

EMERGENCE OF REGIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES IN MANIPUR AFTER 2002: A STUDY

Thoudam Chitaranjan Meitei^{1*}, Keithelakpam Indramani Singh²

^{1*}Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Dhanamanjuri University, Imphal(India)

²Professor, Department of Political Science, Dhanamanjuri University, Imphal(India)

***Corresponding Author:**

***Email:** chita1857@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: In the electoral politics of Manipur, regional political parties have been playing a significant role through the formation of governments or through acting as the opposition party by raising political questions and demanding regional political aspirations. The genesis of regional political parties can be traced back to before Indian independence. The Nihil Manipuri Mahasabha was founded in 1934 with Maharaj Churachand Singh as president and Jananeta Hijam Erabot as vice president. The Mahasabha played an important role in realising democracy and attaining freedom from colonialism, which was eventually manifested in the form of the Independence of India from British colonialism. After Indian independence in 1947, regional political parties of Manipur, such as Manipur United Front (MUF), Manipur People's Party (MPP), Manipur Hill Union (MHU), Manipur State Congress Party (MSCP), etc., were formed, which eventually came to power. Just after statehood, the Manipur People's Party (MPP) formed the government in 1972. Notably, Manipur Hill Union(MHU) formed the government with Yangmaso Shaiza as Chief Minister in 1974, and in the subsequent years, the regional political party, the so-called Manipur State Congress Party (MSCP), formed the government with W. Nipamacha Singh as Chief Minister. But after the MSCP coalition government was formed, no regional political party could form the government in the subsequent years. Thus, there has been a rise and the submergence of regional political parties. It rose when people offended National Political Parties on account of their inability to materialise regional political aspirations, and the submergence of regional political parties happened when parties failed to uphold the state people's political aspirations. Ultimately, a resurgence of regional political parties of Manipur is being witnessed, especially after the outbreak of ethnic conflict in Manipur on 3rd May, 2023.

Keywords: Nihil Manipur Mahasabha, Manipur United Front, Manipur People's Party, Manipur Hill Union, Manipur State Congress Party, Regional Aspiration, Ethnic Conflict, Resurgence.

INTRODUCTION

India is the largest democratic country with the largest population. She shines as a stable and resilient democratic country in the south East Asia. She follows and adopts the Westminster model of democracy, where the Council of Ministers is responsible to the lower house of the parliament. In a democratic country, political parties are indispensable for ensuring a sustainable political system. Regarding the type of political party system, India follows a multi-party system where different political parties are allowed to contest in elections to form the government. A political party is an organisation, devised to get legitimate political power through the formation of government after participating in an election. Political parties aim at securing power to discharge the function of allocating wealth and resources among the citizens equitably and providing security to the people. It is indeed an agent for performing politics, which is defined by *David Easton* as “*Authoritative allocation of values*”. It formulates and consolidates public policies and plans. It also seeks to play as an intermediary agent between the government and the people at the grassroots levels. Besides, political parties ensure further democratisation of society and individuals through mobilisation and giving a platform for launching political activities. It also plays a crucial role by acting as an opposition political party, which ensures accountability of ruling political parties to the legislature through various procedural devices like questions, the budgetary process, etc. According to *Edmund Burke*, an Irish statesman, a political party is defined as, “*A body of men united, for promoting by their joint endeavour the national interest, upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed*”. In India, there are two types of political parties, viz. National Political Parties and Regional Political Parties. A regional political party is one that is concerned and pushes for the regional political aspirations that are in consonance with the Indian Constitution. It seeks to hold legitimate political powers through participation in elections. In another dimension, regional political parties seek to raise the demand for regional political aspiration. According to *L.S Gassah (1992)*, “*Regional political parties in North East India*”, many regional political parties in North East India were initially set up only as pressure groups with the aim of achieving social and economic goals and welfare of the people and to protect and preserve the customs, traditions, customary laws, language, religion and distinct identity of their of their own section of the people. This holds true in the case of Manipur. Indeed, the genesis and responsible factors for the emergence of regional political parties are variations in geography and topography, diversity of physical landforms, diversity of ethnicity, cultures and different traditions.

