to remember that in most of the North-Eastern states, the Congress/anti-Congress cleavages remain as a dominant factor in decisions relating to the choice of alliance partners,[6] and Manipur which have traditionally demonstrated flexibility of the political parties is no exception. The relationship between centrist forces and the regional forces is so fluid that it is difficult to say which is right and when.[7] Whatever the matter it is, this round of elections has shown that the regional parties have an advantage over the national parties in the state's politics.

I. The Campaigning: On January 8, 2000, the Election Commission (EC) moved into election mode once again and announced the scheduled for holding elections in Manipur.

[4] Yogendra Yadav, "Reconfiguration in Indian Politics: State Assembly Elections 1993-1995" in Partha Chatterjee (ed.), *op. cit.* p. 179

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] Balveer Arora. , "Regional Aspirations and National Cohesion: Federal Coalitions in the 1998 Lok-Sabha Elections", in *West-Bengal Political Science Review*, Vol.I., No. 1-2, January-December 1998, p. 66

[7] V. Venkatesan, "State Politics in North-East India: Emerging Trends and Theory Building", *Indian Journal of Political Science*, 1989, January-March, p. 134.

The state, despite its small size, went to polls in a phase manner on 12th and 22nd February, in view of the threat from separatist outfits to disrupt the exercise.[8] The seventh Assembly elections showed that violence has become the part and parcel of the polling process in Manipur.[9]

The outcome of the Assembly elections of February 2000 since the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) Government assumed office at the Centre confirms that as the states become effective arenas of choice, parties with a strong local base have an advantage. In the final analysis this round of elections belonged to the regional party – the Manipur State Congress Party.[10] In this election, everyone expected a low voter participation. " Election fatigue", it was thought, would affect the voters as Parliamentary elections were held less than six months ago.[11] Above all these, there were also serious boycott calls by various extremist groups in the state. Viewed in this context, the final voting figures in the state was impressive, in fact, the percentage was higher than that recorded during the Lok-Sabha elections. This is in keeping with the general trend of the last decade, with the states emerging as effective arenas of political decision-making.

(See Table:1)

Table:1. Voter's Turn out in Lok-Sabha & Assembly Elections:*

State	Lok-Sabha Elections				Assembly Elections		
Manipur	1991	1996	1998	1999	1990/91	1995/96	2000
% of voting	69.7	75.0	56.8	65.8	90.0	91.4	88.2

*Source: Centre for Study of Developing Studies (CSDS), Data Unit, Delhi.

[8] V. Venkatesan, "In Election", *Frontline*, February 4, 2000, p.35.

[9] *The Telegraph* (Calcutta), February 25, 2000.

[10] Yogendra Yadav with Sanjay Kumar and Oliver Heath, "Regional Parties to the Fore", *Frontline*, March 17, 2000, p. 127.

[11] CSDS Team, *Frontline*, *op. cit.* p. 129.

The increase in the turn out was substantial in Manipur. From the figure, by Manipur's standard, the voter turn out was marginally lower during this election than the previous two elections. However, a drop of two to three percentage points only shows that the poll boycott call given by the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) had very little impact. "Surprisingly the polling in the Naga dominated areas was more than 70 percent", State Chief-Electoral Officer D.S. Poonia said.[12] The NSCN, supported by the United Naga Council (UNC) of Manipur, the Naga Hoho, the All Naga Students" of Manipur (ANSUM) and other Naga bodies had given a call to boycott the Assembly elections in Manipur on the ground that "Nagas want a solution to the Indo-Naga problem and not election".[13] However, the turn out of voters surprised the administration and political observers who were expecting the poll boycott call to have severe repercussions. But the polling on 12 February in 27 out of 60 Assembly constituencies, which went to hustings in the first phase proved that the NSCN is out of touch with the public mood.[14]

It has been estimated that more than 70 percent turn out in the 27 Assembly constituencies which went to polls. According to the State Election Office, more than 50 percent polling was recorded in Ukhrul, a stronghold of the NSCN (IM) and home district of its General Secretary, Mr. Muivah. It would be facile, however, to interpret the Naga turnout as a rejection of its agenda and the NSCN itself. "The issues are separate. Let there be talks on the Naga national issue but also there be election as we must have our local MLA in the Assembly" said Ms. Rose Vashum, a Tangkhul Naga housewife. This

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[12] *Frontline, op. cit.* p. 20.
[13] *Deccan Herald*, February 16, 2000.
[14] *Ibid.*

time many Nagas preferred to exercise their franchise as individuals[15] and thus Naga voters defied the boycott call and turned up to exercise their political rights proving that the will of the people is supreme. "NSCN or no NSCN, the Naga public has proved that the will of the people is supreme, nobody can issue diktas which goes against the people's wishes", said a college teacher belonging to the Rongmei Naga tribe of Tamenlong district.[16] After all, with this election, the Manipur State Congress Party (MSCP) had upto a great extent gained in political stature.

(1) Pre-Election Scenario:

With the announcement of the election schedules by Election Commission of India, the small state in the North-Eastern region, Manipur, gears up for the Assembly elections and the political parties of all hues started preparing to face the battle of the ballot. As in ,other states, here too, new electoral alliances and poll-pacts have emerged in order to get into the corridors of power.

