

**The State and Societies in Northeastern India:  
Explaining Manipur's Breakdown and  
Mizoram's Order**

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**PhD in Development Studies**

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To my parents, for their constant support.

## Abstract

The conflicts and disorder in North East India have mostly been explained using the grievance narrative – referring to the alienation of communities in the region due to post-colonial nation making and because of people's poor access to power, resources and opportunities. But these explanations fail to account for the large variance in political outcomes within the North East. An exploration of the political history of the region demonstrates that disorder accompanies a contested and weak authority of state agencies and the fragmentation of society. This state-society reading of politics may help in unraveling the differing success with political order in two States in the region - Manipur and Mizoram. Understanding the differing capabilities of the two States with political order, then, requires delving into history to study the process of state making in colonial and post colonial times and how state elites used political organisations to construct and mobilize collective identities to acquire legitimacy.

My research, which is a comparative case study and is based on archival research, study of newspaper reports, use of public and private documents and conduct of in-depth interviews, demonstrates that in Mizoram the process of state making – involving both the establishing of state and political apparatuses that could mobilize State-wide inclusive politics - was such that it consolidated and strengthened the authority of the state and the capability of its agencies to provide services, manage contestations and avoid breakdown. In Manipur, it was traditional centres of authority with their localized manner of organization that characterised state making. Persistence of traditional centres of power has resulted in weak social control on the part of state actors and poor capability of its agencies to provide services and establish order. The crucial difference between Manipur and Mizoram, then, and which has a bearing on conflict outcomes, is the centrality of the state in the lives of people. These findings have implications for both future research – how to enhance the institutional capability of the state in situations of multiple authority systems – and for policy interventions – restoring order demands that, among other things, the state is made the central pillar of society.

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## Abbreviations

ADC	Autonomous District Council
AFSPA	Armed Forces Special Powers Act
AMSU	All Manipur Students Union
AMUCO	All Manipur United Clubs Organisation
ANSAM	All Naga Students Association Manipur
APHLC	All Parties Hill Leaders Conference
AR	Assam Rifles
ATSUM	All Tribal Students Union, Manipur
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BNLF	Bru National Liberation Front
BPL	Below Poverty Line
BSF	Border Security Force
CII	Confederation of Indian Industries
CPC	Civil Procedure Code
CrPC	Criminal Procedure Code
CPI	Communist Party of India
CRPF	Central Reserve Police Force
DC	Deputy Commissioner
DoNER	Ministry of Development of Northeastern Region
EITU	Eastern India Tribal Union
FCS	Food and Civil Supplies
FICCI	Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry
FPM	Federal Party of Manipur
GOC-in-C	General Officer Commanding-in-Chief
GSDP	Gross State Domestic Product
HAC	Hill Areas Committee
HDI	Human Development Index
HDR	Human Development Report
HPC	Hmar Peoples Convention
HSA	Hmar Students Association
ICC	Indian Chamber of Commerce
IMR	Infant Mortality Rate

INC	Indian National Congress
IPC	Indian Penal Code
IRB	Indian Reserve Battalion
KBC	Kuki Baptist Church
KIM	Kuki Inpi, Manipur
KNA	Kuki National Assembly
KNF	Kuki National Front
KSO	Kuki Students Organisation
KYKL	Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup
LHDC	Lushai Hills District Council
MAL	Mizo Academy of Letters
MBC	Manipur Baptist Convention
MCU	Mizo Commoners Union
MDC	Mizo District Council
MDF	Mara Democratic Front
MHU	Manipur Hill Union
MJA	Mizoram Journalists' Association
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
MLR&LR Act	Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reform Act
MNF	Mizo National Front
MNFF	Mizo National Famine Front
MP	Member of Parliament
MPP	Manipur Peoples' Party
MSC	Manipur State Congress
MSCP	Manipur State Congress Party
MSD	Manipur State Durbar
MTFRP	Medium Term Fiscal Restructuring Policy
MU	Mizo Union
MZP	Mizo Zarlai Pawl (Mizo Students' Union)
NC Hills	North Cachar Hills district
NEC	North Eastern Council
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NIC	Naga Integration Council
NMHM	Nikhil Manipuri Hindu Mahasabha

NMM	Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha
NNC	Naga National Council
NNP	Naga National Party
NPMHR	Naga People's Movement for Human Rights
NSCN (IM)	National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah faction)
NSCN (K)	National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang faction)
NSDP	Net State Domestic Product
NSSO	National Sample Survey Organisation
OTR to GSDP	Own Tax Revenue to GSDP
PC	Peoples Conference
PDS	Public Distribution System
PLA	Peoples Liberation Army
PLRC	Pawi Lakher Regional Council
PLTU	Pawi Lakher Tribal Union
PMGSY	Pradhan Mantri Gramin Sadak Yojana (Rural Roads Programme)
PMYL	Pan Manipuri Youth League
PNC	Paite National Congress
PREPAK	People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak
PWD	Public Works Department
SDO	Sub Divisional Officer
SHDC	Sinlung Hills Development Council
TNL	Tangkhul Naga Long
UCM	United Committee, Manipur
UMFO	United Mizo Freedom Organisation
UNC	United Naga Council
UNLF	United National Liberation Front
VC	Village Council
YLA	Young Lushai Association
YMA	Young Mizo Association
ZNP	Zoram National Party
ZRA	Zomi Revolutionary Army
ZoRO	Zomi Reunification Organization
ZSFI	Zomi Students Federation of India
ZU	Zeliangrong Union

## Glossary of terms

<i>Ahallup:</i>	'Club of old men'
<i>Bandh:</i>	Forced closures
<i>Cheirap court:</i>	Chief judicial body in colonial Manipur
<i>Durbar:</i>	State court
<i>Gram panchayat:</i>	Village committee
<i>Hnam dham:</i>	Mizo customary code
<i>Hnatlang:</i>	Community service among the Mizos
<i>Jhum / Jhumming:</i>	Shifting, slash-and-burn cultivation
<i>Khulakpa:</i>	Naga village headman
<i>Lakpa:</i>	Officer in charge of an administrative unit in old Manipur
<i>Lallup:</i>	Compulsory labour demanded of all subjects in old Manipur
<i>Marwaris:</i>	Traditional trading community from western India
<i>Mautum:</i>	Periodic famine in Mizoram
<i>Meira Paibis:</i>	'Torch bearers'. Women social service movement in Manipur
<i>Metei Mayak:</i>	Traditional script in which Manipuri is written
<i>Mizoram Sawrkar:</i>	MNF's government in exile.
<i>Morung:</i>	Traditional boys' dormitory in Naga villages
<i>Naharup:</i>	'Club of young men'
<i>Nampou:</i>	Village settler in Rongmei Naga village
<i>Ningthou:</i>	Kuki village Chief
<i>Panchayat court:</i>	Customary village courts in Manipur
<i>Panna:</i>	Unit of administration in old Manipur.
<i>Raja / Maharaja:</i>	The Manipuri ruler
<i>Rajkumars:</i>	Traditional Metei aristocracy
<i>Ramhual:</i>	Share of the agricultural produce paid by Mizo villagers to Chiefs
<i>Salam:</i>	Tribute paid by Mizo villagers to Chiefs and advisors
<i>Shiyan Yanza:</i>	Customary legal code of Tangkhul Nagas
<i>Tlawmngaihna:</i>	Mizo code of good behaviour and social conduct
<i>Upas:</i>	Advisors of Lushai Chiefs
<i>Village Pei:</i>	Traditional village councils among Rongmei Nagas
<i>Zawlbuak:</i>	Traditional boys' dormitory in Mizoram
<i>Zilla parsihad:</i>	District Board

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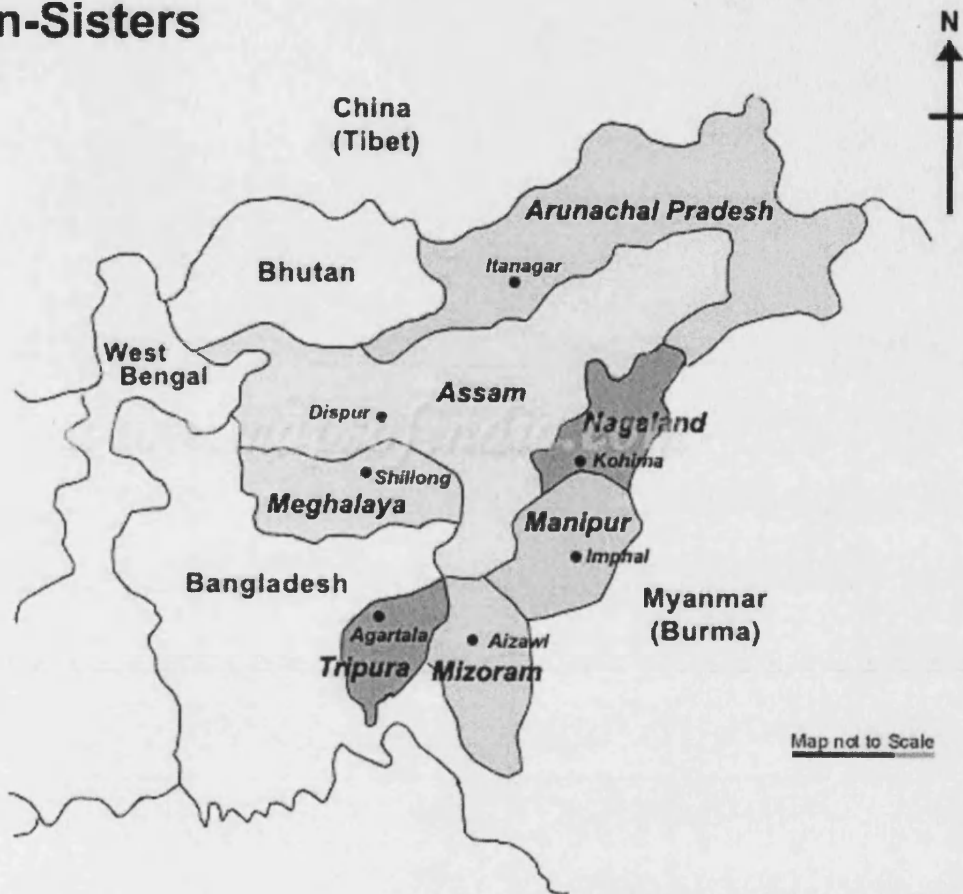
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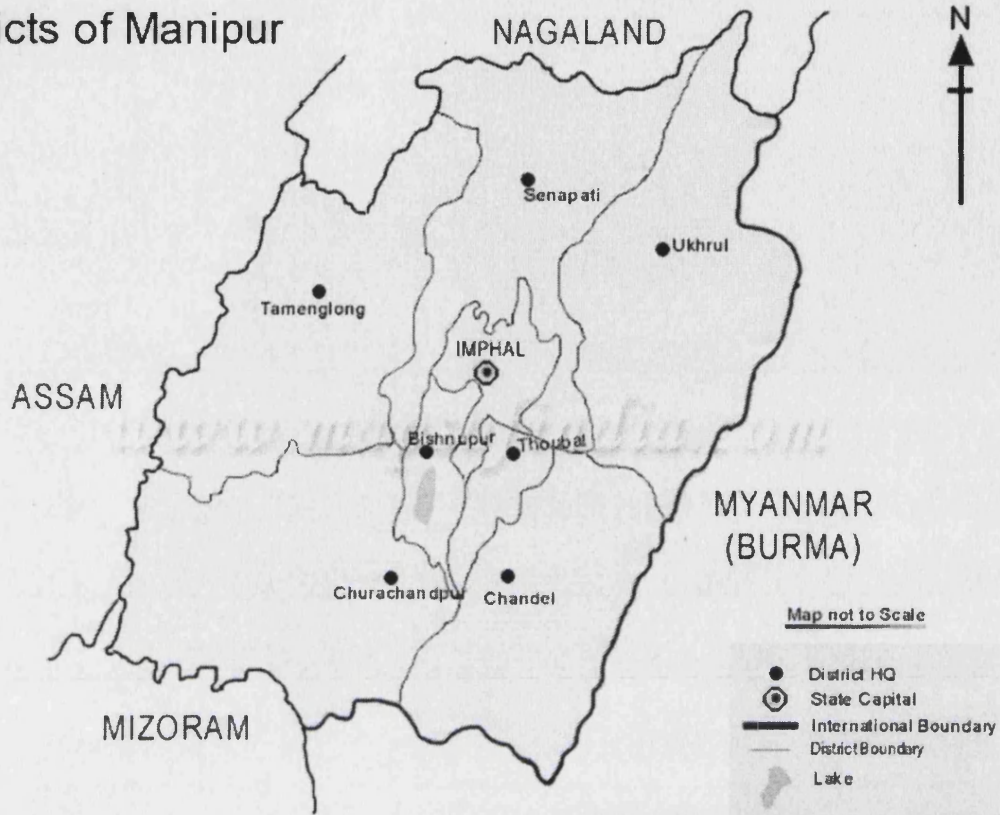


# Seven-Sisters



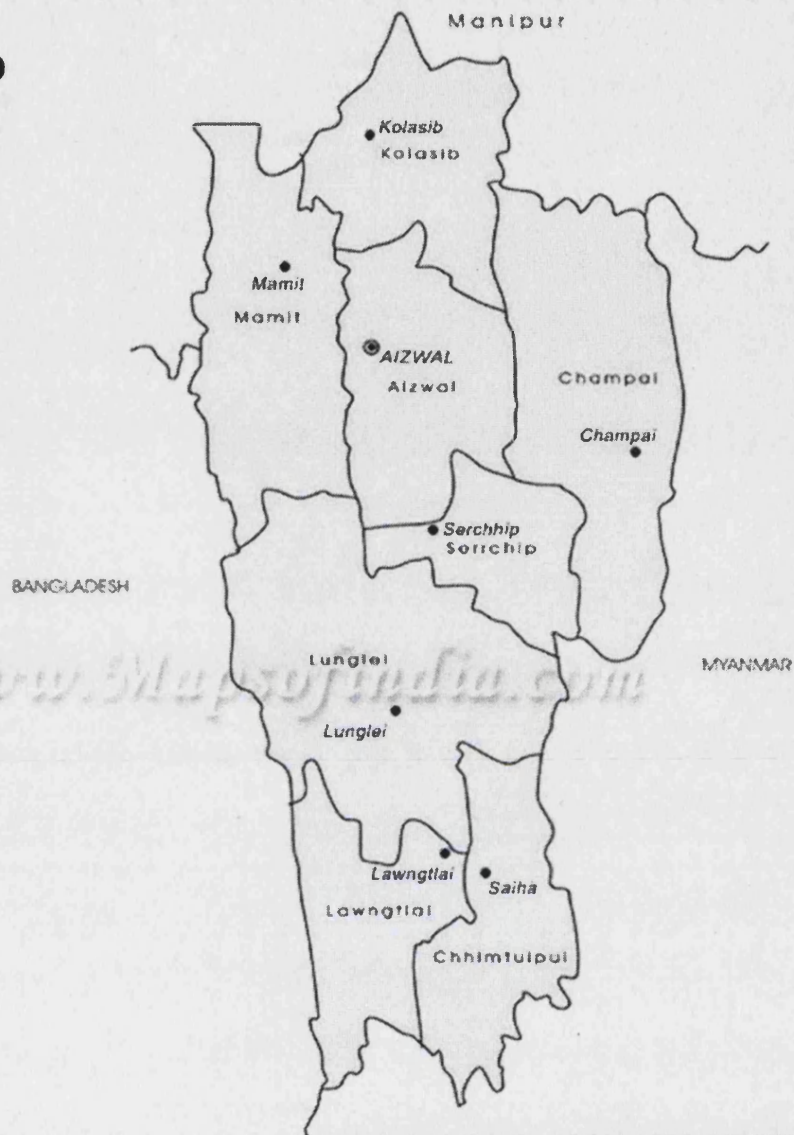
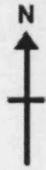
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# Districts of Manipur



Map not to Scale

# MIZORAM District Map



Map not to Scale

- State Boundary
- ⊙ State Headquarter
- District Headquarter

## **Note on Terminology**

State, with a capital 'S' stands for a province of the Indian Union. That with a small 's' is the state in its abstract sense - the organisational and institutional arrangement in society to provide services and manage conflicts.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

This work is about the instability and violence in Northeastern India and attempts by States and societies in the region to respond to them. That compact region of the country, made up of the 'seven sister' States, has experienced sustained conflicts and breakdown.<sup>1</sup> A seminar paper on the unrest in the region captures the range of the crisis:

“.....recurring bouts of violence have damaged the whole fabric of civic governance and culture in (the region). Normal processes of all the three wings of governance have been suspended at best and subverted at worst. The Army has taken over functions of policing in many areas, even as there have been widespread violations of human rights. ...Communities are at war; valued social relationships have been ruptured; inter-personal as well as intra-community trust has been destroyed, quite often by government and security forces as well as by opposition armed groups.....Questions of cultural and national identity, quite often in conflict and competition, dominate the intense public discourse in the region. ....”

Agarwal, (1999:2)

A particularly prominent feature of the crisis in Northeastern India has been the high incidence of violence. In 2003 there were 1107 militancy-related deaths in the region. The figure came down marginally to 882 in 2004<sup>2</sup> (Government of India, 2005a: 165). A Home Ministry report describes the law and order situation in the region as being “vitiating”, an outcome, it claims, of the activities of the region’s insurgent and extremist groups (Government of India, 2005a: 34). The report lists thirteen such groups active in the region, and adds: “numerous other militant groups...are operating in the North East” (Government of India, 2005a: 33). Among the strategies adopted by the government to restore order is ‘counter insurgency’ including declaring rebel groups as ‘unlawful associations’ and

<sup>1</sup> Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura.

<sup>2</sup> These include rebels, government forces and civilians killed in separatist and ethnic clashes, and that involved one or the other rebel group. According to the Census of India (2001), the total population of the Northeastern region is 38 million

deploying Central forces with special powers to neutralise them. The Home Ministry report admits, “Despite heavy deployment of [Central paramilitary] forces, it has not been possible to meet the demands of the states for additional forces” (Government of India, 2005a:35). Other interventions in response to the crisis in the region, the report claims, have been investments in the infrastructure of the region, creation of more jobs and enabling “good governance and decentralisation”. The government also claims to have shown “willingness to meet and discuss legitimate grievances of the people” (Government of India, 2005a:34). It is apparent that the package of interventions has only managed to keep the lid on the situation. Political order and security, both for the state and citizens, remain elusive. I hope to explore why attaining political order and peace in Northeastern India has been such a difficult task.

This introductory chapter is organised in the following manner: In its first part, I begin by defining the problem and outlining the approach I plan to take to study it. I then provide a brief summary of the history of conflicts in Northeastern India and in the two cases - Manipur and Mizoram – I take up for detailed study. The second part of the Chapter is devoted to the specific literature on conflicts in North East India in order to analyse the adequacy of existing arguments for understanding my specific questions. In the third and final part of the Chapter, I briefly survey the literature on state-building and collapse and examine some recent approaches to studying state capability that provide promising ways to engage with my research problem. I conclude by proposing a statement of my argument to explain sustained contestations and breakdown in Manipur as against success with achieving political order in Mizoram.

## 1.2 The Problem

In the literature, there has been a tendency to treat the Northeastern region as a single unit, with common experiences and histories. Most accounts focus attention on the common political economy of the region: the North East’s significantly higher level of ethnic and linguistic fractionalisation compared to the rest of India;<sup>3</sup> the long international borders that

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<sup>3</sup> The North East makes up a mere 4 % of India’s population. Yet it accounts for 58 of the 114 languages and 100 of the 600 tribes listed by the Census of India. (Census of India, 2001)

the region shares with countries with which India has not always had stable relations<sup>4</sup> and the porous nature of these borders, that allow for liberal movement of small arms and drugs (Nepram, 2002). There is also a perception that the region is the HIV-AIDS hotspot of the country. North East is a region that is geographically compact, a feature underlined by the partition of British India in 1947 when the region was separated from the rest of India, but for a precarious 12 mile corridor. Adverse economic ramifications of the Partition have been felt throughout the region, adding to the sense of shared distress. The history of nation building in the North East is also new, with the region incorporated under colonial rule in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, much later than the rest of India.<sup>5</sup> The region is also unique in the sense that the colonial state carved out large enclaves here as special autonomous zones for the protection of the tribal communities, and allowed 'traditional' codes and practices to predominate there, a policy that was continued after Independence.<sup>6</sup>

As a result, much of the representation of the region in power centres in Delhi and the consequent policy response, are premised on the imagination of a common and unitary North East. The Indian state's response to challenges to its nation-building efforts in the region, post-Independence, has reinforced this monolithic image of Northeastern India.<sup>7</sup> The Central government has followed counter insurgency policies that have region-wide implications. It has also created institutions for economic development of the region that again have a regional dimension.<sup>8</sup> But a closer look at dynamics at work in the region proves these assumptions to be flawed. Different parts of the North East have responded differently to the national state's policy prescriptions and to social and economic forces generally. Among other things, this is demonstrated in the variance in violence figures within the region. (Table 1.1).

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<sup>4</sup> These include China, with which India fought a war in 1962, Bangladesh and Myanmar. Indian leaders have often accused the last two of sheltering rebel groups from Northeastern States.

<sup>5</sup> Assam passed into colonial control in 1833. A colonial presence was established in the Naga Hills in 1876. Manipur and the Lushai Hills were annexed in 1891. Large tracts of Arunachal Pradesh, bordering China, continued to remain unadministered and unpenetrated by the state, down to 1947.

<sup>6</sup> Earlier called Excluded Areas and Partially Excluded Areas, these enclaves have now been carved out as Autonomous District Councils.

<sup>7</sup> The armed rebellion by a section of the Nagas, starting in 1949, and that by the Mizos in 1966 were the first of these challenges. The resultant counter insurgency infrastructure established by the Central state has proliferated, to cover most parts of the region.

<sup>8</sup> Such as the Shillong-based North Eastern Council, set up in 1972 and the Central Ministry of Development of Northeastern Region (M-DoNER) in 2001.

Table 1.1 : Insurgency violence in North East India (2002-2005)

Provinces: Year:	Arunachal Pradesh	Assam	Manipur	Meghalaya	Mizoram	Nagaland	Tripura	Total
2002	32	559	239	66	-	90	386	1372
2003	39	401	205	79	1	86	296	1107
2004	43	315	212	47	4	97	164	882
2005	NA	242	331	29	-	40	73	715
Population (millions)	1.1	26.6	2.2	2.3	0.9	2.0	3.2	38.3

Source: Government of India (2006b) and Institute of Conflict Management, Data (www.satp.org)

As is evident, of the seven States, Assam, Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura have shown the greatest propensity to violence. Violence in the region has also been sustained over time. Between 1992 and 2004, 5708 persons died in Assam in ethnic and separatist violence, 3606 died in Manipur, 3267 in Tripura and 2068 in Nagaland. In the years under review, though violence has shown a tendency to generally abate, in Manipur violence levels have persisted. But it is not just in regard to violence figures that the region shows variance. While the North East has shown a susceptibility to instability and breakdown, Manipur's has been a particularly demonstrative example of these dynamics, a characteristic that has often been commented upon by the local media.<sup>9</sup> Manipur has also been known for its frequent and bloody ethnic clashes.<sup>10</sup> The other State that stands out in the region, though for very different reasons, is Mizoram. Organised violence has largely been absent in that State for the past two decades. This is a definite achievement for a territory that was severely affected by prolonged violence beginning in 1966.<sup>11</sup> An agreement in 1986, between the Central government and the rebel Mizo National Front (MNF) successfully restored peace in Mizoram. Though post-conflict Mizoram has experienced its share of group mobilization and ethnic tensions,<sup>12</sup> nowhere has the violence in the State paralleled those in other parts of

<sup>9</sup> A piece in a local daily noted: "We are at the peak of (violence) cycle.....and mayhem has become the order of the day". ['Belling the Cat', *The Imphal Free Press*, Imphal : 11 November 2004].

<sup>10</sup> Prominent among these is the Naga-Kuki, Metei-Pangal and Kuki-Paite clashes in the 1990s, with their heavy toll of life [see Parratt (2005) for details] and the simmering Naga-Metei tensions today.

<sup>11</sup> A piece captioned 'Brave New Phase of Mizoram', described the change in the following words: "Mizoram has tasted and savoured peace for seventeen years now. After two decades of insurgency and its related sufferings, peace has been sweet indeed" [ *The Telegraph*, Guwahati: 22 August 2003].

<sup>12</sup> Groups such as the Maras, Chakmas, Hmars and Brus have, at various times, demanded better access to opportunities and resources. In 1997, a large number of Brus fled the State for neighbouring Tripura, alleging violence by Mizo social organisations such as the Young Mizo Association and Mizo Zirlai Pawl. These organisations have also been known to target other non-Mizo communities, particularly immigrants from Assam and from Myanmar.



the region. Mizoram has largely remained, in the words of its incumbent Chief Minister, “an island of peace in a sea of turmoil.”<sup>13</sup>

Why is this so? Why do we not see in Mizoram, ethnic turmoil and breakdown that characterises politics in Manipur and indeed in most other States in the region? Commentators have attributed the violence in the North East region to identity politics. The few accounts of Mizoram that there are, have interpreted its apparent peace as proof of the absence of identity politics there (Chandhoke, 2005). A closer reading of politics in Mizoram will quickly dispel this notion (Sharma et al., 2004). Much of the politics in Mizoram, like that in Manipur, is around the question of identity and nationalism. Political parties and public organisations in both States have used ethnic identity to mobilise support among their constituents. Yet political mobilisation in the two settings has not led to similar outcomes. Some writers have also attributed restoration of peace in Mizoram to “the devolution of huge economic largesse from the Central government for socio-economic development” and to the “deft employment of the inherent integrative capabilities of a national political party” (Jafa, 2000). Surely, showering ‘economic largesse’ has been a staple feature of New Delhi’s North East policy. As has been demonstrated, the strategy may, in some cases, have actually fed into conflicts, often changing its character, and usually having given it a further lease of life (Sahni, 2001; Baruah, 2005: 18). Further, “the integrative capabilities” of the Congress party have not been very successful in States like Manipur that have an equally long “Congress tradition”. And if military victories of the Army against the MNF played a decisive role in restoring peace in Mizoram (Nag, 2002: 262-265; Jafa, 2000), why have not similar military advantages led to successes against separatist rebels in Nagaland or Manipur? And, crucially, how has peace been sustained in Mizoram? Moreover, there is little in the literature to explain the breakdown and the rising spiral of violence in Manipur or the inability of the state and society there to devise arrangements for restoration of peace and order. The accounts that do exist, privilege the primordial position: the distinctiveness of Manipur; its geographical isolation and the narrow ethnocentrism of ‘mainland’ India (Parratt, 2005:1). Yet these very features did not prevent Mizoram from pulling out of crisis. And methodologically speaking, in the absence of any systematic comparative work on the political economy of the region, (most works either take the North East as a unit of analysis

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<sup>13</sup> *The Telegraph*, Guwahati: 22 August 2003.

or resort to single-case studies of its States), it is difficult to ascribe any predictive value to the causal factors identified as sources of the region's political disorder.

### 1.3 Background

Northeastern India was among the first of the regions to demonstrate, on the attainment of India's Independence, signs of severe political crisis. Over the years, this has translated into organized violence, both separatist and ethnic and which has become an enduring feature of the political landscape of much of the region. Rebellion broke out first in the erstwhile Naga Hills district of Assam in 1949, when the Naga National Council (NNC) under the leadership of Angami Phizo took to arms and declared an independent Federal Government of Nagaland, opposing claims of the national leadership over lands that Naga tribes inhabited. Violence between NNC cadres and government forces spread, in the early 1950s to Naga-inhabited districts of Manipur. The Mizos, inhabiting the then Lushai Hills district of Assam and being similarly apprehensive of 'mainland' India, followed suit. On 28 February 1966, Laldenga, at the head of the Mizo National Front (MNF), declared an independent *Mizoram Sawrkar* (Mizoram Government) and launched an armed rebellion. A famine in 1959 had devastated the Lushai Hills, causing much suffering and destitution. For the MNF, the slow and poor response of Assamese leaders to the famine was the immediate reason for the rebellion. For a few days after the outbreak, MNF cadres enjoyed the complete run of the Lushai Hills, having caught the national and state governments and their security agencies by complete surprise. Central leaders soon handed over the district to the Army, to restore 'normalcy'. Among the instruments used by the Army for this purpose, besides conducting counter insurgency operations<sup>14</sup> was Operation Security, otherwise known as the Village Grouping exercise: wholesale relocation of villages from all over the district to camps set up along its main communication routes. While it is difficult to assess the military benefits of the exercise, social and psychological costs of Village Grouping would eventually turn out to be serious.<sup>15</sup>

The rest of the region generally held on, avoiding breakdown and organized violence for much of the first couple of decades after Independence. It was only around the late 1970s

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<sup>14</sup> Those included, among other measures, clamping dusk-to-dawn curfew and restrictions on movement of civilian population throughout the district. These controls were lifted only in 1972. (See 'Counter Insurgency at its Best': *The Hindustan Times, New Delhi: 27 June 1978*).

<sup>15</sup> For an account of the impact of Village Grouping on the lives of the people, see Nunthara (1981).

that contestations began to spiral into severe crises, breakdown and rebellions in Assam, Manipur and Tripura. The early years of the disturbances in Manipur's Metei-dominated central Valley region saw the birth of youth organizations, initially using peaceful political means to denounce the attitudes and policies of national leaders towards Metei interests. They later turned to violent means and started targeting government forces. During the 1980s, a number of armed groups took birth, all demanding political independence for the State and for keeping 'Manipur for Manipuris'. Economic and political frustrations among the educated youth, emanating mostly from the 'outsider' domination of the bureaucracy and trade and commerce, lay at the root of much of this mobilization.

A crucial aspect of violent conflicts in the region is the recurrent bouts of ethnic clashes that have taken heavy toll of civilian lives and have led to large-scale displacements. Around the same time as the birth of militant groups in the Manipur Valley, the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isaac-Muivah), the principal Naga armed outfit and an offshoot of the earlier NNC, was gaining ground in Naga districts of the State. NSCN(IM) called for the creation of Greater Nagalim, and asked for merging Manipur's Naga districts with neighbouring Nagaland. The Kukis, who cohabit the Hills with Nagas became apprehensive about their future in a Naga-exclusive Greater Nagalim and organized themselves for their own 'homeland' demands. The face-off between the two communities and the armed outfits seeking to represent them, led to the infamous Naga-Kuki clashes of 1992-96 that resulted in over a thousand deaths and extensive destruction of property (Parratt, 2005: 176-178). Signing of a ceasefire agreement between the Central government and NSCN (IM) in 1997 has helped end the insurgent violence in the Naga inhabited districts of Manipur. But Naga mobilization around Greater Nagalim has come as a severe jolt to the Metei population, the State's majority group. The Ceasefire has escalated Naga-Metei ethnic contestations and has helped reinforce separatism among the Meteis. Similarly in ethnic violence in Tripura in 1979-80, some 1800 people were killed and over 3,600 dwellings burnt.<sup>16</sup> Clashes have also taken place between groups in North Cachar Hills and other areas of Assam. Repeated cases of ethnic violence in the North East have created a large refugee population. According to one estimate, there are between 150,000 to 200,000 internally displaced persons belonging

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<sup>16</sup> Refer backgrounders for details: <http://www.satp.org/satporgrp/countries/india/states>

to different ethnic groups in the region'.<sup>17</sup> In Assam and Tripura and indeed in Meghalaya, inter-group ethnic contestations over power, resources and opportunities have fed into and energized armed nationalist separatist movements.

Ethnic violence in the region has existed alongside conflictual inter-group mobilization against agencies of the state as well as against each other. A case in point was the over two month-long mobilisation by Naga public organisations in Manipur in 2005 against state agencies and Metei groups, over the issue of Greater Nagalim. Naga groups imposed an 'economic blockade' of Manipur Valley. These groups were successful in their effort to cut off the State from essential supplies, coming in from outside, despite the heavy deployment of government forces to foil blockade attempts. The State government demonstrated its weakness to counter these disruptive moves when it acknowledged that it had not been possible to bring in essential supplies, so crucial to the State, resulting in acute scarcity of such items as baby food, fuel and medicines. The Central government had to intervene to diffuse the crisis by flying in supplies using military aircrafts. The blockade had itself been a response to what Naga groups felt was a partisan move by political leaders of the State against Naga interests (Routray, 2005b). Identity contests are not limited to Manipur, even if they may be more contentious there. 'Public curfews' and blockade of roads and communication links by students and other groups are common to the whole of the Northeastern region (Baruah, 2002).

Public action by the region's mobilized groups often involves the state and its agencies as their targets. Poor functioning of government offices, overall poor quality of governance and perceptions of state leaders' favouring one social group over the other – all instances of state weakness - undergird these mobilizations. There are other aspects to the weakness of the state in Northeast India. While the region as a whole has reasonably good human well-being indicators,<sup>18</sup> poor performance of state agencies is reflected in the dismal economic management indicators for the region. State governments in the region depend on the national government for promoting infrastructural and economic development as well as to

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<sup>17</sup> The US Committee of Refugees in its World Refugee Survey 2003 quoted in *Times of India*, Guwahati, 2 July 2004. Other reports confirm the large number of conflict induced displacement, particularly in Assam, Manipur and Tripura. See Hussain (2005)

<sup>18</sup> Compared to the All India literacy rate of 65.38 %, the literacy rate in the North East stands at 68.77 %. Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) in Manipur was 25 (per '000 births) and 23 in Mizoram, while the national rate was a high 68. (Government of India, 2006a: 4-5).

support their own maintenance costs.<sup>19</sup> Financial capabilities of State governments across the region are also poor. This is due to poor management of finances and poor capacity of state agencies to raise own revenue through taxation. As a result, share of Own Tax in Gross SDP, during the 1990s was as low as 1.46 % in the case of Manipur, 1.30 % for Nagaland, 1.94 % for Tripura, 3.23 % for Meghalaya and 3.58 % for Assam (Government of India, 2000). Poor state finances have also led to the Centre having to step in to subsidize most public expenditure, including sustaining the region's large public sector.<sup>20</sup> Central assistance for State (plan) outlays was as high as 111 % for the region as opposed to 37 % for all-India (Verghese, 1996: 38). There is also an impression that the region suffers from higher levels of corruption and rent seeking activity (and leakages from Central investment) than the rest of the country, thus compromising the efficacy of much of the Central spending in the region (Baruah, 2005: 14-15; Sahni, 2001).

The situation in the region, then, borders on 'state failure', often leading, in some cases, to collapse. A measure of the failure is the more than normal presence of the Central state in governance in the region; an anomaly, considering the federal nature of the Indian polity. There has been frequent resort by the Centre to direct rule (called President's Rule in India<sup>21</sup>) in the region. But the Centre's overwhelming presence in North East India is strong even when popular elected governments are in office. This presence is most palpable in the large deployment of Central security forces across the region. Greatly compromising the federal principal is also the role of State Governors, imagined in the Indian Constitution as largely ceremonial agents of the Central government in the States. In the North East, Governors hold much substantive authority in local governance. In some instances Governors even have constitutional powers to keep tabs on the security situation in their province, thus undermining the autonomy of the provinces in law and order matters (Baruah, 2005:59-80). Moreover, the dependence of the provincial States on Central transfers for both developmental and maintenance expenditure adds to the overwhelming Central presence in

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<sup>19</sup> Of special significance in this regard was the 'North East Package' worth some \$ 2.23 billion for improving the region's physical and social infrastructure. See Ahmad (2000). One of the principal tasks of the Central ministry of DoNER set up to coordinate development interventions for the region, is to ensure that all Central departments spend at least 10 % of their annual resources in the region. (Government of India, 2006a: 8)

<sup>20</sup> The ratio of state government employees to the total population in the 1980s was 1:17 in Nagaland, 1:20 in Mizoram and 1:29 in Tripura, compared to the all-India figure of 1: 113 (Verghese, 1996 : 340).

<sup>21</sup> Article 356 the Indian constitution authorises the Central government to assume direct rule of a State where it is satisfied that a case of "failure of constitutional machinery" has arisen (Constitution of India, p. 155. <http://lawmin.nic.in/coi.htm>).

the region. But Central agencies in the region also perform other less strategic functions, such as building district roads. While on the one hand Central expansion in the North East reflects the inadequacies of provincial government agencies to perform state functions, the tendency to substitute provincial agencies with Central ones has itself worked to prevent the agencies of State governments from acquiring requisite capabilities. This has been most pronounced in the field of maintaining security and order, though much the same thing can be said about managing finances, providing social services and acting as the objective regulator between contending social groups over resources and opportunities.

#### **1.4 Prevailing explanations**

What does the literature on the North East tell us about its conflicts? Writings on the crisis in the region have mostly used the 'grievance narrative'. Recently, some accounts have also explored the greed motives of these conflicts. The grievance narrative has emphasised cultural differences between people in the region and those from 'mainland India' and the domineering tendencies of the Central state (Parratt: 2005: 1). Supposed incompatibilities between cultures have motivated many scholars of the region to question the 'unequal' and 'forced' integration of Northeast region into the Indian 'mainstream' (Datta: 1990). Some works trace the problem in Manipur particularly, to its forced integration with India and the master-subject relationship that this integration led to, reinforced by a colonial pattern of political, economic and cultural dominance (Sanajaoba: 1988). According to these cultural arguments, Centre-periphery dynamics have seriously undermined the integrity of communities in the region and have caused frustrations and fissures in societies that, it is claimed, frequently results in ethnic conflicts (Arambam: 2003). While much can be said about the role of Central leaders in creating fissures between communities in the region, the cultural argument, reflecting the 'clash of civilizations' thesis, is premised on assumptions that have been widely criticized for their understanding of societal incompatibilities. Extending the logic of the cultural argument, it is easy to fall prey to the fallacy that heterogeneous societies are doomed to conflicts and violence. It has been convincingly demonstrated however, that it is multi-cultural societies that may be better insured against violence than those that are more homogenous.<sup>22</sup> Empirical evidence from the North East,

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<sup>22</sup> See for example Collier et al (2001) and Bates (1999).

where, despite the high fractionalisation of societies, violence has only happened sporadically, supports the case against the cultural thesis.

It is however true that the feeling of having been forcibly integrated into the Indian nation-state is an emotion that greatly animates much of the debate and contestations in the region. Similarly, armed groups in the region have often justified their legitimacy on the need to undo this felt historical wrong. Political mobilisation in the region, by regional and nationalist parties and politically active associations, often evoke their pre-colonial autonomous status, to argue for self-rule, if not outright independence. Undoubtedly the history of India's nation-building efforts in the North East has been messy. The end of colonial rule proved a challenge to Indian leaders anxious to take over from the colonial rulers what had until then formed British India. North East India with its late colonial incorporation, patchy attempts at extending the presence of the state and its tenuous cultural and political links to the rest of India, proved a bigger challenge. Exclusion of many of communities of the region from political developments in the rest of India, and the absence of the integrating effects of the anti-colonial nationalist movement, did not help matters. As a consequence, the nation-building exercise immediately after Independence proved problematic in North East India, with many communities imagining alternative political arrangements.<sup>23</sup> Nation building practices in the region have thus left a mixed legacy among its people. Grievances over the homogenising tendencies of the national leaders have proven a powerful narrative around which to mobilise nationalist sentiments. These have fed into the violence.

Yet considering these grievances to be the causal factors behind the violence and breakdown may be misplaced. To begin with, the nation-building exercise in the North East led to varying responses among its social groups: while some began with demanding independence, others were content with self-rule or even separate administrative units. Many of those that began with independence demands also eventually settled for something less - separate administrative arrangements, usually. In effect, even though the grievance discourse is an important part of the story of crisis of Northeast India, it essentially remains an incomplete story. The account fails to explain the restoration of peace and absence of violence in some parts of the region, explained away as they are, in these accounts, as "the

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<sup>23</sup> See for a discussion, Syiemlieh (1989).

unpredictable fluidity of history” (Nag 2002: 13-14). They are also not helpful in providing a satisfactory explanation for the collapse and spiralling contestations within some societies (Parrat: 2005). As with the grievance thesis of violent conflicts generally, it is difficult to be sure whether grievance is the cause or really an aspect of the violence. In a different context, Soysa has argued that in conflict zones there is an excess of grievance narrative, making it difficult to identify objective factors leading to conflicts (Soysa: 2001). As the case of Manipur demonstrates, while the merger of 1949 is central to the Meitei sense of alienation from the Indian nation-state, much of the narrative could be interpreted as a case of history being reread to give force to the grievance. Grievance, though important to the onset of violence, poses the problem of separating fact from representation and may not be very illuminating when the objective is unearthing causal factors.

In line with the shift in analytical emphasis in the conflict literature from grievance and deprivation to economic interpretations of violence, the ‘greed thesis’ has found resonance in recent writings on violence in Northeast India. These recent accounts point to the rent-seeking activities of the many militant organisations in the region that make use of the vast networks of collusive arrangements they have established with state agents as well as with formal and informal economic actors. (Sahni, 2001:46) These works, claiming that most development funds are captured by anti-state forces, question the devolution of these resources by the Centre, for the economic development of the region. Other accounts have talked of the changing nature of armed nationalist movements in North East India. They point to the diversion of large resources earmarked for the region’s development and for employees’ salaries and contract payments, to rebels through a network of taxation, extortion, commissions, and payoffs. Thus, Verghese had concluded that insurgency (in the North East) draws on the underworld of narcotics and smuggling as well as on the government exchequer for resources (1996: 49).

While economic interpretations of armed rebellions help understand the nature of these movements better, especially how they may have mutated over time and what sustains them, it would be a folly to ascribe causal mechanisms to these interpretations or to use them for policy responses. As Malone argues, “casting rebellions simply as criminal endeavour rather than a political phenomenon obscures legitimate grievances and forecloses opportunities for negotiated resolution of the conflict...” (Malone et al, 2005:7). As it turns out, most accounts



of the 'terrorist economy' of North East India do have the state very much in the narrative of the collusive arrangements between rebels and state forces creating opportunities for dividends (Sahni: 2001; Baruah, 2005: 14-15), thus avoiding a major drawback of the greed thesis: the lack of an institutional component and absence of any conception of the state as an agency that could either trigger or help to mitigate violence. It is to this aspect of conflicts that we will come back later.

An earlier explanation of the instability in the North East had focused on the element of unsettling change brought about by the process of rapid modernisation (Singh, 1987). BP Singh had pointed to fast-paced changes introduced by forces of modernisation in the lives of the region's largely traditional communities. According to this account, changes came to the communities in the region in the form of new ideas and new institutions, but also in the form of the influx of new people. While the Naga and Lushai Hills districts were the first of the tribal tracts to be opened up by colonial administrators and missionaries, un-administered frontier tracts, now called Arunachal Pradesh, were spared these changes in colonial times, and remained largely so in the years following Independence. According to Singh, the different approaches employed for 'development' in different States in the region, account for the early onset of conflicts in Nagaland and Mizoram and their absence in Arunachal Pradesh. Singh also argued that the instability in the region arises from the resistance of the 'stateless societies' of the region to the process of state making itself. He claimed that the state "was treated as an intruder" in tribal areas because it, "not only appeared larger than the more familiar institutions of family or clan ..... but also because it demanded greater loyalty and a subordination of tribe and caste interests", something that local people found difficult to accept (1987: 6).

Recent developments in Arunachal Pradesh, where violence has begun to take roots, cast doubts on this thesis. Further the Khasi and Jaintia Hills were one of the first tribal tracts in the region to be opened up. Yet it was only much later that political contestations took an armed form there. Mizoram has also demonstrated that while rapid modernization does have destabilising influence on communities, the causal link between change and instability is not so direct. As Huntington has argued in the context of third world development generally, political order in changing societies is an outcome, not only of socioeconomic changes (and consequent mobilization of new social forces), but also of the development of institutions,

particularly political ones (1968:1). He has demonstrated that the destabilising effects of heightened political mobilization (due to the mobilization - institutionalisation gap) could be countered by developing strong and well functioning political institutions.

North East India provides further evidence to prove that some societies have been able to develop or acquire institutions that help them absorb shocks arising out of rapid mobilization. Political parties in Mizoram, such as the Mizo Union (MU) and later the Mizo National Front (MNF) as well as social organisations like the Young Mizo Association (YMA) and the different church-based organizations provided Mizo society with an anchor to ground itself, moderating the ill effects of tumultuous change through most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The cadre-based Communist Party of India (CPI) in Tripura may be performing a similar function in that State. Other societies appear to have been less well endowed. The different ways in which communities in the North East have responded to changes therefore, are the outcome of rapid change; but also of forces of change working along with resilience of political institutions, indigenous or imported.

As for the claim about 'stateless societies' resisting state formation, it is evident that the state and the process of state making are not new to societies in the region. Even tribal communities that are taken to be stateless, have had traditions of some sort of institutional arrangements that helped distribute power and resources. Further, much of the contestation in the region, in the past as in recent times, has been over who controls the state and what its policies should be. It may be that local resistance was due, not so much to the intrusion of the state or to state making per se, but to who controlled the state, i.e. where state power lay and what rules it employed.

It is precisely these issues around social mobilization and elite contestations that some writers have privileged to explain the North East's identity wars. Taking an instrumentalist line, these accounts have pointed to the unequal power structure and inter-community competition over resources and symbols, to explain the region's socio-political unrest. The turmoil, claims a commentator, has to do "with ethnic political aspirations and the effort to protect local territories and resources" (Shimray, 2004) . Others, arguing that identities shaping conflicts in the region are "a creation of political necessity and administrative convenience", recognize that conflicts "have been waged not merely on questions of land, immigration and settlement but also on the overweening fear of loss of identity

itself" (Bhagat, 2003). Similarly Singh has pointed to the elite coalitions made up of the landed class and traditional authorities who control the state apparatus in some of these States, mobilising ethnic identities to respond to challenges to their authority (Singh, 1987: 71).

The constructedness of identities and how they form a useful mobilizing tool for elites in their contests over resources and power has been a common refrain of the modernisation literature. While these insights are useful to understand the constructedness of ethnic identities and the processes of ethnic identity mobilization, they do not go very far in informing us of the processes of breakdown and disorder. The absence of large-scale violence in Mizoram for instance, does not mean that identity formation and mobilization in that State has been devoid of conflict. Further Mizoram has its share of inter-group conflicts. And yet there had been relatively little violence and breakdown of political order there. Thus, there appears to be more to breakdown and collapse than sustained elite mobilizations around identity.

How have these dilemmas been examined in the conflict literature? Robert Bates has argued that while ethnic tension may be a necessary condition for political violence, it does not constitute a sufficient condition. (Bates, 1999:24) He demonstrates that it is the relative size of ethnic groups that determines violence - as the size of the largest ethnic group grows, the level of violence (riots, assassinations, civil wars and revolts) initially goes down but then rises. Bates explains: "As the largest ethnic group reaches 50% or more of population, people confront the possibility of permanent political hegemony or exclusion...", thus seeing politics as a zero sum game, making it fundamentally conflictual. (1999:26)<sup>24</sup> Does the fractionalization argument hold for Northeastern India, and particularly for Manipur and Mizoram? The largest ethnic group in Manipur is that of the Meiteis, making up about 65 % of the population; in Mizoram it is the Mizos, who make up 70 % of the state population. And yet the extent of violence and political discord is very different in the two cases. Is it less the relative size, rather the relative extent of access to resources and power that determines exclusion? I will argue in the following pages that despite a Mizo majority in that State, minority and peripheral groups continue to enjoy access to resources and to share in power, something that could be preventing conflicts from breaking out.

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<sup>24</sup> Also see Collier et al (2001) for similar conclusions, though different interpretation.

A more plausible explanation for violent conflicts is provided by Frances Stewart, who has argued that it is not so much the size of the largest group but existence of severe inequalities between culturally defined groups ('horizontal inequality') that determines political instability and violence. The combination of severe inequalities in resource access in political, economic and social arenas and marked cultural differences between communities provides a conducive environment, Stewart argues, for culture to become a powerful mobilizing agent and to lead to conflicts. While leaders often use ethnicity or religion to unite and mobilise groups to achieve their political goals, mobilization, Stewart claims, is effective only where there are substantial horizontal inequalities (Stewart: 2000). Some analyses of violence in India, including those in the North East, have claimed that it is the weakening of modern political institutions that accounts for something like horizontal inequalities – incapability of dealing with local religious, linguistic, caste and regional concerns – and which leads to sectional contestations resulting in the spiral of community conflicts and violence (Weiner, 1989). The shape these breakdowns take, other commentators have argued, depends on how well Central authority is institutionalized and how willing ruling groups are to share power and resources with mobilized groups (Kohli, 1998:7). Conflict has been mitigated in situations where leaders have been accommodative of minority demands.<sup>25</sup>

Curiously, violence and contestations in the North East as a whole exist (many would argue that they have become endemic) alongside the many experiments with self rule and political autonomy for the region's peripheral communities; high levels of human well-being (measured by literacy and health and gender indicators for its communities) and huge Central transfers for the economic development of the region. Further, deinstitutionalisation of the Central polity should have affected all parts of the region in similar ways. Central leaders have themselves shown equal flexibility (or intransigence) in dealing with mobilised groups and rebel organisations from the North East. Yet while a definitive peace deal was possible in Mizoram, peace continues to elude Manipur despite the obvious human costs of the violence. Moreover, if it is 'horizontal inequalities' (between the many groups in the state) that lie behind the collapse in Manipur, the most interesting question to ask is: what is it that determines access (or lack of it) to power and resources of culturally defined communities? And why have leaders in Manipur found it so difficult to provide access to all,

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<sup>25</sup> For a similar argument see Chandhoke (2005)

despite a commonsensical understanding that exclusion feeds instability. This is even as their counterparts in Mizoram have been more successful in pursuing inclusionary policies?

Part of the explanation for the peace in Mizoram has been attributed to the undisputed leadership within MNF ranks helping it clinch a peace deal (that has eluded many other armed groups in talks with the Centre) and the ability of religious and social organisations in the State to demand and work for restoration of peace (Baruah, 2005: 71). Journalistic accounts have often credited the supposed cohesiveness of Mizo society for the sustenance of peace there. If these are indeed the drivers of peace in that State, questions that we need to focus on, and which may have implications for violence in the rest of the region are: what explains the cohesiveness of Mizo society?; what accounts for the synergy between political leaders and social organisations there to work for peace and indeed for a semblance of good governance?; why is society in places like Manipur so fragmented?; why do state leaders in Manipur find themselves so unable to connect with society?; why do they find themselves helpless in the face of pressure from conflicting social groups? And why have Manipur's social organisations not had the same leverage for peace as do social organisations in Mizoram?

### **1.5 Breakdown as state failure**

I will argue that rather than looking at the conflicts in the North East as merely the rebellions of the marginalized or as inter and intra-elite contests, or even as 'resource wars', it may be helpful to explore issues around power in societies in the region and the ability of the state to provide a legitimate basis of authority. Huntington had in his earlier work, drawn attention to the absence of authority, effective organization and lack of political competence in many developing countries, in accounting for their instability (1968:2), as has Bates who asserts that in addressing the sources of disorder, "the concept of the state provides a natural point of departure" (2004: 5). What advantages are there, then, to problematising the conflicts in North East India as a manifestation of state failure? The concept of state failure draws attention to the inability of 'weak' states successfully to enforce policies and programmes, maintain social and political order and mobilize resources.

While much of the collapse in North East India is about ethnic violence, it is about much more than just ethnic conflict or separatist violence. The collapse is also about the inability

of the agencies of the state to perform their basic functions as analysed by various theories of the state: monopolize legitimate power, protect citizens and influence social and economic behaviour. These failures of the state may have led to a situation where, as Zartman notes in another context, “organisation, participation, security and allocation fall into the hands of those who will fight for it – warlords and gang leaders, often using the ethnic principle as a source of identity and control in the absence of anything else” (1995:8).<sup>26</sup> Thus it may be that North East India’s ethnic and separatist conflicts are the outcome of the poor capability of state agencies, in other words the symptoms and not so much the phenomenon itself. Problematizing the phenomenon, then, as state failure, helps us engage with ethnic contestations and violence, while focusing on their root cause, that is poor stateness. It should also allow us to study both forms of conflicts and violence in the region – ethnic and separatist - under a single conceptual frame.

Empirical observations bear out the framing of the problem as state failure or the poor capability of the state. Absence of violence in Mizoram, despite the heightened ethnic mobilization there, refutes the claims of looking at the crisis in terms of ethnic contests - confusing symptoms with cause. And the heightened political mobilization in Manipur supports the claim of looking beyond identity to the working of the state in determining political disorder. That State is a site of intense mobilisation and counter-mobilisation between different groups, of complex ethnic dynamics and the never-ending violence. But in the background in each case of contest, is the image of the state and its agencies, unable, even unwilling to intervene to protect citizens, to resolve conflicts and to prevent private members from taking up arms. As a consequence, the state in Manipur may have become peripheral to the working of society and is left with little legitimacy. Agencies of the state are frequently criticized for their slothfulness, their insensitivity, and their poor capacities. Though Manipur’s minority tribal communities have more to complain about than its majority, criticism of how the state functions is universal. The breakdown in Manipur is as much about mobilization against the agencies of the state as it is about inter-community conflicts. Protests, street marches and *bandhs* (forced closures) are commonplace.

By contrast, the clearest insight that emerges from Mizoram is the positive public perception of state agencies there and the ability and willingness of state actors to intervene to govern

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<sup>26</sup> For a similar argument concerning Sub Saharan Africa, see Addison et al, (2001).

society and resolve disputes. Time and again, state leaders have sought to negotiate with peripheral communities, to diffuse intra-Mizoram tensions. They have established working relationship with them, bringing them into the ruling coalition to share political power. Discussions with academics, as well as with journalists and human rights activists in Mizoram revealed that the state there was seen as being able to deliver and be accommodative to societal demands. The state in Mizoram enjoys the sorts of legitimacy that agencies of the state in Manipur do not.

A recent collection of works has sought to engage directly with the state to explain the North East's "durable disorders". (Baruah: 2005) The argument, closely paraphrasing the author, goes something like this: Much of the ethnic conflict in the region is the outcome of the Central state's following public policies promoting self-governance for particular communities in the region that in turn encourage competitive mobilisation by other groups not so privileged. These have resulted in cycles of conflicts and the birth of many armed groups, to give effect to ethnic assertion (Baruah, 2005:3-27). The weaknesses of the Central state also create conditions for ethnic assertions in the region to take an armed form. Of particular relevance here are the state's excessive reliance on military tactics to respond to rebel threats and its inability to monopolize security. Creating further problems is the Central state's disembeddedness from local societies. These failures have prevented the Indian state from acquiring legitimacy among communities in the North East, a gap that has often been filled by rebel organizations, which are better providers of security for ethnic groups in the region. The state's reliance on counter-insurgency tactics to restore order has meant that it is, on the one hand, tolerant of the suspension of the rule of law and on the other has turned a blind eye to the systematic graft and leakage of development funds by power brokers in the region. Sanjib Baruah has argued elsewhere that extensive collusive arrangements between state and non-state actors in the region means that leakages also create opportunities for insurgent dividends, helping sustain rebel organizations. These contribute to the breakdown (Baruah, 2002:3).

While a focus on the role and actions of the Central state and its engagements with communities in the region advances our understanding of the breakdown in the region, it still leaves some key questions unanswered. When Central interventions in the region have been comparable across States, how has Mizoram managed to come out of collapse and avoid disorder, when other societies - particularly Manipur - have shown a disposition to

implosion? What could account for the moderation in competitive mobilization between different groups in Mizoram when inter-ethnic mobilization in Manipur has a tendency to frequently spiral out of control? If it is militant organizations in the region that end up with legitimacy and taxation and hence sustenance, why did events in Mizoram eventually turn out differently? Why did the Centre's counter-insurgency policies in Mizoram and their associated pathologies, not create opportunities for the MNF leadership to go down the 'resource war' path? And crucially, what may be preventing rebel groups in Manipur from engaging more seriously with political solutions, when that was the solution of choice in the end for the MNF?

Baruah himself may be flagging some pointers to these questions, when he proposes differentiating between "the weakness of the Indian state in the region", and "its strength otherwise", a point he goes on to elaborate: "While mainland Indians are not used to thinking of the Indian state as weak and incapable of providing everyday security to its citizens .....in at least many parts of the North East India, something like the security dilemma is at work, which leads rival ethnic groups to form their own rag tag bands of liberation armies" (2002:6). Evidently, his image of the Indian state is not one that is homogenous and uniform throughout its territory, but one that varies in its capability across regions. There are two aspects to this variability of state capability in the Indian context. One is the fact that under India's federal system, the Central state, in most of its interactions with citizens, does not operate independently, but through and in conjunction with sub-national states. Many of the functions of the state in India, seen from Weberian perspective, specifically, use of coercion, monopoly over legitimate authority and protection of citizens, including their property rights, as also the bulk of the interventionist role of the welfare state, in terms of provision of health, education and social security, are the responsibility of the sub-national state.<sup>27</sup> Much of the revenue accruing to the state from its citizens also devolves to the provinces. The other, and perhaps more significant aspect to this variability is the supposed autonomy of state agencies from society around it. As elsewhere, the ability of the state to provide order and good governance is not only an outcome of the capacity of state agencies – meaning its stateness - but also about the nature of the society that it rests on

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<sup>27</sup> Functions of the state in India are divided between the Central List, the State List and the Concurrent List. Police, Judiciary and social security, all figure in the State List, so do much of the taxation functions. (Constitution of India, <http://lawmin.nic.in/coi.htm> ). It could be argued that the Central state has effectively taken over many of these functions in much of the North East. While on one hand this itself reflects state failure, it is also a dynamic that is a function of the Central state's interaction with the sub-national states.



and must connect with. These have a bearing on issues of authority structure in society and state power.

While a case could be made for the Central state's greater involvement in governance in the North East (meaning a weak capacity of the sub-national state structures), equally significant is the role of the local society in empowering (or hindering) the state and the resultant capability. Maybe, it is this that explains the state's variable performance within the region, across the seven States. Is it then not be useful to take this difference between the Central and the sub-national state and how they connect with society, seriously and factor these into our analysis? In other words, it may be useful to conceptualize the state as not national or sub national but one that combines the energies and resources of the national state with structures of the sub-national to connect with and govern societies and demand obedience. That is exactly the state that the average citizen comes in contact with in the region or elsewhere in the country, one that is made up of both Central and provincial structures and actors, and their working together to seek to acquire legitimacy. Analysts faced with similar complexities elsewhere have been mindful of this difference between *exogenous* and *endogenous* forces working on political outcomes. Robert Bates has claimed that while major forces affecting the development of Africa have originated in the developed world, African states and societies have themselves played significant roles in determining how those forces affect them. For a better understanding of the patterns of development in the South, he has argued for paying greater attention to the "capacity for autonomous choice" on the part of local actors and analyzing how those choices shape the impact of external environments upon the structures of local societies. (Bates, 2005:8)

A close reading of the political economy of Northeastern India bears out the need to see endogenous and exogenous factors interacting with each other in determining political outcomes. A case in point is the response of leaders in Mizoram to violent mobilizations by the Hmar and Bru communities, led by their respective armed groups, the Hmar People's Convention (HPC) and the Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF). Success of peace talks with both groups was the outcome, it appears, of the capability and the willingness of political leaders in Mizoram. They took the lead in opening peace talks with the armed groups and negotiated power-sharing arrangements with them, by making use of the opportunities and incentives that the Central state provided for negotiated settlements to the

violence.<sup>28</sup> It could be argued that Mizo leaders were emboldened in these moves by their greater institutional and normative capability, itself an outcome of the state's embeddedness in a cohesive Mizo society and its autonomy from competing social pressures. Leaders in Manipur on the other hand have felt helpless to respond to demands for better access to power and resources by minority groups, despite repeated proddings to that effect by the Central government.<sup>29</sup> Could this be an outcome of the tenuous links (and hence legitimacy) that state leaders have with what is a fractured society in Manipur and their poor autonomy from conflicting social pressures? In any case, the inability of political leaders in Manipur to set their house in order has led to the initiative to negotiate inter-ethnic conflicts passing on to Central leaders, creating further complications for inter-ethnic relations in the State.

This brings us to the point about the nature and character of the state system and its role in determining political outcomes. The centrality of the state to violence and breakdown has been a common theme of political studies. For Max Weber, the central point about the state was the issue of coercion and the state's claim to monopoly over it. It follows therefore that existence of private groups taking up arms would then be an appropriate indicator of political disorder (Bates, 2004: 8). Understood this way, political order is achieved when governments refrain from predation and protect their citizen's property rights and when citizens refrain from the use of arms (Bates, 2004:11) Thus it could be said that it is the monopoly over the legitimate use of force that defines the state. The reverse of that situation is 'state failure', defined as "the inability of the state to perform its regulatory, legitimization, infrastructure and economic functions" (Janicke, 1990:8) leading in extreme cases to 'state collapse', when "the structure, authority, law and political order have fallen apart ..." (Zartman, 1995:1). In policy terms, then, the central question that analysts have engaged with is how can states' capability be built? They have focused on enhancing the state's *institutional capabilities*, what Francis Fukuyama refers to as the 'strength' of the state – the capacity to plan and execute policies and to enforce laws cleanly and transparently (2004: 5)

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<sup>28</sup> It has been claimed that Mizo leaders strongly declined offers of Central leaders to help resolve intra-Mizoram conflicts, retaining the initiative in their own hands.

<sup>29</sup> Illustrative here is the long-standing demand for bringing the Autonomous District Councils in the State's hill districts under the Sixth Schedule of Indian constitution. This would greatly enhance the powers and autonomy of these bodies of local administration for the tribals, something that is strongly opposed by Meitei groups.

The only problem with this Weberian conception of the state is that it is premised on the belief of the monopoly of the state and its centrality in societies. In the post-colonial rush towards nation-state building, it was widely believed that leaders of the newly established states, like their counterparts in the developed world, would be able to use the agencies of the state to get people to do what they wanted them to do: govern social and economic life, create order and provide the impetus for growth. However, the outcome of drives toward state-building in much of the developing world has been less than encouraging. For many political thinkers, the failure of state-building in transition societies is the result of the flawed assumption of the autonomy of state agencies. Joel Migdal has claimed, for instance, that in developing societies, the state may actually not be the autonomous and the strong agency that it is usually made out to be. (1988: xiii)<sup>30</sup>.

