



Review Article


Hill Parties of Manipur: A Review on Pre-Statehood Political Parties

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Abstract	Manuscript Information
<p>The emergence of political parties in the hills of Manipur has a different context from that of the Valley or any other part of the country. Unlike other political or regional parties in India, the regional parties from the hills of the state emerged in order to safeguard the identity, culture and language of each tribe. As such these parties are tribe based or ethnic based, intertwining democratic representation with tribal feudalism.</p> <p>The current paper is an attempt to review regional parties emerging from the Hills of Manipur before 1972 or statehood. The review is focussed on 7 regional parties- the Manipur Zeliangrong Union, the Naga National League, the Mizo Union, the Kuki National Assembly, the Hmar National Congress, the Paite National Council, and the Khulmi Union.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ISSN No: 2583-7397 ▪ Received: 02-02-2025 ▪ Accepted: 28-02-2025 ▪ Published: 25-03-2025 ▪ IJCRM:4(S2); 2025: 27-29 ▪ ©2025, All Rights Reserved ▪ Plagiarism Checked: Yes ▪ Peer Review Process: Yes
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KEYWORDS: Regional Party, Manipur Zeliangrong Union, Naga National League, Mizo Union, Kuki National Assembly, Hmar National Congress, Paite National Council, and Khulmi

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of regional political parties in the hills of Manipur reflects a broader perspective in Indian politics where regional identities and local issues become significant and play prominent roles in the course of the state's political development. Right after the signing of the Merger Agreement in 1947 and after fully integrating into the Indian Union in 1949, Manipur became a Part C state under the Union of India and began to be administered as a Commissioner's Province (CP). During this period, there was no mechanism for political representation

through direct election in the CP. However, the state was required to send two Members of Parliament (MPs) to Rajya Sabha, for which an Electoral College was constituted with 30 members. The state became a Union Territory of India in 1954. Later, the Union Territory was given an Assembly with 40 members in 1957. The state achieved the status of statehood in 1972 thereby constituting a Legislative Assembly with 60 members. A short review is made in this article on regional parties emerging from the Hills before 1972, when the state achieved full-fledged statehood under the Union of India. Some

of the parties reviewed under this article are the Manipur Zeliangrong Union, the Naga National League, the Mizo Union, the Kuki National Assembly, the Hmar National Congress, the Paite National Council, and the Khulmi Union.

Manipur Zeliangrong Union, 1946

The Zeliangrong Union, established on January 15, 1925, underwent multiple name changes, reflecting its evolving role within the Zeliangrong tribes. Initially known as "Kabui Chingsang," it became "Kabui Samiti" in 1934 and then "Kabui Naga Association" in 1946. A conference on February 15, 1947, led to the formation of the "Zeliangrong Council" to unify the tribes, but it faced challenges. On December 14, 1947, the "Kabui Naga Association" was renamed the "Manipur Zeliangrong Union," which further transformed into the "Zeliangrong Naga Union" in 1960 to better represent all Zeliangrong areas. Its main objective remains promoting unity and socio-political rights among the Zeme, Liangmei, Rongmei, and Pumei tribes.

Naga National League, 1946:

The Naga National League, founded by Athiko Daiho in September 1946, aimed to unite the Naga people amidst colonial divisions. The British administration separated Nagas in Manipur from those in Naga Hills, causing the League to assert that Nagas should not be governed by Manipur. It feared that this governance would stifle their culture and political identity. The League advocated for merging with Assam's Naga Hills District and organized a boycott of electoral rolls and elections in 1948 to demonstrate their non-participation in a system they felt misrepresented them. During the Chief Ministership of Captain Priyobrata Singh, the League launched a "No House Tax Payment" campaign, directing taxes to the Naga Hills Deputy Commissioner of Assam instead of the Manipur government, indicating their political stance. The government's crackdown led to the deaths and injuries of several protestors, and the arrest of League leaders on August 27, 1948, which is commemorated as "Martyrs' Day" in honor of their resistance.

Mizo Union, 1946

In April 1946, tribal leaders from the Hmar, Lushei, and Ralte tribes convened a political conference at Lakhipur, Assam, resulting in the formation of the Mizo Union. This organization sparked the Hmars People Boycott Movement against the Maharaja, with Hmars boycotting the 1948 Assembly elections in Manipur due to dissatisfaction. The Union emphasized the need for unity among the cognate tribes to combat exploitation and sought the establishment of an Autonomous District for Mizo-inhabited areas. It featured two key wings: the Voluntary Corps, which organized male and female volunteers, and the Morse Visual Corps, which facilitated communication between villages. The Mizo Union was instrumental in uniting the Mizo-cognate tribes and advocating for their political rights and autonomy.