In a significant development, and yet giving a surprise to the political observers, the Congress (I), which ruled the state for more than three decades until 1997, has for the first time decided to contest the elections in alliance with the Left parties in order to defeat the ruling MSCP.[17] The Congress (I)"s decision to go with the Left parties and specially with the Manipur People's Party – once its arch rival – only shows its downfall in the political sphere of the state. The Congress (I) - led six-party "Secular Democratic Front" (SDF) which comprised of Manipur People's Party, CPI, CPI (M), Janata Dal (Secular) and the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) was formed and decided to field common candidates in 24 key constituencies and have "strategic seat adjustments" in 29

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[15] *The Telegraph* (Calcutta), February 25, 2000.
[16] *Deccan Herald*, February 16, 2000.
[17] *Frontline*, February 18, 2000, p. 36

constituencies.[18] On the eve of the election, "Manipur Democratic Alliance" (MDA) led by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) with the Samata Party (SP) was also floated. On the other hand, the ruling Manipur State Congress Party had an electoral understanding with the Federal Party of Manipur (FPM) under the name "United Front of Manipur" (UFM). Thus the main fight for power was around these three important political formations namely the UFM, SDF and MDA.

The Congress (I), on the election eve, was in its worst-ever mess in the state since it received a grand drubbing in the last Lok-Sabha elections. In December 1997, the then Assembly Speaker, W. Nipamacha Singh left the Congress Party on the leadership issue and formed a regional party called the Manipur State Congress Party (MSCP). With this split, the faction-ridden Congress (I), with a strength of 15 legislators in the State Assembly lost its ability to work as a cohesive force and in the process lost its status as the main opposition party.[19] The Congress party which ruled the state for the greater part of its existence was in shambles, and it was with this fear that the Party decided to join hands with the Left and of all parties with its traditional rival the MPP.

As always, before any election in the North-Eastern states, the election eve was marked by defections, disqualifications and the politicians changing their parties etc. In Manipur where the politicians are notorious for the fickleness of their loyalty, permutation-combination game has been one of the dominant factors. Legislators changing sides for allurements or immediate advantages in their favour, is a common feature in Manipur.[20]

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[18] *Ibid.* p. 36.
[19] *Frontline*, February 4, 2000, p. 43.
[20] *The Statesman*, (Delhi), 8 February, 1991.

In April 1999 a prominent Kuki leader Ch. Doungel, defected from the MPP to join the BJP. And later in that month, the BJP National President Kushabhau Thakre in his maiden visit to Imphal roped in former Congress (I) Chief-Minister R.K. Dorendro Singh and several others.[21] In the light of this development and the joining of some prominent leaders from parties like MPP and Congress (I), Manipur may now witness the emergence of the BJP as a political force, adding to this is the advantage of having a BJP-led coalition government at the Centre. Since a change of guard at the Centre has always altered political equations in Imphal.[22] One ex-Minister and sitting MLA Morung Makunga, on the eve of the election resigned from the ruling MSCP to join the Indian National Congress.

Apart from these many party workers also shifted their political colour enbloc mostly due to the pulling and pressures during the selection of party candidates. The present state BJP President H. Bhubon Singh was the President of MPP before joining the BJP. Thus shifting of loyalties by politicians is not a new phenomena rather it is one of the most common feature in the politics of Manipur.

(2) Poll Violence:

The fact that the people cannot exercise their franchise freely and fearlessly in the elections without the backing of heavily armed security forces not only erodes the faith in the Parliamentary system of government but also shakes the very foundation of our democratic polity.[23] The holding of Assembly elections in two phases in Manipur was solely due to the arrangement of the deployment of security forces. But there is no guarantee that even the massive deployment of the security forces would ensure free and

[21] *Frontline*, February 4, 2000, p. 43.
[22] *North-East Sun*, June 1-14, 1999. See also, Frontline, 4 February, 2000.
[23] *The Hindu* (Delhi), February 15, 2000.

fair polls if the poll-related violent incidents during the recent elections are of any indications.

In one incident, the escort party of the BJP candidate for the Chandel Assembly constituency, Mr. Thongkholun, was ambushed killing three party workers and two personnel of the Manipur Rifles.[24] Yet in another poll-related incident, armed Kuki militants reportedly were paid by different candidates and political parties, which strucked at two different places in Churachandpur and Chandel districts, killing six and injuring several other.[25] There were apprehensions among the people that the political parties and candidates hired and bribed the "organised groups"[*] to ensure their victory in the elections by using unfair means.

"Every political party has connections with some militant group or the other to seek protection", says a political science professor of Manipur University.[26] One thing very unique about this round of elections is that, if the Nagas have surprised by turning out to vote in large numbers, the Kukis have also stung a surprise, incidents of poll violence were reported only from Kuki dominated areas, which was not anticipated by the administration and the election authorities.[27]

However, elections were free, fair and peaceful in Imphal's seven seats except for the some incidents of proxy voting, there was no report of violence from these constituencies except for minor scuffles between workers of rival candidates.[28] In the rural constituencies of the valley, various candidates engaged armed thugs to rig the

[24] *Deccan Herald*, February 16, 2000.
[25] *Deccan Herald*, February 16, 2000.
[*] *Organized groups* could mean and applied to the underground outfits or factions also.
[26] *Deccan Herald*, February 13, 2000.
[27] *Deccan Herald*, February 16, 2000.
[28] *The Telegraph* (Calcutta), February 25, 2000.