To understand changes in developing societies better, Migdal proposes the notion of the 'limited' state, one that is affected by the society in which it exists and whose monopoly cannot be assumed a priori. State-building according to this reading is a dialectical process with structures of society affecting the character and capabilities of the state and of politics at the centre, and the state itself moulding and transforming societies to acquire monopoly over obedience. The character and the capability of the state is thus, the outcome of this complex two-way dynamic over 'social control' – defined as the state's ability to get people to behave differently from what they would otherwise do. Seen this way, the strength of the state, rather than being a given, is the outcome of the historical contests over authority between different social forces, of which state leaders are just one component. High capability helps state leaders to mobilize people and get them to pay taxes and make them do the state leaders' bidding. It also enables state leaders to get their population to gain autonomy from other social groups that are in the contention to make rules for society. It is evident that this notion of the state, centering on social control, presupposes a contest between state actors and contending social groups over authority and legitimacy. Social control, in this reading, is a contested commodity, distributed among the many organizations in society, each vying with the other to make rules about how people should behave. The state acquires high social control where it is successful in, among other things, "implanting state laws in place of fragmented customary or feudal law...., to induce people to behave as

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<sup>30</sup> A point confirmed by Fukuyama when he links institutional development to the structure of the particular society. (2004: 30).

state leaders wanted them to behave and not according to dictates of local lords” (Migdal, 1988: 22).

Comparing state capabilities will, then, require comparing the *historical emergence* and ‘crystallisation of the state’<sup>31</sup>, seeing state agencies as one of the many actors demanding social control, in the particular society. This implies looking at struggles between state-making leaders and other social organizations to make rules and consolidate authority. What is needed is to begin with examining the actual way in which rules of the game have been devised in societies, involving all social organisations that have exercised social control – both formal and informal, state and non-state. In many developing societies, much of the process of state crystallisation began with colonialism and this has had implications for consolidation (or fragmentation) of social control. A common refrain in the 19<sup>th</sup> century phase of scramble for colonies by European powers was how they linked up with traditional authorities to rule, and used divide-and-rule policies to prevent those traditional leaders from a possible coordinated opposition to colonial rule. This had the effect of empowering customary authorities while fragmenting social control. Post-colonial state building policies have had their own salutary or adverse effects on social control and state capability, but are generally moderated by past patterns of accommodation and cooptation, between state and social actors.

To acquire social control and capability, state leaders build agencies and political organisations to provide the sole rule system and survival strategies for people in all spheres of their lives, throughout their territory. It has been empirically demonstrated that building inclusive statewide political organisations is perhaps the single most important factor enhancing the capability of state agencies that also helps them withstand contestations and crises and avoid breakdown.<sup>32</sup> Yet organisational achievements can provide state leaders only so much social control. Often, the success of state leaders with authority has depended heavily on creating a *collective consciousness* around a national identity. Successful state making leaders not only built institutions, established state wide political organizations and forged coalitions, they also used a variety of symbols and cultural instruments - language policy, system of formal education, collective rituals, mass media and modes of collective

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<sup>31</sup> This phrase is borrowed from Migdal (2001: 26).

<sup>32</sup> For a forceful example of this argument, see the comparative study of four African States by Hesselbein et al (2006).

expressions – to create a master narrative and acquire the legitimacy essential for high social control. Creation of a collective consciousness through mobilising nationalistic movements has been seen to act as the glue to hold the state together and to tie citizens to each other and to the state (Migdal: 2001: 19). This understanding of the evolution of state power and authority rhymes with recent formulations that characterise modern states as containing both organisational and normative components (Kohli, 2004:21).<sup>33</sup>

Northeastern India, with its late colonization and delayed and varying shades of state-making efforts ('settled' areas existing alongside 'excluded', 'partially excluded' and 'unadministered' ones) provides a useful laboratory to analyse dynamics around the exercise of authority and power and the interplay of the state and society in determining political outcomes. The historical contestations between state-making leaders and other social groups over social control and the success or failure of state leaders to create a collective identity around the state and legitimise their authority could be instrumental in enhancing or compromising the strength of the state in the region. This has consequences for the ability of state agencies to perform their basic security and development functions and the authority of state leaders to structure institutional arrangements, manage group contestations and avoid collapse. As Hesselbein and others have argued, it is ultimately the state's territorial monopoly over, not mere coercive (even if legitimate) power but also authority that, in conjunction with state-wide inclusive political actions and organization, is crucial to resisting processes of breakdown in times of crisis (2006:2).

Drawing on these analytical themes, I plan to undertake a comparative study of conflicts and breakdown in North East India, taking the sub-national State as my unit of analysis. Using the 'method of difference', I examine two States - Manipur and Mizoram -, the former high on violence and breakdown; and the latter with comparatively low levels of violence. By basing selection of my cases on the dependent variable, I hope to be able to come up with causal mechanisms that would hold over a wider set of cases. The questions I pursue are: what accounts for the political disorder and breakdown in Manipur and its avoidance in Mizoram? And what does it say about the capability of the state in the North East? I frame my dependent variable, i.e., violence and breakdown, as state failure and take a historical

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<sup>33</sup> Fukuyama says something similar when he suggest going beyond organizational and institutional competencies to emphasize the role of cultural factors, of norms and values and crucially of leadership in determining institutional performance. (2004: 91).

institutional approach to studying the processes of state making and the contestations and compromises made by the many contestants over state authority to account for the divergence in the political outcomes. However, I qualify my institutional analysis of state making by using cultural tools to understand how, in their attempt at consolidating authority, political actors may have mobilised collective identities to connect with society and gain obedience. It is ultimately the institutional arrangements on which the state is premised and the cultural glue linking state actors with social forces that I focus on to understand institutional performance determining breakdown or its avoidance. My principal explanatory variable is state capability, and which I construe as the ability of state agencies to provide their basic security and development functions. My intervening variables are the historical processes of state making - involving, among other factors, the struggles between different social forces over power and authority -; the nature of social structure; political, economic and social institutions structuring relationships between groups; manner of political organisation and finally modes of collective identity mobilization. By looking at crystallisation of the state historically, and at the strategies and instruments used by state actors and their adversaries in their contests over social control and power, I hope to identify the processes and mechanisms leading to state failure and collapse or its avoidance in Manipur and Mizoram respectively.

## **1.6 Argument and organisation**

I propose the following causal mechanism to explain continued collapse in Manipur as against its avoidance in Mizoram. It was divergent colonial and post colonial state making policies and state leaders' mobilising strategies in the two cases that led, on the one hand, to consolidation of the state's authority and its positive impact on enabling a cohesive society in Mizoram, and on the other, to a contested and weak authority of state agencies and fragmentation of society in Manipur.

In Mizoram colonial policies built on pre-existing state-like tendencies of Sailo Chiefs to consolidate the authority of the state, by penetrating society, by incorporating rival social forces within its structures; and by successfully becoming the main provider of rule systems and survival strategies for people. These consolidating tendencies of the state were reinforced in post colonial times when state making leaders contested the persistence of traditional authorities and undertook a slew of measures that enhanced their social control and marginalizing those that could pose challenges to the state. In Manipur by contrast,

political actors – colonial and post colonial - worked with and accommodated rather than challenged, rival social groups. This led to strengthening of the hold of non-state and traditional actors, while it constrained the authority of agencies of the state. Social control in Manipur stands fragmented and the state has failed to become the dominant force in society.

Among the key instruments and strategies used by Mizo state making leaders in their contest with rival social forces, were centralized political organizations that facilitated statewide mobilization of inclusive identities. They also negotiated political alliances and power sharing arrangements with groups that they had failed to incorporate in the Mizo fold. Creation of a grand narrative in Mizoram has helped the state acquire legitimacy and enhance its capability, allowing it to act autonomously from social forces and act decisively to govern society and manage conflicts. The MNF rebellion in 1966 could be seen as an attempt by the excluded sections among the Mizos to gain access to state power. It helped broaden the social basis of the new state, woven around the Mizo identity mobilization and made the authority structure so much more stable. On the other hand, Manipur's experience with state making led to both, a weak and contested authority structure and the salience of multiple identities. A highly fragmented social structure there reinforced the salience of multiple identities. The introduction of democracy sparked off a scramble for state making by elites representing different social groups. They invested in and worked through community-specific political organizations, deploying narrow identities to mobilize support over sectional interests. These trends spiked the growth of State-wide political organisations that could have helped to pursue inclusionary policies. They also set the tone for multiple and spiraling group conflicts in Manipur.

Consolidation of the authority of the state and state making leaders' success with mobilizing inclusive identities has resulted in evolution of a Mizo state that is embedded in society while its leaders can remain largely autonomous from social groups that could constrain their authority. This has contributed to upholding the capability of the state, enabling its agencies to perform their basic security and development functions. As a result, statutory institutional arrangements in place have been successful in withstanding shocks and managing contestations. The better social control of state leaders compared to their rivals' was, in conjunction with other factors, also crucial for restoration of peace in Mizoram. The continued sustenance of Mizoram's peace will, however depend on state leaders' commitment to State-wide inclusionary policies and practices. In Manipur, the state's poor

social control has led, on the one hand to continuing fragmentation of its society and on the other to poor downward reach of the state. State leaders often find themselves powerless and with little legitimacy in society. This has had negative consequences for state capability, to perform basic security and development functions. Poor state capability has prevented state leaders from either reforming institutional arrangements or taking decisive steps to resolve group contestations through coalition making. Rival social groups, many of them armed, have proliferated seeking to exercise coercive powers. Poor capacity of state agencies to act as objective regulators of group contestations has led to these conflicts frequently leading to breakdown.

The rest of the volume is organised in the following manner: I explore the historical process of state making in Manipur and Mizoram in Chapters 2 and 3, respectively. (Section I). In Chapter 4, I explore identity mobilization in Manipur, followed by a similar exploration in the case of Mizoram (Chapter 5). These two chapters make up Section II. In Section III, I conduct the test of state capability by systematically comparing how agencies of the state in Manipur (Chapter 6) and Mizoram (Chapter 7) perform in terms of their basic functions. In the Conclusion (Chapter 8), I try to draw some lessons for the research in terms of the overall argument as well as the manner in which the research findings open out to larger issues around state making, state capability and collective identity construction and mobilisation and how they can help to better inform policy responses to the crises in the North East.



## Section I: Crystallization of the state

A key determinant of the capability of the state is how state agencies fit within society and how those agencies relate to other social forces that may be vying to provide alternative systems of authority in the political, economic and cultural realms. With agencies of the state being one of the many actors that may be seeking to acquire social control and order people's lives, explorations in state capability need to begin with exploring the social basis of the state and understanding how the power of the state emanates from the links it forges with specific groups in society. This mapping will help us understand whether social forces have constrained and compromised state power or if they have helped to provide it with greater weight. Such an analysis of state power and capability itself needs to begin with an understanding of the historical emergence or 'crystallisation of the state' and the various struggles that have happened amongst state-making leaders over authority – a process known as state-making. State making involves evolution of State-wide and inclusive political actions and organizations and expansion of a State-wide formal economy to make the state, the sole provider of rules and sustenance in society.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand the social forces that state making leaders must contend with represent particularistic and localised interests. The contests between state agencies and their rivals among social forces result in, either, the subjugation and eventual incorporation of non-state forces into the state structure or to the continuing autonomy and capacity of these forces to provide alternative sources of authority. The former leads to cohesive state power while the latter to the compromising of its authority. The difference becomes clear through mapping the history of state making.

The two chapters in this section sketch out the divergent trajectories of state-making in Manipur and Mizoram. The historical processes I will be examining in the two cases are the contests between state making leaders and other social groups in their pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods over authority and social control. This will involve exploring the ability of state agencies to penetrate and centrally coordinate all activities of society and become the dominant social force and also identifying the various accommodations and compromises state leaders may have made with traditional authorities in this process. I begin by surveying ethnographic and historical accounts and exploring archival material to map

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<sup>34</sup> Hesselbein et al. (2006:2).

the process of state formation in the two States. Understanding the social structure in the two settings helps me identify and understand the key social forces that state-making leaders had to contend with to establish their rule systems. This account draws on the many elite contests over power in the two States, in the run up to Independence and in the years following it. Examination of the different manners of political organisation after Independence - including constructing political parties, mobilising electorates, making coalitions and forming governments - provides clues to contemporary contestations over state power and over access to the resources that the state controls.

## Chapter 2

### Contested state power in Manipur

#### 2.1 Introduction

An article in a national daily sometime ago characterized the political situation in Manipur as “one of total chaos and disorder, with the State heading for total anarchy”.<sup>35</sup> Citing a top Central government report, the piece claimed, “the writ of extremists is more effective in Manipur than that of the administration.” It went on to say that out of 57 police stations in the State, only 18 were functional, most of them having been abandoned after extremist strikes. The article quoted the government report as saying, “there are many districts where administration is almost non-existent.” It also noted that only two residents in the entire province paid Income Tax, yet from top State government officials to politicians, everyone paid protection money to militant groups. The piece added ruefully that the State bureaucracy was ineffective and “the State’s political class is too busy politicking to have any time for other pursuits.” Three ruling party ministers, the piece informed, had defected to the opposition camp in a bid to overthrow the then government, prompting twenty two legislators to be restrained in the Chief Minister’s residence to prevent them from following suit. It also noted that a large number of non governmental organisations that had received grants from Central government ministries and foreign agencies were run by ministers and senior politicians. The report added “Central government officials feel the State government does not seem to be capable or willing to tackle the situation”.

The article, quite succinctly, sums up the current political situation in Manipur. But it goes beyond just describing the breakdown. It also gives us a feel of the nature of the state in Manipur, its capabilities and its weakness. The state and its agencies appear to command little authority or compliance from society. A reading of the piece makes it evident that the *(in)capability* and the *(un)willingness* of state agencies to respond to the crisis, have played their role in worsening, indeed in creating the sorry state of affairs in Manipur. It is the historical roots of this phenomenon that I will explore in the present chapter. More specifically, I will try to understand the institutional bases of the precarious authority of the

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<sup>35</sup> ‘Handing over a State on the platter’: *The Pioneer*. New Delhi : 6 December 2000.

state in Manipur and the resultant incapacity. I first survey the process of state formation in pre-colonial and colonial times. I then explore the social conflicts in Manipur in the run up to Independence and the political contestations between groups within the State and those between State and Central leaders, after Independence and the merger of the State with the Indian Union. I will conclude with a survey of the impact of these contests on the authority structure in Manipur and its implications for political stability, demonstrated by the nature of electoral politics in the State.

## 2.2 Pre-colonial state formation

There is much in the literature on the pre-colonial history of Manipur. These accounts talk of its Valley region having been home to diverse ethnic groups and clans jostling for supremacy. It was the Ningthouja clan led by Nongda Pakhangba that emerged victorious, establishing their kingdom at Kangla in present day Imphal, Capital of Manipur. The rise of this kingdom was helped by the need of different clans to defend themselves against frequent raids by the neighbouring Burmese, Cachari and Tripuri rulers. Pakhangba's political domination of the Valley enabled him to consolidate different ethnic groups socially and evolve a common Meitei identity around Meiteilon, the dominant language. Thus political consolidation of the state centred on the Kangla and social consolidation of Meitei identity went hand in hand, one reinforcing the other.<sup>36</sup>

It would appear that the resultant state was absolutist. The ruler was the centre of authority, owning all land, and allotting it to his subjects on payment of rent. There existed a reasonably developed land revenue system with officials at the local as well as central levels to supervise cultivation and collection of revenue (Hodson, 1908:86-87). In effect, the state was powerful enough to force compliance of the demands it made on its subjects. These were less in terms of taxes on land and more in the form of labour. This was the harsh form of labour called *lallup*, under which every adult male was obliged to provide to the state free labour for ten days in every forty. These were utilized for public civil works programmes, such as construction of roads and bridges and dredging of rivers. There was an elaborate and efficient administrative machinery to enforce these rules (Singh, 1998: 20-21). The Valley was divided into four administrative units that were themselves subdivided into 107 villages, each under a headman. The King controlled the whole administrative system centrally. Social and political consolidation in the Valley, leading to state formation and

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<sup>36</sup> For an account of the early history of Manipur see Kamei (1991).

concentration of authority in the king helped bring about stability and order. But the King's control over the surrounding Hills was less defined. Though the Manipuri kingdom dominated the Hills - often acting as the peacekeeper between feuding villages there - the ruler did not enjoy the same political (much less social) control in the Hills that he enjoyed in the Valley. His influence there was shifting and informal (Johnstone, 1971:81 and 93-94)<sup>37</sup>. There was thus a lack of penetration of the state and its authority in the Hills. The adverse effects of this fragmented political organisation within the boundaries of the State on the nature of authority structure were exacerbated by the localised and primitive nature of political organisation in the Hills.

State-formation in the Hills was still in its infancy. Hill communities were divided into two main constellations: Nagas, inhabiting the north, east and the west of the Valley and Kukis dispersed in small settlements all around, but mostly in the south. The village was the highest unit of political organisation among both. Each village itself was a collection of clans claiming a common descent. Inter-village contacts were limited, most villages being usually at war with each other. The Naga village system was generally decentralised with the village headman (*khulakpa*) enjoying ritual and political authority but with little economic power. There usually was a consultative council of village elders to govern the village and resolve disputes. Land ownership vested, on the whole, with individual households or with the village council / community. The Kuki system, in contrast, was centralised with Kuki Chiefs (*ningthou*) being heads of villages and owners of all their land. Kuki Chiefs, who were strictly hereditary, were also entirely supported by their subject villagers for their day-to-day requirements. Villagers usually cultivated the Chief's fields and gave him a share of the game they hunted. Chiefs also received presents during marriage or child-birth.<sup>38</sup> A mixed system existed among the Kabui Nagas, where the *Khulakpas* held greater authority than that enjoyed by the headmen among the other Naga tribes - the Tangkhuls and the Mao Nagas particularly. But among the Kabui Nagas, ownership rights over land were vested neither in the *Khulakpa* nor in the village council but in *nampous* (literally meaning the 'village settler'), who derived their rights from past customs. Still, and very much in tune with the Naga system as a whole, *nampous* were not landowners. They

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<sup>37</sup> Commenting on the Hill-Valley relations in pre-colonial times, Reid the then Governor of Assam wrote, "the boundaries of the State do not enclose a cultural unit, but are rather a mixture of the limit upto which the Manipuris of the Valley were in the past able effectively to extract tribute from the hillmen..." (Reid, 1942 : 87).

<sup>38</sup> See R. Brown's account of the Kuki village system, quoted in N. Sanajaoba (2003:144).

only received a token rent from land tillers.<sup>39</sup> Common to both Naga and Kuki systems however, was the autonomy of individual villages. Each village was independent, and there was no overarching authority, a supra village political entity or a tribal organisation to which individual villages owed allegiance. Mostly, they were at war with each other. The little commonality that existed across villages was largely on account of common religious practices (or schisms); endogenous marriage taboos, linguistic affinities and sometimes, specialisation of employment. (Hodson, 1911: 80-84)<sup>40</sup> But inter-village feuds and violence neutralised the little commonness that did exist among villages, even within the same constellation.

### 2.3 Colonial practices and patchwork state making

The British annexed Manipur in 1891 and soon began to put in place administrative changes, most significantly in land revenue and judicial systems. Reformed land revenue administration led to permanent and stable settlement of agricultural land, involving issue of land documents to tillers and payment of revenue in cash by them to the state. Tax was also introduced on homestead land. The colonial state also established an elaborate administrative system to enforce new laws, relying mostly on the administrative system that had existed in the past: the Valley was divided into five *pannas*, or administrative territories, each under the charge of a *lakpa*. These were mostly influential men with connections to the local nobility. In the judicial realm, traditional courts such as *Cheirap* and *Panchayats* were reinstated to manage internal law and order in the State. These courts followed customary codes.<sup>41</sup> In 1907, the administration of the state was handed over to Churachand Singh, who had been groomed by the British since his early childhood to take up the assignment as the (*Raja*) ruler. He was put at the head of the newly constituted Manipur State Durbar (MSD), which was made up of six Manipuri members with an English officer as its Vice President.<sup>42</sup> But as elsewhere in colonial India, effective political authority remained with the British Political Agent, while the native ruler held a subordinate position.

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<sup>39</sup> For an account of the early political and economic systems of the tribes of Manipur, see Hodson (1911: 70-86).

<sup>40</sup> In some cases however, hegemony of a large village in a cluster of villages, such as that of Ukhrul in the Northeast of the State, led to the emergence of some sort of group identity.

<sup>41</sup> There was however the formal judicial court under the Political Agent, with jurisdiction over Europeans, British Indian subjects and Hill men that used British penal codes. Singh (1998: 40-41)

<sup>42</sup> For a survey of administrative changes in this period see 'The Administration of the State of Manipur from 13-9-1891 to 15-5-1907', Manipur State Archives Reference File (MSA RF) # R-1/S-C, 317-Political.

Resort to ‘indirect rule’ – in the form of retaining traditional institutions and combining them with a new bureaucratic structure manned by officers trained in the British system – was expected to consolidate the hold of the colonial state in Manipur, without being too costly for the government. But the results proved to be different. The arrangement engendered competition between the two centres of authority in the State - the English Political Agent and the native *Raja*. This would adversely affect stability. The anomaly of the *de facto* political authority resting with the Political Agent, even as *de jure* authority remained with the *Raja*, placed the latter at a disadvantage. Lokendra Singh has demonstrated how Churachand Singh responded to this challenge by enhancing his authority in the social realm, an arena where colonial agents could play little role (Singh, 1998:44). The *Raja* began to take active part in Hindu religious revival and in effect, set in motion a trend of religious conservatism in the State. He began enforcing caste Hindu religious codes and practices and revitalising traditional religio-cultural institutions. State-led religious zeal, and steps that reinforced exclusive caste-Hindu symbols, emphasised social hierarchy and disadvantaged the non-Hindu tribal communities of the State. This would prove detrimental to inter-community relations further on.

A corollary to these contests over power was that the authority of the state remained circumscribed. People saw the British-controlled state as being a usurper, controlled by foreign elements. Even though colonial administrators prevented Christian missionaries from preaching in the Valley, the Meteis saw British control as promoting a worldview different from their own. Economic consequences of colonial rule, which were beginning to have an effect on the lives of the common man, added to the sense of disquiet. High rates of taxation on land led to increasing pauperisation of the peasantry; price of commodities, especially rice began to rise due to the newly introduced free-trade; and the local economy was beginning increasingly to be taken over and controlled by traders from outside the State.<sup>43</sup> These dynamics created and amplified the state-society break. Beginning in the early twentieth century, a series of popular movements took place against colonial control that severely tested colonial authority in Manipur.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> For a survey of economic consequences of colonial dominance, see Singh (1998: 35-65)

<sup>44</sup> These included the women’s agitation of 1904 against forced labour; the Bazaar Boycott movement in 1920-21 to protest practices of outsider (Marwari) traders and the Nupi Lan uprising of 1931 against the government’s economic policies. For details see Singh (1998: 71-103)

The basis of the colonial state's authority in the Hills was even more precarious. Post 1891-reforms introduced by the Administration were confined to the Valley and did not extend to the vast surrounding forested Hill tracts. Though these areas had been marked out and included in the Manipur state boundary, little was done to penetrate them administratively. A separate office was set up for the Hill tracts, with a small band of paid staff, based in Imphal. It was the Political Agent and the Vice President of the MSD, both English officers, who had to provide administrative leadership by conducting periodic expeditions into the Hills - an area extending over 8000 sq kms. Subsequent administrative changes for "good government and the containment of the tribes", emphasized the latter to the neglect of the former.<sup>45</sup> Peace and order remained the chief objectives of the colonial state, with no effort being made to incorporate the Hills into the State-wide judicial or land systems. Principal contacts took place in the form of periodic punitive expeditions to emphasise British control and punish errant Chiefs. Significantly, reforms of 1907 that had introduced a semblance of representative government in the Valley were silent on any sort of representation of Hill-based communities in the MSD, thus cutting them off from participation in the State-level governing institutions.

The consequences of this hands-off policy in the Hills were disastrous. What followed was "a period of lawlessness...., old feuds between villages broke out afresh and murders for the sake of robbery or for the glory of head-taking became common"<sup>46</sup>. A large number of Chiefs among the Kukis revolted in 1917, spurred by colonial demands to contribute to the wartime labour corps. A more fundamental reason was the disquiet that colonial demands in taxes, tributes and labour had been causing to the Chiefs, who had, until then, remained largely autonomous. Kuki Chiefs were also aggrieved by the vigorous attempts made over the past decades to disarm the tribes and create order in the Hills.<sup>47</sup> Though the Kuki Chiefs were finally reined in by 1919, the Kuki Rising had severely tested colonial authority (and had cost it a huge Rs. 28 lakhs to subdue). Colonial administrators were convinced that a change in tack, by establishing an administrative presence in the Hills, was essential to preempt further rebellions. In 1919 the administration was extended to the Hill areas. Sub

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<sup>45</sup> 'Scheme for Administration of the Hill Territories (1902)', Manipur State Archives, Imphal

<sup>46</sup> 'The Administration of the State of Manipur from 13-9-1891 to 15-5-1907' : MSA RF # R-1/S-C, 317-Political..

<sup>47</sup> Refer Parratt (2005: 42-44) for a discussion on the Kuki Rising.



divisions were created – Tamenglong, Ukhrul and Sadar Hills - and colonial officers actually made to reside in them.

Despite these changes, the 1919 reforms still fell short of any serious attempt to penetrate the Hills very far. Though an immediate presence was established in the Hills, the state left each village to its autonomy, guided and governed by its own sets of customary laws and codes. The state machinery in the Hills was deliberately kept thin, much reliance being placed on local Chiefs and headmen to aid the Sub Divisional Officers (SDOs) to keep peace and order. Local centres of power and authority, in the office of the village Chief, were encouraged. They collected taxes on behalf of the state - retaining a part of it as their share - and acted as the police and magistrate in their villages. Further, overall political control of the Hills remained exclusively with the Political Agent, with the MSD and the *Raja* excluded from any role in Hills administration.<sup>48</sup> Despite there being ample opportunity and the need to draw Hill-based communities into the political and administrative reforms taking place in the rest of Manipur, and establish a common political centre, colonial officials chose to keep the Hills separated from the Valley while keeping individual Hill-based communities autonomous. Colonial policies thus stopped short of establishing centralized administrative structures that would have helped establish a united and common political entity.

Consequences of following these policies in the Hills were severe. Firstly, the state, by following different policies for the Hills and the Valley, created and sustained many fresh divides between the two. As a prominent tribal leader, formerly head of the State bureaucracy observed, “tribal people did not consider themselves as part of Manipur, which was really only the Valley. Only the merger (of the state with the Indian Union in 1949) brought us together. We did not have any connection with the Valley or with the Maharaja. Only after integration did we come together.”<sup>49</sup> This prevented the growth of a common civil space between the two.

But more germane to the present discussion, these policies, by reinforcing local and traditional centres of power and vesting them with political authority, contributed to

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<sup>48</sup> Rules for the Administration of Hills 1919, Government of Manipur, Manipur State Archives, Imphal

<sup>49</sup> Interview : T S Kipgen, President Kuki Inpi, Manipur. Imphal, 21 October, 2004

preventing state agencies from acquiring social control and authority. As has been observed elsewhere in the (British) colonial context, even where it had the means to provide sustenance directly to the population through common codes, centralized institutions and direct rule, colonial administrators chose to go with local power centres and institutions. Throughout the colonial period, traditional centres of power, village Chiefs and headmen remained in positions of strength in Manipur. When they rose in revolt against colonial policies, as during the Kuki Rising or when they did so later during the Naga Raj movement (1931-1934)<sup>50</sup>, the colonial state was successful in containing them. But the strength of these forces and the social control they enjoyed meant that colonial administrators were always dependent on these traditional centres of authority to rule Manipur. Further by using Chiefs and tribal strongmen as their agents and front men to penetrate society and gain the much-needed legitimacy to be able to rule, colonial officers helped these local power centres to consolidate and enhance their authority, at the expense of the state. Indeed, during the final days of their rule in Manipur, colonial officers actively encouraged tribal leaders to establish community-specific organisations, thus reinforcing centrifugal tendencies that would prove costly to Manipur in future.<sup>51</sup>

In sum, it can be said that though the colonial state in Manipur had ample opportunity to draw Hill based communities into reforms taking place in the rest of the State and to establish centralised political and administrative institutions, it chose to behave in ways that strengthened localised institutions, autonomy of individual villages and authority of the Chiefs. Chiefs and their advisors themselves relied on customary codes and practices to emphasise their social control. The incentive structure thus encouraged local chiefs to emphasise their specific identities - built on community lines - to enhance their social control over the population. Old rewards, sanctions and myths associated with customary practices remained more or less intact and could not be replaced with statewide common reward structures. Dynamics of state-formation in the Valley followed a similar trajectory

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<sup>50</sup> The Naga Raj movement, led by Jadonang, the messianic Kabui Naga leader, had the objective of resisting colonial dominance that came in the form of frequent raids, new taxes and demands for free labour. Jadonang called for non payment of taxes and promised that soon the British would be forced to leave, enabling a Naga Raj (rule) in the Hills. The leadership was later passed on to Gaidinliu, a young girl. For an account see (Yonuo, 1974:126-130)

<sup>51</sup> Gangumei Kamei has argued that many tribal organisations, which play dominant roles in political mobilisation in Manipur today, owe their origins to the active encouragement of colonial officers. The Kabui Samiti was established in 1934. Later the Kabui Naga Association was set up, in 1946, and the Zeliangrong Council in 1947. Other tribal organisations that took birth in the years just before Independence are the Kuki National Assembly (for the Kukis), the Tangkhul Naga Long (for the Tangkhul Nagas) and the Paite National Council of the Paite tribe. (Kamei, 2003)

with state-society cleavages leading to contests over social control and a weak grounding of state power. In other words, the colonial phase of state-making in Manipur, saw the development of fissures in the authority structure in the Valley and reinforcement of multiple authority systems in the Hills. While these tendencies engendered divisions, they also ensured that the presence of the state in both the sites remained precarious. The poor hold of the state on society would be amplified in the next round of contestations between social forces over making of the modern state in Manipur.

#### **2.4 A disconnected democratic state**

Political awakening in the Valley began with the establishment in 1934 of the Nikhil Manipuri Hindu Mahasabha (NMHM), a politico-cultural organisation that sought to represent Meteis in the State as well as outside. Its social base was made up of the Meitei urban intelligentsia, educated in Hindu traditions and practices. These were members of the upper echelons of society - working in local courts and State government offices, as well as some businessmen. The social base of the NMHM determined its agenda, which was typically the promotion of the Hindu faith, advancing the social and economic interests of the Meteis and the popularisation of English education amongst them, as well as the protection of Manipuri identity and its cultural symbols (Singh, 1998: 127-128).<sup>52</sup> As the chief patron of the NMHM, Raja Churachand Singh, provided the ideological moorings of this class. NMHM would play the dominant role in the politics of Manipur over the next decade. Gradually a section in the organisation was able to overcome the limited agenda of the organisation to shift from social and cultural reforms to demanding political changes such as an elected MSD and reduction in the powers of the Raja and his lackeys, seen by the educated class as feudal and exploitative<sup>53</sup> (Singh, 1998: 132).

Central to the NMHM and political contests in Manipur in the early years was the role of Hijam Irabot. Access to modern education and links to the ruling family had helped Irabot to the high position of a member of the Sadar Panchayat court. Irabot also played a leading role in the Manipuri cultural renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s - which had itself acted as the springboard for the formation of the NMHM. Introduction to the nationalist movement then

<sup>52</sup> Quoting resolution of NMHS annual conference 1934 and 1936. L. Yaima Singh and RK Maipaksana Singh, *Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha*, Imphal 1983,

<sup>53</sup> Quoting memorandum submitted to the Maharaja by RK Shitaljit Singh and I Jogeshwar Singh, dated 24-11-1938.

taking place in the rest of India, and to its leaders, provided Irabot with an appreciation of the larger meaning of colonialism and its ill effects on society. While the bulk of the NMHM was made up of the elites with only a conservative agenda, it was Irabot who (in 1938 as the president of the NMHM) gave the organization its more political character and began to demand political and economic changes, now with a changed name – Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha (NMM). The organisation's taking on a more direct political role also meant that Irabot and others like him would increasingly have to directly confront the authorities.<sup>54</sup>

But most in the NMM were no match for Irabot's radical politics. Bulk of the members of the NMM belonged to the new class of educated urban elite among the Meteis.<sup>55</sup> Irabot's active support to the women's uprising in 1939<sup>56</sup>, helped alienate him from most in the NMM. Over the next few years Irabot gravitated further towards radical politics and began to focus on the conditions of the peasantry in the State. (Parratt, 2005: 87).<sup>57</sup> He helped in the formation of two mass-based parties, the Krishak Sabha with a following among peasants, and the Praja Sangha, for the urban sections. Using these two political formations, Irabot began mobilizing support to demand full responsible government in Manipur. The nub of the demands of these parties was largely economic: compulsory land rights for those that tilled land, fair price for agricultural products, reduction in land tax and free education (Parratt, 2005:37) as well as protection of the interests of local businessmen and imposition of restrictions on the entry of outsider traders into the State (Singh, 1998: 194). The mass-based nature of political mobilization and the popular agenda of the Praja Sangha and the Krishak Sabha endeared these parties to the masses.

Apprehensive of the growing popularity of these mass-based parties and of Irabot particularly, the NMM leadership decided, in 1946, to merge with a clutch of other elite

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<sup>54</sup> The MSD forbade government servants from being members of the NMM, prompting Irabot and a few others to resign from their positions in the government.

<sup>55</sup> Lokendra Singh has demonstrated how administrative and economic reforms brought by the British, changed the social structure in Meitei society. There were primarily two social groups in the Valley in the pre-colonial days: the Raja and the nobility; and the mass of peasants, serfs and slaves who worked the land of nobles or their own. In part, colonial policies led to pauperisation of peasants. There was largescale surrender of land by the peasants, to those with access to resources and power. As a consequence, a new class of absentee landlords arose, made up of rent receivers and landlords and tenant cultivators. (1998: 51)

<sup>56</sup> This was the agitation by the women hawkers of Imphal against the economic hardships faced by the common man and the role of the state apparatus and outsider Marwari traders in contributing to those hardships. They were specifically protesting the export of rice by the traders and which was leading to shortage of rice for consumption in Manipur itself. The traders had the support of the colonial agents and the Raja in this venture. For an account see Singh (1998:135-140)

<sup>57</sup> In 1946, Irabot contested elections to the Assam State Assembly as a candidate of the Communist Party of India from Silchar and lost only narrowly.

parties to form the Manipur State Congress (MSC). Thus, in the run up to the end of colonial rule, a polarization of the political space in Manipur had been forced, between mass-based parties and those of the (urban) elites. Leaders of both staked claims to dominate politics and act as the state-making coalition. The difference was, while the former sought a change in power relations in society the latter wanted to retain the existing system. But there was a third element in the power games here – that of the Maharaja and the social system he represented. This section, made up of the nobility, was opposed to both the mass-based parties that were asking for fundamental changes in social structure and economic relations and the MSC that was seeking to replace rule by the traditional nobility with one by the educated urban elite. It was this three-way contest over power that would define the nature of politics in Manipur during this critical phase of its political history.

The background to the intensification of political contestations was the moves being made for political reforms in Manipur. Under popular pressure, Churachand Singh's successor to the throne – Maharaja Bodhachandra Singh - set up, in 1946, a Constitution Making Committee to draft a State constitution. Elections to the Committee, the first electoral exercise in Manipur, caused intense politicking between the MSC and the Praja Sangha – Krishak Sabha combine and to a realignment of political forces in the State. While MSC tried to expand its base by establishing links with the affluent sections in rural areas of the Valley (partly influenced by the fact that the franchise in the Valley was limited to the propertied class), the Praja Sangha called for universal franchise and for the expansion of the franchise to the Hills (Singh, 1998: 199). Praja Sangha would continue to emphasise the inclusive nature of its mobilisation in the days to come and even attempted to forge a United Front with Hill-based political formations (Singh, 1998: 215).

With the end of colonial rule, political authority in the state was restored to the Maharaja, who signed the Instrument of Accession and the Standstill Agreement with the Indian Union in 1947. These measures led to Manipur, a 'princely State', being drawn into the Indian Union, although it still retained wide-ranging political autonomy. It was only matters such as Defence, Communication and Currency, over which New Delhi had exclusive authority. Further the Maharaja remained the constitutional head of the State. But the ruler soon began to come under increasing pressure from the MSC for abolition of constitutional monarchy and for its replacement by merger of the State as a constituent part of the Indian Union. To

safeguard his interests in the changed circumstances, the Maharaja encouraged the setting up of and supported the working of the Praja Shanti party, made up largely of those with links to the nobility. Elections to the first Manipur Legislative Assembly, held under the Manipur State Constitution in 1948 - significant in that they were the first elections anywhere in India on the basis of full adult suffrage and for a responsible government - threw up a fragmented mandate.<sup>58</sup> Though MSC was the largest single party, it was Praja Shanti that managed to form the government, with the support of non-MSA members of the House.

While the MSC and the Praja Shanti were locked in these political contests over control of state authority, they also shared a common concern over the increasing radicalisation of Irabot and his mass-based politics. In 1947, in its 3<sup>rd</sup> annual conference, the Krishak Sabha was organising anti-government and anti landlord marches, asking for lowering land taxes. It was also showing signs of increasing militarisation. These moves threatened both the ruling class among the nobility as well as the educated elite who had, over the years, acquired rural property. Significantly, developments at the national level around the time had led to the stigmatisation of the Communist Party of India (CPI) as anti-national and subversive. Irabot's dabbling with the CPI and his links with the Burmese Communist party provided both the MSC and the Maharaja with an excuse to sideline him politically (Singh, 1998 : 202-203). Irabot was forced to go underground and left to organise an armed socialist movement against the government. This put an end to what perhaps was the only experiment with grassroots inclusive political organisation in the history of Manipur.

There were other losers too in these contests over power. In 1949, political developments in the country and in Manipur's own neighbourhood overtook the State. The anxieties of the national leadership with nation building and their fears of a rising communist wave in the east from Burma resulted in Manipur's 'merger' with the Indian Union and the abolition of monarchy and the elected State Assembly. The gainer was of course the MSC, which had established links with the Indian National Congress and which had mobilised for the merger of Manipur.<sup>59</sup> This implied that it was an elitist formation with a limited appeal and a narrow agenda that gained the upper hand in political contestations in the State and which would go on to act as the state making party. As we will see, this would have serious consequences for the legitimacy and the authority of the state.

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<sup>58</sup> In the 53 member House, 14 were won by the MSC, 12 by the Praja Shanti party and 6 by the Krishak Sabha. 18 members belonged to reserved constituencies in the Hills. The rest were nominated members (Singh : 1998:218).

<sup>59</sup> In the first post-merger elections in Manipur in 1952, the Praja Shanti party, managed to win only 3 out of the 21 seats it contested (out of a total of 30), leaving the majority to the MSC (Singh, 1981:24).

Crucially, from being a princely State with a constitutional monarchy and a legislature recently elected on the basis of adult franchise, ‘merger’ led to Manipur being made a ‘part C’ state of the Indian Union, to be administered by the Centre, without a popular government.<sup>60</sup> Abolition of the elected State Assembly and its replacement by bureaucratic rule was a setback in many ways. Parratt claims “the first years of Indian rule had brought into Manipur a degree of unaccountability, financial corruption and nepotism...” (2005: 125). Chief Commissioners appointed to administer the State proved ill equipped to the task and were better known for their mismanagement, leading to adverse public opinion. Many claimed, “the Central government has deputed only the most corrupt, inefficient and domineering officers as heads of almost all departments”.<sup>61</sup> The State bureaucracy provided ample evidence of its insensitivity, when for instance in 1965, poor handling of the agitation against rising food scarcity led to police firing that ended in the death of ten student activists.

Progress toward restoration of popular government was slow and laboured. An Advisory Council made up of nominated members was set up in 1950 to be followed in 1956 by Manipur being designated a Union Territory. In 1957 the elected Territorial Council was set up. From 1960, demands for responsible government and an elected assembly began to accelerate, confined at this stage to petitioning authorities in Imphal and Delhi. In 1963, Manipur was granted a 32-member Territorial Assembly, though top executive authority still remained with the Central government appointed Chief Commissioner. Demands for full statehood and for popular government, gradually shifted to the streets led by youth organisations and political parties. The Administration’s resort to force to quell these public protestations was beginning to have its own fall out on the mood in the streets. Bowing to mounting pressure and street violence, the Centre made Manipur a full State in 1972, with an elected legislature and a government accountable to its citizens.

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<sup>60</sup> Post-Independence state-building in India involved the bringing together of different territorial units existing under colonial India. There was considerable variety in the relationship of these units to the Central state. Some were constituent territories of the Dominion such as The United Provinces (that were designated as Part A states); large princely states such as Kashmir (were made Part B states) and smaller ones under native rulers such as Manipur (were made Part C states). Most Part A and Part B states were given considerable administrative autonomy as ‘States of the Union, while Part C states were kept as Union Territories, under the control of the Central state.

<sup>61</sup> Tajendra Singh of the Meitei nationalist Pan Manipuri Youth League (PMYL), in a piece he penned titled ‘what is wrong in Manipur ?’. Quoted in letter of Superintendent of Police to District Magistrate Central district, dated 3-12-1970 (MSA RF no 23/10/70-pol-1, r/7-e, 1145).

The twenty-three years of conflicts from 'Merger' to 'Statehood' caused a severe break between state and society, further compromising the reach and the authority of the state. With little grounding in society, the Centrally administered bureaucratic state began to be seen as 'foreign' and anti-people. Its frequent use of overwhelming force to respond to popular protests hardened the feeling of discontent among people and led to escalation of protests. These sentiments also contributed to the setting in of armed insurgency in Manipur. Commentators have argued that the abolition of democratic government also changed the nature of politics in the State in a fundamental manner. Politics became petty and self-serving with politicians hankering after the patronage that high State officials and party bosses in the Centre had control over. Combined with the Central leaders' general treatment of the State as a "feudal fiefdom" and their making and unmaking governments and engineering splits, this may have led to rise in corruption, absence of political will to govern and to chronic instability setting in. For many, it was the dilution of the democratic and federal principles by Central leaders that encouraged these trends. (Chandhoke, 2005:19).

Much of this took place around the MSC - now an adjunct of the Indian National Congress (INC) at the Centre and simply called the Congress. MSC's strength had always been, less its organisational or ideological appeal and more its ability to forge alliances with powerful elements in society. In-fighting, fissures in leadership and 'personality cult' were its notable characteristics. Commentators have noted that part of the problem was the state Congress's derivative character and the institutional characteristics of the mother party in the Centre (Chandhoke, 2005 : 23). Something that was to have implications for the nature of politics was the social base of the party, which was restrictive, being exclusively Meitei and elitist. It started with neither a base in the Hills nor any urgent inclination to establish one. In the 1952 Electoral College elections, the Congress did not field any candidate from the Hill constituencies, except in Churachandpur district, where its candidate lost (Singh, 1981: 25).

Despite these shortcomings of the Congress, a weakly grounded Central bureaucracy relied on this section to legitimise its presence in Manipur, due mostly to the pro-merger stance of its leaders. Though MSC enjoyed only a thin majority in the 1948 State Assembly, Central leaders appointed a majority of MSC men to the Chief Commissioner's Advisory Council in 1950. The relationships and alliances between the Manipur Administration and political parties representing different social forces in the Valley had implications for the nature of state power. By aligning themselves with the largely urban and elitist Valley-centric MSC,



State leaders ended up compromising the social base of the state, leading to its precarious hold on society. This contributed to, among others, the weakening of the authority and legitimacy of the state. And by helping sideline mass-based organisation that had shown an urge for inclusive mobilisation (and programmatic reforms) central leaders lost a golden opportunity to bridge the Hill-Valley divide.

Election results in 1952 and beyond demonstrate the changing fortunes of the Congress party and the interests it represented. In the 1952 election to the Electoral College meant to nominate members to the Chief Commissioner's Advisory Council, the Congress won 10 of the 20 seats in the Valley. In the 1962 Territorial Council elections, the party improved its overall position and by the time of elections to the first Legislative Assembly in 1967, it had consolidated its hold by winning 32.5 % of the valid votes, securing the majority in the House. These victories helped the social forces tied in with the MSC - the combine of landholders and the urban elite - to maintain their entrenched position in the State. This also resulted in frustrating attempts at programmatic reforms that could have expanded the base of state power. The Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms (MLR&LR) Act, introduced in 1960 to reform property rights was unable to do away with intermediaries in landholding system, a significant failure, considering the large number of such landlords in Manipur. (Das, 1989: 139-140). Congress's capture of political power, therefore, contributed to preventing attempts at economic reforms in favour of the masses.

An equally notable feature of politics in Manipur, evident from the 1967 elections on, was the importance of 'independent' candidates - those not affiliated to any political party. Such candidates bagged 48.9 % of the total valid votes in 1967. This trend was a continuation of an earlier one, when Independent candidates had secured 41.3 % of votes in 1957, much higher than their share in 1952. In the 50s, most Independent candidates represented constituencies in the Hills, and may have, in the absence of the Congress or the socialist parties there, represented the many ethnic based organisations and interests that were trying to carve a political space for themselves. Soon such candidates began to establish a presence in the Valley too. In the 1967 House there were equal numbers of Independent candidates from Hill and Valley constituencies. They may have represented the sections allied to the nobility that had been ousted from the power structure due to the merger. While some of those allied to the Praja Shanti party must surely have joined the dominant Congress, many would have continued to provide alternative sources of authority. As future developments

would prove, the presence of a large number of Independent candidates was deleterious to political stability in the State.

Table 2.1 : Territorial Council / Assembly elections, Manipur (1952-1967)

	Congress	Socialist	Ethnic Parties	Independent Candidates	Total
1952	10	3	16	1	
1957	12	11	-	7	30
1962	15	5	-	10	30
1967	16	5	-	9	30

Source: Tabulated by the author from Singh (1981: 26-43)

Independent candidates also helped mobilise the sense of despondency and frustration that was increasingly setting in amongst youth, due to the failures of the prevailing political and economic system. The rise of the Congress, based on its power of patronage derived from its links with the bureaucratic state structure had led to a parallel weakening of the socialist parties. The latter had, so far, represented the masses and had espoused economic and social interests of the excluded. The lack of programmatic policies and ideas in the Congress combined with the bureaucratic nature of the State administration proved disastrous for Manipur. They created severe socio-economic challenges, especially around economic opportunities, for state leaders to contend with. Along the way, the Statehood Demand movement and the opposition to it by Central leaders and their agents in the State helped to sharpen the Meitei sense of identity.

The decade of the 1960s brought into sharp focus the combination of these different trends – exclusion of the nobility and the rural masses, rising socio economic challenges and Meitei identity mobilisation – to create the opportunity for sharp increase in political mobilisation and in instability. The exclusive base and manner of political organisation by the different political formations meant that state power was fragmented and had only a precarious grounding in society. An apt illustration here is that of the rise of organizations like the Pan Manipuri Youth League (PMYL) and the Manipur People's Party (MPP). Formed in the early 1960s, PMYL was made up of the youth educated in the best universities in the Northeast region. On their return to Manipur, having imbibed separatist ideas from Assam, they found few avenues for their economic advancement. Higher jobs in the government were with outsiders as were most openings in trade and commerce. Meitei youth also felt

aggrieved on account of the Centre's affirmative action policies, favouring only tribal candidates (all from the Manipur's hill areas), in reservations in public sector jobs and educational institutions controlled by the Centre. These middle class interests acted as the driving force behind the mobilisation against a Centrally controlled and domineering State administration and a Congress party increasingly seen as a lackey of the Centre. Says a veteran politician and a founder-member of the PMYL:

“The irony is that Manipur was peaceful for a long time (after the merger). Youth had their grievances...and rising aspirations that were not being met. They wanted the leadership to take heed. The leadership was mostly with the Central government. But there was such a distance between the people and the bureaucracy...none of their pleas were addressed. If government had been mindful of the consequences, much (of this disquiet) could have been avoided”.<sup>62</sup>

Clearly, it was the failure of reigning political institutions to address basic needs of the people and to create opportunities, combined with the limited social base of the state that was forcing the excluded sections, represented by the PMYL, to seek to mobilise people's sense of frustrations to capture power. The Congress party's institutional weaknesses and the frequent power struggles within helped those outside to forge alliances with the alienated faction in the Congress to form the MPP in 1967 and bid to capture state power. A leftist-leaning leader provides an insight into the internal power struggles in the Congress and their consequences:

“.... The dominant party (Congress) failed to provide succour to the people...they followed their time-tested politics of patronage. They were also less concerned about political rightness or otherwise and were concerned more about staying in power.”<sup>63</sup>

The social base of organizations like the PMYL and the MPP and the political context of the Statehood movement meant that these parties would mobilize support along narrow Meitei identities and seek to pursue a Meitei state-building project. Commenting on the sentiments that brought MPP to power in 1967, an editorial noted, “MPP was never a cadre based party... One may call it Meitei xenophobia or chauvinism or resurgence ...But it was an amorphous and incoherent mass consciousness associated with these terms that catapulted

<sup>62</sup> Interview: L Chandramani, President Federal Party of Manipur (FPM). Imphal: 24 November 2004

<sup>63</sup> Interview: Ch. Ibohal, Leader, Communist party of India (CPI) Imphal: 22 November 2004.

MPP to power”.<sup>64</sup> In subsequent elections, the party deployed its identity tools to its advantage. Its election manifesto in 1972 had little programmatic appeal, being mostly made of promises based on identity. It called for ‘Manipur for Manipuris’ and demanded maintaining the integrity of the State’s borders and for allowing Meteis to acquire property in the Hills. In 1980 it was calling for greater autonomy for Manipur and removal of special laws in the State.<sup>65</sup> These appeals to Meitei identity being voiced in a context of community fears, proved too strong for even programmatic parties to resist and gave a jump-start to ethnic politics in the state. Ch. Ibohal, a veteran of the State CPI admits:

With our leftist ideology, we initially concentrated on poor peasants...and took up their interests. But there were other issues that were also important. ...such as having our own assembly, a state, our own language. These were issues crucial for all and not only for peasants. By supporting these issues, we could bring larger numbers of people into our organisation.’<sup>66</sup>

Mobilisation of Meitei identity helped shift the contest within the State from a class – based one to one based on ethnic lines. This helped different sections of the elite in the Valley to forge closer linkages with each other – the case of the MPP being illustrative. But these came at high cost to inclusive politics. The coming together of the elites prevented a policy focus on socio-economic problems of the rural masses, further preventing the latter’s access to resources and opportunities. And the sharp increase in Meitei mobilisation by the elite to capture state power alienated the large non-Meitei sections of the population. These have resulted in distancing both the rural masses and the tribal communities from the state structure, with stark consequences for the authority of the state and the power it holds.

## 2.5 Accommodation and compromise in the Hills

Political awakening was late in coming to the Hills. It was led by Chiefs’ conclaves and tribal associations that colonial officers had helped to form. In the absence of any pre-existing territorial sense of identity, these associations were largely, narrow in their appeal. They were formed with the objective of promoting the interest of the new tribal elite. Advent of Christian missionaries in the Hills from the later 19<sup>th</sup> century had brought in

<sup>64</sup> ‘MPP and the Pretenders’, *Resistance*, Imphal :12 September 1978.

<sup>65</sup> Party manifestos, Indian National Congress (INC), Manipur People’s Party and Ireipok Lasihem, quoted in Singh (1981).

<sup>66</sup> Interview: Ch. Ibohal, Leader, Communist party of India (CPI) Imphal 22 November 2004.

education and a new worldview (Laldena, 1984:41). Missionaries also set up a network of church based organizations that employed educated youth. Some educated youth also found employment in schools and other institutions run by the state. The landed class in the Hills – the Chiefs, their advisors and other landowners – as well as the church-educated and employed sections made up the base of these tribal associations.

Post-Independence state-making in the Hills helped to reinforce the hold of this section. State-making entailed enhancing the tenuous presence of the state machinery in these districts. But as in colonial times, state leaders chose to depend for most of their administrative expansion on the old power structure of the Chiefs and their advisors. Among the Administration's first moves was to bring into force the Village Authority (in Hill Areas) Act, 1956, to establish village-level governance. Village Authorities set up under this act were elected, and envisaged as supplanting the traditional clan-based village councils. But oddly, it was unelected village Chiefs and headmen that were made to head them.<sup>67</sup> Village Authorities are designed to act as the instrument of the state on the ground in the Hills. The 1956 Act envisaged extensive administrative and judicial powers for them. They were expected to maintain law and order in their jurisdiction and in that capacity act as the police [Section 16(1) (a)]. The Act also entrusted these bodies with the powers of criminal and civil courts (Sections 20 and 30) while exempting them from observing procedural provisions of formal legal codes effective elsewhere in the State and the country.<sup>68</sup> With the state taking on welfare functions, the ambit of the authority of these village bodies has been further expanded, to include powers to implement and monitor development programmes.

The 1956 Village Authority Act and the subsequent expansion of the developmental bureaucracy concretised the authority of Chiefs and tribal associations in the Hills. Though the effort was to incorporate 'traditional authority' in the Hills within the formal structures of the state – under the office of the Deputy Commissioner (DC) and Sub divisional officer (SDO)-, the salience of the hold of 'traditional authorities' proved much too powerful for a tenuous state. As a consequence, a parallel power structure has developed in Hill areas, with the authority of the state existing alongside and mostly being compromised by the more powerful authority of tribal associations. Even elections to Village Authorities have been

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<sup>67</sup> Village Authority (in Hill Areas) Act, 1956. Government of Manipur, Imphal

<sup>68</sup> Primarily, the Criminal Procedure Code (1898); the Civil Procedure Code (1908) and the Court Fees Act (1870).

taken over by social forces, with clans nominating their representatives to the council. Bigger clans have managed to capture most of the seats. Commentators note how this has disturbed the inter-clan balance that existed in the village before introduction of elections (Shimray, 2001: 185). Further, attempts to incorporate the customary village courts within the formal legal system have also failed. The old system of Village Courts that is community-specific, emphasising the salience of tribal institutions and their specific identities, has continued. These institutions use their specific customary laws. An observer notes, “as customary laws have not been codified, it’s really the whims and fancies of the those sitting in judgement that determine the course of the case”.<sup>69</sup>

Increasingly, intra-community competitions over authority and resources have led to the legal system itself being turned into a contested arena. More vocal claimants to community resources and symbols, such as apex tribal organisations and armed groups, have been trying to dominate this space, with some telling consequences for rule of law and individual rights.<sup>70</sup> In the past the colonial administration had prevented supra village bodies where they existed (such as among the Tangkhul and Mao Nagas) from playing a role in village level administration, the SDO keeping to himself the sole authority to intervene in inter-village disputes. (Das, 1987: 479) This had upheld the authority of the state. Today new supra-village social bodies have emerged that are seeking to enhance their authority by playing more formal roles in society. The gap resulting from the absence of formal legal authority in the Hills provides such bodies a useful arena to exert their influence. For instance, in 1988 the Tangkhul Naga Long (TNL) compiled the *Shiyan Yanza*, or code of customary law, of the Tangkhuls and set up its court, as a forum where intra- and inter-village disputes could be resolved based on customary laws and practices. This was posed as an alternative to the official courts. Today, most cases of disputes in villages in Ukhrul district are referred from the village councils to the TNL court, and not the courts set up by the government. (Shimray, 2001: 185-186). Similarly the Zeliangrong Union (ZU) has taken the Zeliangrong community’s common customary code for its judicial activities. It has set up its own court to which disputes are referred by the village *peis* (councils) for

<sup>69</sup> Interview: Senior civil servant. Imphal : 7 October 2004. Name withheld.

<sup>70</sup> It was recently reported that Tangkhul customary courts and NSCN (IM), the armed Naga militant group, imposed a heavy penalty on a girl accused of petty theft in Ukhrul district. According to the report, no investigation was conducted; the armed organization had detained the girl for forty seven days and obtained statement from her, under duress, ‘NPMHR [ Naga People’s Movement for Human Rights] rejects verdict of Ato Longphang’, *The Sangai Express*, Imphal : 21 September 2005.

adjudication. Newly acquired judicial authority helps these tribal organisations to play a leading role in mobilising their constituency and enhancing social control.

A similar take-over by ‘powerful elements’ has occurred in the land-holding system. Individual ownership of land among Tangkhul and Mao Nagas may have contributed to the development of permanent farming and investment in productive assets. Amongst the Kukis and sections of the Zeliangrong Nagas, ownership by Chiefs or the community has prevented ordinary villagers from trying to take up permanent cultivation, affecting their economic wellbeing. It has also prevented monetisation of the agriculture sector in these areas. Changes in the land system have been slow in coming. Land reforms introduced in the state under the MLR &LR Act (1960) were confined to the Valley. Hills areas, which account for seventy per cent of the State’s total land area, are excluded from its purview. Attempts to introduce the provisions of the Act to the Hills have been stoutly opposed by tribal leaders.<sup>71</sup> Tribals are concerned about possible alienation of tribal lands to non-locals and loss of traditional rights that ordinary villagers have over *jhum* land. Perhaps tribal leaders, mostly with interest in landed property, are equally concerned about losing their traditional economic and political base.<sup>72</sup> Consequently, land laws in hill areas are still governed by tribal customs and practices. These exist outside the state’s control and have not been codified.

A combination of these factors has helped sustain and consolidate the authority of powerful social forces in Manipur’s Hills. It was no wonder the state’s initiative to abolish the system of village chiefship failed miserably, despite an act to that effect having been passed in the State Assembly in 1968. Evidently state leaders were unable to muster adequate authority to confront entrenched social forces. Failure to abolish chiefship has meant that links with the traditional past have not been severed; and by putting the hereditary Chiefs at the top of the elected Village Authorities, their traditional authority has been enhanced. Having been incorporated in the administrative structure of the State, and also being the channel through which development funds flow, yet lacking in accountability, Village Authorities in the Hills

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<sup>71</sup> The Manipur Land Reforms (Sixth Amendment bill) introduced in 1989, sought to extend the Act to Hill areas. It was opposed by tribal legislators and eventually withdrawn. [Government of Manipur, (1997: 22)]

<sup>72</sup> It was the Kuki Chiefs who most vehemently opposed extension of the MLR&LR Act to Hills districts. Today opposition to its extension has become a symbol of tribal protest among all sections of tribals in Manipur.

have become sites of contestation for control between different sections. These sections have usually taken recourse to community specific appeals. This has impacted not only on elections to Village Authorities but also the general character of tribal politics, which have become predominantly identity-based and exclusivist.

Let us look at electoral contests in the Hills to see how this dynamic has been playing out. The 1948 elections to the pre-merger State Assembly was based on some sort of communal representation of tribal communities. By the time of the next elections in 1952, while a clutch of national and regional parties contested and won elections from the Valley, Hill constituencies were represented almost exclusively by ethnic parties.

Table 2.2 : Elections to the Manipur Electoral College, 1952

Party	Candidates	Seats won	% Votes
Manipur State Congress	22	10	26.8
Left – leaning parties	20	3	10.4
Other Metei parties	53	10	30.9
Kuki National Assembly (H)	7	2	07.2
Mao-Maram Union (H)	2	2	04.6
Mizo Union (H)	2	1	02.9
Zeliangrong Union (H)	2	2	04.1
Paite National Council (H)	1	-	00.7
Naga National League (H)	2	-	03.4
Total	112	30	100.0

Source: Singh (1981:24) Note: 'H' denotes Hill-based parties

By the time of the subsequent elections to the Territorial Council / Assembly, most of these ethnic parties had died out. But what emerged in their place was not the prominence of state or national level political parties, rather the salience of 'independent' candidates.

Table 2.3 : Success rate of candidates in Hill constituencies (1957-1967) in %

	Congress Party	Socialist parties	Independent candidates	Independent candidates in the Valley
1957	30.0	40.0	26.32	5.26
1962	22.0	28.0	33.0	5.40
1967	50.0	-	17.84	5.63

Source: Tabulated from Singh (1981: 26-43)



Table 2.3 demonstrates the high rate of success of Independent candidates in the Hill constituencies. This is particularly marked when compared to the success rate of such candidates in the Valley. The impressive performance of Independent candidates in securing seats in the Hills reflects the difficulty faced by formalised political parties there. Part of the problem was of course the absence of national or State parties in Hill districts to begin with. With larger parties, such as the Congress, absent from the Hills, it was community based ethnic organisations that rushed in to fill the gap. The Congress, then the dominant political formation in the State, also had a Valley-based make up and outlook. This played its part in putting off tribal leaders from trying to connect with the organisation. In the initial years, the party did little to penetrate tribal areas (Singh, 1981: 25). The Socialist party, under the leadership of Rishang Keishing and Yangmasho Shaiza - themselves from the Hills - made some gains among tribal electorates. But the overall weakness of the party in the State prevented it from establishing any significant presence in the Hills.

Most of all, the large number of Independent candidates in the Hills reflected the salience of identity-based politics amongst tribal communities. Elections were fought mostly on tribal lines with manifestos being narrow and sectarian (Singh, 1981:35). Partly, this may have been coloured by rising political aspirations among different tribal groups leading to mobilization of distinct identity. Commenting on the limited agenda of ethnic organisations that cropped up, a historian notes “.....the elite groups (have) always organize(d) themselves on narrow ethnic lines. ... They want to use ethnic based associations or parties just to promote their own interests” (Laldena, 1982). But essentially, it was the legitimacy and strength that traditional authorities and ethnic organizations enjoyed that played the decisive role in making identity politics the dominant form of politics in the Hills. Ethnic parties that had contested and won elections in 1952, were repositories of their community’s distinct identity and traditional values. Independent candidates have continued this link with narrow sectarian politics. This was also a reason why State-wide political parties had such a difficult time penetrating the Hills. Though the Congress did eventually manage to establish a base in the Hills, the party’s appeal reflected more its ability to distribute patronage among the political class, rather than any progress the party may have made in organisation or ideas. Reflecting the extensive compromise and accommodations that the Congress made

with alternative centres of authority, was its absorption of a large number of ethnic based political organisations in the Hills.<sup>73</sup>

Today it is Chiefs' associations and tribal councils that are the most active in politics in Hill districts. They decide who voters in the village will vote for, employing a variety of tools at their command – threat of eviction from village and denial of jhum plots being illustrative – to enforce those political decisions (Singh, 1981:55). Without being formal political parties, they take an active part in political contests and electioneering, mobilising people on a variety of issues and determining political outcomes. In this process they claim to represent the will of the people, more than elected political representatives. During the recent mobilisation by Naga groups over Greater Nagalim demands, a resolution of the Naga Peoples' Convention claimed “no Naga elected representative in the Manipur Legislative Assembly or the Parliament has the mandate to represent Nagas if their views and statement do not reflect the views of the Naga people.”<sup>74</sup> The United Naga Council (UNC), the apex organisation of Nagas of Manipur that was behind the resolution, was evidently attempting to stake a more legitimate claim to represent Nagas than representatives elected through the formal electoral system to the national Parliament and State Assemblies. While this may reflect the lack of legitimacy of elected representatives, it represents more the gradual hollowing out of the political process in Manipur and its replacement by identity-based contestations led by ethnic organisations. The narrow and exclusive focus of these ethnic organisations means the mobilisation is on narrow sectarian lines, most calling for establishing separate ‘homelands’. These have resulted in intensification of conflicts and have contributed to frequent ethnic violence such as the Naga-Kuki clashes of 1992-96 and the Kuki-Paite violence of 1997-99.