OBJECTIVES

The paper aims to give the genesis and the socio-political backgrounds for newly emerging of different regional political parties in Manipur after 2002. The paper will also deal with the factors for the submergence of major regional political parties and their inability to sustain and remain as vibrant political parties in Manipur. Further, the study will focus on the nature and contradictions that exist between regional political parties based on the hill districts of Manipur and the regional political parties in the valley area.

GENESIS OF REGIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES IN MANIPUR

The genesis of regional political parties can be traced back to before the independent period. In 1934 Nikhil Manipur Mahasabha was formed by Maharaj Churachand Singh. This organisation was later headed by Hijam Irabot. The main aim of this organisation was to achieve self-rule and cultural upliftment. But later, the word Hindu was dropped from the organisation at the Chinga session in 1938, and they reoriented their tasks towards more comprehensive political parties. The trajectory of the regional political party, forming government, could be traced back to 1967 when the Manipur United Front (MUF) formed the government with Thambou as Chief Minister. The government was formed when the territorial council was functional. But, it could sustain only for 20 days.

After Manipur got union territory departing from part C status, in 1968, a vibrant and influential regional political party called the Manipur People's Party (MPP) was formed. The objective of the party was to achieve statehood status, protection of rich culture and tradition, promotion and protection of the Manipuri language through the inclusion under the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. It also aimed to achieve an egalitarian society based on democratic socialism. It also espoused greater autonomy of Manipur. After statehood, MPP could form the first state government with Md. Alimudin was the first chief minister after attaining statehood status. Then, in 1990, MPP with RK Dorendro as the chief minister formed the government lasting only for one year and 267 days. Besides, MPP also played a significant role in supporting and sustaining the coalition government in Manipur. Additionally, MPP also played a crucial role by acting as a vibrant opposition political party in the democratic politics of Manipur.

Another regional political party called Manipur Hill Union (MHU) could form the government with Yangmaso Shaiza as the chief minister. Lastly, in 1997, the Manipur State Congress Party, with Chief Minister W Nipamacha formed the coalition government. Thus, in post post-independent political history of India, regional political parties have played a crucial and significant role in supporting and realising regional political aspirations and interests through either leading the government or supporting the government. However, in the 21st century, the regional political parties in Manipur could not form the government; rather, most of the time they supported and participated in the coalition politics, helping in forming the government or remaining the opposition party.

REGIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES OF MANIPUR AFTER 2002

In 2012, the People Democratic Alliance (PDA) was formed with Bd. Behring Anal as its president. It is an unregistered, unrecognised political party in Manipur. The party has no significant achievements. It could not compete well in the state legislative assembly.

In 2015, North East India Development Party (NEIDP) was formed by Narengbam Samarjit Singh with the objective of all-around development through social, economic and political revolution in Manipur and in the northeast region. But, it got submerged because of the debacle it faced in the 11th Manipur legislative assembly, as none of the candidates could secure a seat in the state assembly.

Then, in 2016, People Resurgence and Justice Alliance (PRAJA) was formed by Irom Sarmila, an icon of human rights in Manipur who stood against the draconian law known as AFSPA, and the convenor of the political party was Erendro Leichonbam. The party had the main objective of fighting against the AFSPA and bringing clean politics to the state of Manipur. However, in this case also, the debacle faced in the 2017 general election as the party could not secure any seat in the state legislative assembly, resulted in its submergence.

In 2022, the Kuki People Alliance (KPA) was formed by Tongmang Haokip (former Indian Foreign Service officer) and Wilson L. Hangshing. The party's objective is based on the political interest of Kuki. In the 2022 state legislative assembly election, it won two seats and extended support to N. Biren Singh government. But, after an ethnic clash erupted on 3rd May of 2023, the party withdrew support from the state government, and the party has been pushing for separate administration for Kuki inhabited areas in Manipur. Thus, it is primarily a community-based political party working primarily on the controversial interests of the Kuki community. The party openly has demanded separate administration with union territory status through separation from Manipur. (source: Hindustan Times, @HT-Videos, YouTube channel accessed on 31st December, 2025)

In 2024, a party called Universal Family Party (UFP) was founded with Ngasepam Nilakanta as president. In March of 2024, it was registered at ECI for recognition. The party's main objective is to bring a solution to the problems of humanity, equitable distribution of resources, instilling peace and ensuring the conduct of elections without the influence of money power. (@sktvmipur accessed on 21 december 2025)