polls. There were also instances of booth capturing by armed men.[29] Another trend that was noticed in the rural and the valley constituencies was the rivalry between villages. Candidates from larger villages did not allow candidates from other villages to even campaign in their respective areas.[30]

In the Kuki dominated constituencies in the hill districts the involvement of Kuki militants in the election process was cleary visible and there were instances in Henglep constituency of Churachandpur district where Kuki rebels held polling officials captive

Till the end of the polling to prevent them from reporting these malpractices to the authorities.[31] But if we go by Bihar's standard, it was comparatively a peaceful election.[32] One Janata Dal (United) candidate S.S. Songate was murdered by extremist on January 31and thus election was countermanded in Tipaimukh constituency. The boycott called by the underground NSCN (IM) failed to evoke any significant response.[33]

II. The Outcome:

(1) Parties Performance:

The results have routed KNA, NPP, and the Communists from state politics and have brought in the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) for the first time . And if there were another winner besides the MSCP, it is the BJP. Its tally of six seats in an Assembly of 60 is its best ever performance in the hill states of north-eastern India. Five of these seats came from the Meitei-dominated areas in the valley, the remaining seat came from the tribal-dominated hills. The Manipur peoples party (MPP), once a very strong and influential party, won only four seats but it has again failed to hold

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[29] *Ibid.*
[30] *Ibid.*
[31] *Deccan Herald*, February 25, 2000.
[32] *Deccan Herald*, February, 16, 2000.
[33] *Frontline*, March 17, 2000, p. 20.

its MLAs as three of them have jumped over the fence. The Congress Party once a dominant force could return with only 11 seats. Thus the election results not only confirm that the change of guard at the Centre influences the faith of the political parties in the state but also shows the unpredictable behaviour of the electorates.

(2) Elections and After:

Manipur went to poll to constitute its 7th assembly on 12 and 22 February 2000 respectively and the counting was followed elsewhere in the country, booth-wise counting was done, and this according to the official sources was to avoid delay and ensure proper figures booth wise.[34] "Elsewhere in the state, polling was by and large peaceful" said the Chief Electoral Officer D.S. Poonia. [35] security personnel's were deployed in all "sensitive" and "hyper-sensitive" areas of the state. Assam Rifles, Central Reserve Police Force, Border Security Force,Manipur Rifles and the India Reserve Battalion personnel's were deployed in various parts of Manipur valley.[36] Elections were held in 58 constituencies out of 60 because of the repoll in Henglep Constituency and the countermanding in the Tipaimukh. Elections to these two seats were held on 8 March, 2000.

As for the post-election violence's, over 100 employees from the Revenue Department and Deputy Commissioner's Office marched in protest against the criminalisation of politics and submitted a memorandum to the Governor demanding actions against MLA elect L. Jatra Singh on 1 March, 2000. some of the MLA's workers had beaten up Returning Officer of Khangabok constituency, P. Nabachandra Singh for not issuing him an election certificate. The R.O. was hospitalized with two fractured

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[34] *The Telegraph* (Calcutta) 25 February, 2000.
[35] *The Telegraph* (Calcutta) 23 February, 2000.
[36] *Ibid.*

ribs.[37] Yet in another incident a BJP National Secretary in Charge of Manipur P. B. Acharya was assaulted by two unidentified gunmen. Sources said five persons arrived at Hotel Anand where Archarya was staying. While three of them waited outside the Hotel, two barged inside his room when he was talking to state BJP leaders M. Bhorot Singh, R.V. Shirang and the two workers and assaulted Archarya and asked him to leave the state immediately. However, the BJP officials declined to comment on the incident.[38]

(3) The Hung Assembly:

Since 1972, in Manipur, no party has secured an absolute majority. In these elections, parties took this point into consideration and formed big unwieldy alliances.[39] The major political alliances are the Manipur State Congress Party and the Federal party of Manipur's United Front (UF), Congress (I) led Secular Democratic Front (SDF) and BJP led Manipur Democratic Alliance (MDA). However, no party or alliance could secure a clear majority. The United Front came close but fell short. The small assembly has members of at least 11 parties, providing ample scope for political permutations and combinations. Thus it could be well said that the final results in Manipur showed all the attributes that have characterized electoral politics in the state since it attained statehood in 1972: "high turn out political fragmentations and the hung Assemblies".[40]

(4) The Road to Power:

The analysis of the final results showed that the three years old, breakaway group of the Congress, MSCP has established that it was the authentic heir to the Congress

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[37] *The Telegraph* (Calcutta), 2March, 2000.
[38] *The Telegraph* (Calcutta), 2 March , 2000.
[39] *Frontline*, 14 April, 2000.
[40] *Frontline,* 14 April, 2000.

legacy. The MSCP fared well in the valley and also won five seats in the hill areas thus establishing itself as an all Manipur Party. (See Table:2)

Table:2. Party-wise Performance in the Valley and Hill Constituencies:*

Party	Seats Contested	Valley Seats	Hill Seats	Total
MSCP	56	18	05	23
FPM	36	02	04	06
INC	44	07	04	11
MPP	30	04	00	04
CPI	14	00	00	00
JD(S)	02	01	00	01
BJP	38	05	01	06
JD(U)	17	00	01	01
NCP	40	01	04	05
RJD	13	00	01	01
SMT	34	01	00	01
Independents	40	01	00	01