It was probably concerns such as the above that motivated the Zomi Students Federation of India (ZSFI) to demand abolition of chiefship and all signs of ‘tradition’ with it. The demand made in the context of the Kuki-Paite clashes, and which was significant in itself, saw the continuance of traditional practices in the State as being behind much of its conflicts and violence. The argument merits being quoted at length:

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<sup>73</sup> Some of these being the Manipur Hills Union, Manipur Mizo Union, Simte National Organisation, Kom Rem Union, Gangte Tribal Union, and Vaiphei National Organisation. Editorials, *Resistance*, Imphal : 30 November 1976 and 28 December 1976.

<sup>74</sup> Resolution of Naga Peoples' Convention, United Naga Council, Manipur. Senapati : 28 June 2001.

‘[The] abolition (of chieftainship) would bring about a common and comprehensive land and revenue law applicable to all Manipuris. Such a step would result in immediate neutralisation of ethnic clashes. Attachment to land has been exploited by vested interests,...as they interpret Chiefs’ rights to land on ethnic lines....Further, sentiments of land belonging on communal lines have been politicised and has caused divide in the tribal social and communal space’.<sup>75</sup>

Exclusivist political organisation in the Hills has also been strengthened by concerns of tribal communities over Meitei domination. The legacy of exclusionary social practices in the Valley (such as caste taboos redoubled in the late-colonial phase) and state leaders’ sharpening their Meitei identity, post-merger, to create a Meitei core of the new state, resulted in counter mobilisation by tribal leaders with clear separatist objectives. Rather than look to Imphal, tribal leaders from Manipur were inspired by political movements of their kinsmen in neighbouring States. Sections of the Nagas and Kukis were drawn to political movements for self-determination in the Naga Hills and the Lushai Hills of Assam. They began mobilising for merger of their respective territories with those districts outside the State. Immediately after the merger, organisations such as the Naga Integration Council (NIC) and Kuki National Assembly (KNA) began mobilising their ethnic constituencies, seeking votes by promising integration of tribal areas in Manipur with Naga Hills and the Lushai / Mizo Hills districts of Assam. These separatist tendencies among the tribals were intensified during the Statehood Movement that was seen by the former as being Meitei-led. During the 1972 assembly elections, held immediately after the grant of statehood to Manipur, there arose a rash of ethnic parties in the Hills, emanating ostensibly from tribal fears of Meitei domination as a result of the latter’s new-found acquisition of political power. Eighteen candidates of various tribe-based organisations contested elections to the twenty seats from the Hills. These included candidates of the United Naga Integration Council and the Mizo Integration Council that had overt separatist agendas. That eight such candidates were eventually successful shows the success of such appeals. (Singh, 1981:56) Debates in the State Assembly on cultural policies also demonstrate the sharp cleavage developing across the Meitei-tribal divide.<sup>76</sup> These divides created further opportunities for exclusivist political

<sup>75</sup> *The Imphal Free Press*, Imphal: 20 April 1998.

<sup>76</sup> Such as those over making the status of the Manipuri language that many tribals saw as being an imposition.

organisation. Perceptions of their poor access to resources and opportunities have further energised tribal separatism and strengthened exclusivist politics among them.

In 1973, Autonomous District Councils (ADC) were set up in each of the six districts of the State, under provisions of the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution.<sup>77</sup> State leaders agreed to this arrangement for tribal communities, partly out of the need to buy tribal support for their demand for statehood for Manipur. But under the Fifth Schedule, ADCs are largely dependent on the State government for their existence. They have little of the wide-ranging and autonomous authority enjoyed by ADCs in other States of the North East, under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. Not long after they were set up, tribal leaders of Manipur began demanding Sixth Schedule status for ADCs in Manipur.<sup>78</sup> Lack of an enthusiastic response from state leaders led the Hill Areas Committee (HAC) of the Manipur Legislative Assembly, made up of all its tribal members, to call for a boycott of ADC elections in 1990, pending conversion of ADCs to Sixth Schedule status. No elections have been held to these bodies since then. While State leaders have been vacillating over a response to Sixth Schedule demand by tribal leaders, Meitei public organisations have shown more open resistance. Citing existing legislations that benefit tribal communities - such as affirmative action programmes for tribal candidates in jobs and educational institutions - they question the need for additional safeguards for them. Of late the opposition to Sixth Schedule demands has been voiced in the context of the State's 'territorial integrity'. United Committee Manipur (UCM), an apex Meitei social organisation has voiced fears that bringing the State's ADCs under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution would lead to the separation of the Hills from the Valley, resulting in the break-up of Manipur itself.<sup>79</sup> Meitei political leaders have supported these arguments.<sup>80</sup> On the whole,

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<sup>77</sup> The Constitution of India created ADCs as institutional arrangements for the protection of tribal communities. The objective, following on similar institutional arrangement created under the British rule for these communities, was to enable the 'backward' tribes to pursue their customary practices and to retain control over their local resources. ADCs were also expected to have access to special devolution of developmental funds from the Centre and State governments. But a distinction was made in the Constitution between ADCs for tribal areas of undivided Assam (contained in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution) and those in the rest of the country (contained in its Fifth Schedule). Tribal areas in Tripura were brought under the Sixth Schedule in 1984 leaving only the tribal areas of Manipur, of all tribal tracts in the Northeast, under the Fifth Schedule. In the former, ADCs are empowered to exercise legislative, judicial, executive and financial functions, more or less autonomous of State governments. In the latter, the autonomy of the ADCs is more circumscribed and real powers vest with the State governments.

<sup>78</sup> Refer to resolutions of the Hill Areas Committee of Manipur State Assembly on the subject in 1978, 1983 and 1990. Assembly Secretariat, Imphal

<sup>79</sup> *The Sangai Express*. Imphal : 31 October, 2002.

<sup>80</sup> RK Ranbir, Ex-Chief Minister, warned of loss of territorial integrity of the state if the demand was conceded. Letter to the Editor: *The Imphal Free Press*, Imphal: 2 November, 2002.

mainstream political parties have shown little urgency to resolve the issue, leaving ethnic associations on both sides to engage in debates and exclusivist mobilisation, further dividing society and fragmenting state power.<sup>81</sup>

## 2.6 Localised political organisation and the crisis of legitimacy

Exclusivist political organisation and poor institutionalisation of political parties in both the Valley and the Hills have resulted in severe instability in Manipur. Political parties and the political process itself are shorn of legitimacy. Coalitions, when they are formed are unstable. Independent candidates representing traditional and exclusivist forces, play dominant roles in government formation and their sustenance. Floor crossing is a common feature and governments hardly ever last the full term. Alongside, exclusivist identity-based mobilisation has become the key feature of electoral politics in the State. A survey of elections over the past decades demonstrates the evolving crisis. (Table 2.4)

Table 2.4: Party-wise position in Manipur State Assembly (1972-2002)

	Total seats	Congress	Other National	Regional	Ethnic	Independent
1972	60	17	9	15	-	19
1974	60	13	8	20	14	5
1980	60	13	22	4	2	19
1984	60	30	5	3	1	21
1990	60	24	18	9	3	-
1995	60	22	12	21	2	3
2000	60	11	14	34	-	1
2002	60	20	12	28	-	-

Source: Election Commission of India (<http://www.eci.gov.in/ElectionResults/>)

While the Congress party has mostly been the dominant one in the State Assembly and has formed the government on most occasions, the most significant aspects about elections in Manipur have been the fragmented mandate given by people and the strong presence of Independent candidates. Independent candidates (and those representing ethnic parties) were

<sup>81</sup> Manifesto of the Indian National Congress, 2002 Assembly elections and The Federal Agenda, 2002, manifesto of the Federal Party of Manipur

a big force in the 1970s and 1980s. They were prime targets for parties seeking to form the government but that lacked a clear majority. Independent candidates represent community interests unmediated by statewide political parties. This is confirmed by the decrease, from the 1990s, in the number of Independent candidates in the State Assembly with a parallel increase in position of regional and ethnic parties. The Kuki National Assembly (KNA), Manipur Hills Union (MHU) and Naga National Party (NNP), all Hill-based organisations, have had modest successes in mobilizing their constituencies, limited as they are on account of the small size of constituencies they cater to. On the other hand it was the Manipur Peoples Party (MPP) followed by the Manipur State Congress Party (MSCP) that gained at the cost of national parties.<sup>82</sup> While these parties sought to appeal to all constituencies, and even managed a small presence in the Hills, their outlook has essentially been Valley-based.

But it is no longer only the purely chauvinistic parties that espouse exclusivist agendas. Parties with definite State-wide aspirations have also begun to deploy identity-based mobilization. The Congress party won a majority of seats in the 2002 assembly elections, promising to protect territorial integrity of Manipur. It went on to form the government in alliance with a clutch of national and regional parties.<sup>83</sup> The Federal Party of Manipur (FPM), the principal opposition in the current Assembly, made similar appeals to identity sentiments.<sup>84</sup> The problem arises on account of the internal contradictions inherent in identity mobilization in a multi-ethnic State, which pits these community-based promises in direct confrontation with aspirations of other communities. While protection of territorial integrity of Manipur is a noble objective, its espousal by political parties without any parallel desire on their part to open up access to power and resources for tribal communities (in the form of effective ADCs, for example) has helped to alienate the tribal leadership from politics in the State. In recent years, communalised political campaigns by all parties, have led to greater polarisation of communities (Bhagat, 2002). These tendencies have fed into intensification of social conflicts and political instability.

Instability in Manipur caused by the poor ability of political institutions to manage conflicts is worsened by the rising aspirations among all sections of the population. Lack of opportunities in the private sector means that the newly mobilised electorates see benefits

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<sup>82</sup> MSCP was a breakaway faction of the Congress party and was formed in 1997.

<sup>83</sup> 'Congress Manifesto, 2002 Elections' : Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee, Imphal

<sup>84</sup> 'The Federal Agenda, 2002' : Federal Party of Manipur, Imphal.

accruing only through greater political participation, so as to capture what the state has to distribute. This has also put extra pressure on legislators to deliver. But political leaders increasingly find themselves heading State departments with diminished resources to distribute among their constituencies, making their claim to power precarious.<sup>85</sup> These trends have led to the political class resorting increasingly to rent-seeking behaviour, constantly jockeying for power and for advancement in the ministerial scheme of things and their frequent resort to divisive identity mobilisation to wrest control over the little patronage that is still available. These reflect the increasing powerlessness of the political class and the state. These dynamics have added to political instability, ethnic mobilisation and intensification of conflicts. Since the late 1980s there has been greater political instability in Manipur. There have been ten changes of ministries in eighteen years - when there should have been just four. During this period there have also been two spells of direct Central rule (called President's Rule).

Political instability has also created situations helpful to violent contestations and to the use of violence in the electoral process itself. The 1990s, the decade with the worst ethnic violence in the state – Naga-Kuki (1992-96), Metei-Muslim (1993) and Kuki-Paite (1997-99) clashes – witnessed frequent change of government. During recent elections, there has been a rise in violence and in the use of money in elections. Indeed a nexus of sorts has emerged between the political class and rebel organizations, formed along ethnic lines. This has been playing important roles in determining political outcomes. During the 2000 elections, the media reported large-scale use of violence by both, those in control of the state machinery and rebel organisations to gain political advantage (Gupta, 2000).

Poor institutionalization and legitimacy of political organizations and intensification of exclusivist politics is reflected in the political process in Manipur itself, having begun to acquire a strange multiplicity, with “liberal democratic polity surviv(ing), and .....coexist(ing) with underground politics and parallel governments”; and “rise of money and ...gun culture and loss of ideologies and values” (Bhagat et al : 2002). A sad commentary on the loss of legitimacy of formal politics was provided by a survey conducted in the last assembly elections. It appears that an overwhelming majority of electors voted for

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<sup>85</sup> This section is based on interview with O Joy Singh, President, Manipur People's Party. Imphal: 21 November 2004.

candidates not on the basis of their party affiliations but on their individual merit<sup>86</sup> (Bhagat, 2002). The sense of frustration among the electorate with formal politics was palpable. Only seventeen legislators in a house of sixty, were returned to office (the lowest in any election in the State). All political heavyweights were defeated (Bhagat, 2002).

These are reflections of the poor authority of state agencies in Manipur and their poor and fragmented social control. These failures of state leaders to acquire legitimacy hold the state back from being able to connect with society to gain the power required to enhance its capability. As we will see these failures create opportunities for non-state actors to mount increasing attacks on state agencies in the performance of statutory functions, resulting in state failure, community conflicts and violence.

## 2.7 Conclusion

There is evidently much contestation between state agencies and social groups posing a challenge to the monopoly of the state, and which have compromised the authority of the state and have made it relatively powerless. This chapter has demonstrated that the basis of this weak state authority can be found in the particular pattern of state making in Manipur. Some aspects of this pattern turn out to be particularly decisive here. First is that about the dichotomy in pre-colonial times between the Valley with its strong state system and the Hills where the state system had not yet taken shape. This institutional feature was sustained and further developed in colonial times. The arrival and spread of Christianity among the Hill communities (as against the rise of a particularly exclusivist form of Hinduism in the Valley) and the use by the state of separate administrative arrangements for the two regions contributed greatly to the division. Post-Independence, the Central state reinforced these divisive trends, itself influenced by divisions in society.

The upshot of this fragmented pattern of state formation is that the state has been unsuccessful in making itself the sole rule-maker and determinant of people's lives. Other claimants to authority have been strong and have successfully contested the attempts by state leaders to monopolize authority. Tribal Chiefs and ethnic associations in the Hills as well as

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<sup>86</sup> While 68.8 % of respondents in an exit poll considered individual candidates crucial in deciding whom to vote for, only 13.1 % were moved by party affiliations.



dominant elite groups in the Valley have constantly chipped away at the authority of state agencies, compromising the latter's capacity. Since traditional centres of power are themselves structured around specific identities, it was their specific identities that they mobilised to be able to gain political advantages in their contests over power and resources.

What stands out in the story of weakened state authority and salience of exclusivist politics in Manipur is the absence of a uniting central idea or organization, to rally the population and knit different communities together into a common whole, an outcome that could have legitimized the claim of the state to monopoly over social control. Manipur has neither had a uniting political party nor an ideology powerful enough to bring different sections of the population together, nor a leader who could by his authority keep different communities connected to each other. What exists in their place is exclusivist organization of politics: multiplicity of community – specific organizations with local social bases, pursuing narrow agendas through competitive identity mobilisation. The fragmented basis of the state translates into a situation of poor ability of state agencies to make and enforce rules and policies and to moderate the frequent resort by social groups to exclusivist mobilization - so that there is a vicious spiral in operation.

## Chapter 3

### A cohesive state in Mizoram

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter maps out the history of crystallisation of the state in Mizoram. It explores how political actors there acted during the colonial period to enhance the authority of the state while they chipped away at the hold of traditional centers of power. In the postcolonial phase of Mizoram's history, state-making leaders, made up of the section that was opposed to the hold of traditional authorities, reinforced the past trend of state consolidation at the expense of traditional interests. They were helped in this attempt by their numerical strength – an asset in the new democratic dispensation. Having gained political power, they cultivated the poor by undertaking land reforms and redistributive measures. They also developed their organisational capacity to govern by investing in and promoting centralized and inclusive political institutions, whose control rested with the state. These measures had the effect of establishing the authority and the centrality of the state by enhancing its autonomy from social forces representing sectional interests. All along state-making leaders in Mizoram appear to have reinforced their strength by grounding state power in a unified and inclusive identity that they devised.

State making leaders may have been successful in strengthening the Mizo state by distancing it from the influence of traditional interests. But as it turned out, they failed to devise ways to incorporate those traditional forces into the state structure, thus making the state vulnerable to crisis. As we will see, the Mizo Union's (MU) strong anti-Chiefs mobilisation and the policies it undertook left the Chiefs and their supporters excluded from power in the new dispensation. This was even as MU emphasized the inclusive character of Mizo identity it was espousing. Chiefs and their families found themselves alienated from the new Mizo state, with little in it for them to participate. A series of opportunities - beginning with the Assam State government's poor response to the famine in the Mizo Hills in 1959 and the hardships caused to people as a consequence - provided the former elites with the chance they were seeking to re-stake claim to authority. They did this by mobilizing Mizo identity, this time by defining its external boundaries and by raising fears of cultural assimilation to sway public opinion in their favour. Ultimately they resorted to rebellion as the final weapon

to force their claim to the Mizo state. A disciplined political organization, in the form of the Mizo National Front (MNF), was at the forefront of this campaign. By the time peace returned to Mizoram in 1986, traditional elites, who had found themselves excluded in the aftermath of MU mobilization, found their way back into the state structure. However, this is not to say that the MNF mobilisation negated the gains of the MU-led one. Today state power in Mizoram appears to be better grounded in its society. This could be helping enhance the state's authority. It is thus the state's autonomy and its better grounding in society that is behind the state's greater capabilities in Mizoram.

The above argument is elaborated below using empirical evidence gleaned from ethnographic accounts, archival records, public and private documents, press reports and from interview with a host of informants. I have also used secondary material for analysis and interpretation of data. I begin by looking at the history of state crystallization in erstwhile Lushai Hills, to understand the conditions and processes that went into creating the sort of authority structure that we find in Mizoram today. Here we will explore, historically, the genesis of state power during pre-colonial and colonial times. I then examine the struggles that took place during the early post-colonial period, between state-making leaders and traditional interests, to understand how state power has been grounded. I will also try to identify the forces behind MNF's armed rebellion and explore what the second round of struggles over authority was about. In the final section, I try to explore how the grounding of state power in society and the role of key political organisations in the State has led to greater stability and legitimacy of the state and the political process in Mizoram. I conclude the chapter by drawing some empirical insights from the Mizoram material on state formation.

### **3.2 Early consolidation of the state**

What comprises present Mizoram<sup>87</sup> is made of a collection of tribes broadly classified as Kuki-Chin and who came into the present territory in many succeeding waves beginning probably from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The first to move in were 'Old Kukis' (made up of Hmar, Rangkhoh and Baite sub tribes) followed by 'New Kukis' (of Thadous and their clans) and the Lushai clans (of Sailos, Thangrur and Zadengs).<sup>88</sup> These successive waves of migrants

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<sup>87</sup> The region was initially called Lushai Hills district. It was renamed the Mizo Hills district in 1956. In 1972, the district was converted into a Union Territory and in 1987 into a full State of the Indian Union.

<sup>88</sup> For an account of the early classification of the sub-tribes, see Shakespeare (1912: 1-3) and (1912:148)

evicted the previous settlers of the Mizo hills, so that today it is Old Kukis who have been pushed farthest north, some having spilled over into Cachar and North Cachar Hills districts of Assam as well as into Manipur. New Kukis have similarly found habitation in the fringes of Mizoram. It is the Lushai and related clans who occupied the central regions of Lushai Hills district.<sup>89</sup> The topography of the Hills and the shifting cultivation technology used for agriculture (*jhumming*) prevented the development of settled societies and concomitant state formation of the kind we noticed in Manipur's valley. Each village was autonomous and their Chiefs supreme. Yet we are told of the development of some sort of supra local authority, based on the wars between the various village Chiefs and clans. These wars, eventually led to the rise of the Sailo clan among the Lushais, who while pushing northward, began to wrest control of the whole area. This process of development of supra local authority was helped by the hierarchical nature of Sailo chieftainship. Although every village remained an autonomous unit and no political unity existed among them, "... (the village Chief) generally owe (d) some sort of allegiance to the most powerful Chief of the group of villages to which he belongs" (Reid, 1978 : 4). Helping the Sailos in consolidating their hold was also their better cohesion and administrative abilities. As Shakespeare notes, the previous occupants of the Hills were "small communities with no power of cohesion". The consolidation of this process was complete only by early 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the Sailo chiefs in overall command of the territory (McCall, 1949: 35-37).

Sailo chiefs were despotic. They owned all land in the village and apportioned it amongst their 'subjects' for cultivation. Political power and the war-like qualities of the Sailos meant that their subjects – the mass of people residing in their village called *Hanmchawm*, meaning Commoners included those from the many non Lushai sub-tribes - Hmars, Thadous, Raltes, Rangkhols and the like. According to Shakespeare, "the population of a village ruled by Thangrur (Sailo) Chiefs at the present time is composed of representatives of many tribes and clans which have all more or less adopted the language and custom of their rulers." (1912: 41) Commoners could rise to important positions in the Chief's administration, but could never become Chiefs themselves (McCall, 1949:96). Chiefs appointed *Upas*, or advisors, to assist them in administering the village and in deciding disputes. Disobedience of the Chief's orders could entail the seizure of the miscreant's entire property. Chiefs

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<sup>89</sup> For further discussion on the history of the movement and the rise of the Sailo rulers of the Lushai clan, see Shakespeare (1912 : 3-7)

depended on the *Zawlbuak*, the young men's barracks, to provide security from external threats and to enforce rules of discipline within the village. While the *Upas* were entitled to receive *salam* (fee) for services rendered, Chiefs themselves were supported totally by the numerous tributes from the subjects.<sup>90</sup> They also had their agricultural fields worked and their houses built by the villagers. The dominance of the Chiefs could however not be taken for granted. There were limits to Chiefs' powers over their subjects. The latter had the choice of migrating to another village if they found the rule of the Chief becoming oppressive. Chiefs therefore attempted to legitimise their domination. They also promoted *Tlawmnghaina*, the code of community obligation, which implied public service (and which was also an instrument to uphold the existing order). (Shakespeare, 1912: 43-45 ; McCall, 1949: 97-98).

The Chin Lushai expedition of 1889-90 led to the conquest and incorporation of the Lushai Hills into British India.<sup>91</sup> This was followed by a slew of administrative changes designed to maintain peace and extract revenue. By 1898, the whole of the Lushai Hills had been consolidated and its borders clearly marked out. (Reid, 1978: 21-22). The colonial state particularly emphasised peace and order within the territory. Chiefs were forbidden from raiding each other. They were urged to maintain security of person and property.<sup>92</sup> As elsewhere, the colonial state sought to ride piggyback on pre-existing structures of authority to penetrate society and acquire the legitimacy it needed to rule. The strong presence of Sailo chiefs in these Hills provided the colonial state the platform it needed.<sup>93</sup> It began by upholding the authority of the Chiefs. Chiefs were also made responsible for collection of taxes and for maintaining peace within their jurisdiction. The attempt by the state was to impose as few legal enactments as possible, and to rely on pre-existing customary codes and practices. (Reid, 1978: 56). The policy was clearly geared to administrative convenience.

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<sup>90</sup> McCall notes, "a common defect among many chiefs was their unbridled greed". (1949: 98)

<sup>91</sup> Annexation of the Lushai tract was motivated by the need to 'prevent raiding' by the Lushai chiefs on settled villages and tea gardens in Cachar and Sylhet plains in adjoining Assam and Bengal. Reid (1978: 9). The raids themselves were partly on account of the increasing encroachment by colonial tea planters of land used traditionally by the Lushais for jhumming and hunting. The enormity of these raids, their frequency and scale throughout most of the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century led to a series of military expeditions to subdue the Lushai chiefs. The Chin Lushai expedition was the last of these attempts. And which resulted in the subjugated of all the restive chiefs. For a discussion see Nag (2002: 45-49).

<sup>92</sup> Reid writes that, at a durbar of chiefs organised by the Superintendent in Lungleh in 1892, chiefs were made to swear friendship or at least peace with each other. (1978: 45)

<sup>93</sup> "I have noted with astonishment the blind submission rendered to Lushai Rajas (Chiefs) by their dependents, and considered that this is a factor that cannot be ignored in any future arrangements that may be made for the administration of these hills." (Reid, 1978: 27)

Incorporating the Chiefs within the administration, it was thought, was a better bet and a cheaper proposition for administration of the Lushai Hills than by establishing authority all over again. ( Reid, 1978:38)

Significantly, while bringing the Chiefs on board and upholding their authority, the colonial state was working in a manner that would help to consolidate its position and ultimately undermine the authority of the Chiefs. In this sense the state in the Lushai Hills behaved in ways very different from how it was behaving around the same time in Manipur. First the state consolidated its hold territorially. While the region was divided into two districts immediately on conquest, in 1896 both were consolidated into a single Lushai Hills district, with a Superintendent based in Aizawl as centre of political and administrative authority.<sup>94</sup> While Sailo Chiefs continued to be integral parts of the administration, responsible for governing their villages, they were ultimately accountable to the Superintendent for their actions. In 1901 the system was strengthened with the introduction of the 'circle system'. The district was divided into sixteen circles, each with an interpreter to act as a liaison between the Chiefs and the Superintendent.

Then in 1906 the first rules for the administration of the district were introduced.<sup>95</sup> These rules further eroded the authority that the Chiefs had enjoyed traditionally. Many powers they enjoyed before, such as ordering capital punishment, confiscating property of subjects and taxing traders were taken away. Supervision of the Chiefs by the Superintendent was tightened. Chiefs could now even be punished. In 1937, the 1906 regulations were amended to reorganise the administration of the district and bring the Governor, the Superintendent and the Chiefs within a unified and closely regulated system. Though the Chiefs still sat in judgement over petty cases, appeals could now be made against their orders to the district Superintendent. Further, Chiefs' powers to try criminal cases, especially heinous crimes were also taken away. It appeared that henceforth, Chiefs would act merely as eyes and ears of the administration (Thanhranga, 1994 : 5). In 1928, all customary laws prevalent in the district were compiled and brought out in the form of a monograph to help in the

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<sup>94</sup> Evidently the grounds for this reform were financial. The Superintendents' Conference at Lungeh in 1896 had recommended the transfer of South Lushai Hills to Assam, suggesting, "It might affect an annual saving of 2 lakhs of Rupees." Reid (1978: 55)

<sup>95</sup> Rules for the Regulation of the Procedure of Officers Appointed to Administer Justice in the Lushai Hills, 1906, Government of Assam.

administration of justice. (Parry: 1928). This provided uniformity in the administration of justice, and made the task of Superintendent's supervision over the different sub-tribes easier. It also contributed to further incorporation of the authority of the Chiefs into the formal system of the state.

Perhaps the measure that most severely undercut the Chiefs' authority was the taking away of the proprietary rights that Chiefs had traditionally enjoyed over land under their control. Under the 1901 'land settlement' system introduced by John Shakespeare, the district superintendent, each chief was issued a lease over land under his possession, for life. Within the assigned territory, Chiefs were allowed to move about, as they liked, as long as they paid revenue and observed government orders. This marked a fundamental change in the land holding system in the Lushai Hills. While 'land settlement' stabilized village boundaries, and contributed to preventing inter-village disputes, it also meant that it was the colonial state and not the individual village Chief that was now the owner of all land in the district.<sup>96</sup> With this change, the independence that the Chiefs had enjoyed so far was done away with. It also meant that existing Chiefs could be removed and new ones created. Soon the state began issuing rights over tracts of land to men it considered useful for its interests. While at the time of the Settlement in 1901, there were an estimated 60 Chiefs in the district, by 1948 that number had risen to about 400. (McCall, 1949: 245). Thus, in ways very different from those in which the colonial state behaved in Manipur, in the Lushai Hills it was working assiduously to incorporate traditional centres of authority within its structures. This strengthened the hands of the state even as it compromised the authority of social forces that could have posed challenges to its authority. McCall remarked that the effect of these measures was, "the Chiefs stood vanquished and bereft of their erstwhile freedom of action" and "pulverised ....before all their people." (1949:202). There were other forces at work in Lushai Hills that would weaken the hold of traditional authorities, sometimes to the advantage of state actors.

Christian missionaries had arrived in the Lushai Hills on the heels of colonial conquest. In 1894, JH Lorrain and FW Savidge of the Arthington Aborigines Mission set themselves up in Aizawl. This was followed by Baptist missionaries setting up a base in 1903 at Lungleh in

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<sup>96</sup> According to McCall, the state's assumption of ownership rights over land was primarily to avoid "unsatisfactory settlements on a treaty basis with as many as sixty to one hundred families within an area of 8000 square miles." (1949: 201-202)

the south. Thus while the northern parts of the district came under the influence of the Presbyterian Church, southern Lushai Hills became a Baptist field.<sup>97</sup> Missionaries and their proselytising activities were not popular with the Chiefs, as the former worked to erode the hold of traditional values and beliefs central to the authority of the latter. Early missionaries were forced, therefore, to focus on spreading literacy. They set up schools and hostels in Aizawl and in the interiors. Teacher training institutes were set up and gradually a primary school system was born. The state facilitated this growth of literacy. It gave grants to missions for salaries for the staff they appointed and for buildings to house the schools, and began providing incentives for people to take to education. In 1904 the administration handed over the entire education function to the missions (Hluna, 1986). But it was the missionaries who were investing the most resources, more than the state did, in the education efforts in the Lushai Hills. (McCall, 1949: 199-200). Along the way, the severe case of famine in 1910, provided missionaries an opportunity for social service and a means to endear themselves to the people. Relief camps that they set up for the affected also became centres of Christian congregation where non-Christians were attracted. A series of revivals, first in 1906 then in 1910 and later in 1935 also helped with the spread of Christian ideas. By the close of the colonial period, a large majority of inhabitants of the Lushai Hills had converted to Christianity. Alongside, combined efforts of the missionaries and colonial administrators had the effect of significantly raising literacy levels, compared even to more central districts in the province. (Table 3.1)

Table 3.1 Growth of Literacy: Mizo Hills vs. Khasi Hills (1901-1961) in %

	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951	1961
Mizo Hills	2.95	4.72	7.43	12.67	23.12	36.51	51.24
Khasi & Jaintia Hills	6.75	6.51	9.05	10.94	16.15	22.96	37.15

Source: Census of India 1961, Vol. III part A – General Report, pp. 166-167<sup>98</sup>

Christian missionaries' education and proselytising work in the Lushai Hills had serious consequences. They contributed to strengthening the forces that were working to weaken

<sup>97</sup> For a discussion on the growth of Christianity in the Lushai Hills district, see Nath (1991: 399-410).

<sup>98</sup> Quoted in Nunthara (1996:38)



the hold of the chiefs, this time working on the minds of the common people. Writing on this subject in the twilight days of the colonial rule, McCall lamented, "the history of the first forty years of (colonial) contact has been overshadowed by a full-scale assault upon the people by the missions....."<sup>99</sup>. He saw this in the mission's working endlessly to compromise the hold of Chiefs and their values. He continued: "The changes they have wrought have been spectacular.....necessarily involving attack after attack on tradition" (1949:199). The large resources that the missions commanded <sup>100</sup>, their expansive role in social life of the people and their holding the passport to modern professions was to give a final blow to the authority of the Chiefs in Lushai society. While eroding the authority of the Chiefs, influence of Christianity and modern education helped in the growth of a new class of citizens in the district. This class made up of mission workers and salaried employees of the government - that McCall derisively called the 'black-coated' class - largely belonged to the non-Sailo Commoner section of society, made up of Hmars, Raltes and other sub tribes. It was this section that took the lead in state making on the eve of Independence by rallying against the authority of the Chiefs. The despotic rule of the Chiefs helped in mobilising support among the Commoners for the anti-Chiefs movement. <sup>101</sup> These changes also led to the structuring of the society into two sections: the educated Commoners influenced by Christian missionaries and the Chiefs and their followers supported by colonial administrators.

### 3.3 Social conflicts and contests over state power

The Commoners had little experience with political organisation. In 1935 the Young Lushai Association (YLA) had been set up by Presbyterian missionaries, as a social service organisation. Soon YLA began to acquire new purposes. The district had, like other tribal-majority districts in Assam, been kept as an 'excluded' area, with the Governor having direct responsibility for its administration. This also implied that political activities were severely restricted. In these circumstances, YLA began to act as the club for the educated sections to discuss issues of public concern. Around this time, a debate was also raging among colonial administrators on the future political status of the Lushai Hills and other

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<sup>99</sup> "...and a watching brief by Government", McCall (1949: 198)

<sup>100</sup> McCall complained that the Missions collected funds from their patrons, sometimes in excess of the taxes demanded by government. (1949: 212-213)

<sup>101</sup> Nunthara has argued that Chiefs became particularly dictatorial during the colonial times as their authority now, rested less on the legitimacy they enjoyed among their subjects and more on their relationship with the colonial masters. (1996: 72)

tribal tracts. For the moment an arrangement that would sustain the existing system of rule by the Superintendent through the Chiefs was preferred.<sup>102</sup> In 1938, Anthony McCall was writing:

“The fundamental fact that this district is run very greatly by the Chiefs and headmen exercising specific powers conferred by the government should not be weakened without a very good cause. ...” (1938: 3)

To consolidate the administrative system and to coordinate with and consult the Chiefs, colonial agents set up the Lushai Hills Durbar in 1940, headed by the Superintendent and made up of all the Chiefs of the district.<sup>103</sup>

But by now, political developments in the rest of India were beginning to have their impact in the district. The nascent leadership of the Commoners made up of men such as Vanlawma (a Ralte, and the first matriculate in the district), Pachunga (a Hmar businessman) and Sabrawnga (from southern Lushai Hills) were anxious about of the shape of things to come after the impending withdrawal of the colonial rule. They resented the attempts by the administrators to perpetuate the hold of the Chiefs in society. Pressures for introducing democratic changes, from this section, proved successful, and in 1943 a Lushai Hills District Conference was set up, with representation from the Chiefs as well as the Commoners. But the Commoners, conscious of their numerical superiority in the district, began calling for dilution of the Chiefs’ presence in the Conference and for the removal of the privileges that they enjoyed in society (Goswami, 1979: 131).

To be better able to raise their demands, these leaders set up the Mizo Commoner’s Union (MCU) in 1946 and heightened their anti-Chiefs demands. The members elected Pachunga as its founding President and Vanlawma as its General Secretary. In their first conference in September 1946 in Aizawl, MCU resolved to demand the government drastically to cut the privileges of the Chiefs: their power to evict villagers; their share of the agricultural produce and game hunted by villagers; and their demanding hard labour from villagers. They also asked that *upas* (advisors) be elected by the people and not selected by the Chiefs (Laldinpui : 1997). These demands were seen unfavourably, not only by the Chiefs but also by colonial

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<sup>102</sup> Some officers were arguing, “It would be several generations before the district is sufficiently developed to be brought under the reformed constitutions.” Superintendent, LL Peters’s letter to Commissioner Surma valley, Assam, dated August 1935. File regarding correspondence between the Superintendent and the Divisional Commissioner, 1935. Mizoram State Archives.

<sup>103</sup> For a discussion on the District *Durbar*, see McCall (1949: 246-252)

administrators. But attempts by the latter to organise an alternative system of administration for the district were met by opposition from the Commoners, who demanded a majority say in any future administrative arrangement. They also began to ask for the abolition of the authority of the Chiefs.<sup>104</sup>

But by now differences began to crop up within MCU itself, regarding the line taken with regards the Chiefs. A section began to be apprehensive of the likely outcome of the more radical demands made being made by some leaders for abolition of the Chiefship altogether. Leaders like Vanlawma, Pachunga and Zairema - the last a prominent Ralte church leader - feared for a vertical split in society, between the Lushai-Sailo Chiefs and their *upas* on one hand and the largely non-Lushai Commoners.<sup>105</sup> They felt political changes would be best served by going slow and by keeping all sections of society together. To prevent the divisions and their likely impact on social relations in the district, and to advance their own goals to win a wide support base, these leaders worked for and were instrumental in changing the name of the party to Mizo Union (MU) in 1947.<sup>106</sup> The name signified the broad social base that these leaders were aiming to appeal to, including ameliorating some of the schism that had taken place between the traditional elite and the new middle class. The constitution of the MU listed, among its objectives, “to unify and integrate all Mizo people”, “to normalise relations between chiefs and the commoners”, “to act as a representative of the Mizo people”, “to popularise the Mizo language”, and “to better the standard of all Mizos”.<sup>107</sup> However this did not mean a dilution of the anti-Chief stand, of the party. A section of the MU, made up of leaders like Sabrawnga, Bawichuaka, and Khawtinkhuma, held strong views on the subject and were for all-out abolition of Chiefship. These ‘left wingers’ of the MU, demanded more space for the educated members in the working of the organisation. Rising expectations among the general mass of Commoners meant that it was

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<sup>104</sup> In November 1946, McDonald, the Superintendent, organised a District Conference of all Lushai notables and laid a plan for a future constitution. This was seen by the Commoners as being biased in favour of the Chiefs. Nunthara (1996:122-123). Colonial administrators all along, justified the system of rule by the Chiefs by arguing that the alternative, i.e. the downfall of the Chiefs “would lead to the disintegration of village and national life”, due to “factional strife in the village (s)”. “Superintendent’s letter dated August 1935, to Commissioner Surma valley. Assam. File regarding correspondence between the Superintendent and the Divisional Commissioner, 1935. Mizoram State Archives.

<sup>105</sup> This section is based on interviews with R Vanlawma, founder of the MCU. Aizawl: 11 July 2004.

<sup>106</sup> The same year, YLA was renamed as Young Mizo Association (YMA). Vanlawma (1972: 84) quoted in Nag (2002:108)

<sup>107</sup> Bhattacharya (1998 : 268-280). Notably, the Constitution of the MU listed 41 sub-tribes as those belonging to the Mizo family. This included the Lushais. Many of these tribes have their traditional homes outside the Lushai Hills district, in Manipur, Tripura and even in Burma and Chittagong Hill Tracts of present Bangladesh.

the anti-Chiefs sections that were eventually able to dominate the working of MU (Nag, 2002:119).

The contrasting views of the Commoners and the Chiefs over the future administrative system in the district was brought out in the different submissions of the Chiefs-dominated District Conference and the Commoners MU to the Sub-Committee for Northeast Frontier Tribal and Excluded Areas of the Advisory Committee of the Constituent Assembly (Otherwise called the Bordoloi sub-committee), in 1947.<sup>108</sup> While the former demanded that powers over land tenure, agriculture, education and social customs be left with local governing bodies of the Lushai Hills, the latter asked for integration of Mizo dominated areas in neighbouring districts with the Lushai Hills, change in identity nomenclature from 'Lushai' to 'Mizo', for internal administration of the district to be placed in the hands of Mizos themselves and for liberal financial assistance for the development of the district (Nunthara, 1996: 124-127).

The arrival of the Bordoloi sub-committee in Aizawl had opened up another debate in the district, this one over the future status of the Lushai Hills. The choice was to exist as a part of the Indian Union or as an independent entity. A principal objective behind the formation of the MU had been to safeguard Mizo interests and which also meant its interest in any post-colonial political dispensation. Leaders of MU were conscious of the need to maintain the distinct identity of the Mizos and were anxious about their unequal relations with the more 'developed' plains communities surrounding them - the Assamese, Bengalis and the Burmese. In the debates around the future of the Assam province in the post-colonial dispensation, Assamese leaders had courted Mizo support (as they did of the other tribal communities within Assam) to enable Assam to be a part of India (as against Pakistan). In return they promised autonomy for the Lushai district and adequate political powers in Mizo hands, in the form of representation in the Assam State Assembly and national Parliament in a free India. Of immediate relevance to Mizo leaders was the earlier promise by Assamese leaders of full MU membership in the Bordoloi sub-committee. What was finally offered to

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<sup>108</sup> The sub-committee was asked to look into the concerns of tribal communities in the Northeast region and recommend special administrative measures that could be incorporated into the Constitution for their protection. Tribal areas in Assam had remained 'Excluded' and 'Partially Excluded' under the Government of India Act of 1935, remaining outside the control of the popularly elected ministries. It was the Assam Governor who had direct responsibility for the administration of these areas. Tribal members of the Constituent Assembly, such as JJM Nichols Roy, were demanding that such protections be continued. (Government of India, 1947)

MU was co-opted membership of the Sub committee. This led to breakdown of trust between the two sides with a section of the MU, led by Vanlawma, expressing apprehensions over Mizo interests in Assam or the Indian Union.<sup>109</sup> The Chiefs dominated District Conference, shared the apprehensions of these leaders. For the 'left wing' of the MU on the other hand, the more immediate concern was the abolition of the privileges of the Chiefs. They were satisfied with subsuming their apprehensions concerning their future position within Assam to their immediate goal of neutralising the dominance of the Chiefs. In their objectives, this radical section of the MU - that also enjoyed considerable popular support - had the backing of the Bordoloi Committee. Yet, while choosing to be a part of Assam, MU leaders across the spectrum asked for maximum autonomy for the district and for maintenance of special provisions enjoyed by the Lushais under British rule such as those for the exclusion from the district of non-tribals under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation (1873) - also called the Inner Line Regulation - and the Chin Hills Regulation (1896).<sup>110</sup>

Independence saw MU heightening its demands for introduction of representative government and for abolition of the privileges of the Chiefs. It claimed that people of the district "neither have voice nor representatives in the State legislature and also in the local administration".<sup>111</sup> These demands were a cause of discomfort not only for the Chiefs and their *upas* but also for the Administration, which was accused of siding with the Chiefs. What followed was a wrangling match between the Superintendent and the leaders of the MU. The latter felt that the Superintendent, by siding with the Chiefs, was denying the legitimate democratic rights of the people. MU launched a non-cooperation movement against the Superintendent and asked for his transfer out of the district. (Laldinpui: 1997)). These popular movements by MU and the party's spreading its base in rural areas with the promise of chiefship abolition led to the popularisation of the MU among the masses, on whom much of the burden of chiefship fell. By 1947 there were as many as 30,000 full members of the party. (Nunthara, 1996: 155). MU's only opposition, the newly founded United Mizo Freedom Organisations, (UMFO) - made up of those espousing the interest of the Chiefs - failed to make a dent in MU support base, due on one hand to the popular

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<sup>109</sup> Nag provides an account of the negotiations between Gopinath Bordoloi, the Premier of Assam and R Vanlawma, Secretary General of the Mizo Union, (2002:115-116).

<sup>110</sup> See Nag (2002:174) for a discussion on these early trends.

<sup>111</sup> Resolution # 10 and 11 of the 5<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Mizo Union. Hlatu, 9-10 Feb. 1951. Mizoram State Archives file relating to the activities of the Mizo Union.

message and the radical methods of the MU, and on the other to the UMFO acquiring the popular image of ‘zalen pawl’ or the party of the privileged.<sup>112</sup>

The popularity of MU and the strength of its agenda can be gauged from the fact that the party won seventeen of the eighteen seats in the first elections to the Lushai Hills District Council (LHDC).<sup>113</sup> The party also won elections to most of the 381 village councils (VCs) the same year. In the first elections to the Assam State Assembly, MU won all three seats from the district. It had earlier won all but one of the twenty-four seats to the Advisory Council in elections held in 1948. MU’s electoral successes proved a concern for the Chiefs. They were quick to appeal to the Assam State government to protect their status and position including the privileges they had enjoyed under the British administration.<sup>114</sup> Their apprehensions were proved right when in one of the first steps that the MU-dominated LHDC took, it passed the ‘Lushai Hills (Abolition of Chiefship) Regulation in 1952 and began putting pressure on the State and Central governments for its approval, claiming “the institution of Chiefship, with its unlimited autocratic possibilities, is a misfit with democracy and as standing in the way of the well-being of the district”.<sup>115</sup> In 1954, the Government of Assam, despite some initial misgivings about the total abolition of Chiefship, acquired the rights of the Chiefs. With that ended the rule of the Chiefs in the district.<sup>116</sup> This institutional change was to have a profound impact on the authority structure in the Lushai Hills, having fundamentally changed the basis of power relations there.

If there was any doubt at all who the owner of land was in the Lushai Hills during colonial times, the 1954 acquisition of rights of the Chiefs, in one quick stroke, removed all that. While the British had asserted the state’s primacy, Lushai Chiefs had continued to enjoy propriety right over land in perpetuity. This they could even sublet land to tenants. And by virtue of this protection, Chiefs had maintained special privileges, mostly at the expense of the Commoners. Abolition of Chiefship meant that the authority of the Chiefs was taken over by the state, and vested in the elected LHDC. This had profound implications for the

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<sup>112</sup> For a discussion of the MU-UMFO contestations, see Nag (2002:178-180)

<sup>113</sup> The Bordoloi sub-committee had recommended setting up of Autonomous District Councils for tribal communities in Assam. One of these was the LHDC, set up in 1952 and whose jurisdiction extended to much of whole of the Lushai Hills District.

<sup>114</sup> Memoranda from Lushai Chiefs Council dated 17-12-1951, to the Governor of Assam asking for retention of their chief ship. Mizoram State Archives, File no 95-66 (General)

<sup>115</sup> LHDC memo to Union Home Minister dated 22-12-1953. Mizoram State Archives, File no. 135-1 (General)

<sup>116</sup> Assam Lushai Hills District (Acquisition of Chiefs’ Rights) Act 1954. Government of Assam.

authority and the social control enjoyed by the Chiefs. Acquisition of the rights of the Chiefs also led to the burden of village administration shifting from Chiefs and their councillors to elected Village Councils (VC).<sup>117</sup> VCs were given the charge for day-to-day administration of the village. Today, they collect land revenue and taxes, distribute *jhum* and non-agricultural land and ensure compliance with government regulations. The legal framework in the district was also amended with the consolidation of the systems of administration of justice under a single overarching control under the formal legal system of the state.

Changes in power relations in Lushai Hills between the chiefs and the rest of the population in the early years of state-formation there brought in significant political rewards for the MU, enabling it to win elections to most Village Councils, the Mizo District Council and Mizo seats in the State Assembly over the next decade. (Tables 3.2 & 3.3)<sup>118</sup> Despite the absence of a mobilising tool subsequent to MU's abolition of the chiefship in 1954 and even after the devastating impact of the famines of 1959 had become clear and the Mizo National Front (MNF) had begun to mobilize support on secessionist lines, at the cost of the MU, the party retained its dominance in Mizo politics, winning the District Council and Village Council elections in 1962. It was only from 1963 onward, that MU began losing some of its support, mainly due to events outside its control. The success of the MU in electoral contests was the outcome of the strength of the party itself. Being the dominant as well as the first major political party in the State, it attracted educated and progressive elements of the population to its fold. MU had broad-based support, was well organized at the grass roots level and was programme-oriented. Its organizational network extended right down to the village level. This translated into organizational strength and stability in MU's leadership and helped the party undertake major policy actions, which in turn endeared it to the masses.

Table 3.2 Village Council Elections, Mizoram (1952-1971)

Parties	1952	1957	1960	1963	1971
MU	Most	Most	280	228	66
UMFO			83	12	-
MNF			-	145	-
Congress			-	16	48
Independent +			18	10	79
Total	381	381	381	411	158

Source: Tabulated by author from Nunthara (1996: 77)<sup>119</sup>

<sup>117</sup> The Lushai Hills District (Village Council) Act 1953, Government of Assam.

<sup>118</sup> For a discussion on early electoral politics in the Mizo district see Prasad (1987) and Rao (1987).

<sup>119</sup> Some VCs were split in 1963 and Village Grouping in 1967 led to reduction of number of VCs. After restoration of normality, some original VCs have been revived. No VC elections were held in 1966, due to the outbreak of MNF rebellion.

Table 3.3: Mizo District Council elections, Mizoram (1952-1970)

Party	1952	1957	1962	1970
MU	17	13	16	9
UMFO	1	7	-	-
Congress	-	-	-	10
PLTU		2	2	2
Other	-		4	1
Total	18	22	22	22

Source: Tabulated by author from Nunthara (1996:131-137)

The Mizo Union's role in the modernisation of Mizoram has been far-reaching. By abolishing chieftainship it emerged as a democratic political force. In the process it also integrated ethnically diverse groups in the district into the Mizo fold. Significantly, administrative arrangements, land relations and electoral ascendancy, together, led to a complete shift in the power structure in the Lushai Hills. Lushais, who had dominated political and social life until 1954 were sidelined. It was the Commoners – made up of the non-Lushai clans such as Hmars, Raltes and Renthlais – that now began to dominate state power. Alongside, there was considerable success in consolidation of the authority of the state. These had the effect of enabling Mizoram to be perhaps the only Hill State in Northeastern India, and one of the first in the country, to have attempted reforms in land ownership and distribution - encompassing written laws, defined rights of tenants and protection of their property through issue of land certificates. Das (1990: 219-220). It also led to regulations promoting equity in management of land.<sup>120</sup> These measures further enhanced the downward reach of the state and the consolidation of its authority and legitimacy. MU's active role in abolition of chief ship, consolidation of the administrative and legal framework in the State and bringing of land tenants directly in contact with the state agents, helped bring centralised state institutions centre-stage in the lives of majority of the people in Mizoram. This enhanced the state's authority and social control, and would result in considerable autonomy for state actors from constraining social pressures.

### 3.4 MNF rebellion and the repositioning of state power

So if state consolidation was such a success during the MU movement, how can we explain the MNF rebellion and the resultant violence and collapse? Perhaps in MU's success itself

<sup>120</sup> Important legislations in this regard were the Lushai Hills District (House Site) Act 1953, the Mizo District (Land Revenue) Act 1956, the Mizo District (Agricultural Land) Act 1963, the Mizo District (Transfer of Land) act 1963 and the Lushai Hills District (Revenue Assessment) Regulation 1953



lay the seeds of the breakdown. MU had kick-started the first phase of state making in the Lushai Hills by resorting to institution building and forging coalitions among different sections of the population through politicising a collective Mizo identity. MU's particular politics had succeeded in strengthening the state by consolidating its reach in the mass of society, especially in rural areas. But perhaps in excluding the traditional elite, state leaders had gone too far. Political power had enabled the MU - led by its more radical leaders - to undertake a slew of measures that ended in marginalizing the Chiefs and the section around them: abolition of chief ship with its age old privileges and social status, taking away of the Chiefs' control over land and their role in village level administration. Admittedly, these were architectonic changes in the context of the Mizo society. By the end of this phase, political power had shifted from the Chiefs to the Commoners made up of non-Lushai clans, as demonstrated by the results of the electoral contests between MU and UMFO. Excluded from political power, the former saw little scope or involvement for themselves in the structures of the new state. This also meant that the resultant state structure was precariously balanced.

Most of the resentment of the former ruling class, as of those in the MU who would have liked a less confrontational attitude against the Chiefs, was directed at the then leadership of the MU – men like Sabrawnga and Bawichuaka, who had taken an extreme line of confrontation on chiefship.<sup>121</sup> Some of the anger was also aimed at the State and Central leaders, who most Mizos felt, were antagonistic to Mizo interests. The increasing ethnicisation of politics in Assam; the famine of 1959; a common feeling among the people that the Assam State government had done little to ameliorate public sufferings during the crisis; and similar perceptions about the LHDC (now called Mizo District Council -MDC), provided anti-MU leaders the opportunity they were seeking to counter MU attempts to consolidate its hold over state power. This, the second phase of political mobilisation in the district was kick-started by the MNF sparking off the armed rebellion in 1966, and led to almost two decades of insurgency and violence in Mizoram.

As we saw in the previous section, Mizo public opinion for inclusion of the district in independent India was by no means unanimous. Across the political spectrum, Mizo elites

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<sup>121</sup> Nunthara informs of misgivings within the then MU leadership of the Mizo Hills District Council over the total abolition of chief ship, and the consequent delay in enacting the said act in 1952 (1996: 135). Vanlawma still speaks of the role of Sabrawnga in the chief ship abolition debate and its pitting Mizo society against each other. Interview: Vanlawma, Aizawl: 11 July 2004.

were anxious about protecting their distinct identity and their interests after the British retreat. In the early years, colonial administrators had been looking around for suitable arrangements for administration of tribal areas in Assam - including the Lushai Hills - outside of what was to be the Indian Union.<sup>122</sup> The ruling Lushai Chiefs, being closer to the Administration, shared these views. They were also endeared to colonial policies due to the assurances of colonial administrators to uphold the existing order in any future administration of the district, and which implied control over land and privileges they enjoyed. On the other hand, the Chiefs were concerned about the loss of their traditional rights and privileges if the district merged with India, partly due to the popular appeal of the Indian national movement. Post-independence, electoral contestation saw the birth of the United Mizo Freedom Organisation (UMFO), a party that was supported mostly by the Chiefs.<sup>123</sup> Besides opposing the Mizo Union, UMFO demanded merger of the district with Burma. UMFO's argument was that Mizo culture and way of life would never be safe in the present set up, dominated by non-Mizo Indian interests.

For the Commoners a better bet to be able to usher in democratic rule in the district, appeared to be in siding with Assamese and Indian national leaders. However they were aware of the complexities involved, when it came to safeguarding Mizo interests within a largely non-tribal Assam. Leaders of the MU were thus placed on the horns of a dilemma – merge with India but only so much as to be able to protect their identity and interests. It was this balancing act that men like Vanlawma were attempting in their deliberations with Assamese leaders around the end of colonial rule, and one they felt was not working. Resentment of some of the leaders among the MU with Assamese politicians also led to their joining the UMFO, enhancing the strength of the latter. However, the intensification of the anti-Chiefs mobilisation by MU, including the party's decision to take the movement to the villages, took the wind out of the sails of the UMFO as well as of the doubters among

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<sup>122</sup> Officials had long mooted the idea of some separate administrative arrangement for tribal areas, which they argued were inhabited by people with little affinity to plains dwelling Indians. Admittedly, some of this sentiment represented the paternalistic urge among colonial administrators to protect tribal communities against the onslaught of non-tribal plainmen all around them. NC Parry, the Superintendent of the Lushai Hills, had in 1928 argued for the exclusion of the Lushais from the proposed constitutional reforms in India and their being put under the North Eastern Frontier Agency, along with other tribes. Later the Governor of Assam, Robert Reid, set out a plan for all tribal majority districts in Assam and Burma to be carved out and made into a protectorate under the direct rule of the British Crown. This idea later developed into the 'Coupand Plan' and attracted much interest among local administrators, before it was finally dropped in the thick of the debate over the partition of India and the colonial retreat. For a discussion see Nag (2002: 73-81).

<sup>123</sup> The Lushai Chiefs' Council had picked up Lalmawia, the founder of the Lushai Students Association and himself a Lushai, to mobilise support for the UMFO (Goswami: 1979:136).

the MU, concerning the future of the Mizos in India. (Reflected in MU's crushing defeat of the UMFO in the 1947 Advisory Council and 1952 District Council elections). As it turned out, this was only a temporary relief. A series of developments in the district as well as in Assam generally – where effective political power lay - provided the sparks for the public mood to swing drastically away from intra-Mizo contestations and towards protecting pan-Mizo interests.

Politics in Assam in the 1950s had been taking an increasingly ethnic turn, with moves for the State to acquire an Assamese identity and which translated immediately into demands for Assamese to be made the State's official language. This was in part an outcome of the Assamese leaders' wariness with 'outsider', mainly Bengali, domination of the State. But complicating the matter was the complex multi-lingual character of Assam. In 1951, Assamese speakers made up some 57 per cent of the population of the State, the rest being made up of Bengalis and a multitude of tribal communities, including Mizos. Formal declaration of Assamese as the State language in 1960 made the Mizo people, like other non-Assamese minority communities, uncomfortable, leading to a series of 'language riots'.<sup>124</sup> Other developments at the State level, such as the nomination of non-tribals by the Assam government to the District Councils in 1952, led to alienation of tribal communities in Assam. The outcome was the establishment of the Eastern India Tribal Union (EITU), to be followed by the All Parties Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC), as political fora of tribals in the State. EITU mobilised support for the creation of a separate Hill state for tribals, carved out of Assam. (Nag, 2002:217) For Mizo leaders, the less than sympathetic attitude of Assamese politicians towards tribal communities added to their sense of apprehension around their own identity and interests. These sentiments resulted in the better showing of the UMFO - that later shared the political space with the EITU – in the 1957 District Council elections as compared to its showing in 1952 (Table 3.3).

All this while, economic conditions in the Mizo district continued to be poor. Mizo public opinion held the Assam state administration responsible for this supposed lack of concern for Mizo interests. This perception was reinforced when the famine struck the district in 1959, on account of failure of paddy crop. Despite serious shortage of food in the villages, the State government's response to the crisis was lukewarm. This was despite attempts by

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<sup>124</sup> For a discussion see Baruah (1999: 91-114).

the Mizo District Council and local administrators to attract the state government's attention. The seriousness of the situation, especially in remoter parts of the district, was best described by the Sub Divisional Officer (SDO) at Lungleh who reported that *jhum* fields of 70 villages in his sub-division had been totally destroyed, affecting the life of some 70,000 persons.<sup>125</sup> It was the widespread economic frustrations born out of these hardships that provided the section excluded from the MU-dominated state structures in the district the weapon to re-stake claim to authority. The MNF was the vehicle they used for this purpose.

MNF's earlier incarnation was the Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF) which was a youth organization formed during the 1959 famines to undertake relief work and fill some of the gaps in the State government's response to the crisis. Its leaders were men like John Manliana, a Hmar works contractor; Laldenga, an accountant in the Mizo District Council (MDC) with Pawi connections and R. Vanlawma, who by now had become convinced of Assam government's partisan role in the Mizo district. They were all highly critical of the State government's failure to respond effectively to the crisis. These leaders also criticized the MU led MDC whose weakness, they argued, had proved that ADCs were no answer to Mizo desire for protection of their interests. MNFF soon converted to MNF, a political party in its own right, to contest MU's dominance of Mizo politics. Laldenga became the president of the party. Its earlier MNFF legacy provided the MNF with a grassroots and a somewhat disciplined network of youth who had garnered public support with their relief work. The party extensively used Mizo identity and the fears of the subjugation of that identity in a largely non-tribal Assam and India, as a mobilisational tool. Fuelling this mobilization was the personality of Laldenga, who had been removed from his position in the MDC on charges of misappropriation of public funds and who therefore bore a grudge against the MU leadership of the MDC – particularly Sabrawnga, its Chief Executive. Yet, despite Laldenga's attempts to mobilize popular anger among the Mizos against the State government, MNF was unable to make any dent in elections in its early years. It was MU with its established support base that romped home with 16 of the 22 elected seats in Mizo DC elections in 1962 and won both seats to the Assam State Assembly from the district that year.

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<sup>125</sup> 'Report of Rice Scarcity and Famine Conditions in Lungleh Subdivision in 1959' SDO Lungleh's report to Deputy Commissioner Aizawl : 23 October 1959. File containing Fortnightly Confidential Reports of Lungleh sub division, 1959. Mizoram State Archives.

But clearly the pressure was building on the MU leadership. Political developments in Assam were bringing about increased alienation in the Mizo district, a mood that was exacerbated during the famine disaster. Being the party in power in the MDC, some of that public resentment rubbed off on the MU as well. These trends led to the strengthening of the hand of the section represented by the UMFO and now the MNF. Post-famine, MNF had increasingly become the locus of revolt by the erstwhile Chiefs and their followers excluded from political power by the MU. UMFO had merged with the EITU after 1957 in an attempt to push for a separate hill State. It was this section - made up of the UMFO as well as the right wing of the MU – estranged from the EITU - that now gravitated towards the MNF.<sup>126</sup> Ultimately the MNF threat represented the return of the anti-Mizo Unionist sections in State politics. They began posing a serious challenge to MU domination. Crucially, with the chiefship already abolished in 1954, the electoral capital that MU had enjoyed in the past and which had helped it monopolise political power for well over a decade, was no longer available to it. The party was thus forced to devise new agendas and strategies. Beginning in 1960, after the declaration of Assamese as the official state language, MU stepped up its demand to the State government to give Mizos a better deal. It broke off its earlier links with the Congress-led government in Assam, joined hands with political organizations in other hill districts of Assam – notably with the Khasi dominated All Parties Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC) - and began demanding the creation of a separate hill State.<sup>127</sup>

The next years were significant for politics in the Mizo Hills. A survey of the Fortnightly Confidential Reports from Sub divisional Officer (SDO) Lungleh to Deputy Commissioner (DC) Mizo district during the turbulent years after 1962, provide insights into the intense electoral competition taking place between MNF and MU.<sup>128</sup> MNF skillfully used the food scarcity in the district; the poor response of the State administration to these shortages and the general condition of poor economic development, to the party's political advantage by raising fears around Mizo insecurity. The oratorical skills of its leader – Laldenga - proved very helpful in these mobilisations. Slowly MNF began to win over support, raise finances and win over support around its separatist ideology. The party also began to register

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<sup>126</sup> For a survey of these developments see Nag (2002: 216-224).

<sup>127</sup> According to Nunthara, separatist sentiments, at least for the creation of a separate Mizo state, had, by now, become popular among the district's educated classes. Refer survey of government officials and teachers during the MNF insurgency. Nunthara (1996:142-143).

<sup>128</sup> File containing SDO Lungleh's Fortnightly Confidential Reports (FCR) to DC Mizo Hills, 1960-63. Mizoram State Archives.

electoral gains, winning both seats in bye-elections to the State Assembly in 1963.<sup>129</sup> MU responded to these developments with its own 'direct action' mobilization to retain its political base; while pressing the State and Central governments for the creation now of a separate Mizo State. Between 1963 and 1965, electoral competition between MU and MNF led to intense charging of the political mood in the district, often leading to violence.<sup>130</sup> Attempts were made to broker a peace between MNF and MU and prevent intra-Mizo political differences and violence.<sup>131</sup> But a variety of factors, not least of them the fact that MNF increasingly found itself pushed into a corner by MU's rising anti-MNF mobilization, led to Laldenga striking by declaring armed rebellion.<sup>132</sup>

In hindsight, Laldenga's attempt at capturing political power was helped by a variety of external factors, most ironically by the central and provincial state's response to the MNF rebellion. The Central state took up measures that in the ultimate analysis strengthened MNF's identity appeal and enhanced its social base, while severely compromising MU's constituency. Indian leaders saw the MNF revolt as posing a severe challenge to national security. A reading of the parliamentary proceedings on the MNF declaration of freedom on 28 February 1966 illustrates the shock value of the revolt. Responding to the calling attention motion on the subject, the union Home Minister gave a report on the strike at Assam Rifles post at Lungleh and the abduction of the SDO there, followed by similar incidents at Aizawl, Vairengte, Chawngte and elsewhere. Opposition members alleged that "a soft and weak attitude of conciliation and compromise (by the government) shown to the Naga hostiles and others who indulged in violent activities had encouraged the MNF people to also seek recourse to violence." The Home Minister said that in his view the situation was more serious than the media reports revealed. He also stated that stern action would be

<sup>129</sup> While MU won 55 of the 110 VCs, MNF was able to capture an impressive 49. FCR of SDO Lungleh to DC Mizo Hills. 1 October 1963. Mizoram State Archives.