In July 2024, another new political party called Good Governance Party (GGP) was launched with Yambem Laba, a renowned journalist, as president, Senjam Surjit as the working president, Phijam Brojen as the vice president and Sanabam Raghmani as the general secretary. The party criticised N. Biren Singh as the Chief Minister for his inability to go to Churachandpur and Kangpokpi, and frustration over the failure to provide good governance to the people of Manipur. (<https://www.thehindu.com>, published on 31st july, 2024, Guwahati)

Further in 2025, People Democratic Front (PDF) was floated with Dr Rajeevkumar Narengbam as president; the main objective of the political party was to provide safeguards to the cultural, historical and political identity of Manipur. In addition to this, the party will also work on integrity, unity and all-around development of the state. The newly floated party expresses

Strong resentments over the failure of national political parties in tackling and solving political issues of Manipur (Northeast Live, YouTube, accessed on 28th December, 2025)

FACTORS FOR THE EMERGENCE OF NEW REGIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES AFTER 2002

The first and foremost factor for the emergence of regional political parties is the failure of national political parties to ensure regional political aspirations. The failure of the 15-year rule under the Congress government and subsequent years under the rule of the BJP, to check ever-increasing problems of illegal immigration, especially from Myanmar and unabated problems of poppy plantation in hill districts and associated problems of narcoterrorism, paved the way for the emergence of regional political parties. The second important factor for the floating of regional political parties was acute consciousness of ethnicity and prepondering emphasis on the socio-political interest of the ethnicity, for example, the formation of Kuki's People Alliance in 2021, strengthening of the Naga People Front (NPF). Thirdly, the continued negligence of the central government on account of development and looking at Manipur and the North East from a security and strategic landscape further increases the level of frustration, leading to the emergence of regional political parties. Fourthly, the failure of the central government to curb and control Manipur's infamous ethnic violence since 3rd May of 2025, further adds anger to the people of Manipur. This leads to the formation of fertile ground for the emergence of regional political parties. Fifthly, despite having high natural resources and avenues for economic growth and prosperity, the problems of unemployment have not reduced despite the same party ruling at the state and centre. Sixthly, the unabated rise of corruption, irregularities in the recruitment of state government employees and nepotism have eroded the public trust in the national political parties which resulting in the rise of regional political parties. Seventhly, imposition of constitutional emergency or president rule in the state from 13th February 2025 under Article 356 of the Indian Constitution, despite the fact that the same political party is ruling both in the centre as well as in the state, reduces the trust and commitment of the national party. With the imposition of President's rule, the yearning for having a popular ministry or a responsible ruling government for themselves has increased tremendously. People's faith and belief in the progression of the double-engine system have also been eroded. This, in turn, has led to the formation of fertile ground for the sprouting of many regional political parties.

NATURE OF NEWLY EMERGING REGIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES OF MANIPUR

After the end of the coalition government led by the Manipur State Congress Party (MSCP) with W. Nipamacha Singh as Chief Minister, no regional political parties of Manipur could produce a Chief Minister of the state in the subsequent years. The rise of Congress as the party ruling the state for fifteen years under the chief ministership of O. Ibobi Singh and subsequently succeeded by the BJP after 12TH state legislative assembly general election held in 2017, reduces the chances of regional political parties coming to rule. However, the contribution of MPP, which contributed a lot in the journey of statehood and in preserving and protecting the state's distinct culture and identity, can not be ignored. Some of the natures of regional political parties can be stated as follows,

Most of the emerging regional political parties have resource constraints and poor financial backup. The newly emerging political parties are facing problems regarding generations of funds. In fact, there is a lack of public funding since there has been witnessing lack of public trust and credibility issues. Besides, there has been less time for the mobilisation of financial resources. Political mobilisation requires huge financial resources, on which the success of a political party is largely based. Secondly, the clash of personality cult and ego clash among the leaders of regional political parties arrests the growth and progression of regional political parties. Frequent eruption of factions and defections to other national political parties causes serious degradation of image. This also severely reduces public trust and credibility towards regional political parties.