After the final results came and as the process of government formation unfolds, the United Front of Manipur (UFM) could garner a majority and thus making the coalition tally increased to 39 without the BJP. Of these, 23 are from the MSCP, six from its coalition partner, Federal Party of Manipur (FPM), three from the break away nationalist Congress Party (NCP), one from the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), one from the Janata Dal (Secular) and one Independent. After they jumped the fence, the MPP MLAs had formed the MPP (K). similarly the three MLAs of the NCP have announced the formation of NCP (O). The remaining NCP MLA Chungkhokai Doungel, in a quite interesting development, had also announced the formation of NCP (D) and then joined the Ruling MSCP.[41] Thus, shifting loyalties and changing the political colours have not only become the principal activities of the political leaders, it also at the same time exposes their lust for power which ultimately led to the formation of "jumbo" size

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*Centre for Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Data Unit, Delhi.

[41] *Assam Tribune*, March 10, 2000.

ministries at the cost of the public money. However, despite the ruling United Front of Manipur (UFM) having garnered a majority in the process of government formation, yet the political scene in Manipur was still hazy. The Manipur State Congress Party wanted to speed up the process of government formation and hold the swearing-in-ceremony in a couple of days since the party felt that it was risky to prolong the swearing in ceremony as its MLAs are prone to "defection".

At last after rounds of political manoeuvering, the MSCP could succeed and Nipamacha Singh rides again. Consequently, the ruling coalition government led by Nipamacha has returned to power once again. Three year old MSCP has won 23 out of 58 seats on its own despite the fact that during the period of its rule in the state i.e. from December 1997 to January 2000, Manipur's law and order was at the lowest ebb.

However, the Nipamacha government claimed that the brutal, inhuman and mindless violence and killings that have been taking place in Manipur have been defused during the regime of Mr.Nipamacha Singh as the Chief-Minister of Manipur. "The most remarkable achievement of this government is the complete halt of the ethnic violence between the Zomis and the Kukis in the Churachandpur district".[42] Further emphasizing the importance of a regional party, the party maintains that, for the first time since independence one M.P. from a small state like Manipur has been included in the highest circles of the Prime Minister, Home Minister and other ministers and involved in high level consultations of political as well as developmental issues relating to the state of Manipur.This has become possible because its M.P. Shri Th.Chaoba Singh was being

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[42] "The Objectives and Achievement of Manipur State Congress Party", in *The Objectives of Manipur State Congress Party*, 26 August 1999, Published by Shri S. Umananda Singh, General Secy. MSCP. Imphal, Manipur, p. 3.

elected from as regional party i.e. Manipur State Congress Party .[43] Thus, the Manipur State Congress Party with its solid stand for preserving the territorial integrity of Manipur, proved that it is the only party which can win the hearts of the people by emerging as the single largest party in the recent elections .

On March 2, Nipamacha takes oath alongwith a jumbo ministry amid high drama and against the wishes of the Governor Ved Marwah . Marwah initially postponed the swearing- in-ceremony due to differences over the size of the ministry. This may strain relations between the Chief Ministers office and the Raj Bhawan. Marwah did not smile ever once during the 90- minute ceremony .[44] Battling for survival, Nipamacha Singh has inducted a 34 member council of ministers – the biggest ever cabinet in the state's political history – in a bid to gain "stability". He has given the ministerial post to 34 of the 39 of the United Front of Manipur (UFM) legislators.[45] Of the 34 ministers, 23 are of the cabinet rank, 5 are the ministers of state with independent charge and 6 are ministers of state. Of the 23 MSCP legislators 22 have been made ministers. Five of the six Federal Party of Manipur (FPM) legislators, three of the four breakaway NCP legislators and the two of the three breakaway MPP legislators have got the ministerial berths. An RJD legislator and a woman independent member have also found place in the ministry. As many as 20 members were for the first time venturing into the 7th Manipur Assembly to try their political skills amidst the old horses of Manipur politics. The return of many of the politicians who had their stint in the Assembly at least once or more (every time under a party which is different from their previous ones) proves that political personalities overshadowed the ideologies of parties (See Table:3).

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[43] "Achievements and Commitments", Published by the President, MSCP, Bishnupur District, p. 5.
[44] *The Telegraph* (Calcutta), March 3, 2000.
[45] *The Telegraph* (Calcutta), March 3, 2000.

Conclusion:

The first Assembly election of the century has concluded. The Seventh Assembly started its functions. With that a final seal has been put on the inability of the coalition government in the state. Democracy has done well in the Indian politics and the most significant sign is the increasing faith of the weaker sections in asserting their right to vote. Regional politics has flourish in the periphery signifying the reality of Central government showing insensitivity to the regional identity and the aspirations.[46]

Various calls for the boycott and the resort to violence have not deterred the urban or rural voters of Manipur from exercising their constitutional rights. They turned out in large numbers to elect their representatives. They have not been impressed with the talks of a stable majority since stable majorities could turn out to be an authoritarian rule. They rather prefer stability of programmes. For them change of the party affiliations does not make a difference.