<sup>130</sup> MU's 'direct action' for statehood and MNF's mobilisation for Independence. Fortnightly Confidential Report of Mizo District, 1965. Mizoram State Archives, file no CB 115 – G 1390.

<sup>131</sup> All-Mizo Conference held in Kawnpuui in Manipur's Churachandpur district in January 1965. Goswami (1979:90)

<sup>132</sup> The hostility between the MNF and the MU was so strong that it was believed, many might have joined MNF not for any romantic notions of Independence but to contest the hold of the MU. (Letter from Paul Zakhuma, Aizawl Citizens' Committee to Chief Minister, Assam dated 16-8-1966. Mizoram State Archives file relating to the activities of the Mizo Union party. It is claimed that some 300 Mizo Union cadres were killed by the MNF during the uprising. Interview: J.V. Hluna, Historian. Aizawl: 23 July 2004.

taken without delay, adding, “There is no question of compromise with extremist Mizo elements.”<sup>133</sup>

In counter-insurgency response to the rebellion, the Central government handed over the district to the Army, which went about restoring ‘normalcy’.<sup>134</sup> Among the instruments used by the Army to quell the uprising, was what they called ‘Operation Security’, otherwise known as ‘Village Grouping’; wholesale relocation of villages all over the Mizo district to camps set up along the main communication arteries in the district. The objective of the Operation, in the words of its architect, Lt. General Sam Maneckshaw, GOC-in-C of the Eastern Command of the Indian Army, was two-fold: “to protect those living in isolated villages in the disturbed areas from the depredations of hostiles and to deny the latter their only means of sustenance, that is loot.”<sup>135</sup> While it is difficult to assess the military advantages of Operation Security, the social and psychological costs of the exercise were telling. Village grouping affected an overwhelming majority of the district’s population. It led to total dislocation of economic activity - particularly cultivation - in the villages, on account of shortage of land (in proportion to the population) in the grouped villages; restrictions imposed on movement of civilians and due to the break in the cycle of shifting cultivation. These severely reduced the agricultural yield. The administration’s attempts to supplement agricultural output with a public distribution system were inadequate. (Nunthara: 1981). It has been argued that the socio-economic fall out of the grouping and the resultant frustration enhanced the support base of the MNF in the district (Nunthara, 1996 : 112-114). Contributing to alienating the people from ‘Indian rule’ were also the many cases of human rights violations that military operations allegedly resulted in. The wounds on the minds of the people are still fresh:

“The Army raped and molested. I was a child and I saw it with my own eyes. To get food to eat, women would be forced to offer themselves. They would not let people carry more than what they had on them. It is from that day that I became a *vai* (‘outsider’) hater.”<sup>136</sup>

<sup>133</sup> *The Hindu*, (Madras : 3 March 1966).

<sup>134</sup> This involved, among other measures, clamping dusk-to-dawn curfew and restrictions on movement of civilian population all over the district. These controls were lifted only in 1972. (See ‘Counter Insurgency at its Best’: *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi : 27 June 1978).

<sup>135</sup> Others were less sure of the benefits of the strategy. An editorial described the move that would affect some 60,000 people or one third of the total district population, as ‘disquieting’. (“Operation Security” *Indian Express*, New Delhi, 7 January 1967).

<sup>136</sup> Interview: Vanlalruata, journalist, Aizawl : 25 July 2004)

Counter-insurgency measures of the Army put the MNF on the back foot. The Army mounted military pressure on the rebels to distance the MNF from its local support base. The group was forced to move out of the district, firstly to Chittagong Hill tracts in the then East Pakistan and later to the Arakan Hills in Burma, thus making its operations against government forces in the Mizo Hills difficult. These dynamics may have contributed to the weakening of the MNF threat and to their eventual agreeing to peace with the Central government. But parallel to MNF's losses on the military front were its gains in terms of people's sympathies. MNF cadres began to be seen as patriots and freedom fighters.

The failure of the MU to secure a separate Mizo state, the onset of the MNF rebellion and the subsequent counter-insurgency operations by the Army, combined to turn the public mood significantly in favour of MNF. Yet, despite a parallel diminution in the support for the MU the party continued to remain a significant force in Mizo politics, partly on account of the absence of any serious political competition – MNF being an underground organization excluded from electoral contests. It was around this time that the Congress party began to make forays into politics in Mizoram, by mobilizing some of the anti-MU opinion. MU had been losing some of its lustre not only on account of economic hardships during the violence but also because its leaders – mostly of Hmar origin - were seen to be excluding other clans from benefits of the state system. The feeling was strongest amongst the Raltes, who had by now also begun to take active part in the MNF organisation. Slowly a sort of three-way alliance of Lushai, Ralte and Renthlais (close to Raltes) was beginning to take shape against the Hmar dominated MU. Crucially, by positioning itself as an anti-MU party, the Congress also endeared itself to the MNF and tapped into the pro-MNF sentiments among the electorate.

These intra-Mizo dynamics and the Congress's playing them up, led to the MU losing the 1970 District Council elections, the first time that the Mizo DC would be controlled by a non-MU party. The MU Chief Executive of the MDC and the secretary of the MU, both Hmars, were defeated along with many others. However, MU was successful in defeating the Congress in the first assembly elections in Mizoram in 1972, but only after the Hmar leaders of the party had left, on account of dissension within the MU.<sup>137</sup> The new-shape MU was also able to play the intra-Mizo dynamics better. Combined with the disarray in the

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<sup>137</sup> For a discussion on political contestations between the MU and the Congress party in the 1970s, see Goswami (1979:78-83)



Congress camp, it was successful in regaining its popularity. Along the way, the extreme polarization of the political space had led to all non-MU parties merging with the Congress in 1972. Realizing that their Commoner-Mizo plank was no longer viable (the Hmar leaders having left), leaders of the MU themselves decided to merge with the Congress in 1973, in part to retain their political standing. (Nunthara, 1996: 148).<sup>138</sup>

Other factors may have helped this decision. Impatience with the MU had been growing among people due to its poor showing on the economic management front, especially in light of the economic cost of extended armed violence. Further, Congress being the dominant national party enjoyed the unique advantage among all parties in Mizoram, of having the ability to channel development funds in from the Centre. People realized that as a national level party and the one in power in the Centre, it could leverage its resources to bring in investment that the district so badly required. In 1971, the MU dominated District Council had resolved to ask the Central government for conferring full statehood to the district, a demand that was met favourably by the Centre. The merger of all political parties in the district, including the ruling MU, with the Congress party, then in power in the Centre, could also be seen as an attempt by the central Congress leadership to extract its pound of flesh for awarding Union Territory status to the Mizo Hills district in 1973.<sup>139</sup>

Increasing number of cases of human rights violations by the Army during its counter insurgency operations against the MNF led in 1973 to the formation of the People's Conference (PC). Its leader V. Sailo was a decorated Mizo officer of the Indian Army, who had resigned to raise public awareness nationally about human rights abuses in the course of counter-insurgency operations against the MNF. His public action, demanding justice for victims of abuses and standing up to the Army, endeared him to the Mizo masses. They saw in Sailo and the PC, actors that could raise Mizo public concerns, something that the Congress lacked due to its non-indigenous character. PC's human rights campaigns facilitated the grounding of its political base in the district. The party was to gain further legitimacy due to Sailo's principled stand against the violence and intimidation that MNF cadres were themselves perpetrating on their political rivals.

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<sup>138</sup> The MU leadership by now has passed back into the hands of Saprawnga, President of MU and a Chongthu and Ch. Chhunga, the Chief Minister and a Ralte.

<sup>139</sup> For a discussion on these contestations, see Nunthara (1996: 145-148). Congress' s strength was of course offset by its non-indigenous character. But at that particular point in time, people saw the Congress as the party that had the wherewithal to bring economic and peace benefits in.

Internal conflicts between the MU and MNF and later between the MNF and PC, resulted in much bloodshed in Mizo society. This along with the hardships associated with Army operations, led to the MNF violence, now in its second decade, beginning to be seen among the people as self-defeating. PC's popularity and its legitimacy stemming from its strong programmatic mobilization and organizational strengths helped the party win an overwhelming majority of seats in the 1978 Assembly elections (23 out of 30 seats), in the face of concerted and sometimes violent campaign by the MNF to disrupt the electoral process.<sup>140</sup> And though the PC-led ministry soon crumbled due to intra party differences, it was able to retain its majority in the House (18 out of 30 seats) in the elections in 1979, and return to power.<sup>141</sup> PC ultimately drew its strength from the increasing Mizo alienation from the Indian state structure that MNF had helped create and expand. Its political gains at the expense of the Congress underlined the hold that separatist tendencies had begun to have on Mizo society, during those years of the violence.

Table 3.4 Party-wise share of votes in assembly elections (1972-1984) in %

	1972	1978	1979	1984
Congress	30.93	21.94	23.88	40.44
MU <sup>142</sup>	35.63	7.01	8.16	3.62
PC		37.47	32.68	34.71
Other	33.44	33.58	35.28	21.23

Source: Government of Mizoram (2004a)

Over the next years, politics in Mizoram was driven by people's desire for an early end to violence. Congress' electoral campaign claiming to be the only party that had the wherewithal to facilitate the return of peace in Mizoram helped it gain a majority in 1984 assembly elections. This formed the backdrop to the signing of the Mizo Peace Accord between the MNF and the Government of India on June 30, 1986 which ended the two decades of insurgency in Mizoram.<sup>143</sup> Along with the end of violence came statehood for Mizoram, special provisions for protection of Mizo customs and their rights over land; commitment of a large infusion of development grants to improve the infrastructure of the

<sup>140</sup> 'Towards Stability': *Ananda Bazaar Patrika*, Calcutta : 6 June 1978.

<sup>141</sup> 'Peoples' Conference won against heavy odds': *The Times of India*, New Delhi : 2 May 1979

<sup>142</sup> Dissident members of the MU continued to uphold the party even after its merger with the Congress in 1973. The party does not exist now.

<sup>143</sup> This had been preceded by a political settlement between the MNF and the Congress on June 25, 1986, for setting up an MNF-Congress coalition ministry in Mizoram.

state and promises for the establishment of University and High court among others. Significantly, the Accord was based on and led to the dissolution of the elected Congress ministry, then ruling the State, and to the setting up of a coalition ministry with the top executive position going to MNF chief, Laldenga, and several other ministerial ranks going to senior leaders of what until then had been a rebel organisation. In return MNF gave up violence and demilitarized. The Mizo Accord and the incorporation of MNF cadres in the ruling coalition in Mizoram, is a unique instance of the state co-opting into its power structure non-state actors who had challenged its authority.

What were the implications of the MNF movement for state power in Mizoram ? The MNF movement led to a readjustment of state power, with those so far excluded from it (as a result of MU's state-making efforts) being brought in and incorporated into the state structure. This may have led to consolidation of the state's authority and to state power being better grounded in Mizo society, thereby affecting its stability. The MU's anti-Chiefs mobilization and policies had brought the Commoners, particularly the Hmars and Raltes, centre-stage to dominate political power, while excluding the Lushais and their followers. The MNF movement, led and manned by the Lushais in the beginning, but increasingly, after the MNF Mizo mobilization, by Raltes and other sections of the Mizos (Goswami, 1978: 79), as well as changes within Mizo society itself, led to Lushais returning to participate in politics in the State. Nunthara provides evidence of this change in political participation. He argues that the shift of popular support in the years after the declaration of rebellion, from the MU to the Congress and to MNF sentiments, was in part influenced by the Lushais beginning to play a more active role in politics in the district subsequent to their receiving compensation from the government in the late 1950s, for the land they had lost. (1996:79). This section that had been largely excluded from power, extended its support to the Congress in the 1970s, to counter the hold of the MU. By the end of the MNF movement, the process had been completed with Lushais back in the State's power structure. In 1972 Lushais made up only 18 of the 70 prominent leaders in the district and 7 of the 30 MLAs. In 1989, after the conclusion of the MNF movement, there were 14 Lushais out of the 40 MLAs in the State Assembly, a rise from one fourth to one third of the total strength of the House. This was in proportion to their one-third share of the State's population, and Nunthara argues, reflected their return to political power (1996:175-176).

Alongside, a fundamental change had taken place in Mizo society which contributed to its stability. In the pre-1956 phase, Mizo society had been divided along the Chiefs-Commoners line, a divide that had helped create the Lushai-Non Lushai fissure. Abolition of Chiefship had removed the economic basis of the divide. Structural changes (such as land reforms) brought in by the MU itself, consolidated these gains in such a way as to have the effect of promoting a civic basis of participation in the Mizo state. Crucially, the MU's mobilizing an inclusive Mizo identity (See discussion in Chapter 5) concretized the common Mizoness of different sections of the population. Augmenting these tendencies were developments outside the State – particularly the perceived attitude of Assamese leaders, the hardships borne out of the famine and the dislocation as well as sufferings due to the Army's security operations against the MNF. These external forces had the effect of cementing intra-Mizo cracks through mobilization that emphasised Mizo – non Mizo faults. In this circumstance, the difficulty of upholding the previous power balance structured on Lushai / non-Lushai line was reflected in the rising dissidence within MU ranks, and the growing popularity of political forces that were opposed to the MU - UMFO to begin with and subsequently the MNF, Congress and PC. With chiefship already abolished, it was difficult to sustain that basis of legitimacy. MU's attempt at a makeover in the 1960s by posing as a party that stood for pan-Mizo interest, proved unsuccessful, as parties with better anti-non-Mizo credentials already occupied that political space. In the end the rationale for the presence of the MU proved untenable and it merged with the Congress party in 1973.

Greater participation of Lushais in the power structure and the cementing of pan-Mizo identity as the basis of authority had the effect of making state power better grounded in a broader Mizo identity that had elements of both the Lushais and the non-Lushais. This grounding may have provided state agencies in Mizoram with cohesive power. Today, the state and civil society' persistent efforts in Mizoram to maintain this pan-Mizo edifice, sometimes at the cost of excluding non-Mizos, may be seen as the anxiety by state making leaders to sustain that social base of power and maintain order.

### **3.5 Inclusive political organisation and the resultant legitimacy**

Common to much of the political contestation in the pre-1986 phase of politics in the State is the powerful role of political organisations that were instrumental in moves to consolidate state power around a pan-Mizo society. Political parties in the State have mostly been organic to Mizoram. They have grown out of political and social movements in Mizoram

and represent the struggles that have taken place between its different social forces. MU was the outcome as well as the instrument of the Chiefs-Commoners contests. Similarly MNF was an outgrowth of voluntary relief operations during the 1959 famines and the fears around Mizo sentiments; and the PC drew its strength from its public campaign for protection of human rights of people. National parties such as the Congress have also tended to establish local legitimacy by emphasizing Mizo anxieties as well as by establishing linkages with peripheral communities, helping with regime stability. Thus unlike other States in North East India, where dominant political parties have usually been imports from and foisted by the national leadership, it is parties that have a local base and legitimacy that have been in power most of the time in Mizoram. The better institutionalisation of political parties and their resultant legitimacy have helped aggregate and channel popular demands thus promoting stability in society, while enabling the state to provide better governance.

Today, the gains of this legitimacy are being reaped the most by the MNF, which has been showing some impressive success in State and national level elections.<sup>144</sup> (Table 3.5). The party formed the government in 1987, in the first elections held after the signing of the Peace Accord in 1986, when its candidates contested elections as independent candidates. Though the party slipped in 1989, it managed to regain some of the lost ground in 1993 elections. In 1998, the party won a clear majority in the Assembly, and has repeated that performance in the 2003 state elections. This in itself is a remarkable feat, considering the volatile nature of politics in North East India and the dominance of national parties - particularly the Congress - in the region.<sup>145</sup> MNF also won the lone parliamentary seat from the State in 2004 elections.

Table 3.5: Party wise position Mizoram assembly elections (1987-2003)

Party/Year	'87	'89	'93	'98	'03
MNF	-	14	14	23	21
Congress	13	23	16	6	12
PC	3	1	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	12	7
Independent	24	2	10	1	-
Total	40	40	40	40	40

Source: Government of Mizoram (2004a) & Government of Mizoram (2004d)

<sup>144</sup> For a survey of election results see Government of Mizoram (2004).

<sup>145</sup> In 2003, four out of the seven states in the Northeast - Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh - were ruled by the Congress or Congress-led coalition governments.

Admittedly, the institutional strength of the MNF has helped it perform better. The Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF) network provided the backbone for the MNF, which turned to electoral politics, contested elections and helped politicise Mizo identity. MNF's transformation into a military organisation with a strict control and command structure, helped it weather the long years of insurgency. The resultant organisational discipline and cadre-base helped the organisation in the next phase of its transformation, when it came over ground, once again to stake a claim to political power. In what has been the first in the region, the entire MNF fighting machine demilitarized and came over-ground, without a rump faction left behind to continue the war and blunt peace efforts, as has been the case with most peace deals in Northeast India.<sup>146</sup> Today, as the party in power in the State, MNF has been able to use its better discipline and organizational strengths to its political advantage. Zoramthanga, the MNF Chief Minister of Mizoram and the number-two man in the MNF hierarchy in its 'rebel' days, when asked to identify the distinguishing characteristic of his political party, noted, "our strength is our party discipline. We fought the government in the past. But having come over ground, we have retained our cadre strength. We value the discipline in the party."<sup>147</sup> This has obviously worked to the advantage of the MNF.

Contributing significantly to its success is the MNF's positioning itself as standing for pan-Mizo identity and culture. MNF's past has been very helpful in this project. MNF has been at the forefront of the pan-Mizo identity mobilization. Though other parties have sought to occupy that space, it is MNF with its ideas and appeals and its local roots and legitimacy that has managed to monopolise this call.

"The masses feel MNF is a band of heroes who have fought and suffered. MNF has been utilising this sentiment to the hilt. It may also be helping sustain some of that feeling to keep using the 'nationality' benefits it derives, by championing the 'Mizo cause'.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> This was even though MNF had failed to realize its initial objective of sovereignty. This outcome has been credited to MNF's strong organisational discipline and leadership. Peace deals in Nagaland as well as those in Tripura and Assam have frequently grounded down due to factional conflicts within rebel ranks.

<sup>147</sup> Interview: Zoramthanga, President MNF and state Chief Minister. Aizawl: 21 July 2004

<sup>148</sup> Interview: David Thangliana, Editor Newslink, Aizawl : 21 August 2004

Better institutional strengths and better basis of legitimacy have helped MNF to deliver on its electoral promises. Behind much of its electoral success is the image of a party that delivers. According to a report on a post-poll survey conducted after the 2003 elections, “the victory of the MNF could be interpreted as an appreciation of the people for the work done by the MNF government in the State in the last five-six years.” According to the survey, 61 per cent of respondents said they voted for MNF because of its good performance in provision of public services. Underlining the positive vote for the party is its large support base (some 37 per cent of the respondents identified themselves as traditionally supporting MNF, while only 20 per cent held that association with the Congress); and its popular leadership in the incumbent State Chief Minister, Zoramthanga. Significantly, according to the survey, MNF enjoyed support across social classes, with a bias in favour of the rural sections (Satapathy : 2004). A political historian, confirming the popularity of the MNF and the perception of its being better able to deliver, notes:

“The MNF government has been much better at pro-people policies and interventions than its predecessors. They know the reality. They were themselves UGs (underground) once. There is also stability in the MNF support-base. Their supporters do not change sides easily. Moreover, MNF men represent perhaps the more popular sections of the population.....MNF is more sensitive to public issues and is much better at governance....”<sup>149</sup>

MNF, through its institutional strengths, its stable leadership and its better grounding in Mizo society has been able to marshal resources to deliver better on social demands put on the state. In the process it has sustained its popular appeal. This has helped with greater stability of politics and to the maintenance of the legitimacy of the political process in Mizoram. In combination with other factors, some of which we will explore in the remaining chapters on Mizoram, legitimacy of the political process may have shored up the strength of the state, preventing instability and breakdown.

### 3.6 Conclusion

So what does the Mizoram experience teach us about the processes and strategies of state crystallization and authority? As elsewhere, various social forces in Mizoram, in their efforts

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<sup>149</sup> Interview: Sangkima, Historian. Aizawl: 1 July 2004

at state making, beginning with the advent of colonial rule to the present, have engaged in struggles over control of state power. Their successive struggles have led, in the final analysis, to consolidation of state power and its being grounded firmly in society. But the one common thread that runs throughout these disparate struggles is the propensity of state-making leaders to build coalitions with different sections of the population, in order to enhance their authority. Rather than exclude, they have all, in their different ways, sought to include. The colonial state working through traditional authorities, established district-wide structures and institutions to enhance its hold on society. Similarly, state-making leaders on the eve of Independence tried to stake a claim to the state by building inclusive political organisations and identity (the role of the MU is central here), a trend that was expanded on by the later struggles over the state, represented by the MNF. This capacity of Mizo leaders to build State-wide organisations and pan-Mizo identities has grounded state power in society, enhanced its downward reach and legitimacy and helped consolidate its authority. It is perhaps this aspect of the Mizo story, more than any other that is behind the state's relative stability.

Statewide organisations and policies also mean that Mizoram's state-making leaders have been able to incorporate social forces into their state structures, thus enhancing state stability and autonomy. When instability did set in, it was on account of exclusive policies that were leading to the marginalisation of a section the population from the power structure. The MNF revolt could be seen as the attempt by the excluded sections to claim a share of state power. Signing of the 1986 Peace Accord and cooptation of the MNF cadres in the governing structures was the only way a lasting solution could be devised. The sustenance of the 1986 political deal, seen in this light, points to the success of seeking solutions to political contestations through centralised organisations, inclusive policies and coalition building.



## Section II: Mobilising Societies

In this section, I will look at the efforts of different claimants to state-making in Manipur and in Mizoram to mobilise cultural instruments so as to enhance their social control and legitimacy in society. In Section I, I surveyed the efforts of different social groups to acquire authority, by building state agencies and political organisations. In the present section, I will explore state leaders' resort to cultural instruments - norms, values, myths and symbols - to create a collective consciousness around national identity in an effort to concretise their authority and gain legitimacy. Successful creation of collective identity enables state making leaders to bind different sections of society to each other and to the state. This helps them to plug into society and acquire the legitimacy they need to be able to order peoples' lives and rule effectively. The process of creating collective identities is of course fraught, especially in multi-ethnic societies. Resort to nationalism through drawing social boundaries and constructing and mobilising identities implies that while some sections of the population are included, others may be left out, thus ending in their marginalisation. What is crucial for state makers' drive towards legitimacy and monopoly over social control is whether the creation of collective identity is inclusive - aimed at bringing many groups within the fold - or if it is geared to narrow exclusivism. The crucial questions that we must deal with in this regard are: what determines inclusionary (or exclusionary) mobilisation? And what implications do these have for the leaders' state making projects? It is this two-way process of mutual transformation of state and society: contestations among state-making leaders over what shape the society should take and the implication of these moves for state power and the capability of agencies of the state in Manipur and Mizoram that I hope to explore in the next two chapters.

The key independent variables I will focus on here are: the historical evolution of community identities in the States, the impact of modernisation on social and political mobilisation among communities and the ensuing elite conflicts among them, and the institutional and organisational arrangements in the two cases and their roles in promoting or constraining inclusivity. This exploration will require looking at the historical determinants of differences (or similarities) between communities. But more important will be exploring the process of modernisation in the two cases and the ensuing processes of social

mobilisation that unleash elite contests over power and resources. Identifying the strategies used by the elites in society – such as inclusionary or exclusionary identity mobilisation – to contest each other and control the state and analysing the causes behind those choices will be crucial to this understanding. Central here is, of course, the role of institutional arrangements in society in determining the divergent pathways that political actors take. Equally important will be grappling with the principal vehicles of political mobilisation in the two cases - political parties and community-based organisations - and understanding their roles in contributing to society formation and state legitimacy.

## Chapter 4

### The fragmentation of society in Manipur

#### 4.1 Introduction

On June 18 2001, activists led by the All Manipur Students Union (AMSU) and the All Manipur United Clubs Organisation (AMUCO) took out large demonstrations in Imphal, Manipur's capital. They were protesting the extension of a four-year old ceasefire agreement between Government of India and the Naga rebel group, Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN-IM) that would now be effective not only in adjoining state of Nagaland but also in Naga-dominated districts in Manipur. The extension, they feared, was a prelude to the separation of these districts from Manipur. The crowds that gathered in front of the Governor's House, soon turned violent, directing most of their ire at symbols of state authority. Agitated mobs selectively set fire to offices of all political parties in the State, the Chief Minister's official residence and the office complex, residences of many legislators and former State cabinet members, and significantly, the building housing the State Assembly. In the rampage at the Assembly, two legislators sustained grievous burn injuries and the Speaker of the House was badly manhandled by the mobs. In police action against rioters, 18 persons lost their lives. Later, public organisations gave 'ultimatum' to Members of Parliament and Members of Legislative Assembly from Manipur to resign. They declared that they were prepared for a 'civil war', to prevent the disintegration of the State.<sup>150</sup>

Part of the mobilisation was also directed at Nagas living in Imphal, prompting a small exodus among them to safer environs in the Hills. On June 29, the United Naga Council, the apex Naga body, organised the Naga People's Convention in Senapati town and in defiance of developments in Imphal, welcomed the extension of the Ceasefire to include Naga districts. It also urged the Central government to hasten the peace talks with the NSCN-IM. Integration of all Naga-inhabited areas was central to this hope among the Nagas. UNC threatened to block all routes of entry into Imphal valley indefinitely if the Central government buckled under Meitei pressures and went back on the extension. Over the next couple of months, police and protestors were locked in pitched battles all over the Valley,

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<sup>150</sup> Reports from *The Imphal Free Press*, Imphal: 19 June 2001 to 22 June 2001.

until the Central government eventually withdrew the 'extension'. The promised communication blockade of Imphal by Nagas did take place, but was eventually eased. Today, June 18 has itself become a contentious issue between Nagas and Meteis, with the former observing Solidarity Rallies in the Naga dominated districts in support of Naga integration. Meitei organisations, on the other hand, observe the Great June Uprising, to commemorate those who died in police firing in 2001 and to restate their opposition to the disintegration of Manipur.<sup>151</sup>

These inter-group contestations in Manipur demonstrate the extent to which the two communities have been mobilised around their specific identities and the way mobilisations have been fashioned in conflicting terms. In the rest of the chapter, I explore the dynamics of exclusivist political mobilisation in Manipur. I look at the social basis, the aspirations and the interests of the rising middle class in the Valley where early attempts at state-making were taking place. I map the existential dilemmas and challenges that the new class faced to its interests and the identity-route they took to surmount those challenges to be able to legitimise their social control. The identity that this class mobilised was Valley –focused, and was perceived as excluding non-Meitei sections of the population. I then explore the concerns of non-Meitei sections, and the economic and political factors underlying the resistance that this section posed to Meitei mobilisation, and map the spiral of contestations that has been the outcome of these exclusive and conflicting attempts at society making. But was the ethnic basis of identity construction and mobilisation and the ensuing conflicts the only way forward for Manipur? Was an inclusive, civic basis of identity impossible? I engage with this question, trying to understand what factors forced state making leaders to go down the exclusivist path. I also look at the nature of 'civil society' in Manipur to understand how its constituents contribute to the process of rising ethnic contests and explore how these contests then impact on the powerlessness of state leaders, the two dynamics reinforcing each other. I conclude the chapter by drawing some empirical summations from the material.

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<sup>151</sup> Reports from *The Sangai Express* Imphal : 17 June 2005 to 22 June 2005

#### 4.2 Class conflicts in the Valley and Meitei mobilisation

Much of the social change in Manipur can be traced to social and political developments beginning to take place in the early decades of the last century. Behind most developments were changes taking place in the Valley. Colonial rule had had its consequences for social and political mobilisation in Manipur. Introduction of colonial rule and subsequently of English education led to the birth of a small middle class in the Valley that derived its legitimacy from modern education. A number of schools were opened and there was enthusiasm among the people to send their wards, including girls, to these schools. Between 1909 and 1930, the number of schools in the State as a whole increased from 58 to 87 and pupil strength from 3391 to 6577. Soon a high school was opened and a matriculation examination centre introduced in Imphal. The expansion of the education system led to a growth in literacy rate (from 0.9 % in 1901 to 5 % in 1941) and to turning out of high school and college graduates (Bhattacharya, 1963 : 370).<sup>152</sup> This group formed the basis of the new middle class in the Valley.

But the avenues of advancement for the educated class were limited. Senior positions in the State administration were manned by British officers, while those in the courts were in the hands of the traditional nobility. Middle-rung positions and those in schools and courts were manned by personnel brought in by the colonial administration from Assam and Bengal. That left only petty positions in schools, state offices and the courts, open to the educated class from the State itself. In the meanwhile, colonial policies had also led to the rise of political consciousness among the masses. A series of mass mobilisations, beginning with the anti-British women's uprising in 1904, followed by anti-trader disturbances in 1920 and again in 1939,<sup>153</sup> contributed to mobilising the masses in the Valley politically, against the dominant power structure made up of colonial rulers and the nobility and those aligned with it. Outsider traders, particularly *Marwaris*, played a key role in the existing power structure. This section with their extensive all-India trade networks and links to the local nobility and the colonial system, monopolised much of the trade in the State. Practices of this class were seen as exploitative and as adversely affecting the interests of local people, especially consumers and petty traders. Much of the public agitation in Imphal in 1920 were around the

<sup>152</sup> This growth of the middle class is also reflected in the birth of vernacular magazines and periodicals around this time (Singh, 1998: 118)

<sup>153</sup> Disturbances at Imphal, Dec. 1939. Manipur State Archives, Reference File (MSA RF) # R-1/s-b, 141).

role of Marwaris in exporting rice outside the State that had led to a sharp increase in the price of rice and consequent hardships for the populace. Adding to these anxieties was the increasing rigidity promoted by the Maharaja under the influence of orthodox Brahmin preachers - themselves imports from outside the State - that was putting economic burdens on the masses and increasing inequalities within the Metei society.<sup>154</sup>

In the hardship faced by petty traders, farmers and the common man, the educated elite found a common cause against 'outsider' dominance. Thus Marwari traders, petty Bengali and Assamese officials and the Brahmins, stood as symbols of this outsider influence. The only way the local educated sections could contest the influence of this class was by mobilising their Metei identity to give society a Metei character in order to be able to stake a claim to economic and political resources. The anti-outsider mobilisation took different forms: (i) the Sanamahi movement, which held that the economic and social ills of Manipuri society were the outcome of the people following Hindu practices. The chief proponent of this thesis and the man behind the movement, Naorem Phulo, found some popularity with his calls for rescinding connections with Hinduism and for revival of the indigenous Metei belief systems. (ii) The Hindu religious reform movement led by a section of the educated. According to these leaders, it was not Hinduism itself but the manner in which it was being practised that accounted for most socio-economic problems of Manipuri society. They considered that the way forward was by reforming Hindu practices, encouraging modern education including for girls and by promoting the local Manipuri language, in place of the imported Bengali. The outcome of these moves was the establishment of private high schools and upgrading of existing public schools as also the setting up of schools for girls. (iii) There were others among the educated that had a clearer economic take on the ills of Manipuri society. This group led by leaders like Hijam Irabot emphasised poverty as the fundamental problem of Manipur, and attributed it to an outsider-controlled colonial economy. They appealed for an end to foreign imports and for the use of local produce. In his pamphlet titled *Houjik Tougadaba Karino* (What is to be done now?), Irabot suggested the use of Manipuri handloom and local salt, to counter the drain of wealth from Manipur. He urged Manipuris to take to trade, questioning how outsider traders had amassed wealth in their State. A resolution of the Manipur Praja Sammelan - the earlier incarnation of the Praja

<sup>154</sup> Maharaja Churachand Singh, under Brahmin influence, imposed a variety of religious sanctions to escape which people had to pay hefty fines. Brahmins were also behind the promotion of rigid enforcement of caste hierarchies in the State. For discussions see Singh (1998:42-49) and Parratt (2005: 32-33).

Sangha party that Irabot had established - urging local people to question outsider monopoly in business and trade, was suitably titled '*meteigi maru oiba awatpa*' (some important shortcomings of the Meteis).<sup>155</sup>

The common thread running between all these different strains of resistance was of course the opposition to the dominance of outsiders in economic, political and social life in the Valley. Equally, what was common to all was the fashioning of the resistance in the form of Metei nationalism. The response to outsider dominance was either to go back to traditional Metei religion or to reform Hinduism to make it more in line with Metei conditions, promote Manipuri language and literature and education among the youth and improve the economic condition and opportunities for the common man. By politicising their Metei identity, these leaders were seeking to stake claim to control of the state that was in the process of being formed. Reflecting their claim to state power was the demand by this section for a greater role for the state in changing the economic conditions of the people. They argued that the function of the government was not only to rule but also to improve the economy of the State.<sup>156</sup>

The social base of this elite class facilitated their resort to politicisation of their identity in their bid for political power and social control. Lokendra Singh has demonstrated how the new elite was made up of the urban and semi-urban sections of the population that had recently also acquired agrarian roots. This was the section that had, before the advent of colonial rule in 1891, been part of the ruling coalition making up the *Rajkumars* - the nobility - but whose powers and privileges had been greatly reduced due to colonial policies. Ironically it was this section, along with those that rose to positions of power and influence under the new colonial-controlled administration, which was gaining the most economically under the changed system. Singh provides evidence to prove that there was extensive pauperisation of the peasantry under colonial rule leading to distress sale of land by them to the elite. (Singh, 1998: 49-58) This feudal class making up the combine of urban notables with rural holdings was the mainspring of the new Manipuri elite that was forming around the time of the end of colonial rule. The limited opportunities available to this class to satisfy

<sup>155</sup> Proceedings of the Working Committee of the Manipur Praja Sammelan, dated 4 September 1946. MSA RF # r-1/s-d, 245 (relating with Hijam Irabot).

<sup>156</sup> Krishna Mohon Singh, *Manipurgi Houjikmak Kannaba* ('Issues of immediate relevance to Manipur') *Lalit Manjuri Patrika* Vol XII, 1 August 1934, p. 493, quoted in Singh (1998: 124)

its aspirations led to its alienation and to its initiating various popular movements. Singh argues that reflecting the opportunistic bent of this class was the support this section often gave to the ruling coalition against the masses when it suited their interest to do so. (Singh, 1998: 249) Since they were also steeped in Hindu beliefs and practices, perhaps, it made sense for these state making leaders to mobilise their Metei identity in the garb of promoting Metei culture and Hindu religion, to be able to serve their own interests.

Political awakening and the possibilities of popular participation in electoral politics led to cracks developing in this combine. One section, led by the Nikhil Manipuri Hindu Mahasabha (NMHM) retained its elite, landed and narrow Metei outlook. The other, led by leaders like Irabot, sought to work more closely with the peasantry, to be able to broaden their social and political base. Reflecting the urge of this latter section to broaden its appeal was the attempt by the Krishak Sabha, a party espousing the interests of the peasantry, to forge alliances with non-Metei communities in the state. (Singh, 1998: 214). The upheavals during the Second World War helped the Metei middle class further to consolidate their economic power, while the dislocations caused increased land alienation and destitution among the masses.<sup>157</sup> (Singh, 1998: 186) This concretised the existing class polarisation in Manipuri society. Post-War developments in the State and outside, led to the conversion of the elitist NMHM into the Manipur State Congress (MSC) and eventually to its laying claim to state-making in the post Independence phase of state-making in Manipur. This section, along with the State's nobility and in connivance with the Central leadership, stigmatised the mass-based radical politics of the Krishak Sabha eventually to drive the latter out of the political process in Manipur. The implications of this historical juncture for political mobilisation in Manipur have been stark.

Though the educated elite welcomed and even mobilised for the merger of Manipur with the Indian Union<sup>158</sup>, economic and political changes in the wake of the merger acted as further grounds for their alienation. The merger ended up limiting the economic opportunities available to this section. Immediately after the merger, top civil and police positions in the Administration, that had been earlier with local residents, began to be manned by officials

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<sup>157</sup> Manipur, along with the Naga Hills, was the only part of India that actually saw fighting during the Second World War. The Japanese Army entered Manipur in the beginning of March 1944. It was evicted after prolonged fighting with the Allied troops in September of that year.

<sup>158</sup> In part due to the intra-elite contests over power and authority (Singh 1998: 226)



from outside Manipur. Establishment of a Centrally controlled state structure with a mandate for socio-economic development of the State, led to expansion of the bureaucracy and to the influx of a large number of personnel, again from outside Manipur to man those positions. These moves led to increase in anxiety among Manipur's educated middle class. This class was itself growing in these years. The proportion of literate population in Manipur had risen from 5.1% in 1941 to 11.4 % in 1951 and to 30.9 % in 1961 (Government of Manipur, 2003b). But with most jobs in 'outsider' hands, the educated saw little hope for themselves. Past anxieties among Meteis about outsider dominance of economic opportunities were thus reinforced in the years following the Merger. Reflecting on the seriousness of the problem of access to opportunities was the resolution of the State Territorial Council, which complained in 1957, "almost all key posts in Manipur are now being held by outsiders". It resolved to move the state administration and the central government to place Manipuris in these posts.<sup>159</sup>

Adding to their woes was the worsening situation of economic opportunities for local people, a development that the Manipuri intelligentsia attributes to the Central government's 'economic colonialism' in the region.

"A large influx of outsiders took place in the state under Central rule, causing pressure on the population balance and change of control of economy from local to outsider hands. Further, from what was a self-sufficient economy, the State ha(d)...become a market for products produced outside. This ....led to absence of employment opportunities in the State."<sup>160</sup>

There was a steep rise in the flow of economic migrants into the State: from 6,282 in 1951 they rose to 37,548 in 1971, making up some 3.5 % of the total population of the State.<sup>161</sup> This group, made up of labourers, farm hands, domestic workers and petty traders mostly from Assam, Bihar Uttar Pradesh and Nepal, was seen as eating into the scarce economic opportunities available in the organised and unorganised private sector in the State. With political power in the hands of the Centrally controlled bureaucracy, the Meitei elite could do little to prevent the flow of the migrants. These fears led to the leadership sharpening their

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<sup>159</sup> Record of the debate of Manipur Territorial Council session, 2 January 1958. (MSA RF # 2/11/64-con, R 16/A no 196).

<sup>160</sup> Interview : Joykumar, Historian. Imphal: 3 November 2004)

<sup>161</sup> Census of India. The flow gradually tapered off (to 2.3 % in 1981 and 1.1 % in 1991), a result presumably of public mobilisations and legislative measures discouraging outsiders.

MetEI identity in a bid to gain political and economic power. But with little opportunity in the private sector, the public sector was increasingly being seen as the hope of the educated class. To gain access there, the leadership figured, it would be essential first to acquire political dominance in the State. Among other factors, this strengthened the drawn out movement for 'statehood' for Manipur.

Given the social basis of the movement and the manner in which the issue had been problematised as a movement for restoration of the political and economic authority of the MeteIs against a centrally controlled bureaucracy, mobilisation for Manipur's statehood was around the MetEI identity. The movement was envisioned as a contest between the just aspirations of the MetEI people and an exploitative outsider political-economic system that had unjustly usurped power. Through the movement, the MetEI middle class asserted both its claim to political power over the State as well as its dominant position within. As we will see, the Statehood Movement was to set the trend for a series of mobilisations around MetEI identity, all of which were based on the MetEI elite's notion of Manipur for the MeteIs. By using identity as a mobilising tool to politicise the MetEI sense of frustration, the elite was able to give force to its claims for political power.

Restoration of political power however, was not an end in itself. Manipur became a full State in 1972, but claims of structural constraints continued. With political power restored, the search for economic opportunities for the MetEI middle class would take the form of further movements aimed at expanding their dominant claim to opportunities in the public sector. This they did by attempting to change the rules of the game to favour their own community. Movements for making the Manipuri language an essential qualification for all recruitments to class I to class III jobs in the State government, inclusion of Manipuri language in the Eights Schedule of the Constitution and demands for setting up of a separate public service commission for the State, were some of the efforts by the educated elite to expand opportunities available to it. The effort was to dominate the expanded opportunities in the public sector that creation of a full state apparatus implied. Public sector opportunities were enhanced in the 1980s on account of increase in spending by the Centre for economic

development for the Northeast region as a whole.<sup>162</sup> Most of this meant an increase in the size of the State bureaucracy. Between 1980-81 and 1993-94, the economy grew at a real rate of growth of 5.2 per cent annually. During the same period, while the share of Agriculture in growth fell from 46 per cent to 41 per cent, and that of Manufacturing hovered at a low 11 per cent that of Services rose from 43 per cent to 48 per cent. Public Administration made up most of this growth. (Lahiri et al.: 2002) No wonder that of the total number of people in gainful employment in Manipur in 1991, 98.6 % were in the public sector, mostly with the State government.

And significantly, as discussed in Chapter 2, Meteï mobilisation, while helping the landed elite to stake their claim to state power, also helped the section to overcome any possible threat to their economic dominance in society. The shortcomings of the land reforms programme in Manipur provide proof here. Das (1989: 27) The alliance of the educated elite represented by the MSC and the ruling class represented by the Praja Shanti party that in 1948 ousted Irabot from electoral politics and forced him underground, could be construed as an attempt by the elites / conservative elements in society to allay their fears of a potential rural upheaval. Meteï mobilisation would, then, have served a useful purpose in shifting the contestation between the elites and the masses to one between Meteïs and non-Meteïs. The poor working of the Central bureaucracy and the deployment of Central security forces to counter the anti-state violence by Irabot's District Organising Committee of the Communist Party spurred Meteï identity mobilisation and helped in this shift.

But as it would turn out, the use of this strategy had its costs. In a multi-ethnic setting, the sharpening of Meteï identity to claim state power proved problematic. By mobilising their Meteï identity, state-making leaders sought to exclude non-Meteï citizens of the State from the opportunities they were seeking to create. Surely, it was not only the Meteïs who were looking for opportunities. Tribal communities too had aspirations that required to be met through economic mobility. These sections saw Meteï mobilisation as adversely affecting their own interests. This was leading to a clash of interests between the two sections. As we

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<sup>162</sup> Plan expenditure jumped from Rs. 989 million in the Fifth Plan (1974-79) to Rs. 2.4 billion in the Sixth Plan (1980-85) and to 5.1 billion in the Seventh Plan (1985-90). Most of the contribution came from the Centre. (North Eastern Council, 2000:164)

will see, these moves had serious repercussions for inter-community relations and political order within Manipur.

### 4.3 Counter mobilisation in the Hills

How were tribal communities responding to changes in the Valley? Colonial penetration had kick-started the state making process in the Hills of Manipur. They had led to pacification of the tribes, an end to their isolation and eventually to the development of corporate feelings leading to society formation among them. Christian missionaries, who came on the heels of the colonial administrators, played key roles in these early changes in the Hills.<sup>163</sup> They introduced and helped spread education among the tribes; even helped them develop their own dialects. These changes provided the social basis for emergence of new educated groups amongst the tribal communities. In the later part of their rule, colonial administrators worked with tribal chiefs and the educated class to help crystallise supra-village associations that formed the basis of the emerging identities. The educated elites were self-conscious and desired a say in the political and economic changes beginning to sweep Manipur around the end of colonial rule. They were also increasingly aware of their difference with Meiteis inhabiting the Valley.

A case in point is the Tangkhul community inhabiting the Northeastern Hills of the State. Initially made up of a large number of head-hunting villages, their inhabitants all speaking mutually unintelligible dialects, perhaps the biggest change in the lives of people of these villages was the arrival in their midst of an American Baptist missionary, William Pettigrew, in 1894. He set up his base in Ukhrul, the largest village in those Hills and began actively promoting education among the children. Pettigrew's enthusiasm in persuading villagers to send their wards to school he set up, won him support not only from Ukhrul but also from villages in the vicinity. Pettigrew also devised a primer based on the dialect spoken in Ukhrul – that was later to become the standard Tangkhul – to act as medium of instruction in schools and for people to read the Bible and hymn books in. The Administration was suitably impressed by these first initiatives in education in Hill areas to offer support to Pettigrew in his education endeavours. These in turn helped the latter to enhance the scale of

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<sup>163</sup> Missionaries first came to Ukhrul in 1894, and later to the South East Hills in 1910, and to the northwest part of Manipur in 1920.

his educational initiatives.<sup>164</sup> Pettigrew's standardisation of the Ukhrul dialect leading to its use in other villages in the area helped provide linguistic cohesiveness to the people. It was from this band of youth in Ukhrul and elsewhere that the first generation of the educated middle class in the Tangkhul Hills would emerge. They provided the bricks and mortar of the Tangkhul identity, as did similar trends in other parts of the Hills of Manipur, leading to the rise of other identities.

However, as Tangkhuls were the first to encounter education they were also the first to rise to a level where they could stake claim to political power. It was from amongst the educated in the Tangkhul community that most tribal political leaders emerged in post-Independence Manipur.<sup>165</sup> And it was also from this group that the Meitei middle class faced the strongest challenge to its claim over state power. Alienation among the tribals was reinforced by the increasing rigidity coming about in Hindu practices among Meitei in the years before Independence and which exacerbated social exclusion of the tribals. As a tribal historian explains, 'in the Valley, modern education and the new intelligentsia... had affinities with Bengali and Vaishnavite ethos. This element, which was seeking to integrate the Manipuri mind with Hindu India, bore strong prejudices against the non-Hindu tribal populations. Their orientation was Valley centric.'<sup>166</sup> Thus when political consciousness came to tribal sections, they thought in terms of their own communities.

But a contest for power meant competition not only between the tribal and Meitei leadership but also within the emerging middle class among the tribals. The other group that was evolving in the years preceding the end of colonial rule was that of the Kukis, with their contacts with education and petty jobs in the state bureaucracy. The coordinated armed revolt by Kuki Chiefs against colonial consolidation during 1917-1919 (the Kuki Rising) had contributed to the rise of some sort of a corporate feeling among this group. Similarly the 'Naga Raj' Movement of 1931-1934 in the western Hills had helped with the evolution of community feelings among the Kacha Nagas and Kabui Nagas inhabiting those Hills. In

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<sup>164</sup> For a discussion of the impact of Christian missionaries in the Hills see 'Note Regarding Missions in Manipur' by Laurie Hammond, Governor of Assam, dated 20 February 1928. (MSA RF # R-1/S-B 1350. and Laldena (1988)

<sup>165</sup> Bob Khathing was a minister in the first popular government in the state. R. Suisa was a member of the first Assembly, before Merger. Rishang Keishing and Y. Shaiza, both served as successful chief ministers of Manipur, the first lasting in that capacity the longest.

<sup>166</sup> Interview: Laldena, Historian. Imphal: 25 November 2004.

part, the Kuki Rising and the Naga Raj movement also contributed to creating rifts between the Kukis and the Nagas and that has been so difficult to bridge to this day. In the course of their revolt, Kuki Chiefs had, besides resisting colonial control, also targeted Kabui villages who they considered siding with colonial forces.<sup>167</sup> In turn, Jadonang the leader of the Kacha Naga anti-colonial movement, while calling for an end to paying taxes to the government had also urged his followers to avenge the felt wrongs of the Kukis during their raids on Kabui villages in the past. Thus, the unique encounter that different evolving community grouping had with the past has been an important factor determining intra-tribal relations and preventing the growth of a unified tribal identity, despite their common religious practices. On the whole, group identities that were evolving in the Hills remained largely narrow and inward looking.

Determining the proclivity to community-based political organisation in the Hills is the persistent autonomy and authority of traditional tribal institutions. Rather than establishing centralised state wide political institutions, colonial administrators had relied on tribal Chiefs and their councils to maintain their control over the Hills. The authority of these localised institutions was consolidated in the post-Independence phase of state building when the powers and role of Village Authorities were expanded. Chiefs and village councils relied on customary codes and traditional authority to emphasise their social control and discharge their responsibilities. It also meant that old rewards, sanctions and myths, remained more or less intact with state-wide common reward structures remaining inadequate and mostly absent. The outcome of these tendencies was mobilisation along community lines based on narrow identities. Contestations over power and resources in the post-Independence period, led to the tribal elites investing in and strengthening their respective community-based organisations, reinforcing narrow identity mobilisation. The multiplicity of fragmented and autonomous centres of power meant that there would be multiple and conflictual mobilisation of these communities. Faced with the sharp politicisation of Meitei identity by the majority community and its claim to dominate state power, tribal chiefs and leaders politicised their specific identities.

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<sup>167</sup> MSA Ref file no R-1/S-D, 230 (The Kuki Rebellion), pp. 8-12.

Demands for statehood for Manipur and for effective political power to be handed down to State leaders, prompted tribal leaders to demand protection of their culture, identity and rights in any future dispensation in Manipur. The fears of this section were proved realistic when declaration of statehood for Manipur in 1972 led to Meitei political leaders and community organisations redoubling their efforts to give to the State a Meitei core and character. A legislator, participating in a discussion in the Assembly to commemorate Manipuri being made the state language commented: “we should try to bring a new life into the Assembly by making a legislation of a State language as other States have their own language. If we have our State language we can proudly say that we have got equal rights of the citizens of India.”<sup>168</sup> These moves were seen by tribal legislators as domineering and as a threat to their interests. Non-Meitei members of the House opposed these demands claiming that though Meiteis were the majority in the State, there were many minority communities for whom Manipuri was not their mother tongue. They were also concerned about “other urgent matters relating to the development of the backward non-Manipuri speakers, mostly tribal hill-men that needs to be addressed more urgently.”<sup>169</sup> The Manipuri Language bill split the House not along party lines but along communities. Some Naga members even warned that Naga areas of the state would merge with Nagaland if Manipuri were made the State’s official language.<sup>170</sup> The Bill was eventually passed and Manipuri made the official language in 1979.

These contestations between Meitei and tribal leaders over what the ‘outer structure’<sup>171</sup> or the identity of the State should be, continued to pit leaders of different communities in Manipur against each other, leading to increasing conflicts and divide. By far the strongest attempt by Meitei leaders to consolidate the Meitei character of the State was around the issue of inclusion of Manipuri in Eight Schedule of the Constitution. Meitei leaders had been demanding this inclusion on account of its developed script and literature. It was believed that an official recognition for Manipuri under the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution would facilitate recognition of the language at the national level and bring in some benefits in terms of additional job opportunities. But these moves were seen by tribal leaders as yet another attempt by Meitei leaders to exclude tribals. Their apprehensions were not helped by

<sup>168</sup> I Tompok Singh, MLA. Proceedings of the Manipur State Assembly, Imphal : 19-23 January 1973, p. 61.

<sup>169</sup> Gouzagin , MLA. Proceedings of the Manipur State Assembly, Imphal : 19-23 January 1973, p. 65.

<sup>170</sup> ‘Rano to the rescue of Shaiza detractors’: *Resistance* Imphal : 26 September 1978.

<sup>171</sup> This phrase is borrowed from Migdal (2001:124).

Metei leaders' stand on the issue. RK Ranbir, a senior state legislator, who introduced the bill in the State Assembly argued, "although youth of the Valley do not lack in educational qualification, they have not been able to compete with those in the Central pool who belong to the advanced states of our country....."<sup>172</sup> Metei leaders felt that although tribal youth from the State enjoyed reservations in jobs, including those with the Central Government, Meteis had little access to these positions and enabling the latter to write examinations for jobs in Manipuri would neutralise some of their disadvantage.<sup>173</sup> The difference between the two sections was strong enough for tribal legislators to stage a walkout when the bill was introduced in the Assembly.<sup>174</sup>

Contestations over the shape that society would take have widened cleavages within Manipuri society. Attempts by state-making leaders to enhance their social control through creating a Metei core of the State, have been resisted by tribal sections. Tribal leaders have responded by asking for greater safeguards for themselves in the form of political and cultural autonomy. Opposition to tribal demands by Metei groups have in turn led the former to raise separatist demands. Nagas have been the most vocal here, asking for separation of Naga districts of Manipur and their integration with Nagaland. This has fuelled strong Metei counter-mobilization. Public agitation by Metei organizations against possible Naga Integration moves in 2001, sustained for well over two months, led to widespread rioting, destruction of public property and the death of 18 Metei activists in police firing. In June 2005, under increasing pressure from Metei groups, the State government declared June 18, observed since 2001 by Metei social organizations as the day of the 'Great June Uprising', as a public holiday. This precipitated another round of crisis with Naga organisations blaming the State government for being a handmaiden of Metei interests and oblivious to Naga sentiments.<sup>175</sup> What followed was 50 days of blockade of roads and transport links to the State by Naga groups.

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<sup>172</sup> Proceedings. Manipur State Assembly. Imphal : 29 December 1978. pp. 45-50.

<sup>173</sup> '.....the number of ST (Scheduled Tribes) who have been successful in the IAS (Indian Administrative Service) examination is very much, whereas we (Meteis) have only one. So we better think how to improve it putting aside the question of employment. Because it would not be good if our General Administration is manned only by the STs.' Proceedings. Manipur State Assembly. Imphal : 29 December 1978, p. 47.

<sup>174</sup> Proceedings. Manipur State Assembly. Imphal : 12 April 1979.

<sup>175</sup> 'Manipur Government... bans UNC rally: Heads for confrontation'. NET News Network, Imphal: June 15, 2005 and 'Rally defies ban, thousands throng to the streets'. NET News Network, Imphal: 16 June, 2005



#### 4.4 The intensification of conflicts

What accounts for the intensification of conflicts in Manipur in recent years? There has been a rapid rise in levels of education among the youth. This rise has been most significant in the Valley, but also in the Tangkhul dominated Ukhrul district of the Hills. Between 1981 and 1991, literacy levels rose from 62.38 % to 78.33 % in the Meitei dominated Imphal district. In Ukhrul, they rose from 61.74 to 72.17. (Government of Manipur, 2003) This has led to expanding search among the youth for jobs and employment, most notably within these two communities. But rising aspirations are not matched by rise in opportunities. Between 1993-94 and 2000-2001, public sector growth, which had fuelled most of the growth in the previous decade, slowed down, from 48.1% to 43.1 %. The outcome of this mismatch has been reflected in the increasing number of educated youth approaching employment exchanges for jobs. Few have managed to be absorbed. According to the state Directorate of Employment, 19,189 persons registered with employment exchanges in 1993-94 but only 1390 of them were given placement. The following year, there were 29,894 people entering the register, but jobs could be found only for 1085. By 1997-98, registrants had gone up to 31,000, with few placements available. Today there are 4,10,076 persons on the live register of employment exchanges in Manipur. Of these, over 1,10,000 have some form of higher qualification. (Government of Manipur, 2003b)

The growing imbalance between rising education levels and aspirations, and avenues for gainful employment to satisfy those aspirations has led to intensifying contests over jobs and economic advancement. In the absence of growth in the private sector, most of these opportunities are with the government. Thus for a community ever to advance in this race, it is essential that it has political power that can then be used to make or break rules favouring the community. Political power is an outcome of numbers. The Meitei middle class has used this power to its advantage. This has alienated tribal communities, who are searching for ways to acquire their own forms of political power. But even if all tribals could get together politically, they would still face the disadvantage of numbers in any attempt to counter the Meitei project.<sup>176</sup> Structuring of politics along lines of identity has also prevented the rise of class-based parties or ones that could claim to occupy the middle ground. This is despite the presence of centrist and secular parties such as the Congress and the Federal Party of

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<sup>176</sup> In the sixty member legislative assembly, thirty-nine constituencies belong to the Valley and the rest to the Hills.

Manipur. The nature of existing tribal institutions has also meant that the tendency is to look for separatist solutions. This has taken the form of demands for constitutional changes that could allow autonomy for tribal areas, restricting Meitei influence. Meitei opposition to demands for conversion of the Autonomous District Councils (ADC) to Sixth Schedule status, due to their reluctance to share power or on account of fear they may have of losing control over a large part of the State, have fed into tribal alienation and subsequent mobilisation. A senior tribal leader, trying to understand the emotions on either side, puts it thus:

Since political power is in the valley, they (Meiteis) can play the arbiter. Hills want parity with the Valley, but they do not get it. This has created havoc with tribal sentiments.<sup>177</sup>

For Meitei leaders, economic and political concessions for the State's tribal communities are not justified. They complain that tribals have been given too many concessions in the past and argue:

'After all Meiteis too need jobs and opportunities for employment. Education is rising, but there are no jobs and opportunities available in the State. Meitei youth have to go out of the State. Thus their potentialities cannot be used here in Manipur. There are no jobs available here.'<sup>178</sup>

These contests are likely to become exacerbated. The public sector, which is the principal source of employment in Manipur, is over-burdened. As of 2002, there were over 90,000 persons employed in various offices and agencies of the state government, making Manipur, the state with one the highest employee-population ratio in the country. (Lahiri et al., 2002) Macro-economic reforms have meant that the State government has had to put a ban on further recruitment. Attempts to create opportunities in the private sector have proved a damp squib. With avenues for further employment in the State administrative appearing bleak, leaders face a challenging task in trying to fulfil aspirations of the masses. Identity mobilisation and community contests have also led to hardening of attitudes on both sides, obstructing efforts to work out solutions that take the interests of all communities along. Just

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<sup>177</sup> Interview: Nengsong, President Paite Tribal Council. Churachandpur: 27 October 2004

<sup>178</sup> Interview: Bobbichand, ex- President, All Manipur Students' Union. Imphal: 1 November 2004

as autonomy to Hill districts is anathema to the Meteis so is any talk of changes to land laws in Hill areas, changes that could have a positive effect on growth.

#### 4.5 The institutional roots of Manipur's divisions

It is evident that ethnic identities have been mobilised by different groups so as to be able to gain advantage in their contests over economic and political power. This has meant that state-making leaders have sought to create a society whose basis is ethnic and not civic. Though the state itself claims to represent all citizens of Manipur and treat everyone as equal citizens of the polity, in practice the society that has been fashioned by State leaders to provide sustenance for the state and give it the legitimacy it needs, treats people differently. The Meteis form the core of the society and non-Metei communities exist outside it or in a graded hierarchy. Communities that have been excluded have themselves mobilised along ethnic lines to retain their sense of self-control. There has been little attempt from either side to create a society with a civic basis that could help unify different sections. Evidently Manipur lacks a grand narrative that could encompass in its embrace all the people of the state. Was this unavoidable? While historical factors give the impression of over-determination of this outcome, a close reading of Manipur's history points to the important role of contested identity categories and the State's shifting borders, in influencing the politicisation of individual identities. The role of the Central state and the rising socio-economic challenges have given force to this trend, thus preventing a unifying idiom. Let us survey some of these trends.

Local folklore and ethnographic accounts claim that what is today Manipur was inhabited by a collection of tribes thought to be of common Tibeto-Burman origin. Among all Hill-dwelling tribal populations, there are many legends that give them and the Meteis a common descent.<sup>179</sup> Differences in topography, mode of production and capital accumulation between the Valley and the Hills, led to the beginning of the process of state-formation along with the emergence of a united Meitei identity in the Valley, while there was little evolution of common identities in the Hills, bypassed by the process of state formation. The impression one gets from existing accounts is that the intercourse between the Hill people

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<sup>179</sup> Interestingly, Hodson notes that though tribal communities believe they had common links with the Meteis, the latter deny any possibility of their common origins with the tribals (1908:6-8).

and the Meteis was limited and often conflictual. Drivers of these conflicts were, as usual, the lure of tribute, resource control, slaves and the constant threat of foreign attack (Kabui, 1991:215). The difference between the Hill-dwellers and those in the Valley would be amplified with the advent of organised religion.

Like their counterparts in the Hills, Meteis were originally animists. Beginning in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, Hindu influence began to percolate into the Valley from Bengal. Once the ruler was brought under its influence, Hinduisim soon became the official religion of the State and quickly consolidated its hold over the kingdom.<sup>180</sup> Hinduism of a particularly rigid variety took roots in the Valley during the early parts of the last century, bringing into sharp focus caste rigidities and excluding non-Metei sections of the population. Exclusive religio-social practices, led by Hindu organisations such as the Gauri Raksha Pracharak Sabha and the Brahamo Sabha, all patronised by the State's ruling elite, helped to distance the socially excluded Hill communities from the Meteis. Significantly, consolidation of caste Hinduism in the Valley was accompanied by the rapid spread of Christianity among the tribal population in the Hills.

Christian influence, first introduced in the Hills in 1894, began making rapid strides. After a slow start, the number of converts grew, peaking after Independence. The Christian population as a percentage of total population of Manipur, rose from 2.33 % in 1931 to 5.03 in 1941. According to 1951 census, the figure was 11.84 %, jumping to 19.49 % in 1961 and to 26.03 in 1971. According to the 1991 census, 34.11 % of the state's population professed Christianity.<sup>181</sup> More important than numbers however, was the social impact that Christianity brought in the lives of people. Christianity helped end their constant feuding and headhunting, thus allowing the birth of community sentiments. As a result of the growth of modern education that accompanied Christian missionary work, there was increasingly rapid social mobility. The newly educated elite, made up of priests and petty government servants, represented a new set of values. "They also began to regard themselves as belonging to more or less different categories", from the traditional tribal elite, but also the Meiti community in the Valley (Laldena, 1990:116-117). To the educated tribal, Christianity

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<sup>180</sup> Significantly there was little attempt to spread the religion in the Hill areas.

<sup>181</sup> All along the Hindu (Metei) population has ranged between 61 to 57 %. Muslims make up about 7 % of the population. The remainder are animists. Census of India, 1991.

and modern education gave them an alternative to a subservient place in the Meitei scheme of things.

While religious and social differences are important factors in contributing to the widening chasm between Meiteis and tribal communities, they in themselves do not explain the cycle of fragmentation of identities and exclusivist mobilisations among Manipur's tribal communities. Further, religious differences do not foreclose the option of bi-community accommodation enabling peaceful coexistence or to the mobilisation of civic nationalism, bridging religious divides. And commonness of religious belief has not prevented Manipur's tribal communities themselves from conflicts and violence within. In fact, in the decade of the 1990s, it was increasingly becoming clear that intra-tribal differences and conflicts were a bigger challenge for Manipur than those across the Meitei – tribal divide. In some of the worst ethnic clashes in the region, Nagas, Kukis and Paites lost considerable lives and property.