Further, the problem of inability to have sustained psychological drive for realising regional political aspirations among the leaders of regional political parties remains the most standing problem for regional political parties. The psychological and societal drive for realising regional political aspirations is short-lived and cannot be sustained for long. Thus, there has been a witness to erratic nature in the political activities and mobilisation of newly emerging political parties, which induces a lack of credibility of political parties' leaders, resulting in brewing a serious threat to their sustenance. Further, the lack of internal democracy and the heavy influence of particular leaders also affect the political parties. In another dimension, some regional political parties are inclined towards a particular ethnicity and are concerned with the socio-political problems of that ethnicity. For instance, NPF and KPA are working for socio-political advancement Naga and Kuki communities, respectively. In brief, the newly emerging regional political parties are lacking a strong ideological focus on regional political aspirations, lack of integrity and commitment. Besides, they are facing gigantic challenges while competing with national political parties as they lack both money and muscle power.

Although having drawbacks, newly emerging political parties of Manipur have consistently played a constructive role in realising state political interests, such as addressing issues of illegal immigration, acute problems of Narcoterrorism, and the issues and problems of ethnic clash in the state. Besides, the newly emerging political parties of Manipur criticise the failure of the ruling national political parties in the centre and double engines for their inability to control ethnic clashes and ethnic issues effectively, as free movement of people belonging to Meitei and Kuki can not go freely to Kuki inhabited areas and Meitei inhabited areas respectively and vice versa.

COMMUNAL-BASED REGIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES OF THE HILLS DISTRICTS OF MANIPUR

It is to mention that hill-based regional political parties such as the Naga People Front (NPF) and KUKI People Alliance (KPA), etc., focus mainly on the development and protection of culture and traditions on ethnic lines. For instance, the manifesto of the Naga People Front(NPF), Manipur state unit for the 11th Manipur assembly election, aimed to bring political development regarding hill districts of Manipur, e.g full functionalisation and institutionalisation of Hill Area Committee(HAC) under Article 371©, protection of land of tribal people and culture, separate budget for hill and valley. In the same manner, Kuki People Alliance(KPA) in its election manifesto of 12th Manipur legislative assembly elections talked about effective implementation of Hill Area Committee(HAC) under article 371©, and strengthening of Autonomous District Council(ADC)(<https://northeastlivetv.com>). Thus, it can be corroborated from the fact that Manipur regional political parties, which are based in hill districts, have primary objectives of political work in hill districts and provisions relating to tribal people. It seems that there is an apparent lack of concept of inclusiveness on the part of the political objective of hill-based regional political parties of Manipur. However, regional political parties of Manipur based in the valley are concerned with the broader political perspective, such as protection of the territorial integrity of Manipur, effective control of large-scale illegal immigration from Myanmar, large-scale poppy plantation in hill districts, protection of the distinct identity and cultures of different ethnicities and strengthening of federalism and autonomy of the state. However, lacunae on the part of the regional Political parties such as MPP, The then Manipur State Congress Party (MSCP) and the newly emerging political parties such as Universal Friendship Party (UFP), Good Governance Party (GGP), People Democratic Front(PDF) etc. can not extend its influence in the hill districts, which weakens its organisations and their claim of having inclusiveness.

CONCLUSION;

Regional political parties that are vibrant, influential and which are ideologically focused on regional political party is quite required. One of the most important tasks on the part of the leader of the regional political parties is to shun individual interest, and it should be focus on the larger societal and political interests of the state. Secondly, refocusing and reemphasising regional political aspirations must not be abandoned at any cost. These political parties must work on issue-based politics. In another dimension, the newly emerging regional political parties must reorient themselves towards reengaging with the people at the Grassroots levels, which will ensure building strong people's trust in the newly floated regional political parties. The problems of factionalism and personality cult among the leaders of the regional political parties of Manipur should be addressed.

This can be assured through the inculcation of regional political aspiration, viz., reemphasising on protection of indigenous citizens from rampant illegal migration, protection of distinct cultures and identity and strengthening and asserting the federal scheme of governance. Although a resurgence of regional political parties is witnessed after 3rd May 2023, the task ahead revolves around how much regional political parties are committed to regional political aspirations and preventing their members from defecting and joining national political parties in the time of the state legislative assembly.

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