By now familiar faces are seen wearing different party tags. In this election, the voters have cleary shown their preferences for a wider consensus politics. With the "region-centric" politics is strengthened in the emergence of regional politics in India, the perspective that led the founding Fathers to design a centralized system has outlived its utility. In this context, the MSCP and its regional allies should try at its best to come up to the expectations of the electorate since the emergence of the regional parties not only influence the local politics but has also played an important role in the national politics. The decline of Congress and the dramatic rise of the MSCP within the political limits compelled and make the Congress to forge a political alliance even with the MPP, its

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46 Kamala Prasad, "Electoral Verdict at the Millennium-End", *Mainstream* , 30 October 1999, p. 5

arch rival, only shows that the MSCP is becoming a political force in the state to be reckoned with.

But, in the politics of Manipur with its previous experiences, no one could safely come to any conclusion about the disability and stability of the government. Thus, for the Chief-Minister, W. Nipamacha Singh, the main task is to keep its folks together and he should be vigilant enough and at the same time he cannot take for granted the role of the opposition members and their every move should be monitored. Then only should he be able to get some peace.

After all is said, as the United Front Government begins its second innings in office, the political atmosphere shows no change. In actual term, there is almost the same council of ministers and what makes this time unique is the jumbo size ministry in a poor state like Manipur at the cost of the public money. Reflecting on the ministry formation of Manipur one paper wrote in its editorial: "In a country that is short of nearly every essential commodity, there is only one product that we stock in excess: *ministers* ...Manipur remains the champion in the excess minister states..." [47]

Sensing the problem of having a jumbo ministry and its possible burden on the public exchequer, the other newspaper reports that "the jumbo size ministry sworn in yesterday, the salaries (revised) paid to the government employees, pay and allowance of the ministers and MLAs means that the state has to bear an expenditure of approximately Rs. 72 to 75 crores every month. This undoubtedly is proving to be a nightmarish experience for the state finance ministry at the end and the beginning of every month." [48] Manipur Pradesh Congress President, Radhabinod Koijam much before the second round

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[47] *The Hindustan Times* (Delhi), March 4, 2000.
[48] *The Sangai Express* (Imphal), March 4, 2000.

of elections anticipated the economic crisis of the state. He opines that "any party which govern Manipur after this round of elections will have to take certain unpopular decisions to tight over the economic crisis in the state". Blaming the Nipamacha government, he further said that "the new ministry would have to contend with a plethora of economic problems, including an empty exchequer".[49]

The task before the new government is endless. Nipamacha Singh has to do justice to the people of Manipur. The electorates are expecting something substantial from the new government and it must ensure that the development of the state gets top priority. However, with defection not a new thing in Manipur politics and power-hungry politicians not averse to changing their colours and moreover the Secular Democratic Front (SDF) and the Manipur Democratic Alliance (MDA) with BJP lurking in the wings, Nipamacha should try to convince the electorate and its colleagues that his government is a government for the welfare and the benefit of the people. Otherwise, he may have to pay a heavy price when they appear again before the People's Court. Perhaps, for now, it would be better to keep one's fingers crossed since, anything could happen anytime in the murky politics of Manipur.

Table: 3 Elected Members of the 7th Manipur Legislative Assembly 2000.*

SL	Name	Party	Constituency	Remarks
1	K. Tomba Singh	MPP	Khundrakpam	Fresher
2	W. Thoiba Singh	FPM	Heingang	Minister
3	Basanta Kumar	SP	kshetrigao	Ex-Member
4	S. Dhananjoy Singh	MSCP	Thongju	Sitting MLA
5	H. Bidur Singh	MSCP	Keirao	Minister
6	S. Chandra Singh	MPP	Andro	Sitting MLA
7	P. Achou Singh	MSCP	Uripok	Ex-Minister
8	L. Bheigyachandra Singh	FPM	Keishamthong	Fresh
9	H. Bhubon Singh	BJP	Singjamei	Fresher
10	R.K. Dorendro Singh	BJP	Yaiskul	Ex-CM

[49] *The Telegraph* (Calcutta), February 16, 2000.