Most accounts of ethnic violence in Manipur have pointed to the socio-economic roots of these conflicts (Shimray, 2004). Other accounts, of conflicts in the region as a whole, have attributed these to the flawed policy of ethnic mapping: the state's creation of ethnic categories and its tying access to collective entitlements to these categories (Baruah, 2005: 7-12; Chandhoke, 2005:25). In other words, the state itself creates the incentives for leaders of supposed marginal communities to mobilise for separate categorisation through use of identity mobilisation. The exclusivist nature of these mobilisations engenders conflicts and violence. But Manipur provides evidence to support the view that exclusivist mobilisation could also be the outcome of the feeling among leaders that boundaries which structure society – such as ethnic categorisation and borders of the State- are changeable and that the change can be achieved through political mobilisation. It could be argued that the cycle of conflictual mobilisations in Manipur is the result, among others, of the mutability of official categorisation of tribal communities and the non-permanence of the State's territorial borders. The possibility of a change in these boundaries is a strong incentive for community leaders to politicise their separate identities, in an effort at political capital, a tendency that often engenders conflicts. There is little incentive in this situation for community elites to enter into negotiations and establish compromises with other communities, something that could form the basis for peace and stability in multi-ethnic societies.

It was the Linguistic Survey of India that first helped officially classify the inhabitants of the Hills according to their linguistic affinities. The decennial census began in India in 1872. These included collection of data on 'caste, tribe, race or nationality'. The 1891 Census categorised forest and hill tribes in Manipur into three groups: Kuki, Lushai and Naga.<sup>182</sup> This categorisation was followed more or less without alteration up until Independence and was instrumental in crystallising these identities from the vast pool of clans and sub-clans that existed in the Hill tracts. A key feature of this categorisation, as followed by the census operations, was that respondents had to fit themselves into one of the three categories. In 1950, minor changes were introduced to the categories with the three groups now called 'Any Kuki', 'Any Lushai' and 'Any Naga', to allay concerns voiced by sections that did not identify closely with any of the three categories. The nomenclature change helped balance aspirations for separate identity with concerns over social fragmentation and consequent conflicts. It also provided a broad frame for smaller identities to fit into one of these larger constellations.

In the succeeding years however, pressure by sections of tribal elites for separate categories (presumably as a path to better access of the community to resources and opportunities) led to the Central government intervening to allow people to choose their own census categorisation. In 1951 orders were issued reversing the fixed categorisation of the past.<sup>183</sup> These were ratified by the Centre-appointed Backward Classes Commission. As a result the Scheduled Tribe list of the State was revised to include 27 tribes. These changes came into effect despite reservations of the state administration. Refuting the claim of small groups to separate official status, officials had argued that any large-scale revision of the list would "strengthen existing fissiparous tendencies.....and promote disintegration" in the State.<sup>184</sup> They were proved right when the new list led to a scramble for recognition of newer tribes. Even clan and family names began to be recorded as tribe names. This was particularly so among the Kuki category, where the superior attitude of some of its leaders was a major factor pushing peripheral groups within the Any Kuki category to distance themselves and

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<sup>182</sup> Census of India 1891, Assam. Volume 2, Table XVI, Group 6. p. 194 . (Nehru Museum and Library, New Delhi). 'Manipuri' was the other population category for the State.

<sup>183</sup> Government of Manipur Home Department memo no hill /10/50/7 dated 5-1-1951, contained in MSA RF No. Hill 50 R/18-S-F, 968.

<sup>184</sup> Chief Commissioner's DO letter # 10/62/61-Dated 26-4-1963 (MSA RF No. 10/62/61-D, R/1-S/D no 74).

ask for separate status. Groups such as Khongsais and Baites even took to arms to demand separate categorisation.<sup>185</sup>

In a situation where identities were evolving, hence not formalised into fixed categories, this manner of official categorisation facilitated atomisation of identities in the Hills of Manipur that today feed into ethnic mobilisation and conflicts. The specific path that groups took in this dynamic has undoubtedly depended upon a variety of factors: the nature of conflict resolving institutions within the community, the willingness of the dominant elite to accommodate aspirations of smaller sections, the nature of intra-community compact, and the interests of the dominant coalitions. This variance is reflected in the divergent path taken by Naga and the Kuki groups, with the former, hovering on the whole towards a pan-Naga cohesion. Yet the turning point and in many ways the driving energy determining identity fragmentation in the State was the opening up of the rigid categorisation of communities in official censuses. With boundaries being open to negotiation, it was up to community leaders to mobilise for separation or for cohesion. The incentives are ranged in favour of the latter, due mostly to fears over unequal access to resources and opportunities that, it is felt only a separate categorisation can overcome. These have led to continuing mobilisation for recognition of groups as separate tribes. Today there are thirty two different tribes in the scheduled list for the State, the last revision having been made in 2003.

These fissiparous tendencies have been reinforced by the impression among all sections of the fuzziness of State borders. The belief among the tribal sections in the mutability of the boundaries of the State has provided a strong pull for both tribal and Meitei leaders to mobilise their exclusive identities in an attempt to legitimise their separate claims over the State. Lack of permanence of the borders of the State has acted as a serious disincentive for dominant state leaders to think in terms of a civic basis of Manipuri society and for the those of the minority communities to work towards accommodation and compromise. The first test of this dynamic came soon after Independence when in 1948 the Central government proposed plans for the formation of the Purbanchal province in the region by bringing together Manipur with Tripura and Cachar and Lushai districts of Assam to form a bilingual province. This proposal split the political leadership in the State with the Meiteis strongly

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<sup>185</sup> Among the Nagas, a variety of factors – the ability of modern Naga institutions to be accommodative to intra community demands, being prominent - have helped prevent this trend. They have also helped create a semblance of cohesion.

opposing the move arguing, "...people of Manipur ...are a distinct minority with their own separate culture, language and social and ethnic peculiarities...".<sup>186</sup> There were other attempts by the Central leadership in the years following Independence, to reorganise the North East region. Various possibilities were debated: merging all territories into Assam; formation of a Hill State comprising of all hill areas in the region; even the creation of separate autonomous administrative areas for specific communities within the existing territories. The tribal population of Manipur supported these changes, seeing such an outcome helping them advance their socio-economic goals. But for the Meitei elites, these developments were threatening, as they would cut up the State. As was the case with the opposition to the Purbanchal proposal, Meitei leaders countered these moves by demanding the integrity of Manipur's borders. But with State boundaries having already been brought into question, these claims to Manipur's territorial integrity were made increasingly on the basis of ethnic Meitei identity, rather than on a civic pan-Manipur basis that could include all sections of the State. Developments in Manipur's neighbourhoods threatening the State's territorial integrity further helped to concretise this ethnic basis of making the territorial claims.

In 1949, the Naga National Council (NNC) rebelled in the Naga Hills district of Assam, against their incorporation into the Indian Union. By 1952, sections of Nagas in Manipur too were fighting along with their counterparts from the Naga Hills in the NNC. Others, led by Naga leaders from Manipur like Daiho Mao and Rishang Keishing, formed the Naga Integration Council (NIC) to demand integration of Naga dominated areas of the State with the Naga Hills district. In 1954, a Ceasefire was affected between the Centre and NNC and in subsequent moves to win over the Nagas, the Centre in 1963 upgraded the Naga Hills district to a full state of Nagaland. Meitei leaders resented this move, as they felt threatened by the rise of a full State with expansionist designs on parts of Manipur.<sup>187</sup> In a memorandum submitted by the Manipur Territorial Council Congress Committee to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1969, leaders urged that, "the promotion of Manipur's political status to statehood is the only way to remove the demon of political disparity in this

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<sup>186</sup> Working Committee resolution of Tomal Congress (of 4-8-1948) quoted in Singh (1998: 219)

<sup>187</sup> Manipur State Congress Committee memorandum to States Reorganisation Committee (SRC), 20 April 1954: Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee Records, Imphal



sensitive region”.<sup>188</sup> Evidently, the demon was the grant of statehood to the Naga Hills and the inclusion of three Naga districts of Manipur in the Centre’s ceasefire agreement with NNC, which made these districts potential targets for incorporation into Nagaland. Similar moves by Hmar, Kuki and other communities in South Manipur for merger with their kinsfolk in Mizoram or Assam, added to the sense of fear among the Metei leadership about the future of Manipur.

These doubts have dogged Metei leaders ever since and have fuelled much of the ethnic mobilisation to strengthen their control over state power and the future of the State. These fears have also prevented them from objectively responding to demands from tribal communities for greater autonomy for Hill areas, arrangements that most States in the Northeast have provided to their minorities. Metei leaders have often interpreted the grant of autonomy to the Hills as the stepping-stone to their separation from the State. These fears have been reinforced by calls by tribal leaders for carving out areas inhabited by them from Manipur and for the creation of separate administrative units or their incorporation in neighbouring provinces, such as those by Mizos, Hmars, Kukis and the Nagas. These calls have themselves been made based on signals that tribal leaders have received from national leaders who have considered creation of new States and administrative units as a valid policy instrument. These dynamics have facilitated conflictual identity mobilisation and have generally prevented moves at accommodation between different communities. The ongoing mobilisation among both the Meteis and the Nagas over territorial claims provides ample proof of the extent to which political mobilisation can get exclusivist and communalised when territorial boundaries are brought into question.

#### **4.6 A fragmented civil society**

Failure to forge a civic basis of society is reflected in the absence of a civil society in Manipur. If civil society is defined as a common public arena, then there is little of that in Manipur. Instead what exists are ethnic associations, tribal bodies, community based student and women’s organisation; even community based human rights groups. These associations have been the bricks and mortars of Manipur’s society. It is through them that state and

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<sup>188</sup> MSA RF No. 11/118/69-Pol-1, R/7-B/294.

ruling elites have sought to create their version of the society. These associations have been important elements in helping community leaders define their identities and fix boundaries. The exclusive nature of these associations has helped keep society in Manipur fragmented. Exclusive ethnic associations represent the salience of local strongmen and associations based on narrow and localised identities. They also represent the abiding weakness of the authority of the state and of statewide political and social organisations in Manipur. During early stages of Manipur's state and society formation, most community resources were channelized through these ethnic organizations rather than through centralised institutions of the state, thus strengthening the position and role of these non-state local interests. To understand the forces contributing to the formation of a segmented society in Manipur, we need to delve into the nature and agenda of civil associations in the State. Here we trace the development of civil society historically, explaining why it has been segmented.

Manipur has had a long tradition of associational life, both among the Meteis as well as among tribes inhabiting the Hills. Pre-colonial Meitei society and polity was structured by functional associations. There were the *pannas* or clubs, six in all, most prominent being the *ahal-lup* (club of old men) and *naharup* (club of young men). Ethnographers believe it was military compulsions of the day to keep the State in military readiness that led to the structuring of society into such functional associations. While the clubs served economic functions during peacetime (such as acting as the labour corps), they became fighting militias during Manipur's frequent military encounters with Burma. (Hodson, 1908: 58) In the Hills, these collective roles were performed by *Marungs* (among the Nagas) and *Zualbawks* (among the Kuki-Chin). Both bodies were essentially associations of the youth of the village, being next only to the village councils in their centrality to village life. Depending on the tribe in question, they performed important roles in village life. The village Chiefs and councils relied on these bodies for a variety of purposes. Primarily, these clubs doubled as the regimental headquarters of the village militia, while they also provided a pool of labour for public works in the village. (Hodson, 1908: 59) Given the limited contact between villages in pre-modern times, associations of youth provided the only basis of civic life. The crucial functions that these organizations in the Valley and Hills performed for the ruling elite, helped imbue them with a sense of strength and stability. Their strengths have been carried over to modern times.

The insularity of pre-modern communities was broken by the advent of colonial rule. Interaction between the Hills and the Valley and that amongst Hill villages themselves began to take place. Yet there was little growth of a common civil space in society. This was probably the outcome of conflicts of interests between communities and the effect of a colonial system that encouraged institutional bifurcation.<sup>189</sup> Religious differences between the two added to the segmentation of society.

But it was not that religious affinity in the Hills helped with unity and a common civic space. While the foregoing discussion helps explain the fragmentation in tribal communities, absence of unity in the Hills could also be the failure of institutions of the churches to act as a space for civic interaction. This is perhaps because the pre-dominant Baptist church organisation in the state is structured along ethnic lines, with each community having its own tribal association that together make up the state-wide apex Manipur Baptist Convention. The key operational level of this hierarchy is the tribal association and which prevents a coming together of interests and identities of different tribes. Day-to-day interactions in the religious realm are in any case limited to people from the same ethnic group. Only on occasions does any form of interaction take place across ethnic boundaries.<sup>190</sup>

Social organisations thus failed to acquire an all-State character, thwarting the growth of a civil society in Manipur. It was unique associational groups that took the lead in emphasizing inter-ethnic differences and exclusivity. Intra and inter community contests, the need to mobilize people and resources as widely as possible, and the implications of colonial policies worked together to lead to channelization of most resources and energies in the years round Independence into community specific political organization. Meteis, Nagas and Kukis focused on building their own political organisations to confront the colonial state and later to enhance their chances in the ensuing political contestations over power and resources.

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<sup>189</sup> Other factors could be the limited interaction between people of different communities, the spatial division of habitation patterns and absence of state – wide nature of political organisation or that of an inclusionary social movement.

<sup>190</sup> This account is based on interview with Rev. V. Sithlou, Executive Secretary, Manipur Baptist Convention. (Imphal: 5 October 2004)

Post Independence political developments helped consolidate the ethnic basis of formation of society, having prevented society from acquiring a civil character. The scramble over the 'developmentalist' state meant that the contest amongst different sections over state-controlled patronage and benefits would lead to further mobilisation of ethnic identities. This dynamic led to the growth of community specific political organisations - ethnic organisations but also political parties, though they had little of the integrating civil role. Ethnic organisations like the Kabui Association, Tangkhul Long, Hmar Union and Kuki National Assembly as well as political parties such as the Manipur State Congress with their Meitei make-up and interest as well as organisations that would take birth later such as MPP, were locked in political bargaining and contestations over benefits, a phenomenon that has continued to this day. With society determined to fracture along so many community lines, inclusive political organisation had little of a chance in Manipur. An all-State nationalist movement, an institutionalised national or regional party with integrative capacities or the call of a strong leader with inclusionary credentials may have helped bridge these divides and create that common civil space. Manipur has lacked these.

Who are those carving an autonomous space for civic action in society outside the state? With the state in Manipur seen as ineffective and weak, many 'parallel authorities' have developed which take up issues of public concern. These organizations have begun posing a serious threat to established institutions of the state. They have taken it upon themselves to police social life, administer rough and ready justice, provide a sense of security to their ethnic group, act as watchdogs against corrupt politicians and officials and voice protest over violations of human rights by government forces. Particularly influential in these roles have been student and women's groups as well as the tribal apex organizations. *Meira Paibi*, the women's movement for instance, is one that has a long tradition of activism among the Meiteis, including against colonial practices during the turn of the last century. Similar groups are active in the Hills. Youth organizations like the All Manipur Students' Union (AMSU), All Naga Students' Association Manipur (ANSAM), All Tribal Students Union Manipur (ATSUM) and the Zomi Student's Federation (ZSF) as well as the Kuki Students's Organisation (KSO) are active in Manipur. Apex tribal organizations in the Hills, such as the Tangkhul Naga Long (TNL), Zeliangrong Union (ZU), Kuki Inpi Manipur (KIM) and Paite National Congress (PNC) have also been playing more institutional roles, determining laws and adjudicating civil and criminal disputes. The multiplicity of civil society organizations

and their being organised along ethnic lines means that often, these bodies are engaged in mobilisations against other communities. The outcome has been enhanced inter-community contestations and conflicting mobilization.

Paralysis of the state has further undermined its role as the framework for resolving inter-community conflicts. With little direction from the state, public organisations have assumed centre-stage, moving politics more towards particularism and exclusivism and cycles of mobilisation and counter mobilisation. This has put additional pressure on the state to respond to multiple particularistic fragments of society. Absence of civil society, or of an appropriate institution to respond to contestations has led to further divisiveness in social relations. For instance protests by tribal organisations for better public services in the Hills or for protection of human rights have seldom found support from public organisations in the Valley. Hills communities have acted likewise when public bodies in the Valley have protested. Public response to popular movements across the Hill-Valley divide has been lukewarm at best. Mostly it has been hostile.<sup>191</sup>

This has meant that even as non-state actors have posed a strong challenge to the authority of the state, internal divisions among the former and their urge to rip off what the system has to offer have prevented these organisations from being able either to discharge the role of conscientious watchdogs to demand better services from the state or to act in concert with the state to provide stability. Adding to the problem of coherence in society is thus internal dynamics and instability within ‘civil’ organisations:

There are so many groups and organisations in the valley. And they keep rising and falling. There was first All Manipur Student’s Union (AMSU), then All Manipur United Clubs Organisation (AMUCO), then United Committee Manipur (UCM) and now *Apunba Lup* (United Committee). With every new campaign, a new group comes up claiming to represent people’s voice. But the moment it starts establishing itself, it loses credibility.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Examples are protests by tribal organisations such as All Tribal Students Union Manipur (ATSUM) for better services in the Hills and by Valley-based organisations such as united Committee Manipur (UCM) over human rights violations by security forces.

<sup>192</sup> Interview: Political commentator, Name withheld. Imphal : 25 October 2004.

Throwing further light on this dynamic, a retired government official from the remote Tamenglong district, known for its protest culture, comments on the underlying political economy.

NGOs are mostly corrupted. They are easily bought off by powers that be. They are the people who make the loudest noise on public issues.....when they go down to Imphal to plead people's cases with the authorities.....they get bought off easily with promises of government contracts or other pay-offs.<sup>193</sup>

Weaknesses of the civil society have in turn prevented reform of institutions of the state and have thus kept its capabilities low. Diminished centrality of the state in the lives of people and its poor allocative capacities in the face of rising socio-economic challenges (reflected in the poor management of economy) have led to reduced dependence of people on state institutions. The resultant gap has been filled by non-state actors. This take over is reflected in the rising culture of protests and mobilisation, all taking place along ethnic lines. The inability of state agencies to mediate effectively between contending groups has further diminished their capability. These have had implications for the character of the state by further promoting ethno- nationalism.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

What does the study of society formation in Manipur demonstrate? The success of state making depends, in part, on the ability of state leaders to evolve an inclusive society for the state to plug into and derive sustenance from. The basis of this inclusion could be either ethnic or civic. While in the former, the membership in the polity is determined on the basis of ethnic criteria - only those belonging to a particular ethnic group are considered members - in the latter membership is based on citizenship with everyone having equal rights. While the two differ significantly in their ability to accommodate differences and liberal ideas, the crucial thing about structuring of society in both, and which has important implications for the success of state formation and for state power, is the inclusionary nature of the collective identity that is sought to be formed. Admittedly, whether state-making leaders are able to forge an inclusivist identity and construct a State-wide society would depend on a variety of factors. (i) The first is the success of state leaders to replace localised and autonomous

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<sup>193</sup> Interview: Village elder. Name withheld. Tamenglong: 6 November 2004

institutions with State-wide ones. Where the institutional terrain is fragmented and localised centres of authority the norm, the chances are that those local authorities will mobilise their narrow identities by deploying exclusivist political organisations. (ii) A related factor is the social structure. Where society is structured in hierarchical classes and where there are large differences between these, the dominant class often seeks to resort to exclusivist mobilisation to thwart possible attempts by the lower classes to challenge the existing order. (iii) Often, the educated elite have been seen to mobilise narrow identities to corner economic opportunities to their advantage. These trends are exacerbated during times of rising economic challenges and poor management of the state's economy. In these circumstances, society assumes an exclusivist basis leading to its fragmentation. The Manipur story demonstrates this pattern rather well.

Manipur also shows that the tendency towards an ethnic basis of society formation may be enhanced when state power is controlled by external agents. In Manipur state making leaders mobilised their Meitei ethnic identity to create a 'legitimising core' in society to enable them to wrest state power away from the Central actors then controlling state institutions. This alienated the non-Meitei communities, who undertook similar identity based mobilisations. And as boundaries of the State – the territorial boundaries separating one administrative unit from the other as well as official boundaries separating categorisation of different communities in the province – became negotiable and acquired an element of non-permanence, it was in their own ethnic identities and local associations that communities found security. There were also incentives in the system for leaders to force a change in boundaries through narrow identity mobilisation, thus contributing to prevent accommodation and promote exclusivist politics. Direct Central rule in Manipur from 1949 to 1972 contributed to this exclusionary politics by obviating the need for political leaders of different communities to work with each other. Most of the time they came in contact with each other through the medium of external political actors. Elsewhere, where effective control has rested locally and where boundaries have been more permanent, there have been incentives for community leaders - both dominant and minorities - to accommodate differences and come to some sort of a working relationship with each other, thus promoting inclusionary politics. In sum, Manipur represents an extreme example of how internal and external political and social dynamics could work together to create a distinctly ethnic basis for society formation resulting in fragmentation and conflicts. These

contribute to the poor legitimacy of the state and its ability to manage inter-group contestations. The path to society formation that state-making leaders take, thus, has significant implications for the capability of the state and for the stability of multi-ethnic societies.



## Chapter 5

### Building the Mizo nation: Include some, exclude some

#### 5.1 Introduction

“The Mizoram government led by the former rebel leader Laldenga, is finding itself in a fix over a movement launched by the People’s Conference (PC) for the reunification of Mizo inhabited areas which is considered a popular demand of the Mizo people. The movement seeks the reunification of all Zomis constituting all Mizo people having a common language, though different dialects, and the formation of a ‘Greater Mizoram’. The [Mizo National Front] government is in a quandary because prior to wresting power in the State, it had been a strong advocate of the demand and had even promised a ‘Greater Mizoram’. The former state Chief Minister, T. Sailo, a retired brigadier of the Indian Army and president of PC, who is the main force behind the reunification move, has said that Laldenga had fought for the same demand with violent means and had not succeeded. He has asserted that his movement would be peaceful and within the purview of the Indian constitution. Brig Sailo is obviously seeking a political comeback by raising the demand in a big way. It is an emotional demand and could lead to serious situations if the movement catches on. For obvious reasons the MNF government and other political parties would be hesitant to oppose the demand.” (*Vipin Dubey, The Indian Express, New Delhi. June 4, 1988*)

Ethnic identity plays a major role in political mobilisation in Mizoram, as it does in Manipur. But the significant thing about political mobilisation in Mizoram is the *manner* in which identity has been politicised. Unlike in Manipur, where state-making leaders formed and mobilised identities around narrow affiliations and in conflict with each other, Mizoram’s has been a case where leaders actively sought to subsume existing identities under an overarching one. While boundary making leading to a Mizo identity did draw upon shared cultural traits, much of it was the outcome of state making leaders including some groups (and excluding others) to construct a society from which they could claim legitimacy. Political mobilisation leading to an overarching inclusive ethnic identity has had many positive spin-offs. For one, it has moderated the likely consequence of competitive ethnic mobilisation so common to the Northeast region. It has also stood Mizoram in good

stead, in the face of rising socio-economic challenges. Faced with similar contexts, politics in Manipur has tended to get dangerously competitive, reenergising conflicts and violence. While the strains of social and economic challenges on the inclusivity of identities in Mizoram are palpable, the legacy of inclusive Mizo mobilisation has dampened much of the likely impact of its consequences. A relatively inclusive society and its strong linkages with the state structure have in turn helped the state enhance its capability to govern and manage inter- group conflicts.

It is these dynamics that I will explore in this fifth chapter of the thesis. I begin the chapter with a survey of the social and economic changes taking place in the Lushai Hills in the years before Independence that help to explain the scramble for state-making among different sections. I explore conflicts in Mizo society and the response of the dominant sections to challenges to their claims over the new State. Mobilisation of the inclusive Mizo identity by those excluded, forms the subject of the next discussion. I look at the processes involved in construction of this identity, reviewing factors that helped with this inclusive manner of identity mobilisation. I then look at key exogenous stimuli as well as contestations within Mizo society to help explain that shift in focus of Mizo identity mobilisation from fixing its internal boundary to defining its external relations. The implications of this shift for social cohesion in the State as well as its facilitating state leaders to gain legitimacy in society form the subject of the last section. I close the chapter by drawing some conclusions for state capability and social relationships in Mizoram.

## **5.2 Reinventing the Mizo identity**

Colonial administrators and Christian missionaries together helped popularise education among in the Lushai Hills. As a consequence, despite the late introduction of education into the district, its spread was rapid. Within a few decades, the district could boast of an impressive literacy rate. This trend continued after Independence, with much of the thrust towards spreading literature now coming from elected village councils and local communities.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> For a discussion on the role of missionaries in education in Mizoram, see Hluna (1986).

Table 5.1: Growth of Literacy in Mizoram (1901-1951)

Year	Population	Literacy (%)
1901	82,434	0.93
1911	91,204	3.98
1921	98,406	6.28
1931	124,404	10.70
1941	152,786	19.48
1951	196,202	36.23

Source: Census of India, Various & Nunthara (1996:59)

Popularisation of education in turn led to the birth of a new class in Lushai society. This section did not draw sustenance from the land it owned or the power it wielded in the traditional scheme of things. The strength of this section of people lay in the education they had acquired and through which they had gained access to paid employment in the Administration and in organisations set up by the churches. Social changes occurred most rapidly in the North and central parts of the Lushai district, particularly around the administrative centre of Aizawl. This region was inhabited by Lushais and their related clans, but also by Hmar and Ralte speaking sub tribes. The Lushais however, being the dominant sub-tribe and being politically and economically in control, were less enthused by the change that education promised. They were also, at least initially, hostile to the influence of Christian missionaries, blaming them for the gradual erosion of their traditional hold on society. It was the Hmars and the Raltes, the subservient clans in the district that found education and modernity an alternative and attractive option.

Colonial rule had also led to some sort of monetisation, leading to the beginnings of a market economy. Educated Christians began to acquire skills for paid employment, while some took to commerce and trade and began acquiring wealth. The consequence of these changes was that by the end of the colonial rule, the social set-up in the district was such that the though dominant power remained in the hands of the Lushais, the district's economy was rapidly being monopolised by the newly mobilised sections of population. Hmars typically took to commerce and salaried employment with the government. Raltes made up the dominant group in different organisations set up by the churches. The new leadership in the district thus emerged from within the non-Lushai sections. This group was resentful of the authority traditionally enjoyed by Lushai chiefs and their associated clans. Given the changed environment, they began questioning the many powers and privileges of the Chiefs

(McCall, 1949: 205-206). But Lushai resented this challenge to their authority and thus was set the stage for confrontation between the old and the new in the Lushai Hills.<sup>195</sup>

The impending withdrawal of colonial rule and the political changes it promised would also play its part in this mobilisation. The Lushai Hills had been kept excluded from political reforms taking place in the rest of country.<sup>196</sup> Thus people had very limited experience with even a semblance of democratic politics. It was only in 1940 that the administrative set up the Lushai Hills Durbar – the first deliberative body in the district. But by now, the educated classes made up of non-Lushai members (notably the Hmars and Raltes) had grown in self-awareness. This section making up the Commoners resented exclusion from political arrangements being set up for the future administration of the district. Their grouse was directed at both, colonial administrators and the Lushai Chiefs. The convergence of ethnic and class differences in society (between the dominant Lushai and the excluded Hmars and Raltes and other sections of population) helped create a severe schism between the Lushais and the rest. While the Lushais hoped to hang on to the power they had traditionally enjoyed, it was non-Lushai leaders who hoped to gain in the event of introduction of democracy in the district. The possibility of incorporation of bordering areas in Manipur and Tripura inhabited by other non-Lushai sub-tribes of the Kuki-Chin family into the existing Lushai Hills district contributed to hopes, among the Commoners, of wresting political power away from the Lushais, in the new dispensation.

The next moves of the leadership of the Commoners are not very clear. But based on documentary evidence and interviews with leaders still alive, one can piece together the sequence of events that led them to '(re) inventing' the Mizo identity and mobilising support for their pan-Mizo project to contest the authority of the Lushai Chiefs. The vehicle they used for this purpose was the Mizo Commoners' Union (MCU). The name of the political party itself was significant. Rather than a Hmar or a Ralte Union, they called it the Mizo Union. 'Mizo' was used to signify the general population of the Hills, being derived from

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<sup>195</sup> For further discussion on this clash see Nunthara (1996:62-63)

<sup>196</sup> Constitutional reforms in the direction of elected responsible government, introduced in India around 1935, provided for 'Excluded' and 'Partially Excluded' pockets, to be kept outside the influence of these reforms. It was considered that people inhabiting them were 'not ready' for democracy. Lushai Hills was an excluded area. The grounds for its exclusion were: 'economic backwardness' and 'political under-development'. (Memo of August 1935 from Superintendent, Lushai Hills to Commissioner, Hills Divisions, Government of Assam. File regarding correspondence between the Superintendent and the Divisional Commissioner, 1935. Mizoram State Archives.

the expression 'mi-zo', meaning man of the hills, and had little ethnic value. This was against the official designation of people living in the district as Lushai, which was an ethnic category. Hence effectively there were a lot more people living in the Lushai Hills district who were officially recognised as Lushais but who were not so ethnically.

MCU's choice of the 'Mizo' title, a neutral, apparently non-ethnic appellation, was instantly popular among those who did not belong to Lushai clans. (Goswami, 1979: 23)<sup>197</sup> Use of the title 'Mizo' helped it forge commonness among the non-Lushai elements, something that was essential since a Hmar or Ralte category would on its own be too weak to contest Lushai authority. These moves were significant given the notable differences that still existed between groups that were being put together. A. W. Davis had written at the close of the previous century, "the bulk of the population (of the Lushai Hills) – the Hmar, Ralte and Paite – while accepting the Duhlian domination have retained their respective languages and customs and have in no way accepted the duhlian." (Davis, 1894: 6). According to him, the difference between the different languages (dialects really) - Duhlian, Ralte, Paite and Hmar - were "very considerable". Equally significant was MCU's move to raise the 'Mizo' neutral category into an ethnic one, complete with its own cultural symbols around the myth of common ancestry and the Duhlian language.

MCU's increasingly vocal political activities led to resistance by the Chiefs. While Commoners rallied for changes, the Chiefs appealed to the new national leadership to protect their status and the privileges they had enjoyed under British rule.<sup>198</sup> Leaders of the MCU realised that their claim to being the dominant state-making party would remain unfulfilled if those claims were contested by a powerful section of the population. To be able to act as the true representative of the people in the district the party had to broaden its base and speak for all sections. Yet at the heart of the appeal of the Commoners was bringing fundamental changes in the existing political and economic relationships in the district. This put the MCU leadership on the horns of a dilemma: standing for institutional change while retaining the support of all sections of population.

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<sup>197</sup> During the 1951 census, many Duhlian speaking Raltes and Renthlais refused to enter themselves as Lushais.

<sup>198</sup> Memoranda dated 17 December 1951, from Lushai Chiefs Association to the Governor of Assam asking for retention of their Chiefship and its privileges. MSA RF # 95-66 (General).

To broaden their base, leaders of MCU renamed the organisation as the Mizo Union (MU) in 1947, dropping the Commoner qualification, thus laying claim to speak for all Mizos, not only the Commoners.<sup>199</sup> With that move, what was until then essentially a class-based struggle, took an ethnic form. Only the construction of ethnicity was inclusive. To be able to claim authority, MU sought to gain universal acceptance not only within the district but also outside. Notably, at the core of the Mizo construct was the *Duhlian* language, a dialect that traditionally belonged to Lushai sections. Probably what motivated the leadership to use a Lushai symbol in an attempt to contest Lushai power was the place of Duhlian in the lives of people. It was the Duhlian dialect that had, over time, evolved as the common thread connecting people from different clans and backgrounds inhabiting the Lushai Hills, and even beyond. Re-emphasising this commonness among its target constituents was central to MU's attempt to forge a common identity to gain political power. These were moves that proved immensely useful to the MU in its state-making efforts.

Mizo Union's construction of an inclusive Mizo identity has been a remarkable feat of social engineering and one that does not find much parallel in the North East, let alone in Manipur. However it must be admitted that there were cultural and social factors that helped the MU to mobilise the population towards identity-based unification.<sup>200</sup> The common origin of the people now called Mizo, has been a common belief among the people, a belief that historians have emphasised. This commonality may have helped create the conditions for inclusive mobilisation. According to ethnographic accounts, the population of Mizoram is made up of the succeeding waves of migrants that, probably from the 18<sup>th</sup> century began entering these Hills. Local folktales mention Sinlung being the original home of these peoples, from where they were pushed out by more powerful elements. The historiography of the Sinlung belief cannot be proved nor is it possible to locate Sinlung physically however the myth of common origin of the people calling themselves Mizo and their migration into present day-Mizoram is something common to all its component sub-tribes (Shakespeare, 1912: 2-6; Lehman, 1963: 18).

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<sup>199</sup> This discussion is based on interviews with R. Vanlawma, founder-member of MCU and MU (Aizawl: 11 July 2004).

<sup>200</sup> Though these similarities have not led to any manner of a similar outcome in Manipur, where Kuki-Chin communities inhabiting the State's southern districts have remained severely divided and have often clashed with each other.

By 1810, a collection of Sailo Chiefs of the Lushai family had gained control of the territory, now falling within the area of Mizoram, even though there was little of a sense of political unity among the villages controlled by these Chiefs (McCall, 1949 : 35-37).<sup>201</sup> The migratory nature of Kuki-Chin tribes meant that most villages were heterogeneous, made up of people belonging to different clans and families. The Chiefs contributed to this heterogeneity by settling in their villages prisoners they captured in raids on enemy villages. Such a mix of people living under the tutelage of despotic Chiefs helped in the growth of corporate feelings. That the Sailos patronised the duhlian dialect helped with its growth as the *lingua franca* among the inhabitants, even though each sub-tribe continued to have its own means of communications (Davis, 1894 : 6). As we have seen, it was the Duhlian language that was to become the basis of 'Mizo' mobilisation from about the middle of the twentieth century.

Advent of colonial rule contributed to movements towards commonness. Before the British came into contact with them, what would later be Lushais, had been referred to as 'Kukis', a Bengali word for hill dwellers (Shakespeare, 1912: 1-2). That changed with the first contact made by the British with Sailo chiefs, against whom the military expedition of 1871-72 was directed. From then on the name 'Lushai' came into use, being a derivative of the word Lusei, a clan name (Shakespeare, 1912 : xiii-xiv). However, another title occasionally used to designate people inhabiting these Hills, that also found currency among the administrators, was 'Mizo'. Davis felt, the label included all inhabitants of the then North Lushai Hills, except the Pawis (Davis: 1894: 5; also Shakespeare, 1912: xiv).<sup>202</sup> On annexation of these Hills, the territory was organised into the unified Lushai Hills district in 1898. All along colonial administrators had given priority to end the constant village feuds and violence and to ensure peace and order in the district. In 1927 the customary codes and practices of the various tribes were also collected and brought out in the form of a single code for administration of the district. (Parry: 1928). All these administrative measures had the effect of engendering greater interaction among the people in the region and commonness within the boundaries of the Lushai Hills district. Yet the majority of the residents of the district did not speak the Lushai Duhlian language and did not belong to the

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<sup>201</sup> Notably, the extreme south, of what is present-day Mizoram, populated by the Shendoo, Lakher and Poi sub-tribes remained outside the influence of the Sailos chiefs.

<sup>202</sup> According to Grierson, this was akin to the word 'Zo' often mispronounced as 'Yo', by which people have been known to refer to themselves (Grierson, 1903: 2).

Lushai category. Even as late as 1930, there were 15 groups under which population of the district was being categorised, most prominent being Lushai but also as Poi, Lakher, Hmar, Ralte, Renthlai, Khiangte and Thadou.<sup>203</sup>

Along with colonial rule had come Christian missionaries into the Hills. Initial response to missionary work was lukewarm. The task was made more difficult in the absence of a commonly understood language. Early mission work was therefore concentrated on developing a viable medium for education and for spreading Christianity. The pre-eminent position of Duhlian made it the natural choice for missionaries. They set about standardising the language, by devising a primer and developing its dictionary. Bible and hymnbooks were translated into duhlian and soon were to find their way into the far corners of the district, further popularising the language. Today Duhlian is the official language of the State. It is also the language used in the public sphere: in bazaars, in church congregations, as the language of mass media.

The efforts of Christian missionaries to develop a lingua franca and promote education among the inhabitants contributed to their acquiring support from the populace. They also gained converts to the faith. In combination with other factors, Christianity began to spread among the people.<sup>204</sup> Starting with modest numbers, churches began to record a phenomenal growth in members: 24 in 1901, 1723 in 1911, 34,893 in 1925, 59,556 in 1935, 102,280 in 1951, 137,418 in 1961, 155,104 in 1971.<sup>205</sup> From our point of view, the crucial fact was that Christianity was spreading throughout the district. Though different churches contributed to this spread, and were localised and geographically concentrated, institutional linkages between different church organisations prevented denominational conflicts. On the whole missionaries contributed to the development of a common language and a State-wide religious faith. These developments have contributed to the integration of the Mizo community.

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<sup>203</sup> Military Report of 1930 (Vol III, p. 201) quoted in Goswami (1978: 22)

<sup>204</sup> Significant in this regard were the Revivals of 1906, 1910, and 1935 and the relief work conducted by missionaries during the famines in 1910. (Hluna, 1986)

<sup>205</sup> Report of Mizoram Presbyterian Synod. Vol. I-XXXII, Aizawl, quoted in Nunthara (1996: 59)



To recapitulate, the Mizo Union party and the Commoners leadership used the pre-colonial seeds of Mizo commonness and the integrating thrust of colonial state making in the Lushai Hills to their political advantage. By the time the British left the district, they had brought peace to the land. Peace promoted greater interaction among different clans inhabiting the district and led to the spread of some sort of a corporate feeling. With defined and fixed boundaries, colonial rule also promoted processes of accommodation and compromise between communities. A set of common codes was compiled to govern peoples' interactions. Colonial rule also facilitated the entry of Christian missionaries, who promoted the spread of christianity all over the district, further consolidating the gains of commonness. They also worked to promote education among the populace. Spread of education and the rise of a new class of educated elites gave to the people in the Lushai Hills, their first claim to modernity. Along with the concurrent development of Duhlian as the dominant and now standardised language, these developments had the effect of concretising commonness. The role of colonial rule in Mizoram was thus in direct contrast to that in Manipur, where it contributed to consolidating divisions.

As we discussed in Chapter 3, mobilising an integrated Mizo identity helped the Commoners to capture political power. One of the first tasks the MU-dominated Lushai Hills District Council (LHDC) took up was renaming the Lushai Hills as the Mizo Hills. Earlier, in 1951, under pressure from the LHDC the centrally-appointed Census Commission had recognised Mizo as one of the tribal categories in Scheduled Tribe list of Assam state. Official recognition of the 'Mizo' worked to consolidate the gains that Mizo identity had already made. The success and popularity of these moves can be gauged from a comparison of population records of the district for the years 1901 onward. While in the former, entries were recorded in a large number of categories; by 1961 most people had begun to call themselves Mizos, so much so that the Lushai, Ralte and Paite categories were recording nil figures. (Table 5.2) These developments took place despite early opposition from the Chiefs to inclusive political organisation. The Lushai Federation, in a memorandum to the Assam Chief Minister, opposed the move to rename the district, claiming that the Lushai Hills district had been the land of the Lushais, and that "they resented being subdued by some

other tribes living amongst them”, who, the memorandum claimed had “cunningly introduced the word Mizo, which had no distinctive existence”.<sup>206</sup>

Table 5.2 : Community wise categorisation of population, Mizoram

Tribe /Year	1901	1951	1961
Hmar	10,411	-	3,119
Lai/Pawi	15,038	10,395	4,587
Lushai	36,322	162,665	-
Mara/Lakher	Na	6,350	8,790
Mizo	-	-	213,261
Paite	2,870	3,368	-
Ralte	13,827	-	-

Source : Lalthangliana (1998) and Census of India 1951, 1961

In the foregoing discussion, we saw how MU used the Mizo construct as an instrument to make a claim at state making. It did so by politicising the Mizo identity, firstly to pit the Commoners against the Chiefs, and then by building on the Mizo construct to gain support from as large a section of population as possible. They appealed not only to those within the district but also those outside, hoping to reorder the boundaries of the district to include other ‘Mizo’- inhabited areas, and thus rally people (within the Lushai Hills) to their cause. One of the key agendas of the MU was ‘Greater Mizoram’. Emphasising the inclusive nature of Mizos while grounding that identity in a Lushai cultural symbol - the Duhlian language - helped MU eventually to win acceptance also within the dominant Lushai section of the population. Central to public support for the Mizo identity was the term ‘Mizo’ itself. This was a neutral term that most people had no objections to using. MU helped construct the Mizo by calling for broad inclusion of different sub-tribes in it, by appealing to all sub-tribes belonging to the group but living outside the district and its frequent call for merger of all these areas into one administrative unit for all Mizos; renaming the Lushai Hills as Mizo Hills; and even its appropriation of Duhlian, the language of the Sailo chiefs, as the Mizo *tlawng* (tongue). But central to the MU mobilisation of Mizo identity was acquiring state power that it used fundamentally to reorder the economic and political structure in Mizoram. Abolition of chiefship, implementing land reforms leading to the enabling of proprietary rights over land to tillers and setting up of elected village councils took away political and

<sup>206</sup> Mizoram State Archives, file no. 95-66 (General).

economic power from the narrow section of Sailo elites and transferred it to the non-Lushai masses.

### **5.3 MNF and the external boundaries of the Mizo identity**

But soon mobilisation around the Mizo identity would take a very different turn. From being inward-looking and trying to define its internal values and symbols, Mizo mobilisation in the post MU phase, centred on defining the outer boundaries of the identity and arranging its relationships with those it considered non-Mizos. This phase of the mobilisation - spearheaded by the Mizo National Front (MNF) from around the late 1950s - was perhaps the other side of the identity construction that Mizo Union party had initiated. Together the two have helped construct the boundaries of the Mizo identity. As with the first phase of Mizo mobilisation, the MNF mobilisation was a product of contestations between state making leaders over state power and social control.

We have discussed in Chapter 3 that the twin causes of the rise of the MNF were the near total exclusion of Lushais from state power on the establishment of MU as a political force and the growing alienation among people at the perceived neglect by State and Central leaders of the sufferings that people of the district faced during the famine of 1959. Exclusion from power led to the sections made up of former Chiefs represented by the MNF, making a bid for state power. The attitude and behaviour of national and state leaders provided MNF leaders the opportunity for mobilising support among the people to change the system. The handling of the relief operations during the famine by the Assam government, growing ethnicisation of politics in Assam itself, leading to a perceived erosion of the multicultural character of the State and, subsequent to the onset of MNF rebellion, the practices of the security forces deployed in Mizo Hills to counter MNF violence, were factors that helped Laldenga and other leaders to rally the population for an independent Mizoram. The basis of that movement was Mizo nationalism. Significantly, all these conditions impinged on the relationship of the Mizo identity with those outside the Mizo construct. Political developments in the Mizo district from the late 1950s were increasingly bringing home to the people their strained relationship with non-Mizo actors: the Assam government and civil society as well as the national leadership and Central security forces. MNF sought to use these emotions to mobilise people's support by concentrating on this external dynamic of the Mizo identity. What had, in MU's hands, been an exercise in

defining who would be part of the Mizo construct, what was common to its constituents and what symbols represented the group best, in the hands of MNF became an exercise in defining the limits of Mizo identity - who was not a Mizo, what differentiated Mizos from the others and such like. This phase of Mizo ethnic mobilisation started after the 1959 famine and reached its high point in the outbreak of armed rebellion by the MNF in 1966. Until a peace accord was signed in 1986, MNF and its armed wing the Mizo Army fought a military and a psychological war with Central security agencies, but also on the home front, with the Mizos themselves, to consolidate their hold over Mizo society and state power.

The gains for the MNF, of riding the Mizo bandwagon, were as fruitful as they had been for the MU. In early 1960s, with an increasing sense of their alienation and heightened mobilisation by Laldenga, the leaders of the MNF won the party significant victories and established it as a force that could successfully challenge the hold of the MU. Commentators have noted that the success of the MNF as a political party in 1960s can be accounted for by the fact that for most people, it was “an agent of Mizo ethnic solidarity” (Nunthara, 1996:218). This solidarity was posed as a counter to the non-Mizo dominance of state power in Assam. Though the district enjoyed an autonomous status, the Assam state government still controlled much of the political and economic resources in the district. Mizos were as a consequence rather heavily reliant on State and Central leaders and this helped MNF mobilise fears of their assimilation into the larger Indian culture. MNF was essentially a regional party that drew its strength from identity politics. Ethnic nationalism remained its centrepiece. It exploited Mizo ethnic sentiments in a systematic manner. A study of its constitution is instructive. The name Mizoram provided a recognisable sense of the community. ‘Greater Mizoram’ was the declared aim of the party and was specially mentioned in its constitution. The party emphasised the pre-British settlement of the community in contiguous areas without any ‘artificial divisions’. As the vast majority of Mizos were Christians, the attainment of a ‘Christian State’ was given top priority by the MNF. By committing to improving the social, economic and political condition of the Mizos, it touched upon the raw deal that Mizos thought they had got at the hands of the State government (Chawngsailova: 1997).

By politicising Mizo ethnicity in the way it did, MNF was able to define the external boundaries of the Mizo self, and able to claim to be protecting the interests of the Mizos

against 'outsider' ( implying non-Mizo Indian) influence. MNF was aware that its social control relied on the strengthening of the Mizo construct. While working to define the external boundaries of the Mizo identity was one aspect of this cohesion process, MNF also mobilised for greater cohesion within the Mizo construct- this time focusing on groups that had continued to demand a status independent of the Mizo.<sup>207</sup> This phase of mobilisation of the Mizo identity complemented the previous one led by MU, which focused on defining the internal (core) character and cultural symbols of the Mizo people. Together the two phases - one including, the other excluding - helped state making leaders, of different hues and with different interests, to define Mizo society and secure their own legitimacy. The change in focus of mobilisation had been determined as much by changed (external) circumstances as by changed interests of state making leaders. While MU had sought to change the existing social order dominated by the Chiefs, MNF stood for finding a secure place for this section in the democratic order. Both manners of mobilisation were instrumental for political power. Together, they also helped give a definite shape to the Mizo sense of identity. At the end of the MNF phase of mobilisation, a Mizo identity had taken a definitive shape, incorporating within its fold many identities that had earlier been independent.

Instrumental in mobilising the Mizo identity has been the role of social organisations in the State, that have worked closely with state making leaders- political parties as well as agencies of the state. Significant here is the role played by the churches and the Young Mizo Association (YMA), itself a church-based social service organisation. Organisations of the dominant Presbyterian Church have traditionally occupied an important place and role in Mizo society, a fact that was often seen as restricting the influence of the authority of agencies of the state (McCall, 1949: 207-212). It has been the most important source of social change for the Mizos. Churches take an active role in social and often political life in Mizoram. Besides the usual homilies to people for good Christian conduct, church leaders have often mobilised support in favour of peace and against violence. They played an important role in creating the mood for restoration of peace during the years of insurgency in the state.<sup>208</sup> Today the Presbyterian Church regularly issues directions and codes of correct political behaviour, for peaceful conduct of elections. They organise political education

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<sup>207</sup> During the MNF rebellion, its leaders invested heavily in cementing the Mizo identity, particularly among Paites and Maras, sometimes by use of force. (Interview: Robert Lalsuana, President Mizo Journalists' Association, Aizaw:8 July 2004)

<sup>208</sup> For a discussion on the contribution of religious leaders to restoration of peace, see Hluna (1987)

seminars and campaigns besides the usual social interventions such as drug de-addiction camps, training in substance abuse, disaster management plans and disaster relief training, career development campaigns and employment promotion programmes. (Mizoram Presbyterian Synod, various)

YMA, fashioned on the lines of the Young Men's Christian Association, was established in its earlier incarnation as the Young Lushai Association in 1935. In 1947, under leaders like Vanlawma of the MU party, YLA acquired its current title, reflecting the important integrative role that its leaders wanted the organisation to play. YMA claims to represent all Mizo citizens above the age of 18, in Mizoram and outside<sup>209</sup>, and to speak for them, claiming for itself the role of the repository of Mizo culture and the conscience-keeper of the Mizos.<sup>210</sup> It has typically focussed on promoting what it claims to be the best in Mizo culture. In recent times, it has sought to do this through "re-emphasising Christianity, sowing seeds of nationalism, searching out and preserving (Mizo) territory and having good political leaders and sound economic policies" (Central YMA: 2002 & 2003). Significantly YMA has emphasised Mizo nationalism and common identity. The churches and the YMA together claim to provide the moral underpinnings of the Mizo society. They have taken for themselves the role of the protector of morality and good virtues, exemplified in the Mizo concept of *Tlawmngaihna* ('code of good behaviour')<sup>211</sup>.

The reach of the YMA and the Presbyterian church and their organisational strengths, make these institutions powerful instruments of social control in the State. Both organisations have centralised bureaucracies with a regulatory body at the top, heading a host of branch and unit offices all over Mizoram and beyond. Each member of the Mizo community falls within this framework, thus binding the entire population together. The position of these organisations being what it is, social sanctions by them against those who prefer to flow against the current are strong.<sup>212</sup> These are also large organisations with sizeable budgets that are financed by individual and public contributions. The centralised nature of these organisations, and their large budgets means they are able to manage their entire

<sup>209</sup> YMA constitution: Central YMA, Aizawl

<sup>210</sup> Interview: Lianzuala, President, Central YMA. Aizawl: 28 June 2004)

<sup>211</sup> For a discussion see Sharma et al (2004)

<sup>212</sup> A recent instance was that of Central YMA's boycott of Sangpuilawn assembly MLA, Sangnova, who it alleged had used unlawful means to influence voters in the 2003 Assembly elections. (Newslink, Aizawl: 13 January 2004)

organisation right down to the individual village level and demand compliance with their programmes and directions.

Table 5.3 : Budget of key social organisations, Mizoram. (2001-2004) in Rs. '000

	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004
Mizoram Presbyterian Synod		353,786	386,682
Central YMA	8,145	9,207	9,501

Source: Mizoram Presbyterian Synod, various & Central YMA, various

In a comparative sense, the churches in Mizoram may also have contributed to integrating identities because, unlike the Manipur case, the churches here are organised on regional and not community lines. There is no Hmar or Lushai Baptists Association or Hmar Presbyterian Association, only the Mizoram Presbyterian Synod or the Baptists Church of Mizoram and their territorial arms. This promotes the coming together of different communities in religious functions and activities, binding all together into some sort of a cohesive whole.<sup>213</sup>

But before we get the impression that these powerful social organisations exist as autonomous centres of power, we need to be reminded of the extent to which the leadership of the YMA and the churches are integrated with the state structures. Reflecting this link is the cross-membership of those leaders with agencies of the state. Formal and informal political institutions are bound together by membership, enabling integration, bonding and a check against state-society frictions. By way of an example, the administrative head of the state agency tasked with essential supplies is also the head of the local branch of YMA besides being a senior member of the Mizoram Presbyterian Synod. The Presbyterian church and YMA, between them, constitute the core of civil society in Mizoram. This bonding helps resolve many routine conflicts of the state-society kind.<sup>214</sup> Because the pattern of cross-membership between state agencies and powerful social organisations in Mizoram is usually the norm rather than the exception, it is no wonder then, that issues YMA and church based organisations have usually emphasised are peace and order, a common Mizo identity and unity among people, 'good Christian behaviour' and social and political responsibility.

<sup>213</sup> Interview: Fr. Jaisilian, Bishop's House, Imphal (Imphal: 15 May 2004) and Rev. Ngurnema, Executive Director Baptist Church of Mizoram (Aizawl: 29 June 2004)

<sup>214</sup> Interview: Thanhawla, Secretary to the Government of Mizoram (Aizawl: 2 July 2004).

Political parties, particularly the MNF, have played up this integrative message. A senior MNF functionary trying to explain the intricate link between Mizo identity, Christianity and MNF's own character claims:

There is a three-way relationship between Christianity, MNF and YMA. YMA is the essence of Mizo society. It is based on selflessness and serving other people. That covers all the morality of the society. What should be our ultimate aim? What is *tlawmngaihna* for? Salvation of my innermost being, which will propagate the gospel of Jesus Christ. This also links up with our party objective. This is an advantage of my party. And that is the reason that MNF is acceptable by the people.<sup>215</sup>

The point I am making is that key social organisation in Mizoram - the YMA and the churches - based on the strength of their organisational capacities, their wide-ranging membership, their integrative message and their reciprocal relationship with political organisations and those of the state, have helped fashion Mizo mobilisation around the integrative Mizo identity and may have helped prevent fragmentation and breakdown. The comparison with Manipur on the role of institutions is stark. In that State we saw how the persistence of autonomous traditional institutions has led to political mobilisation being along fragmented and narrow lines, resulting in poor grounding of state power. Political instability has encouraged this trend further. In Mizoram, the break with 'tradition' combined with a history of institutionalised programme-based parties and the rise of powerful social organisations with strong integrative roles have helped with integrative mobilisation that has fostered stability. In the next section we will see how socio-economic challenges are affecting the integrity of Mizo society and how it may be responding to some disintegrative tendencies.

#### **5.4 Heightened contestations and the challenges to the Mizo experiment**

Political mobilisation in Mizoram in recent times has taken new forms. While continuing to base itself on the overarching Mizo construct, it has had to redefine itself, to cope with contemporary challenges. In this regard, political parties, public organisations, churches as well as agencies of the state appear to have worked together to prevent a breakdown,

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<sup>215</sup> Interview: Pu Thanga, General Secretary MNF (Aizawl : 21 August 2004)



increasingly by excluding those who are at the margins of Mizo society. In this final section of the chapter, I look at how the Mizo society and state are responding to recent socio-economic challenges. The point I hope to establish here is that despite the severe economic challenges Mizoram faces, and which are common to most parts of the North East region, formal and informal organisations that have worked to maintain the inclusive and overarching nature of Mizo identity, have been successful in preventing competition and conflicting ethnic mobilisation that could have led to severe breakdown. I first look at some of the socio-economic challenges that the state and its people face. I then attempt to explore the tentative disintegrative impact of these challenges on Mizo identity. Finally I try to map the various responses of Mizo leaders to these challenges to Mizo integrity. It turns out that the mobilisation resorted to in this case tends to sharpen Mizo cultural identity, by re-emphasising its internal coherence as well as external boundaries.

Socio economic challenges facing Mizoram have intensified over the years. This is on account of basic changes within the Mizo society as well as characteristics of its external environment. There has been a marked rise in the level of education and literacy among the Mizos (Table 5.4). Interestingly, unlike in the past, today it is local level elected village councils that have provided the leadership for popularisation of education. The result has been that today Mizoram stands second only to Kerala in the level of literacy among all the states in the country.

Table 5.4 Growth of Literacy , Mizoram (1981-2001)

Year	1981	1991	2001
Mizoram	74.26	82.27	88.40
India	43.57	52.21	65.20

Source: Census of India, Various

The rise in literacy has been matched by growth in colleges and higher education institutions and students graduating from them. In 1996, 36 post-graduate and 8500 under-graduate students came out of the Mizoram University, 29 colleges, 29 junior colleges and 2 teachers' training institutes in the state. This is a large figure given the total population of the state - 890,000. (Census of India, 2001; North Eastern Council, 2000:128). The large number of educated youth in the job market has fanned aspiration levels.

But opportunities to match the rise in aspirations have not kept pace. This has been because of the poor performance of the economy and the lack of growth in the private sector. The 1990s saw an annual growth rate of 4.8 % (NSDP). Most of this growth was on account of expansion in secondary and tertiary sectors. The primary sector, which accounted for some 60% of total workforce of the State, grew at only 0.5 % annually. The secondary sector grew annually at some 7.0 %, but mostly on account of growth in construction (10 % per annum). The services sector was contributing the most to the growth, making up 62.8 % of NSDP. Significantly, it was 'Public Administration', - accounting for 17.8 % of the NSDP - that grew at 6.8 % annually. Thus most of the growth came from the public sector. The Mizoram government is the biggest employer in the State, engaging some 13 % of its total work force. Along with other government agencies, the total employment in the public sector comes to 15 % - perhaps one of the highest in the country. (Roy, 2004:4). For some time now, recruitment into government service has been frozen, thus slowing down the little growth there was in employment. While the incidence of unemployment was just 0.4 % and 0.8 % in 1983 and 1993 respectively, it has grown to 2.0 %, in 1999-2000, closely matching the all-India figure of 2.3 %.<sup>216</sup> In 1997 there were some 67,900 persons on the live register of employment exchanges in the State. In 1998, another 11,500 persons were added to the list. Indicative of the drying up of opportunities is the fact that employment exchanges in 1998 were able to provide employment only to about 100 persons registered with them. (Northeastern Council, 2000: 132 & 134)

Adding to the rise in aspiration levels is the large inflow of cash into the state's economy. Central policies to develop the Northeastern region through large transfers for investment in infrastructure projects and development schemes, without parallel efforts to create any mechanisms for absorption of this investment and for its proper use, have led to obvious pathologies. An editorial in a local newspaper comments on the fate of these central resources.

"Mizoram has been inundated with development funds from many (central) ministries. Presently Rs. 60,000 million are available from the Central Pool of Lapsable Resources alone for the Northeast region. However, past performance of

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<sup>216</sup> The all-India measure for the two years in question was 2.0 % (Government of India: 2001a).

the (Mizoram) state government dampens enthusiasm. Development funds have not reached the intended targets....”<sup>217</sup>

This large inflow of funds has led to skewed development of the economy. Just to give one example, while the state’s per capita NSDP has consistently remained lower than the all-India level, its per capita consumption expenditure has always been higher. It has also led to some very strange outcomes.

“Quite a large proportion of the money income .... ..has been grasped by a few rich....and spent on luxuries. This has had something of a ‘demonstration effect’ and now many people are in a great hurry to get easy money and are less willing to do manual work. This has brought about a change in social values, which tends to create and perpetuate economic and social injustice in society.” (Lalmachhuana :1981)

The get-rich-quick lifestyle, especially among the urban sections – making up some a whopping 47 % of the State’s population - has pushed up levels of aspiration in society. Poor economic opportunities belie this search for a good life.

Pressure on the job front and unfulfilled aspirations generally, are leading to strains on the Mizo construct. Enhanced competition over jobs and opportunities is forcing communities that are counted among the Mizo to break ranks and think in terms of interest of their specific group. The most demonstrative is the case of the Hmars. But no less instructive is the mobilisation among the Maras and Pawis, or of the Mizos themselves when they relate to their kin-tribes from outside the state. The Hmar sub-tribe had formed an integral part of the Mizo identity in the erstwhile Lushai Hills. Yet the first voice of dissent among the Mizos has come from Hmar leaders themselves. Today an increasing number of Hmars want to call themselves by that name, rather than by the all-encompassing title of Mizo. Hmars have also engaged in an armed movement for creation of a separate administrative area for themselves in Mizoram.<sup>218</sup> Similarly Maras and Pawis are today demanding separate administrative territories for themselves, to be carved out of Mizoram - moves that have

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<sup>217</sup> *Newslink*, Aizawl: 24 May 2004.

<sup>218</sup> Hmar People’s Convention (HPC) led an armed movement, from 1989 until 1994, when it signed peace accord with the State government.

generally been thwarted for now.<sup>219</sup> There is also resentment brewing among the Mizos against the ‘outsider Mizos’, mostly refugees from Myanmar, employed as manual labourers and petty traders in Aizawl. The resentment has been deep-seated enough to lead to group violence.<sup>220</sup> What has been behind this intra-Mizo mobilisation? Do these trends mean that the inclusive over-arching Mizo construct has outlived its utility? And equally important; why have these dynamics not led to a complete breakdown?

A few qualifications are required. The Hmar dissidence is generally confined to the specific pocket of Skawrdai part of the Aizawl district that borders Hmar dominated areas of neighbouring Manipur and Assam. Those regions have been home to the larger movement for an exclusive homeland for Hmars, with Manipur and Assam based Hmar leaders demanding the carving out of parts of Churachandpur district of Manipur, Cachar district of Assam and the northeastern parts of Mizoram. The Hmar Peoples Convention founded in 1986 as a political movement for the establishment of a Hmar ‘homeland’, took to the gun and went underground in 1989. Therefore the impetus for the HPC movement in Mizoram was political developments outside Mizoram. Adding to Hmar separatism has been the rapid and continual immigration of Hmar speaking people from neighbouring territories into Mizoram, into Aizawl as well as Hmar-dominated Skawrdai and Sungpuilawn region. This section of the Hmars was never part of the Mizo mobilisation process and has therefore not been socialized in it. They prefer to speak their own dialects and maintain their separate identity. Adding to these trends is the generally poor levels of development in the Skawrdai area. For State leaders and Mizos in general, the failure lies in the challenge of development in remote pockets of the State. For Hmar leaders, failure is on account of the attitude of the State government that they allege is not fair. These factors have combined to create a sentiment among Hmar-speaking people against Mizo identity. But reflecting the complexity of the problem is the presence of a large number of people who may have belonged originally to the Hmar group but who have been thoroughly Mizoised due to their long

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<sup>219</sup> Recently Maras, Pawi and Chakmas submitted a memorandum to the central government asking for creation of a separate union territory for the three ADCs in the state. ‘Mizo minority tribes seek Union territory status’: *The Telegraph*, Kolkatta: 22 October 2004

<sup>220</sup> Group violence against Myanmar Mizo settlers in Aizawl led to their mass exodus in 2003. (*Newslink*, Aizawl: 11 September 2003). Violence has also taken place against non-Mizo immigrants. (*Newslink* : April 2004, various ). Commentators have expressed their concern at the growing ‘ethno-centricity and exclusivist tendencies of politics and society’ in the state. Sharma et al (2004)

residence in the State, in its central parts and who indeed formed the core of the Mizo mobilisation in its early phase.<sup>221</sup>

The Pawi group shows similar complexity with the majority being tied into the Mizo case, through the creation of separate and autonomous administrative structures for this group may have led to the persistence and growth of separatist tendencies. The case of the Mara community is less problematic. Maras, inhabiting the extreme south of the State, had formed a group outside of Sailo dominance in pre-colonial times. Their territory was incorporated into the Lushai Hills only in 1924. Colonial administrators also upheld the separate status of the Maras by letting them use their own customary codes and categorising them separately from those inhabiting the north and central parts of the Lushai district. These developments led to Maras resisting the moves of MU for a Mizo mobilisation in their territory. Their separate status got a boost with the Bordoloi sub-committee of the Constituent Assembly recommending separate Regional Councils for Maras (and Pawis) within the Lushai Hills District. And though Mizo groups have seen Maras as being part of the Mizo identity, Maras themselves have resisted these suggestions. Though muted, some Mara leaders have also demanded separation of Mara areas from Mizoram.