Kuki National Assembly, 1946

Founded in 1946, the Kuki National Assembly (KNA) represents the Kuki community in Northeast India, especially in Manipur. It aims to unite the Kuki people and protect their rights within the Union of India, addressing issues like land rights, political representation, and development. The KNA emerged during a time of political awakening among indigenous groups in the region, responding to socio-economic challenges and political marginalization. Its founding marked a significant effort for the Kukis to assert their identity and seek greater autonomy, making KNA a key player in Kuki-Chin-Mizo politics.

Hmar National Congress, 1953

The Hmar National Congress (HNC) was established in 1953 and played a crucial role in the Hmar community's socio-political history, primarily located in Churachandpur, Tipaimukh, and Jiribam in Manipur. The community's political mobilization began in the late 1930s with the formation of the Hmar Students Association (HSA) in 1939, aimed at unifying Hmar students. This led to the creation of the Hmar Mongolian Federation (HMF) in Assam, marking a growing awareness of the Hmar people's rights. The HNC, later renamed the Hmar National Union (HNU), became a significant political platform for the Hmar. In 1986, the Hmar People's Convention (HPC) emerged, demanding an autonomous district for Hmars in Mizoram. An accord in 1994 with the Mizoram government resulted in the Sinlung Hills Development Council, enhancing the community's autonomy and development efforts within Mizoram.

Paite National Council, 1956

The Paite National Council (PNC) was established to preserve Paite identity and address community interests. In 1952, Thangkhai, a respected church leader and politician, was nominated for the Electoral College but was rejected due to the Paite not being listed as a scheduled tribe. This exclusion barred Paite students from scholarships and individuals from jobs designated for scheduled tribes, marginalizing the community. In response, the Paite formally requested inclusion in the scheduled tribes list in 1955, which was granted. Following this, the Guite community sought similar recognition through the Guite National Organization (GNO) in 1958, but their claim was rejected as they were considered part of the Paite community. The Guite renewed their efforts in 1968. The PNC aimed to unify various Zo communities, including the Zo or Yo, who declined to join, having already formed the United Zomi Organization (UZO) in 1948. Internal divisions emerged within the UZO in 1961, leading the Baite clan to form their own political group under Tunkhopum, whose candidacy for elections was also rejected. This period reflected political fragmentation within the Baite community, with members joining different organizations. Between 1957 and 1960, the PNC held annual meetings to advocate for unifying Zo areas into "Chinland," but this proposal was ultimately rejected by the Indian government.

Khulmi Union, 1947

The Khulmi Union, founded in 1947 by defectors from the Kuki National Assembly, originally included 27 tribes such as Aimol, Anal, and Vaiphei. While the Union left out the Thadou tribe and significant Naga tribes like the Tangkhuls, it encompassed diverse tribes from both Naga and KCM groups. In the first State Assembly election of 1948, the Khulmi Union won 7 seats, with candidates like Dr. Kampu Gangte and Tualchin Zou. Following Manipur's merger, internal conflicts arose within the Khulmi National Union, leading tribes to prioritize their identities, exemplified by the Kom tribe's formation of the Komrem Union Manipur, with Teba Kilong Kom as its first president.

CONCLUSION

Before the state's merger with India, the Maharaja of Manipur constituted a popular government through the effective implementation of the Manipur Constitution Act, 1946. Members of this government were composed of various Political Parties, both regional and national. Some of these parties emerged from the Valley (plains) and some from the Hills. While the valley was predominantly inhabited by the Meiteis and Panghal, the hills of Manipur are predominantly inhabited by diverse tribal communities, such as the Nagas, Kuki-Chin-Mizo, and others. In this regard, it must be noted that each tribal community has its distinct languages, cultures, traditions, and historical narratives. During the colonial period, the British maintained control over them (the tribal) through local tribal chiefs by recognising their authority. It was a strategy that aimed at non-interference in the tribal way of life.

This non-interference led the hills to lag behind the valley in terms of development of infrastructure, healthcare, education, and economy. The Valley emerged to be the centre of all investments and development, whereas the hills became the poorer periphery with scanty investments. Thus, there was unequal development between the Valley (center) of the state and the Hills (periphery), and there emerged a sense of political neglect of the Hills (periphery) by the tribal in terms of development of infrastructure, healthcare, education, and economy. In the course of the article, it becomes evident that this sense became the primary reason for the further emergence of regional identity and regionalism, paving the way for the emergence of regional parties in the hills of the state. Ultimately, these parties pushed for political autonomy as the means for their salvation and development in the hills.

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Laishram Somobala Devi is a Research Scholar in the Department of Political Science at Manipur University, India. Her research focuses on political dynamics, governance, and socio-political issues in Manipur. She is dedicated to academic inquiry and contributing to the field of political science through in-depth research and analysis.