11	Ksh. Biren Singh	MSCP	Lamlai	Minister
12	H. Borobabu Singh	BJP	Wangkhei	Ex-Speaker
13	Kh. Chandra Singh	BJP	Sekmai (SC)	Fresher
14	L. Chandramani Singh	MSCP	Patsoi	Dy. CM
15	O. Joy Singh	MPP	Langthabal	Ex-Minister
16	W. Leima Devi (W)	Ind.	Naoria Pakhanglakpa	Fresher
17	W. Nipamacha Singh	MSCP	Wangoi	C.M.
18	Th. Biren Singh	MSCP	Nambol	Fresher
19	Y. Jiten Singh	MSCP	Oinam	Minister
20	K. Govindas Singh	MSCP	Bishnupur	Minister
21	L. Kerani Singh	INC	Moirang	Fresher
22	Md. Allauddin	NCP	Lilong	Ex-Minister
23	L. Tomba Singh	MSCP	Thoubal	Minister
23	Dr. Nimaichand Luwang	INC	Wangkhem	Sitting MLA
24	M. Okendro Singh	INC	Heirok	Sitting MLA
25	M. Manihar Singh	INC	Wabagai	Ex-Member
26	N. Nimai Singh	INC	Kakching	Ex-Minister
27	M. Kunjo Singh	MSCP	Hiyanglam	Minister
28	K. Ranjit Singh	BJP	Sugunu	Fresher
29	A. Biren Singh	MSCP	Jiribam	Fresher
30	Hangkhanpao	RJD	Chandel (ST)	Ex-Minister,SittingMLA
31	Onjamang Haokip	NCP	Tengnoupal (ST)	Fresher
31	Rishang Keishing	INC	Phungyar (ST)	Ex-CM,Sitting MLA
32	C. Doungel	NCP	Saikul (ST)	Ex-Minister
33	L. Jonathan	INC	Karong (ST)	Sittimg MLA
34	M. Thohrii	INC	Mao (ST)	Sitting MLA
35	Thangminlien Kipgen	NCP	Kangpokpi (ST)	Ex-Minister
36	Mangaibou	MSCP	Tamei (ST)	Fresher
37	Samuel Jendai	MSCP	Tamenlong (ST)	Minister
38	Haokholet Kipgen	FPM	Saitu (ST)	Fresher
39	H. Lokhon Singh	MSCP	Khonthoujam	Minister
40	N. Bihari Singh	MSCP	Khurai	Minister
41	Prof. Gangumei Kamei	FPM	Nungba (ST)	Minister
42	Kh. Loken Singh	JD (S)	Sagolband	Fresher
43	Radhabinod Koijam	INC	Thangmeiband	Sitting-MLA,Ex.Dy CM
44	Kh. Amutombi Singh	INC	Mayang Imphal	Ex-Dy. CM
45	D. Shaiza	BJP	Ukhrul (ST)	Fresher
46	K. Raina	FPM	Tadubi (ST)	Fresher
47	L. Jatra Singh	MPP	Khangabok	Sitting MLA
48	M. Hemanta Singh	MSCP	Wanjing Tentha	Minister
49	V.Hangkhanlian	MSCP	Churachandpur (ST)	Minister
50	H. Sanayaima Singh	MSCP	Thanga	Ex-Member
51	S. Bir Singh	MSCP	Kumbi	Ex-MLA
52	S. Rajen Singh	MSCP	Lamshang	Sitting MLA
53	M. Chungkhosei Haokip	MSCP	Saikot (ST)	Fresher
54	Dr. Khasim Ruivah	FPM	Chingai (ST)	Fresher
55	N. Zatawn	JD (U)	Singhat (ST)	Fresher
56	SongchinKhup	MSCP	Thanlon (ST)	Minister
59	Ngushanglur	NCP	Tipaimukh (ST)	Fresher
60	T. Manga Vaiphei	INC	Henglep (ST)	Fresher

*Source: Polls Statistics, Manipur Information Centre, New Delhi.

" Something is required *simpler and more permanent, something which can be loved and trusted, and which can be recognized at successive elections as being the same thing as was loved and trusted before, and a party is such a thing."* *

<u>CONCLUSION</u>

India defies the textbook models of democracy. "They said democracy can never survive infancy in a poor society like India. It did. A multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-cultural polity like India, which did not have communal power-sharing arrangements should have disintegrated long ago. It is alive and voting. That itself is no mean achievement".[1] A polite authoritarian suggestion, "Don't you think that the government in this country can be run better if there were no parties or assemblies or elections?, brings forth a strongly negative response".[2] In India, the opposition to the democratic system is weaker among the deprived groups and stronger among the privileged sections of the society. The idea of democracy enhanced the imagination of those who are hitherto kept out of the mainstream. Political parties are not only providing space to them but also represent their interests in the social and political sphere. It has become a vehicle of mobilizing opinions and aspirations of a particular group or a community and thus become an indispensable part in the democratic set-up.

In India, the Indian National Congress which had emerged from the struggle for freedom exercised dominance in the politics of the nation. Since Independence the congress has been the only national party which has been at the helm of affairs both at

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* Graham Wallas, *Human Nature and Politics, Boston,* Houghton Mifflin Co., 1909, p.83.
[1] V.B. Singh and Yogendra Yadav, 'The Maturing of a Democracy', *India Today,* August 31, 1996, p. 36.
[2] *Ibid,* p. 39.

the Centre and in the States until 1967 when other parties began to emerge from its shadow. Thus, the year 1967 marked a defining moment in the history of political parties in Indian politics.

Since the late 1960s India had been witnessing the birth and growth of many political parties (national and regional) and therefore competition among the parties has increased dramatically. Before 1972 or so, incumbent parties at national and state elections usually achieved re-election. Since then, they have been usually thrown out. The Congress Party might even have lost in 1984 had Indira Gandhi's murder shortly beforehand not secured her son a landslide.[3] The norms had changed in a similar manner in the state level. Indians are adjusting psychologically to this transformation. The national and state party systems in India present a far more complex and variable picture today than they did in Nehru's time. In his days, politics was characterized not only by Congress dominance, but the pre-eminence, in both government and opposition, of parties which appeared to be national rather than regional in nature.

But the situation has changed now and the prospects of federalism are brighter since India entered a phase of coalition era with the sagging fortunes of the Gandhi dynasty, and with it, that of the Congress Party. However, India's federal system and its other formal institutions have had to cope up with mainly two trends. The first has been a political awakening among citizens, in which individuals and social groups have become more aware of their rights and interests, better organized, and more assertive, competitive and impatient as the years passed. The second is a process of political decay where parties failed to respond to pressures from society.