With that caveat as the backdrop, let us try to understand how rising economic challenges have been impacting on the Mizo construct. A look at the community-wise break-up of literacy trends in the State is instructive. (Table 5.5). Communities that have benefited the most from the Mizo success story in literacy are those that like to be identified as Mizos and Hmars, who have about comparable levels of educational attainment; but also the Maras and Pawis, who seem to be fast catching up. It is in these communities that we see rising mobilisation against Mizo identity.

Table 5.5 Community-wise literacy levels, Mizoram (1961-1981)

	1961	1971	1981
Chakma	12.08	21.35	14.70
Hmar	43.82	54.26	63.97
Any Kuki	19.25	14.32	27.16
Maras	20.64	32.96	41.51
Mizo	48.87	60.03	67.76
Pawi	21.03	38.51	54.00

Source: Census of India, various

<sup>221</sup> Interviews: Hmingchunghnung, former president of Hmar People Convention (HPC), Aizawl: 5 July 2004 and with David Thangliana, Editor, Newslink. Aizawl : 29 June 2004.

At the root of much of this mobilisation is resentment over economic disparities. Communities inhabiting peripheral regions of the State (and where the process of Mizo identity construction may have been less successful) accuse State leaders of being less solicitous of economic development of those communities. They also allege poor access to existing economic opportunities. Hmars claim that Hmar-majority areas in the State, such as Sakawrdai, are the most backward with poor physical and social infrastructure and high levels of poverty.<sup>222</sup> Maras and Pawis talk of their poor representation in State government jobs and exclusion from participation in development projects, thus providing a barrier to their further mobility.<sup>223</sup> These economic grouses have today become the stepping-stone for identity-based mobilisation by leaders of these communities against a state and its leaders who speak of a united Mizo edifice. P.P. Thawla, the president of the only Mara political party gives us an insight into the mind of those mobilising against Mizo identity.

“Government status is real safety for language and identity. Political status is very important. We Maras have been split between India and Burma. We were one before, but after separation of Burma from India, we have been divided. With the coming of missions and their work, political aspirations have come about. Today, it is (separate) political status we want. Further, God gave us separate (Christian) missionaries, (from the Mizos). This means he wanted us to be a separate entity.”<sup>224</sup>

Hmingchunghnung, past president of the principal Hmar political organisation, the HPC, argues along similar lines:

“Language is a factor (besides economic factors) in dividing us. We speak Mizo. But in some parts of Aizawl, they speak Paite and Hmar. To this Mizos would say ‘are you not Mizo?’ They would frown on non-Mizo speakers. Language is an emotional and sentimental issue. Such attitude of language-chauvinists becomes a serious problem. Economic development and language chauvinism can both be tackled by political intervention. But the main problem is we are totally neglected politically”.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Memorandum from the Hmar Peoples’ Convention to the Governor of Mizoram (12 October 2000)

<sup>223</sup> Memorandum from the United Lai, Mara & Chakma Union Territory Demand Committee to the Prime Minister (29 July 2000)

<sup>224</sup> Interview: PP Thawla, President, Mara Democratic Front (Aizawl : 1 July 2004)

<sup>225</sup> Interview: Hmingchunghnung, (Aizawl : 5 July 2004)

Unfulfilled aspirations and economic grouses, real or imagined, played out over time, mostly among Mizoram's peripheral communities, have strengthened the hand of those opposing the domination of Mizo identity. They provide elites of the dissenting communities with a locus around which to mobilise their constituencies.

Mizo leaders take the signs of disintegration within the Mizo construct seriously. The religious elite blames creation of separate churches and the use of local dialects in them, as contributing to the disintegration. A senior church leader, commenting on the demands for separate identities feels,

“...this is unfortunate, because when I was a student in Shillong, we would have common gathering of all different groups. We all stayed together. There was no feeling of separateness. But I hear in Delhi they now have separate associations of Hmars and Mizos and Paites and Raltes. It seems the younger generation is becoming more conscious of its separate identity. This is a sinful thing.<sup>226</sup>

The realisation of centrifugal tendencies has prompted Mizo leaders to re-emphasise the inclusive aspect of its identity. This it seeks to achieve by appealing to Mizo sentiments and to unite them as one political force, urging Mizos of all hues to appreciate the benefits of their commonalities; by following cultural policies that would prevent further breakdown; by mobilising for unification of the ‘traditional homeland’ of the Mizos encompassing parts of India, Burma and Bangladesh and increasingly by raising fears of a ‘non-Mizo menace’. At the same time there have been efforts by the state to accommodate intra-ethnic demands and difference of opinion (within the Mizo constellation). These efforts together seem to have helped Mizo leaders manage their internal difference better. Significantly, state leaders have worked in concert with Mizo ‘civil society’ to realise this project. A senior functionary of the Presbyterian church remarks:

“Government wants to keep all linguistic groups together, to prevent trouble and ills of separateness. Smallness of communities will prevent development. Also small communities may not have able leaders. It is best that small communities identify

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<sup>226</sup> Interview: Rev. Zairema, senior church leader. (Aizawl : 19 June 2004)

with a larger community in their vicinity, and benefit from the development that follows.”<sup>227</sup>

Reflecting the state-society concert is the large role played by key social organisations in maintaining the Mizo edifice. Over the years, YMA has turned to playing the lead role in protecting ‘Mizo’ interests and in emphasising the Mizoness of society. Its annual conference in 2001 organised on the theme of ‘Preservation of the country and the nation...’ called for protection of the Mizo nation from ‘external enemies’ (meaning outsiders and non-Mizos) and ‘internal enemies’. The latter would appear to include sentiments in support of separate identity and factors that promote centrifugal tendencies generally). Believing common identity to be important for growth and development, the organisation called for a balanced and equitable development of all Mizo peoples (Central YMA: 2001). These sentiments were re-emphasised in YMA’s conference in 2002, this time on the theme of ‘preserving national identity’. During the conference, it was warned that there was no united sense of nationalism among Mizos, because people do not love their land and hence do not follow the law of God. It was claimed that the land of the Mizos, which the speakers characterised as being God-given, could be preserved by “re-emphasising Christianity, sowing seeds of nationalism, having good economic policies, searching out and preserving our territory and preserving our integrity and nationhood.” (Central YMA: 2002). YMA has also raised fears among its constituents about Mizo lands being under threat, so as to mobilise support for a cohesive Mizo society. It observed 2004 as the year of *Ram leh hnam hum halh* – safeguarding the nation.<sup>228</sup>

Mizo political leaders have chosen to follow these methods to mobilise public opinion. They have responded to centrifugal sentiments in the State by also calling for reunification of lands they claim were traditionally inhabited by the Mizos in India as well as in adjoining areas of Myanmar and Bangladesh. This has served useful purposes. Mizo reunification was a pet theme for the MU in its efforts to counter Lushai domination. It was also used by the MNF very effectively to mobilise support and recruit fighters from territories outside the Mizo district, in Manipur specially.<sup>229</sup> A reunification theme was also used by the People’s

<sup>227</sup> Interview: Rev. C. Ronghinga, Executive Secretary, Bible Society of India (Aizawl: 23 June 2004)

<sup>228</sup> *Newslink*, Aizawl : 4 October 2003.

<sup>229</sup> A large part of the fighting force of the MNF was made of people from Manipur’s Kuki-Chin communities .



Conference (PC) to gain popularity in the later years of the MNF insurgency, helping the party to dominate politics in the state in the 70s and 80s. Today it is the Zomi Reunification Organisation (ZoRO), a purportedly non-political grouping founded in 1993 that has taken the lead in trying to reclaim the lost unity of Mizos.<sup>230</sup> According to its President,

“...our only objective is to restore the common identity of the Zomi people. When that restoration is complete, there will be peace everywhere. Even in Chin Hills (Burma) there are many sub-tribes. They also have different identities because of instigation by the Burmese and the British. Even the British wanted to unite our area administratively. But this is still pending”.<sup>231</sup>

These messages connect very well with popularly held beliefs in Mizo society in support of unity. A recent write-up in a local paper explained this phenomenon such:

“There is a secret longing in every Mizo heart, for reunification of Mizos, so as to bring out a great Mizo nation, that had been scattered all over the southern part of (the) Northeast region. As this involves international and state boundaries, a physical realignment may be impossible. However much can be achieved by a unity of spirit and mind.”<sup>232</sup>

The mobilisation around Greater Mizoram could also be an attempt to iron out differences within Mizo groups, by focusing outward on unifying communities that are still outside Mizo land. In recent years, the outward focus of Mizo elites, to prevent disintegration of the Mizo construct, has increasingly begun to take the form of mobilisation against those perceived as outsiders. This includes focusing on not only the immigrant *vais* (plainsmen) but also non-Mizo indigenous communities such as Chakmas and Brus. The former are predominantly Buddhist, the latter a mix of Christian and animist and now increasingly Hindu. Both communities have their own cultural symbols and both have been stigmatised by Mizo organisations such as the YMA and the Mizo Zarlai Pawl - the apex Mizo students

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<sup>230</sup> The two terms, Mizo and Zomi continue to be used interchangeably. The literal meaning of both is ‘the man of the Hills’.

<sup>231</sup> Interview: R. Thangmoya, President ZoRO (Aizawl: July 17, 2004)

<sup>232</sup> *Newslink*, Aizawl : 28 August 2003.

body - as 'foreigners'.<sup>233</sup> Political parties, social organisations and church groups have often asked for dissolution of the Chakma Autonomous District Council and for disenfranchising those they consider immigrants.<sup>234</sup>

The attitude of Mizo organisations towards the Brus has been equally hostile. Their asking for an autonomous area for themselves in 1997, led to a chain of events culminating in the exodus of majority of Brus from Mizoram into refugee camps in neighbouring Tripura.<sup>235</sup> Attempts by Brus to return to Mizoram have often been thwarted by public organisations and political parties. It is only very recently that a peace agreement has been signed between the state government and the principal Bru outfit, Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF), rekindling hopes of return of Brus to their former homes. Violence against the Chakmas and the Brus, as well as that against the immigrant *vai* labourers from the Bengal / Assam plains has shown an upswing since the early 90s, around the same time that larger socio-economic forces began having their effect on Mizo interests.<sup>236</sup>

While in themselves, these instances of anti-non Mizo mobilisations and the violence they lead to, are damaging, they have nowhere been as violent as similar mobilisations in States such as Manipur. It has been easier for agencies of the state in Mizoram, acting as they do in unison with social organisations, to moderate exclusive mobilisation and control acts of violence. What does this mean? For one it signifies the strength of the state in Mizoram. The state building process in Mizoram, through colonial and post-colonial times, has been more successful than comparable cases elsewhere in the Northeast region. Further, an inclusive state-wide manner of mobilisation of collective identity as the basis of legitimisation of state power, has given the state a solid core to plug into. This has strengthened the downward reach of the state in society. Cohesive political power has translated into maintenance of the centrality of the state in people's lives. It has also enabled state leaders better to manage

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<sup>233</sup> Admittedly, the perception of the foreignness of Chakmas and Brus has been an outcome of the migratory nature of these communities and the significant rise in their population in the State since Independence. The actions of national leaders in favour of these communities have contributed to exclusivist tendencies among Mizo organisations.

<sup>234</sup> '[Mizo Zarlai Pawl ] to drive out Chakma foreigners'. (*Newslink*, Aizawl : 27 June 2003).

<sup>235</sup> *Highlander*, Aizawl : 17 October 1997. YMA later observed the year as 'Save Mizoram Year'.

<sup>236</sup> Under the provisions of the Inner Line Regulations, applicable in Mizoram, Indian nationals from outside Mizoram require a special permit to enter the state. Similar exclusionary laws apply to 'outsiders' doing business in Mizoram. These laws (and their frequent violation by outsider labourers and petty traders, in connivance with state functionaries) have been the driver of Mizo exclusivism and the rising mobilisation by social organisations.

contestations and act as referees to resolve inter-group contestations when they break out. Absence of all-out contestation has itself resulted in enhanced capability of state leaders to respond to social demands.

## 5.5 Conclusion

What does the process of society making in Mizoram teach us? Firstly, claimants to state power sought to legitimise their claim to authority and to their contesting the existing social structure by mobilising inclusively. They sought to create a state that would be rooted in this inclusive statewide society. This could be because it was the excluded class that was mobilising, in the early stages of post Independence state formation, to capture power from the dominant. In that sense the Mizo story stands in sharp contrast to that of Manipur, where the popular upsurge led by Hijam Irabot was unable to stand on its own to claim to form the new state, a victim both, of a mix of historical circumstances and of political machinations of the dominant sections. In Mizoram, the Commoners were able to contest the authority of the dominant Chiefs by mobilising inclusively to gain the advantage of numbers. Of course, the pre-colonial basis of ethnic commonness and religious affinities among all Mizos were factors contributing to inclusive mobilisation. But more crucial determinants of this manner of collective identity formation were some important political dynamics – the fixity of the state's territorial boundaries and the insistence of its leaders to keep official categorisation fixed and non-negotiable. Further state power in Mizoram from early on, continued to be grounded locally. This contributed to a process of internal conflicts and accommodations leading to an internal construction of a State-wide Mizo society. State leaders used external stimuli, such as those perceived to be threatening Mizo interests to further cement Mizo unity and inclusivity. There is thus an internal basis of the formation of the Mizo State.

Secondly, the Mizoram case demonstrates how society making entails leaders not only including some but also excluding others to be able to gain better legitimacy among their constituents and hold them together. Among the factors determining the route that state leaders take to forge society, is the extent of state cohesion as well as the autonomy that leaders enjoy in their state making efforts. Because the state has been reasonably cohesive in Mizoram, exclusivist tendencies of social actors, when they have erupted, have been met with actions of state leaders to mediate ethnic contestations. Exclusionary practices have

grown when state leaders have felt threatened by the external environment such as that concerning the working of Central and state leaders. On those occasions, the centrality of the state in the lives of people has been compromised. Its centrality has also been compromised on account of rising economic challenges and the inability of state leaders to respond to social demands put on them. Today the challenge before Mizo leaders is how to maintain their role as principal actors in society, by plugging deeper into society while keeping themselves autonomous from inter-group contestations to be able to act as effective regulators.

Thirdly, by grounding the state in an inclusive society, state-making leaders in Mizoram have been able to create a strong and cohesive state with extensive links to society, thus enhancing its capabilities. This grounding of the state in society in Mizoram is reflected in the way state agencies and public organisations, such as church groups and the YMA, act in unison to manage inter-and intra ethnic dynamics. The close affinity between agencies of the state and those in society, not only in terms of programme and activities but also in their membership patterns, their policies and strategies, is crucial to any understanding of the nature of politics in the state.

### Section III: State capability

In this section I compare the capabilities of the state in Manipur and Mizoram to understand how difference in experiences with state-making – the outcome of the divergent manner of crystallisation of the state in the two cases as well as the divergent strategies used by state-making leaders to mobilise support and acquire legitimacy - have resulted in difference in the authority and the resultant ability of state agencies in the two to perform their key functions. I will specifically look at how state agencies have performed their basic security and development functions and how institutional arrangements in the two states have helped manage conflicts and contestations. The specific measures of state capability that I will be focusing on are its ability to (i) monopolize the rule system in society, (ii) extract taxes and manage state finances (iii) provide access to services and opportunities and secure property rights to all citizens and (iv) maintain peace and order and uphold the rule of law. Taken together, these ‘sovereign’ arenas provide the essential range of functions that the state must perform and dominate.

My understanding of state capability, as being the outcome of the historical contests between social forces over authority, presupposes the presence, in the political arena, of state agencies as well as non-state actors, both seeking to define rules and influence people’s lives. Understanding how state agencies measure up on their security and developmental functions will, then, require using a framework of ‘institutional multiplicity’<sup>237</sup>, to see how the agencies of the state have performed vis a vis non-state actors on these functions and whether they have managed to acquire monopoly. Where traditional centres of authority have been subdued and incorporated by state agents, there are fewer contestations from rival forces over authority. As a result, state actors are better able to dominate their ‘sovereign’ functions, provide services and be accessible to all citizens. They are able to respond to social demands put on them and to handle political and economic crises. The centrality of the state in the lives of majority of citizens remains intact, thus helping prevent breakdown and collapse. On the other hand where rival centres of authority have remained powerful, state agencies face greater contestations, thus being locked in conflicts with non state actors. This adversely affects their ability to provide political goods to all and to dominate their

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<sup>237</sup> Crisis states programme (2005: 8)

sovereign functions. In these circumstances, centrality of the state in society is greatly compromised. A variety of non-state actors continue to play determining roles in peoples' lives, sometimes rushing in to fill the gap left by state agencies themselves. Contestation between state and rival forces means that such states are vulnerable to political and economic crises, leading to frequent breakdown.

Over the next two chapters I will explore the rule system in the two States, i.e. their institutional and organisational arrangements providing access to all sections of society to property rights, to resources, and to opportunities. I will also examine how successful state agencies have been in their efforts at raising revenue and in managing the economy as also in providing key services relative to their rivals. The effectiveness of state agencies in their key functional spheres also connects to what I explore finally: the quality and capability of public agencies to provide security and to resolve disputes and analyse how they have performed in relation to non-state actors in these arenas.

## Chapter 6

### The unravelling of the state in Manipur

#### 6.1 Introduction

There is little semblance of governmental authority in Manipur, and, on April 23, Manipur Chief Minister Okram Ibobi Singh confirmed in public what had, in the past, largely remained a matter of private discussion. At a public meeting in Thoubal district, Singh confessed, “All development projects have been stalled for interference by militant outfits (sic). The construction of a flyover in Imphal (the State capital) is delayed because the militant outfits are demanding a certain percentage of the project fund.....” The Chief Minister stated further: “Militants are extorting money from each and every one, including barbers, small-time traders and low-ranking Government employees. This has become unbearable for the people. Militant groups have sprung up as cooperative societies in Manipur. (Routray, B.P. ‘Manipur: The State Abdicates’ *South Asia Intelligence Review*, Volume 4, No. 42, 1 May 2006)

#### 6.2 Multiple rule systems

In Manipur, the state’s failure to dominate the rule system and provide secure property rights have undermined its centrality in the lives of its citizens. This is particularly so amongst the State’s tribal communities. Much of the formal law of the state, encompassing key institutions such as property rights, as well as the organizational means to enforce those, are excluded from the Hills. With national laws excluded, it is customary codes and procedures – specific to each community – that determine social interaction. Multiplicity of ethnic groups and therefore codes and practices, has led to a multitude of community specific codes operating in the region, most of them in conflict with each other. The state has sought to penetrate these areas by enhancing its administrative presence, particularly via its developmental role. The package of projects and programmes aimed at bringing about development in the region, mostly through large cash inputs, has produced its own set of formal and informal rules and practices.

Today the Hills of Manipur, making up seven percent of the total areas of the State, have a multiplicity of formal and informal institutional arrangements, engendering frictions and crises. With formal land laws excluded from the Hills, land is neither surveyed nor registered.<sup>238</sup> Consequently property rights in these areas are community-specific, in some cases even specific to the particular village; and there is little consolidation or codification of codes and customary practices. Much of the interpretation of these codes, often depends on personal judgment (and interests) of those sitting in judgment. On the whole, land is owned collectively by the community and there is no system of formally recording land, and no private ownership.<sup>239</sup> Community ownership of land means that the system allows for a degree of equal access to livelihoods, and may perhaps account for the absence of acute poverty in these areas. But in the absence of formal and recorded rights to land, the system has also favoured the hold of local elites enjoying considerable authority in society. Absence of formal rights has also proved a barrier to investment in productive enterprises (Government of India, 1981:40). It also means these societies are vulnerable to attempts by vested interests that can use ethnic mobilisation and violence forcibly to evict existing landholders, a dynamic that may be feeding the frequent incidence of ethnic clashes in Manipur.

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Administrative and judicial authority in Hill areas lies with nominally elected Village Authorities that are headed by unelected tribal Chiefs and headmen. Chiefs rely on the traditional authority they enjoy and on customary codes for social control. These are specific to the community, may not be democratic and tend usually to be exclusive. Traditionally, Chiefs and local councils have the authority to tax and police their villages and now are also encouraged to help implement and monitor publicly funded development programmes. In an arena where the state's authority is tenuous, new social organisations, with scanty democratic credentials, have begun to play an increasingly large role and to capture authority. Though rules empower village councils to assume judicial roles under some sort of a loose supervision of state agencies, it is apex tribal organisations - the Tangkhul Naga

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<sup>238</sup> The Manipur Land Revenue & Land Reforms Act, 1960

<sup>239</sup> Admittedly, there is variance in land holding system among different tribal communities. It is inclined to individual and permanent right amongst the Tangkhul and Mao Nagas; and to community ownership and some permanency in land use (without individual ownership) amongst the Rongmei / Kabui Nagas. Among the Kukis, land is owned by the Chiefs and individual villagers have limited rights over land. For a discussion on land ownership in Hill areas of Manipur, see Das (1989: 86-122).

<sup>240</sup> Both the Naga Kuki clashes (1991-96) and Kuki Paite clashes (1997-98) led to large-scale eviction of people from lands they had occupied for long.



Long, the Zeliangrong Union and the Paite National council, for example- that are increasingly beginning to arrogate these powers to themselves, enforcing their own set of laws and practices, most in variance with provisions of national laws. Community specific 'tribal' organisations have therefore acquired de facto authority in society, undermining the state's social control. They also use this authority to capture the substantial resources that the state channels for economic development. Their chosen manner of mobilising public opinion is identity-based, a dynamic that has fed into conflicts.

Often the state has, rather than expanding its role to provide rules and property rights, or at least to provide the framework within which alternative rule systems can exist, itself left the terrain open for non-state agents to provide alternative rule systems and expand their social control and authority. Structures for enforcing the formal legal system in Manipur – the police, magistracy and law courts - have, over the years, denuded their presence in hill areas, due sometimes to security reasons, but often just a result of poor commitment to provide these services; and they have pulled back to the security of the district and state headquarters. The void left by this roll-back has been filled by a variety of non-state actors - traditional tribal organisations, informal social associations and increasingly by armed groups, eager to establish their authority, all with telling effect on the centrality of the state in local society and its capability.

Property rights are problematic in the Valley as well because of its skewed land holding system and land reform measures that did more to uphold the interests of the landed sections than to introduce equity in land holding. The principal instrument of land reforms in Manipur, the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms (MLR&LR) Act of 1960, has been criticized for its inability to abolish the large number of intermediaries in land holding that were a carry over from colonial times (Das, 1989: 27). As a consequence there continues to be a relatively high incidence of tenancy in Manipur.<sup>241</sup> Tenancy in land has, among other things, encouraged the practice of absentee landlordism, proving a disincentive to productive investment in agriculture. These flaws of the Manipur land reforms act may have been compounded on account of the delayed implementation of provisions of the law regarding ceiling in landholdings, allowing big landholders to subvert the reforms.

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<sup>241</sup> According to the World Agriculture Census of 1970-71, total rented area in Manipur formed 8.8 % of the total cultivated areas (compared to 5 % in the case of Assam and 4. 2 % for Tripura). (Das, 1989: 140)

Besides compromising on equity in land holding, the existing system is weak on providing robust property rights. According to Section 109 of the Act, tenants do not have the right of transfer except for the purpose of mortgage to the government or to banks or cooperative societies, making “a big dent in the value of the tenant’s rights” (Das, 1989 : 28). The law is also prone to misuse because of the provisions it contains allowing lease of land by public charitable and religious institutions or local authorities or cooperative societies (section 106). And allowing leasing of land to a banking company to be excluded from ceiling provision also defeats the very purpose of fixing a ceiling on land ownership. Reflecting on the poor resolve of state leaders to undertake meaningful reforms in property rights was the fact that provisions of MLR&LR Act concerning ceiling on landholding as well as those concerning rights of tenants were not brought into force immediately, at the time of adopting the law.

The persistence of multiple and traditional rule makers and weak property rights along with inequity in land holding in Manipur undermines the claim of the state to act as the sole provider of rules to determine people’s lives and the forum for equitable access to secure property rights for all its citizens. These failures of the state underline the centrality of community specific institutions and organizations in the lives of most citizens. The resultant poor state capability has a bearing on the ability of state agencies to respond to social demands - through managing the economy, successfully extracting revenue and organizing entitlements in society.

### **6.3 State agencies and their administrative capabilities**

Compared to the rest of India, the Northeast region has done poorly in overall economic management. Manipur, from the data that are available, has been at the bottom amongst the States in the region, with particularly poor performance in extracting revenue, spurring economic growth and raising income levels of citizens. (Table 6.1) Manipur remains one of the poorest states in Northeast India. In 1993-94 the state’s per capita income was Rs. 6804, which was 78% of the all India figure at Rs. 8769. In 1997-98, this figure continued to remain low at Rs.10,456, compared to Mizoram’s Rs. 12,817 and Rs. 14,436 for all-India. By 1998-99, state per capita income had dipped to 65 % of the national figure. (Lahiri et al, 2002:11) it is evident that the state’s ability to generate wealth continues to remain poor.

Table 6.1 Macro-economic indicators, Northeast India (1997-2004)

	Growth Rate (% SDP) (1997-2002)	Per capita NSDP (Rs.) (04-05)	Own Tax – GSDP (1990s)	% Own Rev. to Total Rev. (03-04)
AP	4.4	14,771	0.66	11.0
Assam	2.1	11,034	3.58	39.0
<b>Manipur</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>11,410</b>	<b>1.46</b>	<b>08.3</b>
Meghalaya	6.2	15,070	3.23	22.0
Mizoram	NA	19,696	0.56	07.0
Nagaland	2.6	18,911	1.30	06.0
Tripura	7.4	17,459	1.94	18.0
All India	5.3	17,822	5.30*	

Source: Government of India (2000), Government of India (2001a),

Government of India (2004) & Government of India (2005c). \* Average for all states, as % of GDP

This could be for a variety of reasons: inadequate agricultural surplus, poor harnessing of resources, undeveloped markets for manufactured goods, transport bottlenecks and consequent increase in factor costs, poor availability of power and a poorly developed infrastructure.<sup>242</sup> The poor condition of state finances and the State's squandering away of its little income on non-development expenditure have not helped matters. State leaders have shown a consistent weakness in managing public finance; having consistently failed to square up their expenditure with incomes. While a part of the problem has been poor resource mobilization by government departments, an equally serious drag has been the very large expenditure of the State government. By far the biggest head of expenditure of the government is that for the salaries and pensions of its employees. Of the total number of people in gainful employment (in the organized sector) in Manipur in 1991, some 99 % were in the public sector, mostly with the State government. In 1999 this sector was some 80,000 strong, making Manipur one of the States with the highest employee per capita ratio in the country (Lahiri et al, 2002: 32). As much as a fifth of the total population of the State, was directly dependent on the public sector for its livelihood.<sup>243</sup> The large size of the bureaucracy had serious implications for the health of public finance. In 1998-99, the total salary bill of the government was Rs. 4680 million. This had proved a serious enough

<sup>242</sup> For a summary of these, see Verghese (1996: 335-345)

<sup>243</sup> By contrast, total employment in the organised private sector in Manipur was only 2000. (Lahiri et al, 2002: 33)

concern for state leaders to call for tightening their financial belts.<sup>244</sup> But the worst was yet to come.

The Fifth (Central) Pay Commission had, in the year 1997, recommended upward revision of salaries and pensions of the Central bureaucracy. Following implementation of these recommendations, employees' unions in Manipur began mobilising for similar benefits for State government employees. Under pressure from the Joint Action Council (JAC) of the All Manipur Trade Union Council (AMTUC) and the All Manipur Government Employees Organisation (AMGEO), to adopt the recommendations of the Fifth Pay Commission for state employees, and which included a record month-long 'cease-work strike' by employees that brought the state machinery to a grinding halt, state leaders conceded most demands of the JAC.<sup>245</sup> While employee associations were successful in mobilizing support for their demands, much of their success in prevailing over State leaders was an outcome of the internal weaknesses of the ruling coalition then in power in Manipur. The W. Nipamacha Singh-led ruling United Front (UF) ministry had come to power in December 1997 after engineering a split in the ruling Congress. But the UF was a ragtag coalition of parties with divergent appeals and social base. The government that assumed power formed a record 31-member ministry (in a house of 60!).<sup>246</sup> Intra-government contests over ministerial powers and perks and a weak leadership from political bosses may have constrained the ability of the ministry to face up to the challenge from the employees' unions - despite the obvious financial implications of conceding demands for revision of pay and benefits. Similar moves by employee associations in other States have been met with greater coherence on the part of governments. Though salary hikes have now been implemented all over the country, leaders in most States were able to negotiate terms with employees that were favourable to the state and which prevented a possible financial collapse.

The direct outcome of the revision of salaries of employees in Manipur was that the salary outgoings of the State government shot up to Rs. 9270 million in 1999-2000. In 2000-01, the salary bill (along with interest payments) was taking up almost 90% of the non-plan revenue expenditure of the State, leaving little for anything else. The 82,000 or so strong bureaucracy

<sup>244</sup> The state Finance Minister in a discussion on state economy in the state assembly in 1998, revealed the poor state of state finances and asked for tightening of the budget. *The Imphal Free Press* (IFP), Imphal : 3 July 1998.

<sup>245</sup> 'Cabinet decides to hike employees salaries' IFP, Imphal : 8 December 1998, 'Employees reject government appeal. Assembly session to be boycotted' *The Imphal Free Press*. Imphal: 11 December 1998

<sup>246</sup> IFP, Imphal : 5 May 1998.

was proving to be too big a drag on public expenditure.<sup>247</sup> Despite its declared attempts subsequently, to shed staff, the State government has failed to sell its 'lean government' idea among people, with employee associations backed with public organizations (and often vested interests) successfully thwarting all such attempts.<sup>248</sup> Infighting over power and perks leading to political instability have continued, institutionalising the state's weakness.<sup>249</sup> These have pushed the State government into serious financial constraints – unable to even pay salaries of its existing employees<sup>250</sup> - and to compromising the state's authority.<sup>251</sup> The inability of state leaders to stand up to pressures from interest groups, despite the serious condition of finances have worsened the financial crisis. It is perhaps the poor authority of the state and its weak social control that best explains the inability of its leaders to influence citizens and implement rational economic policies. The cost of this failure has clearly been high. Table 6.2 shows, quite vividly, the precarious condition of State finances since 1999.

Table 6.2 State Finances, Manipur (1990-2003), in Rs. millions

	90-91	94-95	97-98	98-99	99-00	00-01	01-02 Revised Estimates	02-03 Budget Estimates
Revenue. deficit	(-540)	(-840)	(-710)	(-1,060)	<b>2,870</b>	860	100	430
Fiscal deficit	760	620	1,900	1,080	<b>6,560</b>	2,340	3,740	2,870
Outstanding debt	4,020	5,270	9,640	12,490	15,210	17,900	19,990	21,640

Source: Lahiri et al (2002) quoting Manipur State Accounts, various issues.

Dire financial straits forced the state government in 1999, to initiate an economic reforms programme with help from Central government. Later a Medium Term Fiscal Restructuring Policy (MTFRP) was adopted, with the objective of achieving better management of state

<sup>247</sup> IFP, Imphal : 20 March 2000.

<sup>248</sup> 'Recruitment ban partially lifted' IFP, Imphal, 11 January 2000. and 'government regularises ad hoc teachers' IFP, Imphal : 10 May 2000.

<sup>249</sup> By the late 2000, infighting within the government was leading to serious instability and to some violence inside the state assembly. (IFP, Imphal: 2 December 2000). The UF government finally crumbled, giving way to another coalition under the United Democratic Alliance (IFP, Imphal : 13 February 2001), which was itself unable to gain the confidence of the House when put to the vote. ( IFP, Imphal: 21 May 2001) President's Rule was imposed in Manipur on 3 June 2001, ending prolonged instability.

<sup>250</sup> '[Chief Minister] fearful salaries may become impossible': IFP, Imphal : 26 April 2001

<sup>251</sup> ' Banks refuse to honour (state) government order', (to pay salaries to employees). IFP, Imphal : 18 March 2000.

finances, through implementing public expenditure and revenue reforms. While these measures together may have helped to contain the growth in public expenditure, reducing expenditure has mostly, been a pipe dream. Revenue enhancement measures under MTFRP have been aimed at attempts to introduce new taxes, widen the tax net to cover more taxpayers; improve revenue governance and introduce measures to increase non-tax revenues. But the revenue generating capacity of state agencies in Manipur has always been questionable. As a result, the State's performance in tax collection has been poor and deteriorating over time. While all states in the North East showed improvement in their Own Tax Revenue to Gross State Domestic Product (OTR to GSDP) ratio between 1993-2003, Manipur was one of the very few States in the country to register a decline in the ratio. (Table 6.3)

Table 6.3: Trends in Average OTR to GSDP % for Northeastern states

	1993-1996	2000-2003	Byoyancy (1993-2003)
Arunachal Pradesh	0.55	1.47	2.55
Assam	3.69	4.58	1.32
<b>Manipur</b>	<b>1.44</b>	<b>1.21</b>	<b>0.84</b>
Meghalaya	3.02	3.26	1.08
Mizoram	0.59	0.97	1.60
Nagaland	1.18	1.19	0.98
Tripura	1.95	2.19	1.10
Total Special Category States (SCS)	3.30	3.96	1.22
Total all states	6.12	6.80	1.14

Source: Government of India (2005c: 44)

Quality of revenue governance, including poor performance of tax collection machinery and a poor tax structure, are some of the reasons contributing to poor revenue extraction in Manipur. There are other institutional factors, such as the State's poor tax base, that may account for Manipur's poor revenue capacity. Part of the problem could be that most economic activity in Manipur remains in the informal sector, outside of state control and regulation, hence taxation. It is this sector that provides the bulk of the economic activity in Hill areas – including forest produce, narcotics and the large cross-border trade in consumer goods from and to Myanmar (Verghese, 1996: 121-123 and Harriss, 2003:2). Further, the entire tribal population of the State stands outside the state tax net, there being no tax on

personal income for tribals. And, as land in tribal areas is a community asset, it does not incur any State tax either. The only form of taxation in the Hills is thus the token Hill House Tax.<sup>252</sup> Despite recommendations to bring economic activity in the Hill areas within the formal system and to introduce some form of taxation of income, little action has been forthcoming (Government of India, 1997:27).

But clearly, the problem is not confined to the Hills. There is the problem of extremely poor tax compliance among groups and sections that do exist within the tax net, even in the Valley. Recently it was reported that only 3 lawyers out of the 903 registered with Imphal bench of the Guwahati High Court had paid the mandatory Professional Tax in 2000-2001. (Government of India: 2001b). There were only two Income Tax payees in the State in 2000.<sup>253</sup> There is little reason for these figures to have changed significantly since. Realizations from indirect taxes too, such as sales tax and excise duty, are poor, due mostly to poor management of taxation functions by concerned agencies of the state and the poor security situation as well as disruptions caused by non-state groups competing with the state to realize revenue.<sup>254</sup> Poor performance in raising taxes has often led to the State government being often ticked off by Central leaders for its consistently poor resource mobilization efforts.<sup>255</sup>

This is surprising, considering that various armed non-state groups in Manipur have continued to demand and successfully extract their own 'taxes' from civilians and businesses, including even government departments. These groups have managed to establish sophisticated tax extraction networks that target the large informal economy, the non-tribal as well as tribal population and the state's bloated bureaucracy.<sup>256</sup> Often rebels have also successfully prevented state authorities from taking steps to enhance revenue. In

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<sup>252</sup> This was Rs. 6 per household per annum, revised to Rs. 20 in 2003.

<sup>253</sup> *The Pioneer*. New Delhi : 6 December 2000

<sup>254</sup> '[Underground] demands Force Taxation Department to Shut: IFP, Imphal: 26 August, 2005.

<sup>255</sup> Comptroller and Auditor General of India has commented on the poor collection of user charges in the state. (Lahiri et al, 2002:60). Criticism has come from other quarters too. "Deputy Chairman of Planning Commission Yashwant Sinha lambasts state financial management" : IFP, Imphal: 27 February, 1999

<sup>256</sup> Local newspapers, quoting police sources revealed that United National Liberation Front (UNLF), an Valley-based armed insurgent group had collected Rs. 200 million from government departments and traders in 2005. (IFP, Imphal: 21 September 2005). NSCN (IM), the prominent Naga rebel outfit has similarly been collecting Rs 20 as house tax, annually from every household in Naga areas of Manipur, besides another 2 percent of salaries of government employee. It also collects 'goods tax' from all commercial vehicles plying the National Highway 39, the principal communication link for the state. According to NSCN(IM), these taxes are imposed by the group in its capacity of the 'bonafide government'. *The Sangai Express*, Imphal : 30 August 2005.

the early 1990s, armed groups in concert with public organizations pressured the state government into declaring Manipur as a 'dry state' and forced a shut down of state lotteries - two economic activities that had given the State substantial incomes.<sup>257</sup> The state's poor ability to extract revenue from citizens, even as other claimants to authority have been successful, demonstrates its precarious hold in Manipur. It also demonstrates the hold that non-state actors in Manipur have on the populace, due presumably to better use of coercive power, better organization and sometimes better authority.

On the whole, while there is a lack of evidence to show that the government's reform measures have been backed with a solid political commitment<sup>258</sup>, attempts to grapple with other concerns of reconstruction - better allocation of resources across sectors and groups, enhanced management and oversight of public services, and creation of greater opportunities through private sector growth - have hardly received the attention they deserve. Together, these failures of the state have derailed attempts to reform Manipur's fiscal system. With much of the focus being directed at merely being able to pay staff salaries, the state's ability to invest in development has been severely curtailed. For much of its development investment, the State depends almost entirely on transfers by the Central government. Manipur like other provinces in Northeast India is a 'Special Category State' and receives Central investment mostly as grants that need not be repaid (except for a small 10 per cent of the transfer, treated as long term loan). The result has been that Manipur's economy is heavily dependent on the rest of the country for its basic needs. (Table 6.2). While this fiscal arrangement may have helped generate the much-needed resources for the State, it has contributed to preventing state leaders from taking up more robust reforms of the economy. There is evidently little incentive to try to reform the economy and establish some sort of a social contract with citizens - through improving the quality of public service and clean and accountable delivery of those services in return for increasing revenues and stabilization of state finances (Table 6.3). In conjunction with other factors, the State government's dependence on the Centre has led to rampant rent-seeking and wasteful expenditure. In the

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<sup>257</sup> A report had noted. ... "although illegal trade in alcohol goes on, Manipur is a dry state with an official ban on alcohol". *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi : 10 April 1993.

<sup>258</sup> A central shortcoming has been the inability of state leaders to stick to their resolve not to recruit additional staff and to cut ministerial perks and expenditure. 'Cabinet decides to cancel 2581 appointments' (IFP, 7 March 2001). There have also been instances where decisions to merge or abolish government departments were reversed. (Lahiri et al, 2002: 3).



process, state leaders have lost the chance to enhance their legitimacy and authority through building a more responsive and viable state.

The state's failure to respond meaningfully to social pressures is best demonstrated by its failure to create opportunities. While the fiscal success of the reforms programme has been limited, its impact on the already severe unemployment problem in the State is more palpable. Growth of employment in Manipur in the recent past has been slow. As against 4.0 % for Mizoram in 1993-94, employment in Manipur grew only by 2.0 % annually. (Iahiri et al, 2002:43). Most of this was in the public sector. Expenditure controls implemented as a part of economic reforms initiated in 1999 have led to a near freeze on fresh jobs in the government. Along with the high turnout from the State's education institutions, this has led to a serious unemployment problem, which adds to the sense of frustration feeding into conflicts. Exacerbating the crisis is the fact that Manipur's pool of the unemployed is made up largely of the educated - 67.5 per cent as against 62.5 per cent for all-India, and much higher than that for the rest of Northeast region. (Sachdeva, 2000: 58). This pool of the educated, unemployed and frustrated youth has been growing at a high rate in recent years - 10.74 per cent between 1993-94 and 1999-00, compared to 4.55 per cent nationally. (Bhawmik, 2002). In 2004, there were as many as 411,341 youth seeking employment – representing an increase of more than 80 % over the last ten years.<sup>259</sup> Reliance on the public sector for jobs and dependence on Central transfers for the upkeep of state finances have also diverted attention from the challenge of developing a viable private sector as the engine for growth and for creating opportunities.

Efforts of State leaders to attract private investment to spur growth and create additional opportunities have remained a pipe dream. Despite the definite advantage of location as 'the Gateway to East Asia', a pool of professionally qualified manpower, incentives to attract investors and a set of investor-friendly policies (New Industrial Policy, 2002 and the Information Technology Policy, 2001 for example) and efforts at setting up some basic infrastructure (such as Software and Food Technology parks) as well as a general turn in interest, among Central agencies and businesses associations, in business opportunities in

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<sup>259</sup> IFP, Imphal : 28 June 2005.

the North East in general,<sup>260</sup> actual investment in Manipur has remained scanty. Efforts of some other State governments in the region to attract investment have borne better fruits.<sup>261</sup>

Efforts to enhance private sector investment and growth, when they have been made, have largely ignored the institutional conditions that constrain private capital formation. Private sector investment requires, besides tax breaks, transport subsidies and promotion campaigns, an institutional environment that facilitates capital formation. Critical here is security of life; secure property rights and a legal framework that is able to enforce those. Also required is relatively free movement of factors of production and the absence of entry barriers. State leaders have been able to provide little of that in Manipur. Moreover, half-hearted attempts at instilling fiscal discipline and attracting private capital without concomitant steps to ensure rule of law and accountability mechanisms in public institutions have led to pervasive corruption in public life, resulting in loss of legitimacy of the state and posing a further barrier to investment. It is perhaps only by enhancing the state's legitimate strength – through better management of its economy; by bringing most economic activity within its control, by enabling services and opportunities for gainful employment for all sections of society and finally by improved and accountable working of its institutions - that state leaders can hope to regain their lost centrality in people's lives and their legitimacy.

It is clear that in Manipur, there is an absence of a social contract between state leaders and citizens. By keeping themselves peripheral in people's lives, agencies of the state have prevented citizens from looking up to the state to provide solutions to their problems. And by performing poorly in arenas that the state controls - the social services it has set out to provide as solutions to demands put on it by society – state leaders have further undermined their legitimacy in the eyes of those they seek to govern. As a consequence the state has been unable to depend on citizens for raising revenues, which could have contributed to enhancing its strength and social control. A variety of non-state actors have successfully

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<sup>260</sup> See Government of Manipur web site <http://investinmanipur.nic.in> for investment promotion measures of the state government. For an analysis of the Central government's renewed interest in the North East region's trade potentials and its implications, see Baruah's account of the 'Look East Policy' (2005: 211-236). Likewise, industry associations such as the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) New Delhi, Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce & Industries (FICCI) New Delhi, and the Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC), Kolkatta have all recently spread their operations in the region.

<sup>261</sup> 'Tripura CM's clarion call to investors', *NET News Network*, Agartala, 29 December 2005 & 'Meghalaya exploring trade ties with Bangladesh', *NET News Network* Shillong, 7 April, 2005.

contested the claim of state agencies to occupy that space, adversely affecting the centrality of the state and its capability. The state's poor showing in providing equal access to the little resource and power it controls has exacerbated these trends.

#### 6.4 The persistence of exclusivist politics

Rising unemployment sets up the issue of conflicts over opportunities, resources and power that fuel the breakdown in Manipur. Perceptions of skewed representation of tribal communities in public employment and their unequal access to power have been sources of continuing radicalization of tribal youth in the state. State leaders' failure to provide satisfactory responses to these demands and their inability to promote inclusive ideas and programmes have contributed to upholding the deep divide in society and concomitant weakening of the state.

Manipur appears to have done reasonably well in the social sector. This has meant that overall well-being of citizens in the state is much better than at the national level and better than the average for Northeast India, although there are concerns when it comes to the poverty level (Table 6.4).

Table 6.4 Some social indicators for the North East : Manipur

	Literacy 2001	Infant Mortality Rate (1991)	Sex ratio (2001)	% of Poor (1999-2000)	Per capita Income Rs./year (2001-2002 )	HDI rankings (1991)
A. Pradesh	54.74	91	901	33.47	17,978	29
Assam	64.28	92	932	36.09	10,951	26
<b>Manipur</b>	<b>68.87</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>978</b>	<b>28.54</b>	<b>13,213</b>	<b>9</b>
Meghalaya	63.31	80	975	33.87	14,510	24
Mizoram	88.49	53	938	19.47	-	7
Nagaland	67.11	51	909	32.67	11,119	11
Tripura	73.66	82	950	34.44	-	22
All India	65.20	77	933	26.10	17,978	

Source: Government of India (2001a), Government of India (2006a:4-5)

However this better than average performance on human well-being hides the problem of intra-state disparities in attainment of well being and in provision of social services generally. Much of the success of state agencies in the social sector in Manipur, especially in

health and education, appears to have taken place in its Valley districts – home to its majority community and where its administrative headquarters are located - while Hill districts, inhabited by tribal communities, continue to lag behind. (Table 6.5). The same can be said about the distribution of income levels across districts.

Table 6.5 Inter-district disparities, Manipur (2003)

	HDI	HDI rank	% of poor
Hills			
Chandel	0.5154	6	42.0
Churachandpur	0.5676	4	40.0
Senapati	0.4602	8	51.3
Tamenglong	0.5120	7	54.5
Ukhrul	0.5800	3	44.4
Valley			
Bishnupur	0.6390	2	26.24
Imphal <sup>262</sup>	0.6455	1	19.33
Thoubal	0.5559	5	24.39

Sources: Government of Manipur (2003b) & NSS 55<sup>th</sup> Round (1999-2000)

Tribal leaders have often complained about state institutions being partisan and unfair in distribution of resources to their areas. These have centred around issues of the poor condition of educational and health services, adverse economic conditions and inadequate infrastructure and have often led to intense mobilisation against the state and also against the majority population. Often these complaints have resonated with findings of government agencies themselves. (Government of Manipur, 2003b). Across the Hills, there are examples of schools with no buildings or teachers to teach, of colleges without qualified teaching staff and of hospitals without doctors. Absenteeism in government offices in Hill districts exists at a level much higher than that in the Valley.<sup>263</sup> Tribal organisations have put much of the blame for this skewedness on the working of the state government.

<sup>262</sup> For the sake of the statistical study the two districts of Imphal (East) and Imphal (West) have been taken as a single Imphal district.

<sup>263</sup> Recently a Member of Parliament from Manipur, T. Meinya, raised the issue of prevalence of 'proxy teachers' in Hill districts – an arrangement whereby teachers from outside the station would arrange for a local youth to sit in on their behalf on payment of a small some of money. 'Proxy teachers rampant in Hill districts': Meinya, IFP, Imphal : 8 May 2006.

A memorandum submitted by tribal leaders to the Central minister of Home Affairs in 1955 had raised the issue of poor provision of health and education infrastructure and of communication facilities in Hill areas.<sup>264</sup> Fifty years on, those complaints continue to be raised. Hill districts make up some seventy per cent of the total area of the State. Tribal communities, who exclusively inhabit them, constitute 37 per cent of the state's total population. A survey of budget allocations for fiscal 2004-05 throws up some interesting figures: only 26 per cent of the total budget of the Education Department was allocated for the five Hill districts. It wasn't any better in other departments: 25 per cent of the Health department and 22 per cent of the budget of Public Works Department's (PWD) - the agency responsible for roads and other public works. In the other key departments of Social Welfare and Agriculture, the allocation was 14 per cent and 12 per cent respectively (Government of Manipur, 2004a). A similar imbalance characterizes credit made available to Hill districts, as a proportion of total credit to the state: 21.4 per cent in 2003 and only 7.8 per cent in 2002 (Union Bank of India, Various). The outcome of low levels of investment in Hill districts has been along predictable lines, with low HDI figures and a higher proportion of the poor in the Hills than in the Valley districts (Table 6.5).

Tribal groups have also complained of their poor representation in State government jobs and of the paucity of personnel and poor functioning of public offices in the Hills. Of the 58 'high officers' in the state in 1947, only seven belonged to tribal communities. They were all heaped at the bottom with not so 'high' titles.<sup>265</sup> Post-merger, a newly enacted central law mandated that 31 % of all jobs in the provincial bureaucracy would be reserved for tribal candidates.<sup>266</sup> But few departments have been able to match up to this target, sometimes due to shortage of adequately qualified candidates, but mostly on account of lack of political and bureaucratic commitment. In a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed in the Guwahati High Court sometime ago, it was claimed that there were only 20.3 % Tribals in the Medical

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<sup>264</sup> Joint Memo from Hills Union and Hills Congress to the Central Home Minister. November 3, 1955. Manipur State Archives, Imphal.

<sup>265</sup> Of the rest, forty three were Meteis, two Muslim-Meteis and six outsiders - three British officers, two Bengalis, and an Assamese. (Manipur State Annual Report, 1946-47, Part II, Statistical Tables, Appendix I. Manipur State Archives)

<sup>266</sup> This was against the all-India proportion of 7.5%, based on proportionate composition of 'tribal' communities at the national level. According to 1971 census, Tribals make up 31 % of Manipur's population. Refer MSA RF # G-FA/12/54, R/18-5, 352 on debate in the national parliament on the issue.

department, 8.5 % in Education 21.80 % in Police and 16 % in the Manipur Secretariat.<sup>267</sup> Reservations about adequate tribal representation in jobs have also been expressed by official sources.<sup>268</sup> A segmented ethnic habitation pattern and lax personnel practices of the state government have worked together to create a situation where employees, mostly from the Valley, are able to 'manage' postings close to home or avoid attending to their postings in the Hills altogether. Result has been very skewed manning of government offices. Tribal groups have frequently complained that while offices in Imphal and other Valley districts have abundance of employees, there is permanent shortage of these in the Hills.<sup>269</sup>

Tribal organisations see most of these allocative problems arising out of the government's concentrating power in the majority community and its reluctance to share power with the State's minorities. Tribal leaders have called for setting up of departmental 'district cadres' in the Hills to ensure better local control over staff posted in schools and health facilities there (Manipur Legislative Assembly, various). This, presumably, would also allow for entry of more tribal persons in government jobs. But state leaders have been reluctant to concede demands for district cadres, as that would mean that control over personnel would shift from the state capital to the Hill districts. Yet state leaders have – although in compliance with national guidelines - devolved administrative powers to local bodies in Valley districts, under the renewed Manipur Panchayati Raj Act 1994. As a consequence, elections to empowered *Gram Panchayats*, (village committees) and *Zila Parishad* (district boards) in rural areas in the Valley as well as to municipal bodies in its urban areas have been conducted regularly. Women have successfully contested these elections and make up an estimated 40 per cent of the total seats. Though devolution of powers and resources by State government to these bodies has admittedly been slow, progress towards administrative and financial decentralization in the Valley has been much more on track than it has been in the Hills.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> Public Interest Litigation filed with the Guwahati High Court by H Nengsong, on behalf of Manipur Tribal Employees Association (MTEA), Civil rule No 359 of 1995. Scheduled Tribes Welfare Association of Manipur, Churachandpur.

<sup>268</sup> 'Government fails to reserve SC and ST quota': *Manipur Mail*, Imphal : 6 October 1991.

<sup>269</sup> Memorandum submitted by Movement for Tribal People's Rights, Manipur (MTPRM) to State Chief Minister. Imphal: 1 March 2003

<sup>270</sup> 'Cabinet decides to introduce bill to further empower municipal bodies', IFP, Imphal : 1 December 2004, and 'Cabinet Clears Devolution of Powers to Panchayati Raj', IFP, Imphal: 20 September 2005.

Under the divergent system of local administration in Manipur, the locus of the 1994 Act is confined only to Valley districts, the Hills coming under the purview of the Manipur (Hill Areas) District Council Act 1971. Elections to the six Autonomous District Councils (ADC) - set up in the Hill districts in 1973 - have not been held since 1990.<sup>271</sup> The State government has since then controlled them directly. Village Authorities, set up under provisions of Manipur Village Authorities (in the Hill Areas) Act 1956, have similarly remained a damp squib. Set up on the lines of traditional village councils, they have generally been sidelined by the bureaucratic machinery. Elections to them have been irregular and they have mostly been captured by powerful local elites. As a consequence, governance in the Hills has seen a movement towards greater disempowerment. It has reverted to direct administration under the state bureaucracy. Line departments, which so far worked through their district offices, have increasingly become centralised with almost all development schemes being formulated and implemented from the State capital (Government of Manipur, 2003a: 21).

Inadequate access to jobs, poor functioning of institutions of the state in the Hills and reluctance of the state leaders to share power with tribal communities have fed into mounting tribal alienation. Moved by their perceived neglect, tribal leaders and their organisations have frequently resorted to protests and strikes.<sup>272</sup> Absence of participative grassroots democracy in Hill districts has also made demands for empowering ADCs (by brining them under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution) more strident. The State government's response to these grievances has been to buy time and seek short-term compromises. As we argued in Chapter 2, much of this inertia could be the result of pressures on state leaders from powerful Valley based social organisations. Valley based associations as well as prominent leaders have usually assumed confrontational attitudes towards tribal demands. State leaders have usually followed along. As a consequence, despite frequent pressures from the Central government to amplify the authority of ADCs and make them meaningful instruments of local level democracy in the Hills, state leaders have sabotaged these moves and have closely held on to political power. There have been

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<sup>271</sup> ADCs in Manipur were established under the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution, unlike those in Mizoram (and other Northeastern states) under the Sixth Schedule. While the latter have extensive legislative, executive and judicial powers and secure sources of finance, the former have little autonomy. Manipur's tribal leaders have been demanding conversion of their ADCs to Sixth Schedule status and have, since 1990, been boycotting ADC elections to press their demands.

<sup>272</sup> A recent example is the agitation launched by the All Tribal Students Union Manipur (ATSUM) over shortage of teachers and medical staff in Hill districts. 'ATSUM threatens stir'. IFP, Imphal : 11 May 2006.

signs of some change of late, with some attention given at the highest political level in the State to address issues of public service delivery and development in Hills districts.<sup>273</sup> But it remains to be seen whether these initiatives signal a change in attitude or if they are mere political gimmicks.

Behind this narrative of tribal grievances and state leaders' inability to reach out to them is the image of a political organization that has failed to build inclusive ideas and programmes that could address issues of redistribution and recognition in society and provide political stability. The dominant form of political organisation in the State has been along community lines via sectional interests and organisations with their narrow appeals and agendas. They have shown little urgency to mobilize public opinion around crosscutting interests, or to build coalitions and moderate public opinion and channel grievances into constructive ends. With state power dependent on conflictual sectional interests, it is no wonder that the authority as well as the centrality of the state in Manipur is so weak and circumscribed. Failure of state leaders to provide political solutions to sectional contestations then becomes the point of departure for non-state claimants to authority to fill the gap, by organizing violence.

### **6.5 Rival centres of coercive power**

The ability of the state in Manipur to enforce laws and to provide security is severely limited. Much of this is due to the challenge state agencies face from armed rebel groups. A recent report on the security situation in Manipur is telling. Noting that "there is little semblance of governmental authority in Manipur", the piece claimed that 15 rebels organizations with a combined strength of about 15,000 have "ensured that, in 2005, Manipur remained the most violent State in India's Northeast, and the second most violent in the country, behind Jammu & Kashmir" (Routray, 2006). There were 410 fatalities in insurgency violence in Manipur in the year, a significant increase from 258 in the 2004 (Government of India, 2006b: 158). Militants accounted for more than half of the fatalities with a total of 202 deaths, but there were 158 civilian deaths as well. The report went on to add "while a number of other States in the North East have or are being reclaimed from

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<sup>273</sup> 'CM dismisses threat to life' *The Sangai Express*, Imphal, 28 April 2006.



protracted insurgencies, Manipur's rendezvous with militancy appears to be an unending affair" (Routray, 2006).

The poor ability of state agencies in Manipur to ensure order and provide security for the state as well as citizens is on account of the poor capacity of coercive agencies of the state as well as on account of the competition that state forces face from non-state actors in the security arena. Late colonization and consequent delayed and patchy state-building efforts combine with a difficult hilly terrain to constrain abilities of state forces in the Hills. In much of the state, and definitively in the tribal tracts, the presence of the formal coercive authority of the state – the police and investigative agencies - is only symbolic. This may in part be due to the colonial legacy of reliance on chiefs and tribal strongmen to police and provide security in their tracts; policies that were generally been allowed to continue. Post-Independence, rather than building capacity of provincial forces, the trend has been to deploy Central forces, armed with special powers and with little appreciation of local realities, to counter the challenge posed by groups that took to arms to demand a variety of concessions.

According to one source, in 2003 there were four battalions of the regular Army, ten battalions of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), close to six Assam Rifles battalions (with a total of 38 companies) and three battalions of the Border Security Force (BSF) deployed for counter-insurgency in Manipur. These Central forces supplemented the strength of provincial forces themselves - six battalions of the Manipur Rifles, three of the India Reserve Battalion (IRB) and a unit of the Manipur Police Commandos. Given the 2.3 million population of the State, this deployment works out to one member of security force for every ten civilian (Parrat, 2005:147).<sup>274</sup> Force deployment has generally remained at similar levels, before and after 2003.<sup>275</sup>

Reliance on Central forces has shifted focus away from the need to build effective local capacities. Poor training and leadership and a weak control and command structure and a less than robust accountability mechanism have contributed to reduced legitimacy of the

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<sup>274</sup> A battalion is typically made up of 700-1000 personnel.

<sup>275</sup> Although there are variations as during the Kargil conflict between India and Pakistan in 1999, when a notable thinning down of force took place, or during the conduct of elections when force levels rise significantly.

state's provincial forces among citizens (See Laishram, 2004, for a summary of these dynamics in Manipur). Efforts at enhancing capacities of state police have also been half-hearted. Much of the ongoing effort in this direction has been limited to 'modernizing' the state police force – and which has inevitably meant a focus on better and more sophisticated equipment, with some efforts at better training of the officer rank (Government of India, 2005a:181). The poor preparedness of Manipur's law enforcement agencies to tackle crime can be gauged from data provided by the National Crime Records Bureau. (Tables 6.6 & 6.7). It is evident that poor showing by investigating agencies in the state impacts on the abysmally low rate of convictions by courts in Manipur.

Table 6.6: Charge sheet rate of major crimes by the Manipur Police (2004) %, rounded off to nearest zero

	Murder	Kidnapping	Rape	Robberies	Arms Act <sup>276</sup>	Total Cognizable <sup>277</sup>
Manipur	8	2	15	0	13	32
All India	83	94	75	63	98	96

Source: National Crime Records Bureau (2005: 204 - 212)

Table 6.7: Conviction rate of major crimes in Manipur (2004) %, rounded off to nearest zero

	Murder	Kidnapping	Rape	Robbery	Arms act	Total Cognizable
Manipur	0	0	0	0	0	47
All India	34	24	25	31	63	90

Source: National Crime Records Bureau (2005: 216-217)

Crucially state leaders have shown a weakness and inability to stand on their own in the face of challenges by rebels. Faced with a worsening law and order situation and increasing stridency of rebel groups in 2000, the state government withdrew arms from all police stations located outside the municipal limits of the State capital - Imphal - effectively giving in to rebel pressures.<sup>278</sup> A Home Ministry report around the time, whose contents were reported in the media, reflected the depth of the crisis. According to the report, out of the 57 police stations in the state, only 18 were functional. Noting that there had been frequent incidence of surrender of arms by state forces to rebels groups and that in some cases lost

<sup>276</sup> These include crimes relating to illegal possession and use of arms.

<sup>277</sup> These include all crimes of violent and serious nature.

<sup>278</sup> 'Government withdraws arms from most police stations'. IFP. Imphal:29 April, 2000.

arms had been recovered by state agencies after making pay-offs to rebels, the report warned, “a dangerous situation would arise if the police force begins to give money to extremists to recover its own weapons.”<sup>279</sup> Weaknesses of the State’s law enforcement agencies and their frequently succumbing to pressures from non-state actors have severely undermined the authority of the state in the eyes of its citizens. Despite the continued deployment of high levels of Central and State forces in Manipur, the state’s success in monopolizing authority, by neutralizing or accommodating rebel groups, has been poor.

On the other hand, the legitimate authority of the state has often been compromised by state agencies themselves. Central forces deployed in the State have been frequently accused of violating rights of citizens and of undermining the rule of law, though complaints have come against provincial forces as well (See Luithui et al, 1984; Parrat, 2005: 149-155). Both formal institutional arrangements and informal values and codes of practice within which security agencies operate may account for this. A key instrument of the Central government’s response to insurgency in Northeast India has been the Armed Forces Special Power Act, (AFSPA) 1958, brought in initially to counter Naga rebellion in the then Naga Hills district of Assam. The Act empowers security agencies of the Centre as well as of the States with extra-ordinary powers to tackle insurgency. These include powers to the lowest officers of the forces, without the authority of the courts, to arrest and kill those they suspect as being a threat to national security and to destroy property. AFSPA was introduced in Naga inhabited districts of Manipur in 1958. In 1980 it was extended to the rest of the State to respond to insurgent violence that had spread to the Valley. AFSPA has been criticized by civil society and human rights groups as well as by academics, for violating the Constitution, and international human rights norms. It has particularly been criticised for obstructing redress of genuine grievances and of severely limiting the jurisdiction of civil courts to investigate cases of violations of human rights by Central forces.<sup>280</sup> Often top political and bureaucratic leadership of the State have found themselves helpless when they have tried to hold errant Central forces to account, though instances of high handedness by State forces are also not uncommon.

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<sup>279</sup> ‘Handing over a State on the platter’, *The Pioneer*, New Delhi, 6 December 2000.

<sup>280</sup> Widespread public agitation in Manipur against AFSPA led to the Central government setting up a committee to review the working of the act and recommend changes. Government of India (2005a: 34).

Further, informal codes and values at work on the ground mean that principles of democratic practice such as strict civilian control of armed forces, adherence to the rule of law and disciplined conduct of security personnel are frequently violated. In the absence of effective and independent oversight over security operations, violations of the rule of law go unpunished. Though Manipur has its own Manipur Human Rights Commission existing alongside the National Human Rights Commission, the role of the former is limited to advising and recommending action and falls very much short of being able to get state leaders to enforce them (Parrat, 2005: 157-158).

The poor capacity of state agencies to provide security to the state and citizens is more than matched by the intense challenge state agencies face in Manipur to their claim to monopolizing coercive power. There are more than fifteen rebel outfits of varying size and appeal, belonging to different ethnic groups, active in Manipur. Between them, they have a combined fighting strength of about 15,000.<sup>281</sup> According to the Annual Report of the Central Home Ministry, of the thirteen principal outlawed rebel groups in the Northeast region, seven belong to and are active in Manipur. According to the report, there are many more outfits that may be active but are either in peace talks with the Centre or have not been declared outlawed yet. (Government of India, 2006b: 17). These armed groups seem to enjoy significant coercive power and authority in society and help protect their communities against attacks by other militants groups whilst they also combat government forces. On the other hand, agencies of the state appear powerless to enforce their monopoly over providing security in society. A variety of factors could be contributing to the persistent hold of rebels in Manipur: difficult hilly terrain in much of its territory; rents and benefits that rebels as well as state and non-state actors have been able to generate in the climate of violence leading to the growth of vested interest in continuance of armed insurgencies; as well as the considerable sympathy that rebel groups command among the local populace, due in part, to the commissions and omissions of state agencies themselves.

An important reason for the continued legitimacy enjoyed by Manipur's armed groups is what has been described as the "security dilemma" that citizens could be facing (Baruah: 2005:16-17). Usually state agencies have either been absent from the security sphere or have

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<sup>281</sup> The State Chief Minister revealed on the floor of the State Assembly that the total strength of rebels in Manipur was 15,250: 11,530 in the Hills and 3720 in the Valley. IFP, Imphal : 17 March 2000.

failed to provide the assurance of security to communities when they have needed it most. This has led leaders of such communities to organise self-protection groups against violence by other groups, initially through public contributions. Once organized, these rag-tag groups acquire a life of their own and often become sources of insecurity for other communities. In an environment where intra-elite and inter-group contestations have been frequent and conflictual, birth of armed groups to fill the gap left by the state has been a norm rather than the exception. This dynamic was central to the formation of groups like the Kuki National Army (not to be confused with the Kuki National Assembly, a political organization) in the 1960s organising to protect Kukis against violence by the Naga National Council (NNC)<sup>282</sup> as well as of the Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZRA), an organization that was raised in 1993 by leaders of the Paite community in Churachandpur district against violence by the Kuki National Front (KNF) and other Kuki groups. (Evening Post, 1998)<sup>283</sup> Multiple and conflicting armed self-help groups have been behind most violent inter-group clashes in Manipur, as also for much of the violence directed at state agencies.<sup>284</sup> It is interesting to note that on both occasions above, affected communities had repeatedly petitioned state leaders to provide security, before they began organizing self-defense outfits.<sup>285</sup>

The 'security dilemma' continues to dog communities, especially those in more peripheral regions, where the state's presence or its effective control is limited. Recently Chiefs of Churachandpur district accused the State government of not taking any action to provide security to villagers against violence by the many armed outfits taking shelter in the area. They alleged that pleas for protection and restoration of law and order in the district had been ignored by the State government, "despite villages being ravaged by activities of underground elements".<sup>286</sup> It was claimed that 40 per cent of the villagers in the outlying sub-divisions of the district, had left their homes, having taken temporary shelter elsewhere. Accusing the State government of making no tangible efforts to dislodge the insurgents, they

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<sup>282</sup> KNA began by demanding that the government provide security for Kuki villages against NNC violence. Finding little response to their demands, its leaders began mobilising support for an autonomous area for themselves and organising a militia. [Chief Secretary's secret memo on Activities of Kuki Volunteers. (MSA RF # 7/5/65/Pol, R/18-S/F, 874) and Fortnightly Confidential Report ending 15/9/64, in MSA. *ibid* ]

<sup>283</sup> Also refer 'New outfit formed to protect people in Churachandpur', *IFP*, Imphal, 23 September, 1996.

<sup>284</sup> For a summary account of the Naga-Kuki violence (1991-96) and Kuki-Paite clashes of (1997-98), see Parratt (2005: 176-178) and Parratt (2005:178) respectively.

<sup>285</sup> 'Zomis disown alliances with either Nagas or Kukis', and complain of the state having failed to protect them. *IFP*, Imphal, 3 March 1997

<sup>286</sup> 'Churachandpur villagers ask CM for protection from Underground'. *The Sangai Express*, Imphal : 6 September 2005

urged the state Chief Minister to come to their rescue. In the absence of a robust response from state agencies, it is easy for public anxiety over security to convert into public sympathy for armed groups that can provide them that assurance.

But there have been occasions when community organizations have more directly accused state leaders and law enforcement agencies of complicity in orchestrating insurgent and inter community violence. During the Naga-Kuki ethnic clashes, contending sides frequently accused the State administration and politicians of fishing in troubled waters. While Naga organizations accused the State government of bias against Nagas generally<sup>287</sup>, Kuki leaders complained that adequate security arrangements had not been made to prevent clashes and that the administration was not strong enough to restore order.<sup>288</sup> These sentiments then translate into active mobilization by community elites and support by the masses of armed groups of respective communities. Along with the increased role and legitimacy of non-state armed organizations comes the erosion of the legitimacy of state forces and their diminished centrality in the lives of citizens.

The legitimacy deficit of the state goes beyond inability to provide security to its citizens. Public organizations and student bodies in Manipur have repeatedly mobilized against the government of the day and its leaders, for their failure to improve living conditions of people, to check corruption in high places and to uphold the rule of law. Rebel groups eager to acquire social control and authority have sought to fill this normative gap left by the state. According to the general perception in the media - both local and national - and among Central leaders, corruption is pervasive in Manipur.<sup>289</sup> Recently, allegations were made of a large diversion of subsidized fertilizer meant for farmers, into the open market. It was reported that behind this heist was an elected legislator working with the connivance of senior state officials.<sup>290</sup> There is also a feeling that most development programmes have failed in their objectives. Examples of some of these are the failure of the Public

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<sup>287</sup> Naga organisations accused the state Chief Minister of being “biased to the Kukis” and claimed security forces were giving shelter to Kuki civilians affected by the violence, while denying the same to Nagas. They also charged the Administration of bias in distribution of relief and payment of compensation to victims. Memorandum of the Manipur Naga Baptist Church Leaders’ Forum to the Prime Minister. Imphal: 15 June 1993.

<sup>288</sup> Memorandum of Kuki Inpi Manipur (KIM) to the Governor of Manipur, Imphal: 17 January 1994. Allegations have also been raised of the suspect role of Central agencies – security forces as well as intelligence agencies – in abetting violence. ‘[Research and Analysis Wing] move to counter [National Socialist Council of Nagaland]’, *The Times of India*, New Delhi : 21 July 1993.

<sup>289</sup> ‘Handing over a state on the platter’ *The Pioneer*, New Delhi: 6 December 2000

<sup>290</sup> ‘MLAs fight over fertilizer spoils’ *The Sangai Express*, Imphal : 20 August 2005

Distribution System (PDS) - meant to provide direct assistance to marginal families through issue of food entitlements – and the Prime Minister’s Gramin Sarak Yojana (PMGSY) - for improvement of rural roads.<sup>291</sup> While difficult terrain and poor law and order situation do create problems for effective implementation of public programmes such as the PDS, it is primarily poor management, vested interests and lack of robust accountability mechanism that lies behind the endemic corruption and mismanagement in Manipur.

Poor functioning of the state has led to a situation where, “apart from important government functions being left neglected, it has also resulted in the gradual and now complete erosion of faith in the goodness of the establishment.”<sup>292</sup> This legitimacy deficit is sought to be filled by various non-state actors, most notably the many-armed groups that seek to provide alternative sources of authority. Questioning the authority of established institutions of the state, these organizations have taken it upon themselves to police social life, administer rough and ready justice, act as watchdogs against corrupt politicians and officials and voice protest over violations of human rights by government forces. An armed militant group formed an anti-narcotics cell to fight substance abuse. The group had earlier banned alcohol consumption, a move that won considerable applause from the public and one which was followed by the government, in order to wrest back some of its credibility. Another armed group gained wide popularity among the youth by taking up Robin Hood-style operations to rid the public education system of its ills.<sup>293</sup> Others have targeted AIDS patients<sup>294</sup> and rapists<sup>295</sup> and in the process have gained valuable social space while cutting back the role of formal institutions of the state in the lives of people. These moves have contributed to the increased violence and militarism in society. An editorial in a local daily, commenting on the link between a weak state and growing authority of rebels, notes:

With a weak government ruling the State, insurgent organizations began taking keen interest in reforming society. But there was no strong policy of the State government

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<sup>291</sup> Memorandum of the Manipur Hills and Plains Contractors Associations to the Deputy Prime Minister, requesting that the “process of tender for award of work and selection of pre qualified contractors should be done correctly and not in hanky panky [manner, on ] the whim[s] and disposal of ministers and bureaucrats.” Imphal, 28 February 2003. See also ‘PMGSY runs into [percentage] cuts wall’, *The Sangai Express*, Imphal : 2 May 2006.

<sup>292</sup> ‘Stability First’, Editorial. IFP, Imphal : 21 April 2000.

<sup>293</sup> ‘[Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup] issues warning to teachers’: IFP, Imphal: 15 June 2003 and ‘Bullet in leg over cheating’ *The Telegraph*, Kolkata : 26 November 2004

<sup>294</sup> ‘[National Socialist Council of Nagaland] threatens to eliminate AIDS patients’, *Manipur Mail*, Imphal : 3 February 1991

<sup>295</sup> ‘The man who will die today’. IFP, Imphal : 16 December 1996.

to counter extremists' plans to identify themselves with the masses. The government had no clear plans. It moved like a rudderless boat.<sup>296</sup>

Of course much of the activist role of these armed groups disguises the intricate network of criminality that they sit over. Media reports are replete with accounts of the large rents that armed groups have been able to extract from civilians, businesses and government agents. Meanwhile, hefty transfers to the region from the Centre have, in the absence of effective accountability mechanisms, encouraged rampant rent seeking by those able to access those resources. Common to these accounts is the proliferation of collusive arrangements between the state, civil society and rebel actors deriving payoffs from Central devolutions.<sup>297</sup> Manipur's large informal economy has also helped rebel groups to plug into this lucrative sector for revenue extraction left vacant by the state. They have taken over taxation and monitoring of the illegal trade that goes on in timber and consumer goods within and across inter-state and international boundaries.<sup>298</sup> While these payoffs strengthen rebel structures, they also enhance vested interests in the continuance of organized violence.

A consequence of the poor capacity of the state's coercive power and the challenge it faces from many armed social groups is that state and national leaders have not been very successful in negotiating peace deals with rebel groups and in bringing armed movements to an end. A key factor could be the little domestic demand for peace there is in Manipur. Despite the years of violence by rebels and government forces and the obvious hardships that these have caused to people, there is little pressure from society on state or non-state actors to work towards resolution of violence - a dynamic that was instrumental in restoring peace in Mizoram and that has been playing out in the ongoing peace efforts in Nagaland.<sup>299</sup> Undoubtedly, this is a multi-causal outcome. But an important determinant of the weak demand for peace in Manipur could be the fragmentation of its society. With different

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<sup>296</sup> *Manipur Mail*, Imphal : 17 January 1992.

<sup>297</sup> Commenting on the extensive rebel-politician-NGO links in the state, a Central report noted, "...ministers appear to be siphoning off large sums of funds from Central ministries to underground elements". The report led to the banning of many NGOs patronised by senior state ministers, from accessing funds from Central ministries. According to the report, a state minister had donated Rs. 5 00,000 to a militant outfit for purchase of arms! *The Pioneer*, New Delhi: 6 December 2000

<sup>298</sup> '[Undergrounds] indulge in illegal Trade: [Chief Minister]', *IFP*, Imphal : 19 August 1996.

<sup>299</sup> Social organisations as well as the churches were behind much of social pressure for a peaceful resolution of the MNF insurgency in Mizoram. Naga organisations have been playing a similar role in Nagaland, although inter-tribal differences amongst the Nagas have come in the way of a robust progress in that direction.



communities in intense conflicts with each other over rents and benefits to be derived from the state for own community, there is little concerted push from society for an end to violent movements. It may well be that, in an environment of heightened conflicts and disorder; armed groups represent something of a comparative advantage for communities in their inter-group contestations over power, resources and security.

A case in point is the sympathy enjoyed by the many rebel groups in the state espousing Meitei interests. Public support among the Meitei community for these organizations shot up many notches, consequent to perceptions of Central government coming under intense pressure from Naga groups for carving out Naga areas of Manipur and their merger with Nagaland province. As protectors of Meitei interest, armed groups like the United National Liberation Front (UNLF), the People Liberation Army (PLA), and Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL) continue to derive sympathy from the Meitei community - as does the NSCN (IM) among the Nagas of Manipur - so much so that political leaders as well as top state officials of respective communities have often been known to take soft and ambivalent stands against these evidently anti-state organizations, in some cases even supporting them with resources and logistics.<sup>300</sup> As a consequence, even as Central security forces have continued to push rebels onto the back foot and Central leaders have called for groups to settle for political solutions; groups like UNLF and PLA have shown little urgency to do so.<sup>301</sup> The line differentiating state and anti-state forces has been getting blurred, not only on account of collusive arrangements to share rents, but also to safeguard community interests.

The failures of the state in the eyes of citizens are compounded by the fact that where Central leaders have been able to strike peace deals with rebel groups they have shown little urgency to demilitarize societies and restore the rule of law. There is little in the Ceasefire Agreement between the Central government and the NSCN (IM) for example, that demands withdrawal of armed forces, by both the state and the rebel organization, in areas where the Agreement is in effect. Even if there are provisions to this effect, Central forces have shown

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<sup>300</sup> '[National Socialist Council of Nagaland – Khaplang] claims [National Socialist Council of Nagalim-Isaac Muivah – Member Legislative Assembly] link', *The Sangai Express*, Imphal : 1 May 2006.

<sup>301</sup> 'PREPAK rules out talks', IFP, 8 October 2004. And commenting on the Valley-based groups (UNLF) United National Liberation Front's rejection of the Prime Minister's appeal for peace: 'Rebel group looks to UN for support', *The Telegraph*, Kolkata : 24 November 2004.

little urgency to enforce those on the ground.<sup>302</sup> In the absence of intra-state data on insurgency violence in Manipur, we must rely on data from Nagaland to substantiate this point. (Table 6.8). While violence between Naga rebels and state forces has been reduced, violence in society itself - amongst rival Naga factions and against civilians by rebel groups - has continued. It is clear that although government forces have managed to contain their own losses in Nagaland, society at large continues to be riven by violence. This has compromised the legitimate authority of the state. Rebels on the other hand have increased their hold on society. This has also led to increased criminality (Shashinungla, 2005). These observations hold well for Naga areas of Manipur.

Table 6.8 Insurgency related fatalities in Nagaland (1996-2005)

Year	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
S. Forces	48	38	14	4	4	2	2	3	1	0
Rebels	112	218	72	118	84	76	29	31	22	31
Civilians	144	104	26	26	13	25	5	3	35	9

Source: Institute of Conflict Management, Data. ([www.satp.org](http://www.satp.org))

Thus a variety of factors have contributed to the reduced ability of the state to monopolise security in Manipur and provide protection to itself and to citizens. A determinant as well the outcome of this dynamic has been the authority that non-state armed groups have continued to enjoy in society, undercutting the state's attempts to be the agent of order and authority. Multiplicity of coercive authorities, all structured around specific communities, also means heightened armed contestations and frequent breakdown.

## 6.6 Conclusion

Unraveling of the state in Manipur has taken place along its four key functions. The state has faced strong contestations in each of these spheres. But on account of the unique experiences of Manipur with state crystallization as well as the way state leaders politicized their identities to acquire legitimacy, state leaders have had little success in either accommodating or neutralizing rivals to their authority in these spheres. Thus the state's stated aim to be the sole provider of rules for society and its ability to manage the economy and tax citizens, and to organise politics inclusively while aiming to monopolise coercive power in its territory,

<sup>302</sup> Though the Centre's ceasefire agreement with the NSCN(IM) is formally limited to the state of Nagaland, it is common knowledge that the arrangement applies also to Naga dominated districts in Manipur – Ukhrul, Senapati, Tamenglong and Chandel.

have been greatly compromised. The strength of its rivals, in each one of these arenas has led to diminished centrality of agencies of the state in the lives of citizens. In turn, the poor capacity of state agencies has helped enhance the legitimacy of its rivals. The reduced role of the state has also prevented its agencies from being able to enhance their coercive or administrative capabilities. But the state's poor capability and centrality also means that multiple rival systems are locked in constant and continual contests with each other and with agencies of the state over power and authority, a situation that quickly and frequently breakdowns into violence.

Paralysis of the state, its weakness and poor authority have undermined its role as the framework for resolving inter-community conflicts. Different sections making up the state system as well as the non-state actors competing with the state for authority have mobilized for enhancing their own rents and sectional interests. This has resulted in an unequal access to power, resources and opportunities for different sections of Manipur's society, thus providing a weak institutional basis for state legitimacy. These institutional characteristics of the state in Manipur provide for its poor capability and make it vulnerable to crises and breakdown. The enduring picture is one of a weak state, with little autonomy, hemmed in by powerful social forces, unable to have its way. Frustration with the state's inability to govern effectively is so pronounced that a local paper noting "there is no indication of any rule of law in the state" and that "nobody respects the law", was forced to ask, "who exactly is running the state?"<sup>303</sup> With little direction from state leaders, non-state groups have played central roles, mobilising support along particularistic lines. 'Parallel authorities' have proliferated and have developed entrenched interests. Absence of State-wide political organization has further undermined the role and authority of the state. Contests amongst and by non-state groups have put additional pressure on the state to respond to multiple particularistic fragments of society while also spawning sustained and multiplying conflicts. With agencies of the state being the channel for most economic investment in Manipur, contestation for a share of these resources continues incessantly, contributing to violence and breakdown. Inter-community mobilisation in this situation tends quickly to degenerate into violence.

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<sup>303</sup> 'No Difference', Editorial, *IFP*, Imphal : 24 June 1998.

## Chapter 7

# The Resilience of the Mizo State

### 7.1 Introduction

Clearly the state system in Northeastern India is under acute stress. Reigning institutions face serious challenges from rival institutional systems. Poor legitimacy of reigning institutions has affected their capability to respond to contestations and manage conflicts. Under these conditions, the state's ability to perform its basic security and development functions, and effectively control its territory has also been compromised, further undermining its legitimacy. While in some cases in the region, the state may be hovering around the 'crisis' situation, there being a serious danger of 'state collapse', Mizoram has evidently managed to recover from crisis, having regained peace in 1986. Notably, despite the odds common to the whole region – the challenges of economic management and poor growth - and which may have worsened over the past decade, the state in Mizoram seems to have avoided a slippage back to crisis (and collapse).

This says a lot about legitimacy of state institutions in Mizoram. There appears to be little of the sense of constant and competitive struggles over who will define rules or who will order people's lives, common to political contestations in the rest of the region. State-society contests are muted, first impressions being one of state agencies and civil society organisations (representing dominant social forces) working in tandem, and avoiding breakdown. Having explored the history of consolidation of authority in the State (Chapter 3) and the process by which state-making leaders built up a ruling coalition using inclusive ideas and organisations (Chapter 5), we are aware of the drivers of the 'legitimacy' of the Mizo state. Legitimacy is also helped by the fact that the non-state space in Mizoram is occupied by organisations that belong to social forces representing the ruling coalition. This is reflected in the unique state-society cohesion in the State, manifested in common agendas of state and non-state organisations, their cross-cutting membership and their shared history. The legitimacy dividend has evidently had salutary effects on the ability of the state to perform its basic functions and respond to contestations and manage conflicts. Discussions

with the man on the street reveal that the state in Mizoram is seen as being able to deliver and respond to group demands.

## 7.2 The consolidation of rules

Changes in the legal system in Mizoram have helped strengthen the authority of the state and its legitimacy. Firstly the abolition of Chiefship in 1954 including the land reform measures that it involved, fundamentally changed the system of property rights in Mizoram. Unlike other land reform regulations in the country, abolition of traditional land rights in Mizoram did not mean that ownership automatically passed to the tenants under the former Chiefs. All allotments given by the Chiefs were also cancelled. Tenants now had to seek fresh allotments from the Lushai Hills District Council.<sup>304</sup> Besides doing away with arbitrary rights of the Chiefs, these new regulations also brought in equity in the management of land. In the past Chiefs and their advisors had the authority to decide the blocks to be put to *jhum* (shifting) cultivation. They usually kept the best plots for themselves, leaving the rest for the ordinary villager and which were usually re-allotted to tenants on the basis of inducements. Under the Lushai Hill District (Jhumming) Regulations Act 1954, it is the Village Council that select these blocks and then allot individual plots on the basis of drawing of lots. Other reforms involving property rights and which ameliorated the condition of the common villager included abolition of residential surcharge, the ending of the practice of forced labour and impressed coolies; and reduction in the paddy tax due to the Village Council (Goswami, 1979: 140). These steps further consolidated the legitimacy of the state.

Changes were affected also in the judicial system. There is a two-fold formal legal system in place in Mizoram. One exists under the District Council and another under the Deputy Commissioner. The former is a three-tier system of courts, at the village, intermediate and regional level, with jurisdiction over minor cases.<sup>305</sup> Courts under the District Council use the Mizo *Hnam Dam* (customary code) as well as the formal Indian Penal Code (IPC). They have been found to be open, fast and cheap (Thanhranga, 1994: 9). A measure of their legitimacy in society is the very small number of appeals for revision of judgements made

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<sup>304</sup> For a discussion on the land system of Mizoram, see Das (1990: 30).

<sup>305</sup> Established under the Lushai Hills District Council (Administration of Justice) Rules, 1953

by these bodies (Thanhranga, 1994: 9, 11).<sup>306</sup> Courts under the Deputy Commissioner try cases of a more serious nature and those involving non-tribal individuals, falling outside the jurisdiction of the District Council courts.<sup>307</sup> Despite this duality in the legal system in Mizoram, what is worth noting is that both systems of justice have the sanction of the state and are integrated within the formal judicial framework of the state, with the Guwahati High Court - the highest forum of justice in the Northeast region - having the ultimate appellate jurisdiction over all courts within the two systems.

Today, most cases that require adjudication are criminal and for redress of which people approach the Deputy Commissioner's court. These law courts, using the formal legal codes of the country have also been gaining in legitimacy over those using customary codes. For instance, in the past rape cases would be registered with the Village Council (VC) court. But today most people no longer approach the VC courts for redress of these more serious crimes. They rely on the formal system of police and law courts "...because people have more faith in the capacity and the reach of the police and the district courts in helping them gain relief in criminal cases."<sup>308</sup> This is borne out by some figures released by the Guwahati High Court that reflect on the functioning of the formal legal system in the state. There are as many as 53 law courts in Mizoram. Each of these was able to dispose of, on an average, 127 civil and criminal cases in 1998, leaving only 70 cases pending per court. These figures compare favourably with the situation in other states in the North East. There are fewer formal law courts in Meghalaya (only 8) and even in Manipur (30), both with larger populations. Disposal per court was poorer in Manipur (94), though it was better in Meghalaya, at 155. In all, these translated into a higher number of cases pending per court in Meghalaya (279) and Manipur (267) than in Mizoram (Government of India, 2000: 307). The capacity of the judicial system in Mizoram to dispose of cases has remained high, with the Aizawl bench of the Guwahati High Court being able to dispose of more cases leaving fewer cases pending relative to other benches of the Guwahati High Court. (Table 7.1)<sup>309</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> However, an anomaly in the legal system in the State had been that the executive wing of the state continued to control the judiciary. This was corrected only recently. All judicial courts have been brought wholly under the Guwahati High Court. (*The Northeast Tribune*, Guwahati : 20 June 2005.

<sup>307</sup> Established under the Lushai Hills (Administration of Justice) Rules, 1937.

<sup>308</sup> Interview: Lalkuknga, President, Village Council Presidents' Association, Aizawl: 29 July 2004

<sup>309</sup> There is a single High Court for the Northeastern region; the Guwahati High Court. The Court however has permanent benches in each of the seven provinces in the region, thus enabling each province, to have separate High courts without their having to develop separate infrastructure for a High court of their own. The Supreme Court of India that sits in the national capital, presides over all provincial High Courts.

Table 7.1: Cases pending with state benches of Guwahati High Court (2001-2005)

State bench	2001	2002	2005
Agartala	4166	4308	5063
Aizawl	357	358	507
Imphal	6806	7869	9195
Kohima	537	529	799
Shillong	825	899	1591

Source: Guwahati High Court website (<http://ghconline.gov.in/stats.html> )

It is VC courts that have primacy in situations where customary codes (*Hnam Dham*) are required to be used. This however does not in itself mean a challenge to the authority of the state. VCs are themselves instruments of the state in the village. As executive agency for administration of the village, they have the authority to distribute land among villagers, enforce *Hnatlang* or community service, for village works, look after the sanitation of the village and collect land revenue and taxes and help with development matters. They also have authority to impose fines to enforce their rightful orders. Lately they have also been empowered to issue residential certificates.

There has been a tendency, in the recent past, to challenge the authority of the VCs. This challenge has come from the informal development boards set up to act as parallel channels for the flow of development funds and by social organizations like the Young Mizo Association (YMA), keen to expand their role in society.<sup>310</sup> Significantly, both these challenges to the legally elected VCs have been promoted not by non-state actors but by agencies of the state themselves: political parties and sometimes administrative departments eager to do away with the 'politically motivated' VCs. A senior government functionary argues:

“VCs have political affiliations and will therefore be influenced by party loyalties. NGOs [Non Governmental Organizations] on the other hand, are politically neutral. We have asked NGOs, specially the local YMA Units to help VCs in their monitoring tasks.”<sup>311</sup>

<sup>310</sup> Interview: Lalkunga, President, Village Council Presidents' Association, Aizawl: 29 July 2004.

<sup>311</sup> Interview: Thanhawla: Secretary, Food and Civil Supplies (FCS) Department, Mizoram, Aizawl: 2 July 2004

Promotion of non-formal institutions at the local level has been a mixed blessing. They have led to a gradual diminution of the authority of VCs. As a local VC functionary laments:

“All political parties have authorised the YMA to chair the body they have set up at the village level to oversee the process [of revision of electoral role] and weed out [from them] doubtful cases [of claims for inclusion]. But we are wondering if we should join the Committee..... At the village level, VC is the authority and NGOs are supposed to be our tools. ....”<sup>312</sup>

Support to these non-formal interventions has also provided space and legitimacy to ideas promoted by non-state agencies, with serious implications for democratic principles and minority rights, raising questions about the role of formal institutions themselves.<sup>313</sup> But more relevant for our discussion is the fact that the state’s promotion of non-state actors and its being bound in patterns of relationships with them at the local level (as at the higher) has prevented the rise of independent non-state actors challenging the authority of the state in the legal arena. Non-state actors that the state has mostly engaged with are not those that pose threats to its authority. In fact, they represent social forces that are part of the ruling coalition in Mizoram. It is in their interest to work with state actors to uphold its authority and maintain the status quo. Mizo law enforcement agencies often receive useful help from social organisations in resolving crimes and in maintaining order. YMA particularly, has been credited with helping authorities maintain order in local communities.

“Local organisations in localities act to maintain order in them. They check for illicit drink selling and such vices. If they were not active, this place would become very insecure.”<sup>314</sup>

Mizo social organizations have been expanding their role in the state’s legal arena. The pattern has varied between cooption and contracting out of its functions by the state to non-state actors. This phenomenon has of course not been unproblematic. The state’s enhanced capability by involving non-state actors has come at a cost. As the state police chief himself admitted, there have been occasions when social organizations “...have become too powerful and are dictating terms”.<sup>315</sup> This has mostly been around issues that involved the

<sup>312</sup> Interview: Lalkunga, President, Village Council Presidents’ Association, Aizawl: 29 July 2004.

<sup>313</sup> See Sharma et al (2004:6-7) for an account of the increasing communalisation of politics in Mizoram and its implications for the state’s minority communities.

<sup>314</sup> Interview: Vanlalchuanna, Political Analyst. Aizawl: 25 June 2004

<sup>315</sup> Interview: K. Thanmuanga, Director General of Police, Mizoram, Aizawl: 23 June 2005



state's relationship with non-Mizo groups, particularly immigrant communities. YMA and other groups such as Mizo Zarlai Pawl have been behind much of the mobilisation in Mizoram against 'illegal migrants', coming into the State, either from other States in the region or from the bordering Chin areas of Myanmar. The former are non-Mizos, while the latter have Mizo affinities. There have been occasions when social organisations as well as local community associations have declared immigrants as illegal and tried to evict them from their homes. Youth organisations have frequently taken measures, sometimes working with the State police, but also on their own, to identify and force non-Mizo labourers and traders out of Mizoram.<sup>316</sup> They have also mobilised against Myanmarese immigrants, forcing their exodus of sorts in 2003.<sup>317</sup> The effect of these measures has been to communalise the legal system of the state.

But what has been the effect of this intrusion of social organizations on the authority structure in Mizoram and on the capabilities of agencies of the state? Mizo state-society dynamics means that key social organisations such as the YMA hardly ever challenge the state's authority. Most of the time, they work with and under the overall framework of state agencies, hardly ever being any real threat to the state system. It could be argued on the other hand that the activist role of social organizations in the legal arena may actually also be contributing to enhancing the capacity of state agencies to enforce laws and maintain order. As a political analyst explains, "YMA has stepped in only because the state police itself was not vigilant on illegal immigrants. When YMA checks Inner Line Permits, it appears communal but when the state does, it does not."<sup>318</sup> While vigilantism in social organizations is a matter of increasing concern, it is also true that most acts of their mobilization against communities involve groups whose legal status in Mizoram is suspect. Public interventions by the YMA and similar social organizations have led to introduction of regulations on entry of foreigners (particularly from Myanmar) into Mizoram and attempts to check misuse of measures to restrict entry of non-local economic migrants into the state.<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> "Central YMA to focus on illegal non-Mizo traders": *Newslink*, Aizawl: 10 June 2003. The piece reported YMA's plans to "carry out 'seek and send home' operations against non-Mizos.

<sup>317</sup> 'Rape Spurs Myanmarese Purge Diktat': *The Telegraph*. Kolkata: 23 July 2003

<sup>318</sup> Interview: Vanlachuanna, Political scientist, Aizawl: 25 June 2004.

<sup>319</sup> "New [Inner Line Permit] guidelines": *Newslink*, Aizawl: 21 May 2004.

State agencies in Mizoram seem to have maintained their monopoly over adjudication, thus retaining their legitimacy in society. This has been possible because of the state's better capacity to perform, but largely on account of the state's co-opting and at times contracting out its legal functions to non-state agencies. Non-state agencies that may have ambitions of providing alternatives to the state institutions, mostly social organizations, mainly work in tandem with the state. They demonstrate little desire to undermine the authority of the state and disturb the power relations upholding the ruling elite. Representing social forces that are part of the ruling coalition in Mizoram, it is in the interest of these non-state actors to uphold the state's legitimacy and work with the state to prevent any threats to its authority. These combinations of factors have helped state agencies maintain their hold over providing the rule system in society – a crucial state function that in other parts of the North East is the arena for much contestation and potential unraveling.

### 7.3 State-society compact and administrative capabilities

Finances of State governments in North East India are generally poor. This has been attributed to a combination of factors, principal among them being poor finance base, poor management of finances and poor capacity of state agencies to tax. The region as a whole is resource rich, even if much of that resource has not been converted into wealth. There is little industrial base, except in Assam. The public sector continues to be largest source of employment.<sup>320</sup> Measures for raising revenue such as through sales tax, excise and taxes on professions have been poorly implemented. The outcome has been very poor levels of revenue extraction. The share of Own Tax in GSDP in 1999-2000 was as low as 1.38 % in the case of Manipur, 2.50 for Tripura, 3.40 for Meghalaya and 4.70 for Assam (NIPFP : 2001). Poor state finances have also led to the Centre having to step in to subsidize most state governments.

Mizoram's has been a similar story of poor ability to extract revenue, especially down to the mid 1990s. Even though its per capita Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) was Rs. 12,378 between 1994-95 and 1999-97, compared to Rs. 8799 for Manipur and Rs. 9823 for Meghalaya (Government of India, 2000: 218) the average Own Tax-to-GSDP ratio during the same period was 0.56, compared to 1.3 for Nagaland and 1.46 for Manipur.

<sup>320</sup> The ratio of state government employees to the population in the 1980s was 1:17 in Nagaland, 1:20 in Mizoram and 1:29 in Tripura, even as the all India figure was 1: 113! (Verghese, 1996: 340).

(Government of India 2000:219) The State government's presentation to the Twelfth Finance Commission makes for some revealing reading.<sup>321</sup> It begins with the following admission: "The State of Mizoram is an economically backward State having no substantial resources of its own. The revenue ...is next to none. The State government has to depend heavily on Central devolution of funds and borrowings. Since its inception, the State government has been pulling on a deficit." (Government of Mizoram, 2004b: 1)

Yet state agencies in Mizoram appear to have made significant improvements in their ability to extract revenue. In comparative sense, they may be performing better than other North Eastern states. Between 1993-96 and 2000-2003, the buoyancy in average Own Tax Revenue (OTR to GSDP was to a factor of 1.60 (compared to 0.98 for Nagaland and 0.84 for Manipur) (Government of India, 2005c :44). In other words while Mizoram improved its OTR to GSDP ratio, many States in the region regressed. Measures that led to improvement in mobilising resources are still being pursued today. According to the State finance department, the government "...endeavours to implement several new measures for collection of more revenue under both tax and non tax revenue." To this end, the report claims to have "widened its tax base by way of introduction of uniform floor rate of sales tax, luxury tax and upward revision of excise duty." Revenue from Sales Tax, the biggest source of tax income for the state, has also been registering "considerable increase" (Government of Mizoram. 2004b:4).

Table 7.2: Trend of growth of Own Tax revenue, Mizoram (1999-2004), in Rs. Million

	99-00	00-01	01-02	02-03	03-04
Professional Tax	22.32	39.92	38.19	40.39	39.60
Sales tax	35.80	60.44	97.87	181.70	231.14
Passenger/Goods	3.62	4.80	5.48	5.32	5.88
Entertainment	2.27	3.70	3.60	3.75	2.62
Total	65.02	102.80	145.14	231.16	279.23

Source: Government of Mizoram (2004b)

Contributing to better tax realization in Mizoram is the fact that the government has been able to bring a larger number of activities under the taxation net. According to the provisions

<sup>321</sup> Finance Commissions are statutory bodies set up by the Central government, every five years, to recommend distribution of tax resources between the Centre and the states as well as amongst the states themselves.

of the House Site Act of 1953, the Land and Revenue Act of 1956 and the Agricultural Land Act of 1963, tax is imposed on cultivable land, houses, shops and stalls, buildings and fish ponds. This is unlike other Hill states in the Northeast region where there is no taxation on land, and only some token ones on households. (Das, 1990:219) But an equal measure of the relatively better performance in raising revenue is the nature and capacity of the taxation machinery in the State. This could be an outcome of the better investment in the taxation machinery in the State, and the better law and order climate that exists in Mizoram - as well as the absence of non-state actors challenging the state in its monopoly over taxation.

Non-state actors in Mizoram that have traditionally demanded taxation and continue to do so are the churches. The Presbyterian Church has been the most significant player here, being able to demand and enforce compliance with its elaborate revenue demands. This is reflected in the large annual budget of the organization, financed primarily through collections: Rs. 353.79 million in 2002-2003 and Rs. 386.68 million in 2003-2004 (Mizoram Presbyterian Synod, Various). The Presbyterian Church's ability to raise resources is not new. Colonial administrators had realized their ability to tax the population early on (McCall, 1949:212-213). Some of the collections they made have continued to this day: (i) donation made at the New Year and which was used for upkeep of the Lushai Church (ii) Collection fixed at 1/10<sup>th</sup> of donor's produce meant for authorities at church headquarters (iii) Collection made in the autumn and used for the benefit of the poor (iv) Collection of cooked rice or other food item made each Sunday for Bible Women and Sunday School expenses. (v) Collections made throughout the month and which was meant for the spread of the gospel. Yet the churches' ability to demand tax compliance from their patrons was never meant to challenge the authority of the state or to act as an alternative to its authority. Churches, as we have noted before, have been at pains to emphasize that they seek to work with and for the state and not as alternatives to it. By emphasizing the primacy of the government and contributing to upholding order and stability, they refrain from using the authority they enjoy in society to claim a parallel and competing authority over the state.

The state's legitimacy is evident also in spheres where it seeks to organize entitlements, such as social services, food security and livelihoods. The difference however is that, unlike in the case of the state's revenue function, where legitimacy may be due to the absence of competing claims by non-state actors, in the entitlements arena it is on account of the state's own organizational capability and its ability to co-opt and contract out functions to non-state

actors. This has enhanced the capability and the reach of state institutions. Political analysts in Mizoram highlight people's faith in government's functioning and its ability for fair play.

“.... It is probably because the state functions in a just manner, transparently and is effective that has prevented the slide down [to contestations and crisis]. People have still not lost faith in the state's capacity to govern.”<sup>322</sup>

A human rights activist confirms this:

“Government is receptive to suggestions of the society. They take them into confidence .....Decision-making is participatory..... State-civil society gap in Mizoram is not pronounced. State is seen as being supportive.”<sup>323</sup>

The state's capability in Mizoram is evident in the way public projects and programmes have been implemented. An example is the implementation of Public Distribution System (PDS), a national food security programme, for which Mizoram has received wide acclaim.

<sup>324</sup> A look at the implementation of the programme throws some light on why people have not lost faith in the instruments of the state here. Much of the success of the programme rests on the partnerships that state agencies have established with social organisations. The Food and Civil Supplies (FCS) department of the State government has put in place a network of supply centres and storage depots at strategic places all over the state, to feed essential commodities to village and locality-level PDS outlets. It has also invested in an elaborate transport infrastructure for effective movement and delivery of these commodities. But the defining characteristic of the PDS in Mizoram has been effective involvement of elected local bodies and public organisations in the management and monitoring of the programme. Village Councils and local branches of the YMA together select 'Below Poverty Line' (BPL) families and the contractors responsible for procuring and supplying the food items to the outlets. They also help the FCS department to monitor the working of the system. Additionally, YMA, through its network of local branches, helps in disseminating information to the public about availability of food items and the prices at which they are being sold.<sup>325</sup> It is through a combination of effective management and

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<sup>322</sup> Interview: Vanlalchuanna, Political analyst, Aizawl: 25 June 2004.

<sup>323</sup> Interview: Angela Varte, Secretary, Human Rights & Law Network of India, Mizoram Branch. Aizawl: 27 June 2004.

<sup>324</sup> 'BPL (Below Poverty Line) scheme successful'. *Northeast Tribune*. Guwahati : 19 June 2005.

<sup>325</sup> Based on discussion with R Thanhawla, Secretary, FCS Department, Government of Mizoram (Aizawl: 2 July 2004)

broad-based public involvement and transparency measures that leakages, so common with the PDS programme in other States in the country, have been avoided in Mizoram. This was largely because the state has been successful in leveraging the strength of non-state actors such as the YMA to deliver public services. Similar effectiveness has enabled Mizoram to stake a claim to being the first e-governance State in North East India and the first to introduce the Right to Information Act, a piece of legislation likely to further improve quality of governance.<sup>326</sup> But it is probably in the field of education that Mizoram has blazed a trail, becoming the second highest literate State in the country. Serchip district created history recently by recording 100 per cent enrolment of children in schools.<sup>327</sup> It is for its performance in education that Mizoram is best known.

In the literature, much of Mizoram's success in education has been attributed to the role, not of the state but of its principal non-state agency, the Presbyterian Church. A first reading of accounts of growth of literacy in Mizoram and the spread of Christianity is informative. The association is very close. The literacy level in the State has closely followed the growth of its Christian population. Local resistance to missionary activity led to Christian missionaries concentrating on education to penetrate the Lushai Hills. It was due to the efforts of missionaries that a primary school system took birth in the district. Their effort bore fruits, and educated Mizos willingly took to the faith. By the time of Independence, a majority of people in the district had become Christians. Equally impressive was the progress on the literacy front. As against a national figure of 18.3 % in 1951, the literacy rate in the Lushai Hills had reached 36 %. This trend of growth continued in the succeeding decades.

Table 7.3: Trends in growth in Literacy and Christianity in Mizoram (1901-1951).

Year	Population	Literate (no.)	Literate (%)	Christian population
1901	82434	771	0.93	24
1911	91204	3635	3.98	1723
1921	98406	6183	6.28	34,893 (1925)
1931	124404	13320	10.70	59,556 (1935)
1941	152786	29765	19.48	74,987
1951	196202	61093	36.23	102,280

Source: Census of India, Various & Nunthara (1996:59)

<sup>326</sup> *North East Tribune*, Guwahati : 11 September 2005 and 28 September 2005.

<sup>327</sup> *Newslink*, Aizawl: 10 May 2004.

However, most accounts of the growth of education in the Lushai Hills miss the point that behind much of the Christian missionaries' success in promoting education was the hand of the state as facilitator. In 1897, shortly after establishing their presence in the Lushai Hills, the colonial government set up the district's first school. And in 1903, impressed with the performance of the missionaries to educate the local people, the government began taking more interest, not directly, but through the missions.<sup>328</sup> Grants were earmarked for running schools and incentives provided to encourage Lushais to take to education. Literate persons were exempted from impressed labour, a scholarship scheme was started and free rations were issued to children, all rather revolutionary ideas at the time.<sup>329</sup> And in 1904 the government made the missions wholly in charge of educating the Lushai people. AW Rowland of the Presbyterian mission was made the honorary Inspector of Schools for the whole of the Lushai Hills district, with de facto administrative authority over education. In 1905 William Savidge of the Baptist Missionary Society based near Lungleh, was given that charge for the south Lushai Hills, carved out as a separate division for education administration. Hence, rather than acting on their own, missionaries in the Lushai Hills acted to encourage education at the behest of the state. Commenting on the state's policy of delegating the task of educating the Lushais to the missions, McCall the District Superintendent noted, "They have ... become the official educationists" (1949: 199-200). It may have been the missions' greater resources, but it was surely the enabling environment created by the state and the conferral of its authority on the missions that helped the district achieve such remarkable success with education. Mizoram continues to show leadership in education administration. Recently the State government announced plans for modernising the education system and using better practices for the purpose.<sup>330</sup>

The state's contracting out of its education function to missionaries ensured that missions acted in tandem with and under the supervision of state leaders. This prevented their working as alternative centers of authority. Churches, through their provision of social services, including mission hospitals, would never have to contest the authority of the state or build their own legitimacy at the expense of the state. The capabilities of state agencies in

<sup>328</sup> It has been argued that this may have been due to the meagre resources available to commit towards educating the Lushais. (McCall. 1949: 228-229)

<sup>329</sup> Letter no 226 from Superintendent Lushai Hills to Secretary to Chief Commissioner Assam, dated 26 August, 1904. Administrative Report of the Lushai Hills for the years 1900 to 1910. Mizoram State Archives.

<sup>330</sup> 'Mizoram for changing [the] education system'. *Northeast Tribune*, Guwahati: 10 June 2005.

Mizoram and their working in partnership with non-state actors for provision of public services have led to the evident success of the state in the administrative realm (Table 7.4)

Table 7.4 Key social indicators for the North East : Mizoram

	Literacy (2001)	Infant Mortality Rate (1991)	Sex ratio (2001)	% of Poor (1999-2000)	Per capita Income Rs./year (2001-2002 )	HDI Ranking (1991)
ArunachalPradesh	54.74	91	901	33.47	17,978	29
Assam	64.28	92	932	36.09	10,951	26
Manipur	68.87	28	978	28.54	13,213	9
Meghalaya	63.31	80	975	33.87	14,510	24
<b>Mizoram</b>	<b>88.49</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>938</b>	<b>19.47</b>	-	<b>7</b>
Nagaland	67.11	51	909	32.67	11,119	11
Tripura	73.66	82	950	34.44	-	22
All India	65.20	77	933	26.10	17,978	

Source: Government of India (2001a), Government of India (2006a:4-5)

#### 7.4 Inclusionary politics

Undoubtedly, the state in Mizoram enjoys authority and legitimacy among its core Mizo population. How is it regarded among the state's minorities? Despite the ostensibly high levels of Mizo mobilisation in society and the space occupied by Mizo public organisations, the state has been able to provide elements of good governance to its minorities too - Christian Maras and Pawis but also non-Christian Chakmas and Brus. This is another facet of the state's capability: its ability to take political decisions to manage group conflicts without, in the final analysis, being hampered by competing non-state actors. Despite the seeming high level of mobilisation by Mizo groups against minorities, state leaders and agencies have repeatedly shown the capacity to strike deals with discontented minority groups and put in place inclusive representative and redistributive arrangements. Political institutions, on account of their capability and legitimacy, have played key roles in this dynamic. The pattern has been of alliances and coalitions that have been mutually helpful.

The principal minority groups in the State are the Maras, Pawis and the Chakmas, all inhabiting the southern fringes of the State and the Brus, in pockets in the west. Maras and Pawis profess Christianity and are seen by Mizo groups as being indigenous to the state and



part of the larger Mizo family. Maras and sections of Pawis have, on their part, sought to maintain a separate status from the Mizo. On the other hand, Chakmas are Buddhist while Brus are on the whole animists, some having taken to Christianity and others to Hinduism. Mizo groups see both as being foreign, having migrated into the territory from bordering areas of Bangladesh and Tripura. While Maras, Pawis and Chakmas are listed as separate tribes in the State's list of Scheduled Tribes and have autonomous areas for themselves, Brus have been making demands for a separate autonomous dispensation and have organised armed groups to protect their interests. Separatist tendencies are also present among, ironically, the Hmars who were at the core of the Mizo construct and the Paites who are again counted as Mizos. Sections of the Hmars, living in the northern reaches of the state, along Mizoram's borders with Hmar-dominated Churachandpur district of Manipur, have sought to maintain a separate status from the Mizos and have demanded a special autonomous region for themselves. This is a spillover from the larger Hmar desire for a separate State of their own, encompassing Hmar dominated areas in Mizoram, Manipur and Southern Assam.<sup>331</sup>

State building in Mizoram involved construction and mobilisation of the Mizo identity, immediately after Independence as well as during the MNF-revolt phase. At the same time, state leaders sought to keep Maras, Pawis and the Chakmas satisfied by establishing autonomous councils for them. The Pawi-Lakher Regional Council (PLRC) created in 1953, was envisaged to safeguard the interests of these 'micro minorities' in the south of the districts, at a time when the Lushai Hills District Council (LHDC) was being set up.<sup>332</sup> Along with upgradation of the Mizo Autonomous District Council to a Centrally administered Union Territory in 1972, PLRC was upgraded to form two separate Autonomous District Councils (ADC), one each for the Pawis and Lakhers. A third council was created for the Chakma tribe. All three bodies were created under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. Among other things, these elected ADCs have authority to determine how natural resources such as land and forest produce are utilised; what policies are followed in respect of language in schools and what personal and customary

<sup>331</sup> These tendencies are largely absent among Hmars living in more central regions of Mizoram and who consider themselves to be central to the Mizo identity.

<sup>332</sup> Lakher is the former name of the community who call themselves Maras. PLRC was thus a unique example of an administrative arrangement to safeguard communities who were minorities within a larger community itself a minority. PLRC was an autonomous region within the Mizo Hills District Council that was itself a part of the Assam state.

laws should apply. With fixed budgetary provisions, ADCs also control much of the developmental interventions of the state in these pockets. The large statutory transfer from Central and State governments means that these protected territories receive substantial and assured developmental investment. It also means that local elected leaders have the freedom to decide how resources are utilised.

Table 7.5: Transfers to ADCs, Mizoram (2000-2005) in Rs. millions

ADC	Population (2001)	No. of Villages	9 <sup>th</sup> Plan outlay (1997-2002)	10 <sup>th</sup> Plan outlay (2002-2007)	Non plan transfers from Mizoram (00-05)
Lai	51,878	83	290.5	393.3	706.0
Mara	50,188	60	249.8	343.2	635.5
Chakma	32,807	69	172.4	244.7	335.3
Mizoram	891,058	787		24,193.7	

Source: Government of Mizoram (2002) & Government of Mizoram (2004b)

ADCs also employ a large number of the local youth. Though Maras, Lais and Chakmas may be poorly represented in the State bureaucracy in Aizawl, the presence of separate ADCs has ensured that they have a share in administrative appointments in their own territories. Chakma ADC employs 996 persons, all Chakmas, Lai ADC, 1648 persons and Mara ADC, 1580 persons, all of the particular ethnic group. This is an average of 3 % of each community's population.<sup>333</sup> This helps bind major sections of the educated elite of the region into patterns of mutual relationships with the state. They also facilitate administrative and political representation of marginalized communities in the institutions of the state, providing the excluded with an access to the state. It also means that power is devolved to sub-state institutions enabling them to exercise local management controls, which may help in improving performance.<sup>334</sup>

It is true that the State government may not have had any direct role in the setting up of the three ADCs. But their very presence may be helping elites of these communities develop

<sup>333</sup> State government with total employee strength of 42,883 employs some 4.5 % of the population. (Government of Mizoram, 2004c) .

<sup>334</sup> Mizoram's record in empowering local bodies has been equally impressive. Village Councils, since their inception in 1956 have worked as effective institutions of local governance. Elections have been held to them regularly. They have also been received requisite funds.

stakes in the Mizo state system, preventing them from raising the tempo of their mobilisation to the breakdown point. More relevant however, would be a discussion of the response of State government and its elites to demands by the other minority communities, for self-governing arrangements for themselves. Of relevance here are demands by Hmars and Brus. The Singlung Hills Development Council (SHDC), an outcome of negotiations between rebel Hmar People's Convention (HPC) and the State government, tries to replicate the ADC example for the Hmar community, albeit on a less grand scale. While SHDC may have its weak spots - fund transfers are not statutory, there is little in the scheme for control over land and resources as well over cultural aspects of the Hmar community – its very presence and the demonstration of the state's readiness to negotiate autonomy for out-groups, has helped moderate minority grievances.<sup>335</sup> The Mizoram government's agreeing to a similar arrangement for Brus recently, was the basis for the Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF) readiness to give up their violent activities. (Routray, 2005a). Crucially, ADCs and SHDC have ensured that development investment in minority areas is less iniquitous. Transfers from the state to these bodies means that peripheral regions and more important, elites controlling local bodies, continue to receive substantial resources that enable them to have an abiding stake in the system.

There has been a noticeable mobilisation by Mizo civil society groups, specially student and youth organisations, against minority demands. The Mizo attitude towards the Brus has been hostile. Their asking for an autonomous area for themselves in 1997, led to a chain of events culminating in the exodus of majority of Brus from Mizoram into refugee camps in neighbouring Tripura.<sup>336</sup> Demands have also been made by a variety of Mizo organisations to dissolve the Chakma Autonomous District Council and to disenfranchise them.<sup>337</sup> Similarly, Mizo groups have frowned upon Hmar and Mara demands. Minority communities have also complained of being rubbed up the wrong way by the increasing role of Mizo public organisations in the political system which they complain has impacted on determining access to public authority in the State. In the last assembly elections in 2003, YMA attempted to use its social authority to browbeat a Hmar candidate who they claimed was promoting intra-Mizo differences.<sup>338</sup> There have also been attempts by Mizo public

<sup>335</sup> Memorandum of Settlement between Government of Mizoram and HPC, Aizawl : 27 July 1994.

<sup>336</sup> *Highlander*, Aizawl : 17 October 1997) YMA later observed the year as 'Save Mizoram Year'.

<sup>337</sup> 'MZP to drive out Chakma foreigners'. *Newslink*, Aizawl: 27 June 2003.

<sup>338</sup> "Central YMA boycotts Sungpuilawn MLA". *Newslink*. Aizawl: 13 January 2004.

organisations, led again by YMA, to determine issues of citizenship. The increasing radicalisation of politics around the immigrant issue in the State recently led to all political parties nominating YMA to head village level bodies they had set up to oversee the process of revision of electoral rolls taken up by the national Election Commission. The attempt was to identify and weed out doubtful cases, meaning mostly those considered 'outsiders' or non-Mizos.<sup>339</sup> The proactive role of churches in the electoral process has also been held responsible for the growing use of Christian symbols in electioneering in the state.<sup>340</sup>

Yet mobilisation against non-Mizos has not prevented the state and the political elite from working out deals with those espousing minority demands. The Congress party in power in 1990s, the ruling MNF today and other parties at different points in time, have frequently forged political alliances with elites within minority communities. This could be because the principal Mizo political parties have been well institutionalised. An aspect of this institutionalisation is that most parties have extensive reach, extending throughout the State. Firstly, the MU, MNF, PC and the Congress have all sought to build up their legitimacy riding on the Mizo bandwagon. Thus they sought to represent the entire gamut of the Mizo population, rather than speaking for a section. Further, both national and regional parties in Mizoram that have seriously nursed leadership roles have tried to extend their presence to areas beyond the 'Mizo' domain, into territories inhabited by minority communities in the peripheries. While MU claimed to speak for all sections of Mizos, the Congress and the MNF have both sought to extend their base in the south inhabited mostly by non-Mizos. These moves have benefited both sides. Political alliances have played a big part in taking minority demands on board, giving them the much needed political voice and legitimacy.<sup>341</sup> And political parties have benefited by acquiring statewide legitimacy and a support base among minority constituents which has also helped them acquire the capability to channel and process popular participation.

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<sup>339</sup> Interview: Lalkunga, President Village Council Association, Mizoram. Aizawl: 29 July 2004

<sup>340</sup> Zoramthanga, the State Chief Minister commented that with large funds available to the state from the Central government and foreign aid agencies, it would be possible to employ a hundred thousand Christian missionaries and send them all over the country to spread the faith. *Newslink*. Aizawl: 14 April 2004.

<sup>341</sup> Political alliances have been common in the past. Congress, Janata party and the PC have all on different occasions forged links with regional parties in the PLRC and the ADCs to stake to the these councils.

The Congress party in Mizoram has traditionally enjoyed a special place among Chakmas and Maras, and has consistently opposed any moves calling for dissolution of the ADCs.<sup>342</sup> The MNF which on many occasions was the party moving the resolutions for dissolution of Chakma ADC, recently welcomed a large number of Chakma leaders into its fold.<sup>343</sup> It has slowly been making inroads in the Chakma District Council, and now heads the coalition that is in power there. The MNF had an alliance with the lone Mara Democratic Front (MDF) representative in the State Assembly, a move that helped the party maintain its majority and helped with a mutual arrangement in the Mara ADC. Earlier, the MNF had established a political alliance with the Hmar Peoples' Conference (HPC), promising to support Hmar autonomy demands in return for electoral support.<sup>344</sup> The break-through in the State government's talks with the Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF) is also being seen as an outcome of similar political alliance between the MNF and Bru leaders. Both these deals have led to cessation of organised political violence in the State. Surrounded as it is by States where multiple rebel organisations and endemic violence is the norm, this is a most remarkable achievement.

So what does Mizoram's experience with managing minority conflicts say about the state? The nature of minority demands in Mizoram, as elsewhere, has mostly been about promoting economic development and / or safeguarding culture and identity. Mara, Pawi, Chakma and Bru dominated areas in the fringes of the State are relatively less developed than the Mizo-dominated central regions. Hence demands which stem from poor development or on account of economic factors, have assumed an ethnic form due primarily to the largely segmented habitation pattern in the State. A survey of Mizoram state's peace negotiations with Hmars and Brus is instructive. During the government-HPC talks, state leaders showed a definite resolve to tackle the problem head on and not leave it to fester. They sought alliances within the HPC leadership and were agreeable to providing concessions. But they showed an equal resolve to not give in to any demands that would lead to the unraveling of the Mizo construct. They refused to allow the proposed Development Council to be given a Hmar (and therefore a community specific) name, and

<sup>342</sup> Congress has consistently rejected moves for dissolution of Chakma ADC. (Records of debates in Mizoram State Assembly: Secretariat, Mizoram Legislative Assembly, Aizawl)

<sup>343</sup> The Aizawl daily, Newslink reported the induction of many Chakmas and Brus into MNF, noting, 'this is in sharp contrast to MNF's anti-Chakma ADC attitude in the past, when they were seated in the opposition benches.' Aizawl: 27 May 2003.

<sup>344</sup> MNF-Hmar Volunteer Welfare Association agreement dated February 17, 1998. Private papers of Hmingchungna, Past president, Hmar People's Convention (HPC). Aizawl

insisted for Sinlung, an appellation common to the Kuki-Chin family.<sup>345</sup> They also insisted on keeping the Central government out of the negotiations, preferring to deal with the situation in-house.<sup>346</sup> Similar dynamics were at play during the talks with the BNLF. While leaders were strongly opposed to BNLF demands for an ADC, considering it to be the formula for state breakdown, they were more generous with concessions to address economic grievances.

The significant thing is that Mizo leaders' capacity to negotiate and do deals with minorities may have come about despite the feeling they nurse that vested interests - mostly national leaders - may have fanned intra-Mizo separatist demands. Mizo intellectuals believe that autonomous units for the minorities in the south, may have been foisted by the Assam government as an attempt to neutralise Mizo demands for autonomy and separation from undivided Assam.<sup>347</sup> Mizos also complain that whereas the Pawi Lakher Regional Council (of 1956) was meant to be an arrangement only for the Pawis and the Lakhers (Maras), the formation of a separate ADC also for the Chakmas in 1972 was an artificial construction forced on Mizoram by Assamese leaders. Whereas Mizos have reconciled themselves to the Mara and Pawi ADCs, their tolerance for the Chakmas is much lower. Mizo leaders also see nationalist parties such as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Hindu organisations as having a hand in politicising Bru demands and in giving them the voice they have acquired.

These feelings have led Mizo public organisations to oppose minority demands strongly and to mobilise against them. Yet they have not prevented the state and the political elite from attempting to respond in meaningful ways to those demands. Leaders have had the resolve and the authority to look for and work out solutions and in the end restore peace. Reflecting

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<sup>345</sup> Mizoram's fragile peace in peril "There is no need to create separate administrative units for ethnic groups who are all Mizos". Lalsangzuala, Deputy CM Mizoram. *The Times of India*, Calcutta edition : 7 November 1991.

<sup>346</sup> Interview: Hmunchingnung, Past President, HPC. Aizawl: 5 July 2004.

<sup>347</sup> A case in point is that of the then Deputy Commissioner of the Lushai Hills, Barkataki, who while recommending the setting up of the Lushai ADC, had suggested that a separate administrative unit be carved out for the Pawis and Lakhers in the south. The justification cited for these separate units, in the words of the Deputy Commissioner is : "the Pawi-Lakher area is geographically and also culturally...not an integral part of the Lushai Hills district. Lakhers were brought under the British only in 1924. The percentage of Christians among them is not yet large. Subversive Mizo Union politics has not been able to penetrate here. This area therefore can serve as a buffer between the Arakan communists and the Mizo Union. This is the main consideration which prompted me to recommend a regional council for the Pawis and Lakhers...although they are not fit for such a council". DC Barkataki's letter to Government of Assam, dated 10 April 1951. Mizoram State Archives, File no 148/C 1950, relating to the activities of the Mizo Union.

on the confidence of the political leaders of the State is the fact that the Mizo state has been able to manage its minority demands and conflicts on its own without excessive prodding from the Central government.<sup>348</sup> Representation of different minority communities in administrative and political structures of the State, sharing of political and administrative powers with them and enabling them to exercise control over local resources and their way of life has helped bind the elite among Mizoram's minorities in patterns of mutual relationships with the state structure. It has also helped the process of integrating minorities into the Mizo body politic.

Thus at a general level, there is a realisation among minorities that the State belongs, not only to the core Mizos, but to all and that they have a stake in its continuance. That may explain why Maras, who have everything it takes to start an armed movement, have been quiescent. The ostensibly heightened sense of having been wronged and neglected and their separatist desires make the Mara case a fit one for violent outbreak. The Mara region, wedged in between Myanmar and Bangladesh, and on the lucrative drugs and arms trade route, make the choice of rebellion eminently rational. Yet never have the Maras ever contemplated a violent movement. Mara leadership attribute their peaceful disposition to the influence of the Bible and to Christian teachings. Some liken themselves to Mahatama Gandhi, claiming they have abiding faith in peaceful means.<sup>349</sup> While all these are not beyond the range of possibilities, the real reason perhaps lies in the fact that Mara elites stand to lose more than they would gain if they took to rebellion. The Chakma community too, despite their small numbers, has the assuredness of self-governing structures that fulfil some of their aspirations. They control political power in two assembly constituencies and are in a position to influence the outcome in three more.<sup>350</sup> Interviews with Hmar leaders also confirms that continuation of violence is meaningless, when the state seems to have taken some serious steps for accommodation.<sup>351</sup> It is on these counts that the Bru peace agreement will be tested.

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<sup>348</sup> This is a far cry from some other states in the region which have little authority and legitimacy even to attempt to resolve some of their conflicts. A case in point is Manipur.

<sup>349</sup> Interview: PP Thawla, Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA), Mizoram and President, Maraland Democratic Front (MDF). Aizawl: 1 July 2004.

<sup>350</sup> Interview: Nihar Chakma, MLA representing the Congress party. Aizawl: 28 June 2004.

<sup>351</sup> Interview: Hmunchingnung, past President, Hmar Peoples' Convention (HPC). Aizawl: 5 July 2004.

## 7.5 Providing security

Unlike the rest of the Northeast where Central forces are deployed in large numbers, Mizoram has little military presence, except to guard international borders with Myanmar and Bangladesh. While the region as a whole has a host of active separatist groups, there is no active rebel organisation in Mizoram (Government of India, 2006b:17). There is consequently little separatist violence in the state, a point we will examine in some detail later in this section. The Mizoram Police, armed and unarmed, forms the core of the state's security apparatus. Some numbers may be helpful. There is one police officer for every 7.6 persons in the state, a figure that is quite favourable, the national average being a low 1.34. In terms of police density though, Mizoram is not very well situated, at only 33.7 police personnel per 100 sq km (against 61.3 for Manipur), perhaps due to the sparse population spread (Government of India, 2005a:33).

But what is most revealing about Mizoram's security and law enforcement system is its evident success with dealing with crime. The charge-sheet rate (cases where the Police were able to press for charges against accused, reflecting the ability of enforcement agencies to investigate and press charges) was in most cases comparable to the all-India figures and which translated into high success with conviction by the courts. (Tables 7.6 & 7.7) These aspects of institutional capacity of security agencies of the state have contributed to the low crime rate and lesser violence in Mizoram. The nature of most crimes is also minor. They are mostly incidences as robberies, thefts, and cases of cheating. Only 5.8 % of all major crimes in the State were violent in nature, involving crimes such as murder and kidnapping (National Crime Records Bureau: 2005).