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[3] James Manor, 'Regional Parties in Federal Systems: India in Comparative perspective' in Balveer Arora and Douglas V,Verney (ed.), *Multiple Identities in Single State: Indian Federalism in Comparative Perspective*, New Delhi, Konark, 1995, p. 110.

Despite extreme difficulties generated by the awakening and decay, the survival of federalism or federal system itself is a notable achievement.

The framers of the Indian Constitution were anxious about national integration. This was entirely reasonable considering the post-Independence political situation that led to the partition of the subcontinent and the diversity of India, which among other things included over 500 princely states. They therefore included into the new system elements of British legacy of governance such as the provisions which permitted the central government to impose direct rule on states in the federal system. As Francine Frankel has noted, this "invited" the central authorities to intervene excessively in state affairs.[4]

In the light of this expression, the Centre should cautiously use article 356, and it should not try to serve its partisan ends by means of this Article. However, the large number of occasions on which President's Rule has been abused should not blind us to its creative potential when it is appropriately applied. It provides the federal system with a device that can help to sustain the politics of moderation and accommodation. But it can only perform that function if politicians in New Delhi refrain from depicting a regional extremist movement as a nefarious threat to national unity which deserves only to be crushed.[5] Feeling the sagacity of its potential, the Commission on Centre-State Relations did not suggest its deletion from the Indian Constitution despite the demands from some quarters.

The emergence of regional parties in the Indian political scene has changed the structure of party system in India viz a viz its federal system whereby the regional parties are becoming more vocal in their demand for more power and autonomy. The

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[4] Francine Frankel cited in James Manor, *op. cit.* p. 108.
[5] James Manor, *op. cit.* p. 126.

rise of the regional parties should not be seen as a threat to the national unity or to the survival of Indian federalism. However, it should be seen as a natural development and at the same time as a symptom of the fundamental problem that has lately afflicted the federal system: over-centralisation by national leaders and governments. The gradual politicization of the plebian layers of the society is another factor which is responsible for the reorientation of our federal system. During Indira Gandhi's time, she and her cohorts often suggested that since Congress represented the nation, opposition parties should be seen not just as anti-Congress but also as anti-national. The political situation then was different.

With the decline of the Congress Party and the subsequent emergence of other political parties from its shadow, one party dominance has become the thing of the past and India has finally ushered into the era of coalition politics. Minority governments, where the regional parties started having a vital role, have become the order of the day. It is in this backdrop that the study of regional parties becomes imperative.

Manipur, the 21st state of the Indian Union, has been over the years witnessing its own share of political fortunes and misfortunes. A former native state in north-east India, Manipur is ethnically, linguistically and culturally very different from mainland India.[6] These historical realities have been serving as the ideological and political basis for the underground movements and the emergence of regional parties in Manipur.

Among the regional parties the Manipur Peoples' Party was the most vocal and it has also been in power for quite sometime. The chief aim of the party is to

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[6] Vijyalakshmi Brara, *Politics, Society and Cosmology in India's North East*, Delhi, OUP, 1998, p. 241.

achieve politically, socially, economically, culturally, educationally and linguistically the well-being of the people of Manipur and to establish an egalitarian society based on democratic socialism. It has been a strong force in the politics of Manipur since its emergence in 1968.

However over the years, the party is losing its political hold in the politics of Manipur partly because of the fragile political nature of the state and mainly because of the leaders' fetish for power. Very often the party, on the election eve, with the only hope to be in power, entered into alliances with other political parties without studying at length the current political situation and diminished its own electoral prospects. This is apparent from the electoral performance of the party in the 2000 Assembly elections. Once a powerful political force in the state, the party however, could return only with four seats. Later on, three of its legislators joined the ruling camp, leaving the party only with one MLA who is also the President of the party.

All these factors and particularly the political behaviour of the leaders has led to the decline of the party's image and in the process people have lost their faith in the party. It is therefore important for the leaders, apart from being honest and sincere while respecting the ideals of the party, not only to look back and revive the party organization but also carefully analyse the ever changing political environment of Manipur before entering into any alliance or political formation. Only then the party could revive its image once again and it can be a force to reckon with in the corridors of power politics.

Various political parties at present are actively participating in the social, political and electoral process of Manipur. However, the parties operating here can rightly be put under the category of party which Maurice Duverger termed as

"personality-minor"[*] parties since almost all the parties are the product of dissident groups an factions of one party or the other. For instance, the present ruling party, the Manipur State Congress Party (MSCP), itself was formed by the breakaway group from the Indian National Congress. These kind of parties are emerging on and off in the eve of each and every elections and are centered around influential personalities and considerable number of people is attached to the charisma of these personalities for reasons of prestige or favour. It is for these reasons that parties in Manipur lack a true social sub-structure and for that reason they are neither strong nor stable in character. Marriage of convenience between competing groups is another main feature of Manipur politics and this usually involves a de-emphasis on doctrine and gives rise to a party or party alliance based upon a shared desire to govern. One glaring example is, in April 1992, a Congress (I) government was installed under the Chief-Ministership of R.K. Dorendro Singh. Barring four members – three belonging to CPI and one from the KNA – the rest of the 60 legislators have supported the ministry.

In Manipur, as elsewhere, parties competed with one another in championing the claims of diverse segments of the electorate and in gaining the maximum number of sympathizers and supporters to push through their programmes. It is therefore incumbent on the political parties to dovetail the interests of diverse sections of society as far as feasible. Aggregation of interests must go hand in hand with their articulation.

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*According to Maurice Duverger, a minor party is one which is minority minded and formed on the basis of linguistic, religious, ethnic and cultural interests. He further classified minor parties into two distinct categories, 'personality' and 'permanently' minor parties. The first type mostly originates as dissident groups and subsequently appears as separate organizations whereas the second type represents a modern variety of minor party by representing either a race or a region without accepting complete fusion with the national community. (See Maurice Duverger, political Parties: the Organisation and Activity in the Modern State, New York, John Wiley, 1954).

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An important characteristic of Manipur is its demographic variations. There is a vast cultural and religious difference amongst the various ethnic communities. Thus the religious and primordial ties are of particular importance in the electoral politics of Manipur. The effects of the ethnic-linguistic-regional differences, in particular those between the majority Meitei community and the Naga and Kuki-Chin tribal people, have been manifold.[7] Another major factor that has always mattered in Manipur's gold-fish bowl politics is the balance of legislators from the tribal areas and the valley.

Besides these, political personalities who often seem to be of greater import than their parties, also in a large sense contributed to the final electoral results. Defections and dissatisfaction in the party leadership that always led to party crisis is very common in Manipur politics. Rishang Keishing, who served the longest term as the Chief-Minister, was blamed on many occasions for not taking into confidence his cabinet colleagues in decision making. Carrying over part of his tribal heritage, Mr. Keishing has always played his cards close to his chest and the party dissidents are sore that he does not take them into confidence in most decisions. One former Minister reportedly blamed that 'Rishang airs his thoughts only in the bedroom to his wife'.[8]

Personal ambitions and desire for power often guide the politicians and so whenever there is an opportunity they change their party loyalty without any amount of regret. In fact the political affiliation of some members changed so quickly that it was impossible to determine whom they are supporting. However, politicians justify their defections on the ground that they defected to another party according to the

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[7] S.K. Chaube, *Electoral Politics in North-East India*, Delhi, University Press (India), p.103.
[8] *The Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), September 23, 1987.

desire and wishes of the electorate.[9] One possible reason for this is that there is a popular belief that if an MLA from a particular constituency belongs to the opposition, then no development work can be initiated. This belief, however, may be due to the lack of political consciousness among the electorates, but then also it cannot be refuted outrightly keeping the nature of politics of Manipur in mind and the delicate balance between the opposition and the ruling party caused by the fractured verdict after each and every election.

Thus of late, the people of Manipur seems to choose their representatives not on the basis of party or ideological lines but on the lines of who will be in the ruling party. This in the final analysis encouraged defections. Defections however were not unknown to Manipur since responsible government was established in 1948.[10] It has been part and parcel of Manipur politics. In a report to the Governor, Mr. Alimuddin, former Chief-Minister wrote - 'Defections in all cases have been found to emanate from the desire of bargain and putting political pressure to the ruling party for advantages which are extremely difficult to entertain'.[11] After all is said, one can ssay that "defections" as such has cast its shadow on the politics of the state and which is one of the main causes of political instability.

Many political analysts, drawing their inferences from the high voters' turn out, have assumed that the people of Manipur are politically conscious. It is indeed true that the voters turnout in Manipur is impressive enough. Despite the boycott call given by the underground outfits, the electorates of the state exercised their franchise

[9] Ksh. Bimola Devi, *Political Development and Integration of Manipur (1950-1977)*, Dissertation submitted to the Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi,1978. p.81.

[10] Th. Bira Singh, *Comrade Irabot*, Imphal, CPI Office, 1974, p. 13.

[11] K.C. Chauduri, 'Politics of Defections in Manipur', *North-Eastern Affairs - Annual*, Shillong, 1973, p. 91

in large numbers. However, the reason behind this high turnout is not because of their political consciousness. It is rather because of the social and cultural fabric that binds the people and the importance of the primordial ties between the candidates and the voters that have been an integral part of the society. The individual candidate rather than politics is seen as the source of power. In this politically fragile state where defections and political instability marked the political life, the presence of politically conscious electorate is the need of the hour. Politically conscious electorates can only be the harbinger of a new political system where the government is both "responsive" and "responsible".

In summation, Manipur, with its geographical barrier and no sincere efforts made to bridge the communication gap with the mainland, remains isolated from the rest of the country culturally and economically, fostering a sense of alienation amongst the people. Above this, Manipur is also a sensitive border state of the country, and thus it is high time to fill the existing gap between the State and the mainland by promoting the ideals of federalism in the true spirit of the term. Any federal scheme involves the setting up of dual governments and division of powers. But the success and strength of the federal polity depends upon the degree of co-operation and co-ordination between the governments. Therefore one should not consider the rise of regional parties and the movements thereof as a threat to the national unity or to the survival of normal politics. Indian federalism is not and need not be threatened by regionalism. The rise of regional parties should be seen as a natural development.

In a country so diverse, socially and culturally, one can hope to see the kind of India characterized by the cordial relationship between its political units and in return strengthens the country as a whole, only when it adopts a federal system with utmost

importance given to the notion of "moderation" and "accommodation". Then only could we able to live up to the expectations of the framers of our Constitution and realize the India of their dreams which Dr. Ambedkar conveyed in the following words : '....the country is one integral whole and its people a single people living under a single imperium derived from a single source'.

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