Table 7.6: Charge sheet rate of major crimes by Mizoram Police (2004) in % rounded off to nearest zero

	Murder	Kidnapping	Rape	Robberies	Arms Act <sup>352</sup>	Total cognizable <sup>353</sup>
Mizoram	86	67	75	56	58	82
All India	83	94	75	63	98	96

Source: National Crime Records Bureau (2005: 204 - 212)

<sup>352</sup> These include crimes relating to illegal possession and use of arms.

<sup>353</sup> These include are all violent crimes of a serious nature.



Table 7.7: Conviction rate of major crimes in Mizoram (2004) in % rounded off to the nearest zero

	Murder	Kidnapping	Rape	Robbery	Arms Act	Total Cognizabe
Mizoram	47	-	83	56	50	63
All India	34	24	25	31	63	90

Source: National Crime Records Bureau (2005: 216-217)

It is evident that despite their thin presence, the state's security agencies have been able to enforce rules and demand compliance. The ability of the state police to solve crimes and bring the guilty to book represents the strength of the authority of the state. It could be the outcome of a combination of factors: (i) institutions of the state have been able to co-opt potential challengers to the state's authority. (ii) State-society relations have themselves been reinforcing, social organizations helping to strengthen the arm of the state. While this may not necessarily represent the cooptation of social organizations by state agencies, it does amount to the two working together in ways that help prevent non-state actors behaving as challengers to state authority and acquiring legitimacy. Let us examine the working of these dynamics in the security sector in some detail.

Mizo state leaders have shown a tendency to do deals with and co-opt groups that have mounted violent challenges to the authority of the state. They have also been successful in striking peace agreements with various armed rebel groups and in bringing them under the state organization. This has contributed to upholding peace and order. Prominent among these deals have been those with the HPC fighting for an autonomous administrative unit for the Hmar sub-tribe on the tri-junction of Mizoram, Assam and Manipur and with the BNLFF that took to arms to demand a similar autonomous council for the Bru community. Mizo leaders have been able to bring both movements to a closure (in 1994 and 2004 respectively) by adopting a variety of measures to accommodate - including general amnesty and attractive rehabilitation grants for rebel cadres; suitable payouts for the movements' leaders and promises of special development investment in territories that formed the core support base of the organizations. It is probably also the territorially peripheral nature of these challenges to the state and their limited support base that helped with the cooptation.

The model for state cooptation of rebel groups was however provided by the way the MNF was co-opted by the national leadership, working in conjunction with the state's then political leadership. Peace negotiations between the Central state and the rebel MNF had been long drawn out, having started sometime in 1971. The Mizo Accord of 1986 involved bringing the MNF leadership into the state structure with Laldenga, the MNF president, being made the state Chief Minister, at the head of a coalition government made up of the MNF and the then ruling Congress party. Many top leaders of the MNF found their way into the State cabinet. There were incentives for MNF's foot soldiers too – general amnesty, a rehabilitation grant and offers of jobs in the State bureaucracy. The Accord also involved interventions on issues that were behind the MNF mobilization to begin with: Mizoram was made a State in its own right with its complement of legislative and executive authorities. A plan for substantial development investment was charted out to improve Mizoram's poor physical infrastructure and to develop its economy. In sum, in a remarkably radical solution to the problem, a rebel organization that had been violently challenging the authority of the state was co-opted into the state structure. Strong organizational capacity of the MNF has helped make the Mizo peace accord one of the most successful in the country. In an environment where violence is the norm, order and stability have endured in Mizoram for the past twenty years.

Cooptation of different forces by the state has itself led to better state-society compact, making the state police and law enforcement agencies responsive to the community. This has contributed to enhancing the state's capability in the security sphere. Police - public relations in Mizoram have generally been good. The police have been sensitive to people's concerns, a point conformed by NGOs and human rights activists.

“We recently wanted to file a police case against the rising incidence of immoral trafficking in the town, and wanted the state government to some take action on the count. The police and their authorities were cooperative and facilitated the whole process.”<sup>354</sup>

This community-focus of the state police is not a new phenomenon in Mizoram. State law enforcement agencies maintained their good image even in times of heightened violence. The following quote from a local daily during the height of the MNF insurgency proves the high regard in which the state police was held by civil society.

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<sup>354</sup> Interview: Angela Varte, Human Rights & Law Network of India, Mizoram. Aizawl: 26 June 2004.

“Mizoram police has earned high marks by securing public praise for performing good job in and outside the normal police routine..... The organisation has earned itself a high degree of public confidence. ...Its joining hands with public bodies in social service ...will go a long way in building relations.”<sup>355</sup>

## 7.6 Conclusion

Mizoram embodies all characteristics of state ‘fragility’. It has experienced extended ‘crisis’, in the form of a long and violent separatist movement and continues to be susceptible to economic and political shocks common to the Northeast region.<sup>356</sup> And yet the state has recovered from crisis and has managed to avoid collapse and large-scale violence. Clearly challenges to state authority have not been uncontrollable. In other words, the state has been able to respond effectively to contestations directed at it. The question that we have been trying to answer is: what accounts for this? The answer could lie in looking at (a) the nature of the challenges to the state system and (b) at the state and the institutions it embodies. Either the contestation is never serious enough to challenge the authority of the state in Mizoram or the institutional arrangements themselves are resilient enough to withstand internal and external shocks, so that contestations can be dealt with within their boundary. In the preceding pages I have tried to demonstrate that the Mizoram story is one of both - the absence of rival challenges to state authority and of the institutional arrangements in place - working together to avoid collapse.<sup>357</sup> What does it tell us about the character and the capability of the state in Mizoram?

The nature of the challenge to state authority in Mizoram comes from two sources. The first from the State’s peripheries, made up mostly of non-Mizo communities, is weak, disorganised and never so serious as to pose a real threat to reigning institutions in the state. The second challenge comes from non-state actors including Mizoram’s principal social organisations such as the churches and youth organisations out to enhance their role and legitimacy in society. But rather than vying to provide alternative means of legitimacy and state authority, the principal non-state actors - because they belong to the same social groups

<sup>355</sup> *Highlander*, Aizawl: 9 September 1983

<sup>356</sup> I use these terms in line with their definitions provided by the Crisis States programme work on War, State collapse and Reconstruction. Refer Crisis States Research Centre (2006).

<sup>357</sup> This is not to say that the two factors work independent of each other. They could and most of the times do have a mutually constitutive role.

and because of the extensive linkages they have historically maintained with state actors enabling their cooptation in the state structure - act in ways that either do not come in the way of the state's legitimacy or they end up enhancing the authority and control of reigning institutions. There is thus little conflict of interest between state and non-state actors in Mizoram, something so pronounced in the case of Manipur. As we have seen, the basis of this compact is the unique pattern of state formation, and the construction of an inclusive Mizo identity that has helped bind the different sections of the Mizo society together.

Mizo 'social engineering' has undoubtedly sheltered the state against contestations. Alongside it has also helped provide state agencies with institutional capabilities to perform their basic security and developmental functions. Institutional arrangements in place in Mizoram are also such that they enable the state to manage shocks and resolve conflicts. Implementation of land reforms and providing for local control over land in ADC areas means that there is little evidence of extreme inequality in the access to property rights. Different sections of people also have reasonable access to social services such as health and education and no group has been totally excluded from the coalition in power in the state. Even if the Mizo coalition enjoys overwhelming control, non-Mizos and religious and ethnic minorities have the basic minimum access to power and resources, either on their terms in their territorial pockets or as junior partners of the Mizo coalition in the capital.

While some of this has been the outcome of external influences (setting up of ADCs for individual communities or the MNF Peace Accord of 1986) most contributions to making the Mizo state 'resilient' have come from within. It is primarily political actors - individuals and organisations - that have made the most difference. Inclusive Mizo identity; land reforms; political coalitions and alliances between dominant state parties and minority political actors; peace agreements with rebel organisations, have all been facilitated by political parties - MU, MNF, PC and the Congress Party. It is this that makes the Mizo 'success' story likely to endure.

However the real test of the resilience of the Mizo state will lie in the response of reigning institutions to rising economic and political challenges. Will the state be able to create arrangements that not only tolerate minorities and enable formation of elite alliances, but

actually engender a democratic space where all sections of the populace find an equal space within Mizo citizenship? That will determine whether the Mizo story continues to remain a 'success story' that it is clearly, today.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Conclusion**

#### **8.1 Introduction**

I began this volume by arguing that the puzzle of the variance in political order and violence levels between Manipur and Mizoram can be best explained by looking at the divergence in the capability of the state in the two settings to provide political goods and monopolise authority in society. It is evident that in Manipur agencies of the state have poor capability to perform their security and development functions and to manage inter-group contestations. In Mizoram, on the other hand, state agencies have demonstrated better institutional capability to perform their key functions and to keep contestations within manageable limits. I also argued that to explain why and how agencies of the state in the two cases differ in their abilities, one would need to delve into the history of the two States to study their divergent experiences with state formation in colonial and post colonial times, so as to understand the contrasting ways in which state elites, by building institutions and constructing and mobilizing collective identities, were able to acquire legitimacy and capture power. In Manipur, state making remained an incomplete exercise resulting in the weak and contested authority of state actors and fragmentation of its society. In Mizoram, state elites had better success with consolidating their authority and with constructing a cohesive society. In the following section, I lay out this causal mechanism in some detail to try to summarise the findings of my research. I follow it up by comparing my account of the variance in conflict and political order to that provided in the literature on Northeast India and the conflict literature generally. I conclude by opening out into a discussion of the theoretical implications of my research to draw out their policy and practical implications for designing appropriate intervention strategies for Northeast India and other cases of breakdown.

#### **8.2 States and political order in Northeastern India**

The centrality of the state is severely limited in Manipur. State agencies face challenges from rival forces across the range of functions – legal, administrative, political and security.

Rival forces, representing both class and narrow ethnic interests, have managed to retain and in some cases consolidate their social control to the detriment of state agencies. Part of the problem for the state in Manipur may be with the limited *scope* of its functions.<sup>358</sup> Throughout much of the Hill districts, the state's law and enforcement presence (the police and court houses and the like) is negligible. The Hills are also excluded from much of the formal laws of the state intended to regulate economic activities and social interactions. Most of these security and legal functions have, for long, been contracted out to tribal chiefs and village authorities. But traditional authorities hardly represent or identify with state agencies, even though the state has often sought their help to extend its reach in society. Elsewhere, the state has left huge gaps – such as the predominantly informal, and therefore unregulated and untaxed, economy of the State, especially in the Hills – that have been filled by non-state actors. The problem is that, to a great extent, these functions that state agencies in Manipur have failed to carry out, represent the sovereign functions of the state.

The weaknesses of the state are exacerbated by the poor *strength* of its institutions.<sup>359</sup> Capacities of agencies of the state that do indeed provide security, development and administrative functions, are poor. The ability of state agencies to enforce laws, administer efficiently and maintain transparency and accountability is also poor. Poor scope and strength together mean that the agencies of the state have constantly to contest non-state actors that seek to provide alternative means of security and development. The inability of state agencies either to prevent non-state actors from providing these functions or to co-opt them, means that the legitimacy of the state is limited. On the contrary, non-state groups have managed to acquire social control. These groups are organized not along broad Statewide bases but along narrow ethnic lines. An outcome of the exclusionary organization of non-state actors has been that group contestations often become fraught. The poor institutional capacity and poor centrality of agencies of the state to provide the basis for political negotiations and compromise mean that group conflicts frequently spiral into violence and breakdown.

In Mizoram on the other hand, the state has maintained its centrality in the lives of people. This is despite the usual challenges to the state system in Northeast India, particularly

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<sup>358</sup> 'Scope', understood as size and the range of the state's functions (Fukuyama, 2004:7).

<sup>359</sup> 'Strength', defined as "the ability of states to plan and execute policies and to enforce laws cleanly and transparently" (Fukuyama, 2004:7).

among its tribal communities – a hilly terrain that prevents domination of the security sector and special concessions for tribal communities that may work to erode the ‘sovereignty’ of the rule system of the state. Firstly, the state has performed a greater range of functions there. Security, enforcement and control of laws regulating economic and social interactions rest with the state and its agencies. Enhanced scope of the functions of state agencies comes with limitations on the part of non-state actors to implant themselves as rival providers of political goods. These forces that could have posed threats to the state system have either been marginalised or have been co-opted into the state structure. Absence of rival claimants to authority means that the state has been successful in penetrating society and extending its statewide presence. This has enabled the downward reach of the state and a cooperative working of state elites with those in society.

Absence of rival claimants to authority and the cooperative working of elites has had positive spin offs for the strength of the state. State leaders are less hemmed in by (rival) social organizations and groups and therefore enjoy more autonomy of action. Working, often in league with social organizations, state agencies have been able to enforce laws, maintain order, uphold transparency and accountability in administration and provide tolerable levels of services. In effect, state agencies are able to influence and determine social and economic interactions. These, in turn, enhance state power and its capability to provide services and political order. Further, the social organizations that state elites ally with are themselves organized on State-wide bases. This has helped mitigate inter group contestations and prevented conflicts from becoming uncontrollable, thus avoiding breakdown.

But we are still left with the crucial question: what determines state capability? Engaging with this question is important if we are to unravel the key issue of variance in capacities of state agencies and the institutional arrangements they embody. As the empirical material from Manipur and Mizoram shows, institutional development (state building in this case) is a function not only of establishing bureaucracies and police agencies and devising the right technical knowledge, but also the product of the particular society’s unique history – the internal contests and accommodations between different social groups over authority and social control. It is this historical context that provides the most interesting insights into why state agencies and leaders in Manipur and Mizoram differ so much in their ability to demand obedience and order social life.



Pre-colonial political institutions in the two cases differed sharply. The Manipur case was one of extreme duality - a centralized state in the Valley and the absence of a state system in the Hills. The two existed side by side, under a variety of arrangements: subordination, mutual assistance and in most cases just coexistence. There was thus little of the sense of a single political entity in Manipur. The Mizoram case resembled the system prevalent in the Hills of Manipur, with chiefs and village heads autonomous of each other. Yet, in pre colonial Mizoram, we do find the seeds of the growth of a State-wide political system. Chiefs - all of the Sailo clan – had established a network of loose alliances, with relations among them ordered in a hierarchical fashion (Reid, 1978:4). The key institutional difference between Mizoram and Manipur however, was the absence in the former of the sharp duality that characterized the polity in the latter.

Colonial policies in the two States represented both continuities and discontinuities with pre-existing arrangements. The duality in Manipur was reinforced with the establishment of separate administrative systems for the Valley and for the Hills. This was to have serious impact on the nature of society and the strength of the state. But it was the manner in which the colonial state administered Manipur, through ‘indirect rule’, that had a more direct and corrosive impact on the authority structure in the State. Colonial administrators did not disturb pre-existing political institutions either in the Valley or in the Hills. In the Hills, for many years, there was little presence of the state. With colonial rule being geared to extraction, administrators had little desire (or the ability) to establish centralised state wide political organisations to penetrate society and transform it. To be able to rule, the state made various accommodations and compromises with local centres of authority – village Chiefs and tribal associations. In the Valley, the British had already established a political alliance with the ruling dynasty, initially as a strategic relationship to check Burmese incursion on the frontiers. These alliances and compromises with past rule makers, strengthened, and in some cases led to the birth of new community-specific organizations.

The case of Mizoram was in sharp contrast. Here the same colonial state, though apparently going along with what had existed before, ended up making drastic changes in the authority of the past rulers. Economic considerations dictated that the state rule through the Chiefs and not directly. But other considerations (mostly the safety of the lucrative tea gardens now proliferating in Assam and Bengal on tracts bordering the Lushai hills) mixed with the activist role of Christian missionaries and individual administrators - John Shakespeare and

Anthony McCall to name just two District Superintendents – to making this rule more direct than it was in the case of Manipur. Shakespeare, taking over the control of the Lushai Hills soon after its incorporation in British India, put in place measures that rewrote the Chiefs-state relationship and made the former the agent and creation of the state, rather than the independent rulers that they had been in the past. During his fourteen years of service in these Hills, Shakespeare expanded the role of the state by going beyond ‘pacification’ or ‘extraction’, to emphasise the state’s role in socio-economic development of the people, demonstrated, among others, by his experiments in wet rice cultivation in the Champhai valley. (Shakespeare:1912; Reid, 1978:51-52). Later, Anthony McCall, at the head of the district from 1932-1942, would argue for further consolidation of the role of the state in moulding Lushai society and character (1949:237-286). And decisively, the impact of Christian missionary work – though outwardly conflictual with state agencies - helped further transform local society and power relations within, undermining the social control of the Chiefs, and creating conditions for the birth of centralized State-wide political organizations controlled by the new class of Commoners. All these measures greatly compromised the role and authority of past rule makers to the advantage of the Commoners, who staked their claim to forming the new state on the eve of Independence. In Mizoram, then, crystallisation of the state involved fewer compromises and accommodations with past rule makers.

The end of colonial rule (and its replacement by a representative democratic system) sparked off intense struggles in both States, between the different social forces for control of state apparatuses. The instruments these leaders employed in these struggles depended on the repertoire of organizations, symbols and coalitions that they had access to. Early state formation and primitive capital accumulation in the Manipur Valley had led to an integrated Meitei society structured broadly along class lines between the ruling class and the ruled. In the Hills, with little signs of state formation, society was still largely localised and undifferentiated. Early stages of state formation in Mizoram meant that though society was largely localized, some degree of social integration, along with differentiation on class lines, between the Chiefs and the Commoners was beginning to take shape.

In Manipur Valley the struggle between the rulers and the ruled led to the former investing in community specific organizations to protect their power and position in the post colonial democratic dispensation. On the other hand, the new class of the educated, sought to create

State-wide organizations to mobilize broad based support and acquire a share of state power and authority. The victory of the old elite, strengthened narrow identity mobilisation and sealed the fate for the development of mass based and inclusionary political organization that could have had a State-wide appeal. This would have serious implications not only in the Valley but also in the Hills – where centralizing tendencies had remained absent all through the colonial period. The power enjoyed by local authorities and community specific organizations meant that Central leaders, then ruling Manipur directly, established alliances and working arrangements with local strongmen, further compromising moves towards consolidation of the authority of the state. Weak centralizing tendencies and the absence of political institutionalisation fuelled heightened political mobilization, leading to fragmentation and political instability. A fallout has been the poor legitimacy of the political process in Manipur.

In Mizoram, colonial rule and the working of Christian missionaries had led to the rise of the Commoners and the diminution of the authority of the Chiefs. The need to change the rules of the game and to acquire the authority to make those rules motivated leaders among the Commoners to establish and invest in central political organizations and build coalitions and alliances to create broad-based support. The Chiefs on the other hand, were skeptical of inclusive organisations. To safeguard their interests, they invested their resources in organisations that were aligned to specific interests, and thus had narrow appeals and agendas. Establishment of representative democracy created opportunities for the new state-making leaders - the Commoners. The strategic advantage they enjoyed in the new dispensation, on account of their numerical strength, meant that state making by this class entailed greater resort to broad-based coalitions and fewer compromises with traditional centres of authority. The outcome was a state structure that enjoyed significant purposive power to make policies and implement them. The MU led Mizo District Council was, as a result, able to make some far-reaching programmatic reforms that changed the political landscape of the district and further compromised the authority of the Chiefs. But purposive power is not the same as regime stability. The complete exclusion in pre-MNF Mizoram, of a powerful section of the population – the erstwhile Chiefs - from the power structure, perhaps amounted to a precarious social base for state power. Economic and political crises of the late 1950s phase of Mizo history worked with this institutional weakness to precipitate a breakdown resulting in the revolt by the pro-Chiefs MNF. The twenty years of internal war and the large-scale dislocation on account of Village Grouping significantly

changed the character of Mizo society, reinforcing inclusionary trends set in motion earlier by the MU. An integrated society perhaps helped create in Mizoram the demand for peace and contributes to the continuing stability of its politics. The state's key political organizations - the MU, PC and the post-Accord MNF - have all played crucial roles in providing this stability, by organising politics inclusively on a State-wide basis.

But, establishing state wide central political organisations and extending the rule system of the state throughout its territory, can lead state leaders only so far. To be able to acquire effective social control, leaders must legitimize their authority (i.e. make their rule appear legitimate in the eyes of people), so that people's self identity is tied to the identity of the state. This has called for creation of collective identities and for creating grand narratives, usually attained through political mobilization. Both Manipur and Mizoram provide ample evidence of this strategic urge of state-making leaders to deploy symbolic instruments to create their version of societies and bind the society, thus created, to the state. The creation of a 'legitimising core' in society has helped state leaders with the extra social control they need to command obedience. But what matters for stability and order and indeed the power of the state ultimately, is the manner in which that society is imagined and what institutional arrangements there are to negotiate intra – society contestations. Do the rules and norms of engagement in society encourage inclusivity or do they exclude groups, thus providing conditions for crises and breakdown, down the line? And what is the basis of construction of the society – civic or ethnic? These are important considerations when grappling with the issue of state power, capability and stability.

In Manipur, the dominant landed class invested in localised political organizations to safeguard their economic and political interests. In the context of the many localised identities in the State, attempts by the Meitei elite to create a society based on the identity of a single, albeit dominant group, meant the exclusion of the minority communities and resulted in their alienation. This severely reduced the state's legitimacy. It also engendered counter mobilization by Hill-based groups that channelised their resources through a number of tribe-specific political organizations. Ethnic contests over power, resources and symbols further drilled in identity attachments and reinforced the hold of community specific organization. This had severe consequences for Manipur's already fractured social structure.

Religious differences between the Meteis and the tribal communities may have facilitated some of this division – although absence of religious difference has not prevented similar schism developing among the state’s tribal communities themselves. There were extraneous factors as well that may have contributed to this trend, a prime candidate being the external constraints on the construction and mobilization of a pan-Manipuri identity. These came mostly in the form of the fluid territorial borders of the state and the shifting manner of official categorization of its population. The mutability of the State’s borders and the possibility that non-Metei groups could join with their kinsfolk in neighbouring Nagaland or Mizoram (a possibility ever since political awakening came to the Hill people) and the open-ended manner of categorization of the state’s tribal population, has meant that communities in the state have greater incentive to mobilize for separate categorization than to accommodate differences and move in the direction of some sort of a stable multiethnic society. The crucial point here is the control that an external agency - the Central state – enjoys in determining state boundaries and official categories, preventing an internal evolution of arrangements promoting conflict resolution and compromise. This has had adverse consequences for the stability of state and society.

Of course, some of the impetus and the opening for the external shaping of internal politics, especially in respect of inter group relations, is the outcome of the failure of local politics to provide equal access to power and resources for all groups. It could be argued that opportunities arise for Central leaders to intervene in the internal contestations in Manipur – with their attendant problems of separatist tendencies – due in part to the failure of the State’s political leaders to provide solutions to their internal problems. We see many more of these Central interventions in the case of Manipur than in Mizoram. Why is this so? And why, despite Central leaders’ power of acting as the external arbiter of the territorial integrity of States all over the country, is it only some provinces – Manipur being prominent today – that have attracted most attention? Undoubtedly, part of the demand for the change in the State’s boundary has come from within Manipur, from its minority communities. Rising socio-economic challenges and the accelerated inter-group contests over the scarce resources have splintered Manipur’s society and have further weakened the capacity of state agencies to withstand crises and resolve conflicts.

In post Independence Mizoram, the new class of Commoners invested in a centralized political organization, the MU, that itself became the tool of identity mobilization and

society formation that was State-wide. The success of the Mizo mobilization was as much an outcome of pre-existing affinities between the different ethnic groups as it was the urge among the Commoner leadership, for the construction of a pan - Mizo society. These dynamics had positive outcomes for the integrated Mizo state that was born. The MNF movement sought to, and in some measure succeeded in reinforcing the inclusivity of the Mizo society – but this time by excluding those it considered outside of the Mizo construct. External factors proved crucial to the MNF, as to others seeking to take that role, in this task of excluding some sections to be able to create a homogenous Mizo society. In a comparative sense, the permanence of borders and boundaries in Mizoram has helped with the task of forming a cohesive Mizo society. With little choice or possibility of further official recognition, contesting groups have usually had to negotiate and look for accommodations, rather than engage in brinkmanship and seek separate recognition through separatist mobilization. And contrary to the Manipur case, the boundary issue in Mizoram has worked to the advantage of the Mizo state- building project. The dual process of excluding non-Mizos and mobilizing for the creation of Greater Mizoram (incorporating territory from Manipur as well as Tripura, Assam and Myanmar) has helped Mizo leaders divert public attention from the socio-economic challenges facing Mizo society and the rising cases of intra-Mizo conflicts over them.

But it is important to see why there isn't the strong movement for cutting up Mizoram, that we seen in Manipur, despite the persistence of separatist tendencies among some communities in the former State – the Maras and Pawis being prominent here. State leaders and agencies in Mizoram have evidently been able to devise power sharing solutions and forge coalitions with groups and communities that feel marginalized. This has kept contestations and separatist demands contained and has also empowered Mizo leaders to thwart attempts, when they have been made, by Central leaders and others from outside Mizoram to intervene in local politics. Political leaders in Manipur may have failed to keep their house in order and have frequently provided the Centre with a lever to intervene in local politics. It must be emphasized however, that while politicizing an inclusive Mizo identity and constructing a cohesive society may have helped Mizo leaders to plug into society and enhance their social control, the future viability of this project – in the face of rising socio-economic challenges - will depend in part on the endurance of the hitherto inclusive institutions in Mizoram as well as on the ability of state leaders to create opportunities equally for all.

### 8.3 Comparison with alternative explanations

This account of political order and breakdown in Northeast India goes beyond the usual treatment of politics in the region as 'identity wars', and provides a more plausible explanation for the variance in conflicts. Arguments based on primordial understanding of identities that see the violence being an outcome of basic differences may be simplistic and ill informed. There are, evidently, systemic reasons for why the violence in some cases has continued to rage while in others, it has largely been contained, despite other similarities and differences. The spiral of violence in Manipur, then, is not so much about inherent differences between its social groups as about the absence there of an effective (institutional and cultural) medium to regulate relationships and moderate contestations. Likewise, the absence of violence in Mizoram is not the result of the absence of the identity politics there or the absence of ethnic differences, but mainly because society in that province has arrangements in place to mitigate inter group contestations and promote accommodation. Seen this way, violence becomes a dimension of state failure, i.e., of the poor capability of the state to manage contestations and provide order on the basis of some sort of a social contract between the rulers and the ruled.

By systematically studying the variance in violence within the region - between Manipur and Mizoram in this case – the study also demonstrates that the greed - grievance debate that most accounts of 'new wars' (or of armed nationalist movements) find themselves locked in, is inherently an incomplete framework. As is clear, grievances abound in Mizoram as they do in Manipur. Fear of the 'mainland' domination of the Mizos, experience of past neglect, the ravages of the counter insurgency war and their associated costs and the dislocation caused by forcible relocation of habitations, have all contributed to creating an extensive repertoire of grievance among the Mizos. There are grievances also within Mizoram, with some groups feeling left out of the opportunities. But these, ostensibly strong emotions, have not prevented Mizo society from pulling out of crisis and maintaining a semblance of peace.

This is of course, not to deny the role of grievance in conflicts. It plays an important role, but maybe not in the manner that most accounts portray. Grievance, especially on account of 'horizontal inequalities', may provide nationalist rebellions and breakdowns greater force and urgency. But whether the particular society will go down the path of rebellion / violence depends on something more than grievance. Grievance in itself may not be sufficient to

cause rebellion. As material from Mizoram demonstrates, deep-seated grievance could also be the wellspring for the resolve on the part of society to demand and work for peace within. Political and social organisations in that province leveraged the emotion of grievance against 'outsider' domination to reinforce a cohesive Mizo society that was, in conjunction with other factors, able to create the conditions for restoration of peace and well-being. In Mizoram today, grievance (against the mainland Indian identity and the Central state) co-exists with peace and order. The study thus, provides further proof that while grievance is an important ingredient of conflicts and violence, the relationship between the two is more complex.

The North East story also provides the counter-factual to claims by the greed thesis, that some societies have repeated conflicts because war is profitable for some groups in those societies (Collier et al, 2001) or that it provides a range of functions for the marginalized – such as security, excitement and escape from humiliation (Keen, 1998). The conditions presumed to make societies vulnerable to protracted conflicts exist in good measure in Mizoram, as they do in Manipur: presence of primary commodity exports, a large proportion of young men and scarcity of opportunities for the youth (the last, a substitute for poor education levels). There is also the heightened grievance narrative and political mobilization along ethnic lines that create opportunities favourable to rebellion and outbreak of violence. Yet these incentives did not prevent the MNF leadership from agreeing to a negotiated political settlement, resulting in a definite end to decades of violence in Mizoram. The Mizo Peace Accord remains to this day, a singular example of successful peace making anywhere in India.

It could be argued that the Mizo exception is the result of the ability of the powerful in that State to corner economic opportunities during peacetime, and that they need not resort to war for profit. The nature of the MNF peace agreement with the Central government – with the MNF leadership as well as its cadres allowed to share in and eventually take over the reins of power – could provide support for this assumption. But the relevant question here is: what has prevented other rebel movements from going down the MNF path? Here material from Manipur gives credence to the argument that, rather than rational agendas of rebel



actors, it is issues of a fragmented and divided society and the weak state-society bond that have acted most forcefully as key hindrances to speedy resolution of conflicts.

This is not to deny the importance of the greed motive in civil conflicts, including to the separatist conflicts in Northeastern India. An important aspect of the breakdown and collapse in the North East is about predation and resource extraction by various rebel groups (as well as by state and other non state actors). This is evident especially in the case of Manipur, with its multiplicity of armed rebel organisations, all espousing nationalist causes, each extracting hefty revenues from civilians, businesses and government departments. Still, although profit making is common to conflicts, seeing it as the objective of conflicts may be a case of confusing symptoms with causes. It is more common for rebels to undertake predation to finance their wars. Civil wars also often mutate into resource wars - as they have clearly in the case of Manipur - thus losing their original focus. Yet the fact that greed did not prevent MNF from negotiating a peace deal and closing the conflict, brings into focus the role of a third factor (beyond greed and grievance) in moderating civil conflicts - that of the institutional arrangements in society, especially the role of the state and its relationship to society. A close reading of the political economy of Manipur also demonstrates how the sustenance of its 'criminal economy' is the result of both the profit seeking activities of its many armed groups, as well as the poor ability and legitimacy of state actors to monopolise the rule making and rule enforcing arena, thus providing opportunities for rebel actors to play the roles they do. The comparison of the political economy of Manipur and Mizoram, then, highlights the lack, common to the greed accounts of conflicts, of an institutional component and the absence of any conception of the state as an agency that that could either trigger or help to mitigate violence. In doing so, it provides a more complete story of intra-state violence in the region.

My explanation for the divergence in violence and order between Manipur and Mizoram draws plentifully from recent institutionalist analyses of state fragility and collapse (Putzel, 2005) that echo the state-in-society approach to understanding politics in the third world. (Migdal, 1988...) The former account is premised on the assumption that it is institutional arrangements in society – embodied in the concept of the State – that regulate and govern political, social and economic interactions, providing the basis for social order and cohesion. Breakdown and disorder therefore, represent a pathological working of those institutions or

a pathology in the institutions themselves. Such States are the 'fragile states', where institutional arrangements embody situations of crisis and breakdown. There is a predominance in these systems of fragmented, rather than State-wide political organisation. Certain social groups in them may lack access to education and health services and to property rights. Fragile states are common to developing societies. They are often states-in-the-making, where a sort of 'institutional multiplicity' exists, with institutional arrangements of the state vying with non-state actors to make rules for society and perform governance functions. It is the capacity of state agencies to ably provide key security and development functions vis a vis the ability of non-state actors to do so (in other words, a contest over 'social control') that, according to this reading, determines whether state agencies are able to weather crises, or if contestations become too serious for formal institutions to contain, leading in extreme cases to collapse and violence

Comparison of the political economy of Manipur and Mizoram, using the institutional prism, demonstrates that both institutional arrangements and capabilities of the state in Manipur are poor and hence prone to internal and external shocks (group contestations and economic crises for example). In Mizoram, institutional arrangements as well as state capabilities are such that they can withstand shocks and manage contestations. Using the language of institutional analysis, while both Manipur and Mizoram may be *fragile states*, formal institutions in the former often assume the character of a *crisis state*: political institutions are fragmented and there is little sense of State-wide inclusive political organization; economic institutions, in the Hills as well as in the Valley, hinder growth and equitable distribution of resources and exclude many from access to property rights; and access to public education and health services are limited for a large part of the population, especially in the Hills. The weaknesses of the institutional arrangements of the state create opportunities for rival institutional systems to challenge the working of state agencies. Non-state actors challenge the state in providing security and rule system, public services and raising resources through taxation. Weaknesses of the state and the serious contestations it faces, means that state agencies are mostly unable to manage conflicts and withstand shocks. Collapse is only a short distance away. In Mizoram on the other hand, the institutional arrangements are better placed to manage crises. Politics is organised inclusively with a proclivity to State-wide organization and appeals. Institutional reforms of property rights, effective decentralization of power and inclusive identity mobilization have worked together

to provide better access for all sections of Mizoram's population to assets and public services. At the same time, state agencies face little challenge from rival non-state forces over exercise of their key functions and over authority. Hence, despite the fragility of the state in Mizoram, especially in economic terms (special laws for the State hamper capital accumulation and economic growth while they constrain the ability of state agencies to raise revenue), it is the resilience of formal institutions that has allowed them to withstand internal and external shocks and has prevented breakdown.

This institutional understanding of the crisis in the Northeastern India allows us to factor in both the greed and grievance narratives, but within an institutional terrain. Poor access of groups to political power or resources – a key driver of grievance – is an outcome of the poor institutional arrangements in place. And it is the incentives provided by the institutional arrangements, in terms of poor rules and regulations concerning conduct in public life; informal norms and practices that see rent-seeking as permissible means of capital accumulation and the opportunities provided by the large infusion of development resources and the largely informal nature of the economy that have led nationalistic movements to mutate into wars of extraction. Crucially, by making us look beyond the macro themes of greed, grievance and nationalism to the specific institutional arrangements in place, institutional analysis has helped us understand why despite the existence in both the states of greed-motivating and grievance-inducing factors, political outcome in the two cases have been so divergent. While macro structures are important for conflicts and breakdown in the region, the crucial thing that institutional analysis has allowed us to do is to focus on how macro structures of nationalism and grievance are magnified or mitigated by specific institutions to determine the political outcomes.

But rather than assuming the goal of political actors a priori, as interest maximisation - as rational choice institutionalists would do - by resorting to historical institutionalism, we have been mindful of the fact that the observed behaviour as well as goals and preferences of political actors are contingent and shaped by the specific institutional terrain. It is clear from the account of Manipur that not all actors have taken to arms for profit maximization. Many were forced into it by circumstances – it was the only economic opportunity or the means of social recognition available. Some went down the path of rebellion to avenge perceptions of misdeeds by rival forces or because they were fired by nationalist zeal. And

despite the equal opportunity for profit making under the smokescreen of rebellion, there is today little resort to armed violence in Mizoram.

This brings us to what, for historical institutionalists, is the crucial aspect about political outcomes – the context and the place of history in providing that context and which also accounts for much of the variance in goals and strategies and ultimately in political outcomes between the cases. Crucially, by focusing on the institutional arrangements that provide the context in the specific cases, historical institutionalism has been able to provide a useful tool to understand policy continuities over time within cases and policy variations across cases. The present accounts of Manipur and Mizoram, besides seeming to being so divergent from each other, often appear circular and deterministic in themselves – a fractured polity in Manipur leading to conflictual mobilisation and divisions leading to further fracture; and consolidation of the state in Mizoram contributing to cohesion and to further strengthening of the state enabling it to avoid breakdown. But this ‘path determinism’ only highlights the centrality of the historical and institutional contexts – that do not change easily - to shaping goals and strategies of political actors.

Yet, material from Manipur and Mizoram provides evidence not only of continuities but also discontinuities in political outcomes within cases. Rather than the inclusive State-wide manner of organisation typical of the Mizo state making process, there are signs, increasingly now, of the exclusion of sections not identified as Mizos. What could explain this changed political behaviour? It could be argued that Independence and the advent of democracy created the external stimulus for the setting in of Mizoram’s dominant institutional arrangement and led to inclusive organization. The MNF rebellion and the ravages of the counter insurgency war created a crisis leading to breakdown triggering institutional change. This set in Mizo nationalist mobilisation, contributing to the present trend of exclusion of non-Mizos. Yet the Mizo story even today has place for inclusive politics – the many peace deals and political coalitions with non-Mizo groups that have existed alongside sharpening of Mizo mobilization. It may be that the dislocation during the MNF rebellion and rising socio-economic challenges led to newer struggles within Mizo groups over power and resources, but also over how Mizo identity itself shall be imagined. These may be impacting on how actors redefine their objectives and how they behave. Rather than a clear shift from inclusivity to exclusion, there is evidence of a more nuanced pattern of evolution of goals and strategies of actors – exclude some to include others - to

acquire power and legitimacy. Factoring in complexity in the understanding of institutional formation and dynamism in this case, also brings to the fore the role of internal struggles and conflicts in determining how external stimuli and the broad political context shape political struggles as well as how they frame institutional arrangements. The same could be said about the trajectory of politics in Manipur.

Casting institutional analysis in an historical terrain, then, to look at how institutions are formed, how they evolve and change over time within and across cases, has helped explain the variance in political goals and behaviour as well as in the overall political outcome of order and disorder across Manipur and Mizoram. Along the way we have also been able to appreciate the continuities and discontinuities in political behaviour and outcomes within the two States themselves. The detailed narrative of the linkages between state and society in Manipur and Mizoram that it calls for, based on a close reading of the history of the two, and on a reading of the interaction between external stimuli and internal contexts to determine political outcomes, has perhaps helped us better understand the real world complexity of politics in Northeastern India.

#### **8.4 States and their capabilities**

Comparison of state-society relations in Manipur and Mizoram is relevant to the larger discussion of state making and its impact on state capability and political order. It is evident that driving the divergent capabilities of the state and the difference in the social structure in Manipur and Mizoram has been their respective experiences with state making. It may be instructive at this stage, to look at the different patterns of this historical process. Central to the divergent experiences of the two States with state making was the role and the practice of the colonial state in the two settings. In Northeastern India, as elsewhere, the colonial state was extractive and authoritarian. By the time both Manipur and Mizoram were annexed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, British domestic policies were dictating that the colonies be run on the cheap and that they be able to justify their incorporation into the colonial system financially. It was primarily this economic consideration (although some have argued that liberal ideals of a limited state may also have had their influence on colonial practices) that was the basis of the preferred colonial practice of 'indirect rule' - relying on pre-existing centres of authority to control territories and extract resources. In terms of state-society relations, this practice meant grafting of state power on a pre-existing society, rather than

that of the former evolving out of the internal contests in the latter. (Kohli, 2004: 405) But the extractive potential of the Hill tracts of the North East was limited. Perhaps this was the reason why these territories had attracted little attention from colonial administrators to begin with. When they did, it was more to act as buffers against powers hostile to colonial interests, such as the Burmese. Sometimes the objective was to pacify and settle the 'wild tracts' to prevent those controlling them acting as threats to colonial interests in the adjoining plain districts.

The British defeat of the Burmese in 1826 and the signing of the Treaty of Yandaboo, had consequences for Manipur – a kingdom that had historically acted as both a bridge to and a balance of power against the powerful Burmese. Manipur's geographical isolation and the limited potential for economic extraction it presented, meant that there was a weak case for the State to be annexed and incorporated into the Colony. Yet the British needed to maintain a presence and control over this powerful kingdom on the frontiers of colonial India. E.W. Dun put the colonial objectives in Manipur in perspective, when he remarked, "their country is to be regarded principally as an advanced military position for the defense of the Eastern frontier and its utility must entirely depend upon its natural resources and the efficiency of its military force" (1975: 52). Earlier, a Manipuri levy of 500 soldiers had been raised by the Manipuri king, Gambheer Singh, maintained and paid for by the British. This levy had proved crucial for the defeat of the Burmese in the Anglo-Burmese war of 1824-26. In 1835 a political agency was established in Manipur with the objective of maintaining friendly relations with the Kingdom. But part of the brief of the political agent was also to prevent the frequent skirmishes between Manipur and Burma, both of which were now in the British orbit (Dun, 1975: 50-51). Internal squabbles in the ruling family and threats they posed to colonial interests, led to the formal annexation of the Kingdom of Manipur in 1891. With colonial control restated and potential threats eliminated, the State was, in 1907, once again restored to its pre-1891 status, although by now effective political power had passed on to the British Political Agent.

The Hills surrounding the Valley - that were home to a variety of warring Chiefs - had little extractive or strategic value. Being far removed from the foothills and plains of Assam, tribal Chiefs in the Hills posed little threat to colonial interests, unlike their Lushai or Naga counterparts bordering the plains of Assam and Bengal. Hill Chiefs were, therefore, not much bothered with – colonial agents relied on the Manipuri King to keep them subdued.

This policy was continued in the period following the 1891 annexation. Only now there were occasional shows of force in the form of annual punitive and tax collection expeditions into the Hills by British agents. The rebellion of the Kuki Chiefs in 1917 led to a concerted move by the colonial state for their subjugation. This was followed by some attempts to penetrate the Hills administratively and to engage more directly with society there. But with the Hills of Manipur continuing to be of limited economic or strategic value to the colonial state – except in terms of the threat they may have posed to communication lines from Assam to Manipur – this expansion was only half-hearted. On the whole, British control of Manipur was based on indirect rule, with chiefs and strongmen acting as agents of the colonial state. The state had made various compromises and accommodations, so that Chiefs and rulers remained autonomous and continued to enjoy significant authority in society. As we have seen, this had profound implications for the state's social control in Manipur.

Colonial rule in the Lushai Hills was qualitatively different. British administrators there forged something like a direct rule over the territory, with colonial presence established deep within the Hills from the beginning. This was despite the poor extractive value of the tract and the necessity for colonial administrators to rule on the cheap (Reid, 1978:55). Whatever the consideration, colonial rule in the Lushai Hills led to the weakening of the political hold of the Chiefs. The latter were incorporated in the administrative structure devised for the district, with the District Superintendent, a British civil servant, at the apex of the hierarchy and the Chiefs as subservient agents within. These measures had the effect, among others, of the downward penetration of state power leading, in concert with other factors, to the transformation of Mizo society. In this respect the British colonial practice in the Lushai Hills was a departure from its staple practice of indirect rule. It resembled more the Japanese colonial practice in Korea. (Kohli, 2004: 387) But this begs the question: What accounted for this institutional divergence within the same geographical area?

Most accounts of the colonial state-making process have emphasized the salience of colonial interests to the exclusion of local conditions; therefore the characterisation of the British colonial practice as 'indirect rule'. But as material from Manipur and Mizoram demonstrates, a single colonial power made use of a variety of instruments of control in territories abutting each other. This variance needs to be explained. Catherine Boone has argued in the case of Sub Saharan Africa that, rather than being a straight-forward function of colonial interests, institutional choice was usually a complex dynamic and depended on a

combination of institutional arrangements *in* society: (i) the nature of social structure (and existence of social hierarchy), (ii) dependence of the local elite on the (colonial) Centre for economic appropriation and (iii) the economic interest of the colonial state itself (2003: 33-37). Boone's formulation can be conveniently modified to factor in other strategic interests of the state, as in protecting its economic interests and communication links. The Hills of Manipur, then, with a non-hierarchical social structure and the limited strategic value they posed for the colonial state, were a fit case for 'non incorporation'. This may have changed to 'administrative occupation' after the Kuki rebellion of 1917 and which implied rule from the Center, representing both the lack of interest as well as the inability of the state to forge rural linkages to expand its formal presence in the Hills. There was variation in institutional arrangements in the Valley as well. Pre-1891, the colonial state first rode piggyback and then engaged in 'power sharing' with the Manipur ruler, to prevent the Burmese from threatening colonial interests in the Assam plains. The 1891 rebellion of the ruling princes against colonial control brought home to colonial administrators the fact that they could not rely on this class to uphold their interests in Manipur. As the ruling elite in Manipur were themselves not dependent on the colonial state, British officers were left with little choice but to 'usurp' the Manipuri state and replace existing institutions with colonial ones. By 1907, marginalisation of the rebellious princes and their replacement by sections loyal to British interests, allowed colonial agents to retract and put back in place a 'power sharing' arrangement, this time skewed in their own favour. By now the strategic value of Manipur had also diminished.

In the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Lushai Hills presented perhaps, greater strategic interests for the British. The Sailo chiefs posed major threats for colonial economic interests in territories bordering on the district – the flourishing tea gardens of Cachar and Sylhet. Colonial administrators admitted that the prime motive for the annexation of the Lushai tract, was the need to 'prevent raiding' by the Chiefs. (Reid, 1978: 9). This also called for a forward policy in the Hills, to break up and disintegrate the communities so as to make the Chiefs submit. The Sailo Chiefs also represented a powerful hierarchical class that the state found convenient to establish linkages with in order to rule. What followed after the defeat of the Chiefs in the Chin - Lushai expedition, was a 'power sharing' arrangement, with state authority devolved to the Chiefs and colonial administrators frequently emphasizing to their own colleagues the importance of upholding the authority of the latter to maintain political order. (Reid, 1978: 27) Annexation and incorporation led in the end to the subjugation of the



Chiefs and their being brought into a client – patron relationship with the colonial state. This was unlike the institutional trajectory in Manipur Valley where power sharing led to the sustenance of the authority of the ruling class in society. The comparative lesson here is that power sharing remained a staple policy in Mizoram on account of the interest of both the colonial state and the local elite. This forged a cohesive state authority. In Manipur institutional arrangements were divergent across territory. They were also vacillating over time. This created instability and weakened the social control of the state across its territory.

But modern states are more than the result of institution building and power sharing arrangements between elites. Besides their organizational achievements – the militaries and bureaucracies – states also have a normative dimension to them - a uniting idea, a value, something that can hold them together. Weak states embody both poor state-like organization and poor normative glue to hold the different components of the state together. Post-colonial states that have held together and those that may have fallen apart differed not so much in their formal structures (which in any case were mostly imposed from the outside) but in the presence or the absence of some form of nationalistic movements – the internally driven struggles to create a statewide society, that some have called a society's 'outermost structure'. (Migdal, 2001:126) State making in Manipur and Mizoram was influenced by internal as well as external forces. Yet the outcome has been so clearly different. In Manipur, state making involved mostly the external shaping of geographical boundaries and institutional structures. State boundaries were imposed by the colonial state, there being little pre-colonial basis of a Manipur-wide polity that included both the Valley and the many communities in the Hills. These are being put to further question by a post-colonial Central state. Institutional structures - inter regional and inter group relations - were also determined by external forces - the colonial state and now the Central government as well as actors in the provinces of Nagaland and Mizoram. State making in Manipur, then, involved the bringing together in colonial times of multiple identities that had existed in diverse institutional arrangements with each other without formal boundaries, within an artificially defined state boundary. There was neither any indigenous definition of this geographical boundary nor any pan-Manipur nationalist movement – to construct a society whose boundaries would be coterminous with those of the state - in the post-colonial phase of Manipur's history, to fuse the different sections of society to each other and to the state structures. The absence of the internal basis of an inclusive state in Manipur has severely undermined the state's authority.

Post-colonial political developments stand out here, particularly the working of the Central state and its relationship to local societies. Part C status and the absence of a popularly elected government in post-merger Manipur, meant that political power rested with external agencies that had little connections or legitimacy in local society. In this situation, political leaders representing different social groups had to talk to each other through the Central administrators. This may have helped prevent the birth of some sort of bi-national accommodation and compromised the growth of a pan-Manipur identity. We have seen how the lack of fixity of Manipur's borders and their controls resting with the Central government had led to a greater pull towards ethnic basis of organization, leading to further strains on inter-group relations.

In the case of Mizoram on the other hand, the transformation was accompanied to a significant extent by internal political processes of conflict, consolidation and identity mobilization around a pan-Mizo identity, to create a society that fitted the state and a state that fitted society. Popularly elected ADCs with their wide-ranging powers over local material and symbolic resources meant that state power was firmly localized in the State from early on. This also prevented external influences from acquiring the disruptive influence they could have had. The internal roots of the evolution of state power has encouraged contestations, negotiations and mobilization within the State, crafting a pan-Mizo identity and the largely inclusionary society we find there today. It can be argued therefore that there is the existence of some sort of a historical polity in Mizoram, and a legitimate authority structure.

Manipur represents the state making experience of most developing societies. Because they have been largely externally shaped, post-colonial developing states sit uncomfortably over their 'web-like' societies. Such societies are not integrated or homogenous and have not been structured on any State-wide criteria such as class. Rather the social structure in these situations represents a *mélange* made up of localised groups. A fragmented social structure means the predominance of primary identities and multiplicity of social organizations - clans, tribes, religious and ethnic groups – each autonomous of the other and with their own set of beliefs and rules. These organizations continue to demand obedience from people and prevent state leaders from establishing themselves as the central organization in society to govern details of people's lives. The outcome is 'institutional multiplicity' with "numerous systems of justice operat(ing) simultaneously", limiting the state's social control and its

capability. (Migdal, 1988:39). There is another way in which social structure has a bearing on state capability. A fragmented social structure means that groups are ever in conflict with each other, over power and resources, with the state being the focus of much of this contestation. There is, then, little incentive for localized groups in a fragmented society to demand accountability and efficient services from state agencies. They have little time left from mutual contestations or from petitioning state leaders for greater share of the rents. On the other hand, a cohesive society is better at demanding and receiving accountability (Fukuyama, 2004:30).

Material from Northeast India supports this understanding of institutional variance. Despite comparable formal structures of the state in Manipur and Mizoram, the strength of state and the resultant government performance in the two settings is very different. State agencies in Manipur are characterized as inefficient, ineffective and corrupt. They have little legitimacy. Public organisations are ever in conflict with state agencies, due in part to the absence of adequate 'voice' option for them. Manipur's fragmented social structure has meant that different social groups there vie with each other and with state agencies for greater subsidies for themselves, with little united push for better governance for all. This also explains why, despite the existence of a vibrant public space (although fragmented), and what looks like an extreme case of a neo-patrimonialism in governmental functioning, there is little concerted push for governance reforms in the state. Demand for these changes, since they are made on narrow and community lines, are never so strong that the neo-patrimonial state cannot deal with them, which it does usually by sharing rents.

In Mizoram, the state and its agencies are seen as being better at providing healthcare, education and essential services. There is greater transparency in the working of state agencies and much of the time government departments actively seek the support of public organisations to deliver services, helping with improved governmental performance and better legitimacy of state agencies. A cohesive social structure in Mizoram may be behind this improved institutional performance. Evidently society at large and social organizations representing the united State-wide Mizo identity, are able to exercise 'voice' and put greater demand on state agencies to improve their functioning, act transparently and be accountable to citizens. Intra-Mizo contestations are present, but they are never so self-consuming for the society not to demand improved performance from state agencies. Particularly influential have been demands made by social organizations that played key roles in demanding

restoration of peace and are now at the forefront of moves for free and fair elections, efficient and fair distribution of essential supplies, and effective implementation of anti-poverty programmes.

Clearly Mizoram provides an exception to the web-like character of most developing societies. How has it been possible to achieve a cohesive social structure in Mizoram? What lessons are there for other developing societies such as Manipur? Is there a way out of the vicious cycle for them? The cohesiveness of most developed societies has, in the literature been ascribed to their unique historical experience: war in the case most European states and Japan and war and dislocation in the case of early developers such as Korea (Fukuyama, 2004: 34-35). Disruption caused by war, it is argued, sparked internal political and social conflicts, leading on the one hand to the evolution of a state system and on the other to cohesion in society. In post-colonial societies, the pathway to statehood was determined externally, so that the social systems of the past have largely remained unaltered. There was also little of the sense of internal conflicts and contestations accompanying formation of statewide societies in them. Rather, colonial practices sparked off fragmentation of authority leading, among others, to further fragmentation in society. Mizoram demonstrates that it has been possible for developing societies as well, to evolve homogenous societies.

As we noticed, this was partly on account of the accident of history and partly due to the larger historical forces identified as helping with the unifying process. The impetus for the inclusive Mizo mobilization was the intense contest between the Chiefs and the Commoners over political power. With the rules of the game changed on Independence to majority-rule, there was incentive for the Commoners to mobilize an inclusive Mizo identity to broaden their support base and acquire political prominence over the Chiefs. The dislocation caused by the MNF insurgency and the Village Regrouping exercise and the impact of earlier programmatic reforms, helped create situations for the inclusive Mizo identity to be further reinforced leading to cohesiveness in society. The extent of constructedness of this identity can be easily grasped by the fact that the homogenous Mizo society is a success more in the central parts of the State than in its remoter corners. The fringes of Mizoram were peripheral to inclusive Mizo mobilization. These corners were also subject to centrifugal tendencies such as those in the Northern Hmar areas bordering Hmar majority territories of Manipur and Assam. By contrast, Churachandpur district in southern Manipur, housing pretty much the same clans and sub groups that today make up the Mizos in Mizoram, remains a divided

house with each sub-tribe in intense contest with the other, leading in some cases to violent conflicts – the Kuki-Paite clashes (1997-1999) notably<sup>360</sup>.

It is clear, then, that transforming and creating homogenous societies has been a possibility in situations of late development. Is it possible to apply this insight elsewhere, in Manipur for instance? Much of the success of the Mizo story is about organising politics inclusively - through establishing and investing in political organisation that have a State-wide agenda, appeal and social base. The cohesiveness of Mizo society and the close state-society links that we find there is definitely an exception. This cohesion clearly did not come about on its own. It is the product of deliberate construction - by Sailo Chiefs, by colonial officials, by Christian missionaries and by the new state-making leaders among the Mizos – around the struggles over state making. It is this element of agency in the construction of cohesiveness that provides lessons for other societies, not so blessed.

### **8.5 Conclusion: Enhancing state capability amid crises**

The developmental challenges facing societies in Northeast India, as in the rest of India, are huge. Better policies, better ways of doing things, and better commitment on the part of state actors can only do so much. As Migdal notes in the case of third world societies generally, these efforts are inadequate to break the self reinforcing relationship between their “weak states and strong societies: the effect of society’s fragmented social control in weakening the state and the effect of a weak state’s politics and administration in reinforcing fragmented social control in society”. (1988: 277). The institutional capability of the state in these societies is, then, severely undermined. This is, of course, not to say that change is not possible. So, how can policy performance (for political order and for equitable access to services and growth) be improved in weak states?

For developing societies to be able to enhance their institutional capability, one way out could be by beginning to establish the state as the main source of authority and the chief provider of public goods and services - that is by expanding the scope of the state. Critics of neo-liberal reforms of the state have demonstrated how these reforms, by concentrating on

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<sup>360</sup> Other instances of clashes in the district have been those between the Kukis and the Hmars in the Hmar dominated Tipaimukh area in 1956.

the rolling back of the state - cutting down the scope of its functions - may have missed the point about institutional development and ended up further weakening the capability of states in many developing situations. (Fukuyama, 2004: 4-5). They have emphasised the greater importance to state capability, of the strength of the state - its ability to plan and execute policies cleanly and transparently. In situations of 'institutional multiplicity', where agencies of the state face challenge from non state actors in the discharge of their functions, it may be necessary to go beyond reforms of the state's strength to also expand its scope – make the state the sole provider of security and rule system for society; enable it to provide all sections of society education and health services and economic opportunities equally; bring as much of the economy in the formal sector so as to regulate and tax most economic activity, and the like. This will also entail building strong state agencies such as political parties and bureaucracies - whose members equate their interest with state power – to provide services, mobilise resources and organise public support for state policies. In sum, the centrality of the state in cases of early stages of states-in-the-making, such as Manipur's, needs to be asserted.

The key challenge here is of course, how to balance state power with rights and protection for the most vulnerable sections. Often, enhancing and centralising the power of the state has been associated with attacks on the identities and interests of the marginalised – minorities and the poor. Ultimately, rather than enhance state power, this manner of state building may make the state less legitimate, hence less stable. Part of the answer may lie in enhancing state authority accompanied by strict adherence to democratic political institutions, i.e. formal and informal constraints such as accountability, transparency and the restraint of corruption, embodied in the concept of 'rule of law'. (North, 1991:97). Unless the state is seen to be *legitimate* in the eyes of all those it governs - the majority as well as minority, the powerful and the poor - its strength, and therefore its authority, will ever remain contested.

Enhancing the legitimacy of the state can be achieved best by practising good politics. The political process determines what policies are prioritized; who benefits from those policies; how resources are generated and allocated; and what the terms of engagement are of the state and citizens, i.e., is the state responsive and accountable to most of its citizens? In Northeast India, with its cornucopia of grievances, patronage and ethnic divisions, conflicts,

and a predominance of self-serving leaders, all of which distort the political process, good politics is more the exception than the norm. Efforts have been made, mostly externally, to induce reforms by better aligning principal-agent relationship in the region, in a productive way. These Centrally driven efforts have, using a bundle of incentives and controls, tried to create the conditions for equitable access to resources for all communities; better public participation in the developmental process; better management of the state's key functions at the local level and their better supervision and oversight. But there are limit to how much can be done externally.

Ultimately and to be effective, change must come from within. To be able to build the legitimacy and authority of the state in the Northeast, the policy agenda must be clearly focused on building the capacity of local states and societies to provide governance to all on some sort of a social contract between the rulers and the ruled. For this task to be taken up with any degree of success, it must be based on vigorous attempts at building cohesive state-wide societies in the region. If a central problem of the North East is that societies are not organised in integrated groups that could demand and work for peace and accountable public institutions, then at least as much effort should go into building cohesion in society, as into enhancing the state's legitimate authority and invigorating local economy to create growth. And building integrated societies whose boundaries are coterminous with those of the state addresses the key challenge of getting all citizens to link up their identity with that of the state, thus enhancing legitimacy.

Integration in multi-ethnic societies can be achieved best by creating conditions for inclusive political organisation. Underpinning the exceptional success of the Mizo story was the inclusive manner of organising politics - through establishing and investing in political organisations that had inclusive state-wide agendas, appeals and social bases. It is clear that the resultant cohesion of Mizo society did not come about on its own. Cohesion there, as elsewhere, has been the product of deliberate construction around struggles in society over authority and power. The key determinant here was that of the human agency making deliberate political choices to engender cohesion, in a drive toward social control over all sections of society. These insights from Mizoram provide openings for other societies in Northeast India, fragmented and unable to pull themselves out of crises as they may be, to move towards inclusionary political organisation. Northeast India's unique developmental experience may be the outcome of its historical processes. But the building blocks of those

are political choices. It is here that the lead-in to institutional change lies. This means that Manipur and similar societies need not be locked in vicious cycles of violent contestations and low growth equilibria. The integrative role of political organisations and policies and practices of political leaders, then, could be the key to breaking the path dependence of the North East.



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## Appendix I

### Methodological Note

#### i. Research design:

Studies on violence and disorder in Northeast India suffer from the single case bias – they either take the entire Northeast as their unit of analysis or they limit their study to a single State. There has been, generally, a reluctance to compare violence and state failure systematically within the region, across its different units. This is despite the significant variance in levels of violence and political order within the region.<sup>361</sup> As it turns out, States in the region differ not only in terms of the level of political order but also in terms of the key characteristics and capabilities of the state system and in their relationship to society. Painting the region with a single broad brush, then, hides much of the finer difference between the States that could exist at the meso and micro levels and which may say a lot about the political outcomes of violence and breakdown. And seeking to provide generalisations about politics in the region based on studies of specific cases may not be very helpful, as inferences drawn from them may actually have little travelling capacity beyond the particular State and society in question. As has been observed, such ‘idiographic’ studies also provide little ground for disproving alternative generalizations about the phenomenon being studied (Lijphart, 1971: 691).

I think there are crucial lessons to be learnt about politics and breakdown in Northeastern India by undertaking a comparison of the political history of the region. Comparison has helped me highlight the causal factors that could be determining the divergence in political outcomes between States in the North East, while holding constant other factors that impinge on the region as a whole. It is true that comparison could involve simplification and reduction of the social reality to a set of manageable variables. This also means that the phenomenon must have to be taken out of their specific context. As a result, the inferences so derived, may lose their relevance to the ground reality. As a way out, so as to be able to

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<sup>361</sup> The notable exception to this is Sajal Nag’s accounts of the trajectories of political violence in three States in the North East - Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland. (Nag: 2002). But, rather than attempting a systematic comparison of the three cases using a common set of variables, the volume turns out more as a compilation of discrete single case studies.

provide at least a partial generalisation of the reasons behind the violence and collapse in Northeastern India and still keep the analysis firmly grounded in the specific context of the cases, I have used the method of comparative case study research, conducting a 'controlled comparison' of a predetermined set of variables across the cases.<sup>362</sup> This has, I hope, helped me to strike a balance between the depth and thickness of understanding of purely 'idiographic' studies and the inclusiveness of the 'nomothetic' ones.

**ii. Case selection:**

Much of the strength of the inferences derived from comparative research, however, depends on the choice of cases. (Geddes, 2003:129). The choice of the cases itself depends on the incidence of the phenomenon being studied and the research strategy chosen. The sharp variation in the incidence of violence and disorder in Northeast India means that the strategy best suited for this exercise is the 'method of difference', i.e. selecting cases with variation on the dependent variable. The best choice here is of cases which are most dissimilar on the dependent variable and, taken together, represent the full range of possible outcomes.

For our study of violence and disorder in Northeast India, we must take the State as the unit of analysis, for the simple reason that under India's federal polity, States are the sub-national units of political and economic governance. Also, most local level data on politics and economy in India are available at the level of the State. For a comparative study of violence at the sub-national level, then, the State is the most viable unit of analysis, allowing for comparison of trends concerning public policy and economy as well as issues that lie in the realm of state building and institutional capacity and collective identity formation and mobilisation.

Of the seven States in the region, Assam, Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura show the greatest propensity to violence. Of these Manipur stands out as the case where violence levels have not only been sustained over time but have also showed signs of becoming institutionalised

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<sup>362</sup> For a discussion on the comparative case study research design, see King, Keohane & Verba (1994 : 45). Alexander George has argued that for comparative case studies to be able to provide explanatory or descriptive inferences they must be made more systematic, something that can be achieved by observing discipline in the collection of data. He calls this controlled method of conducting comparison as 'structured, focused comparison' (George, 1979:61-62).

in ways that have made attempts at resolution difficult. Manipur's is perhaps the worst-case-scenario of political disorder in terms of the incidence of violence and conflicts, its spread, complexity and scale; although Assam, Tripura and Nagaland have demonstrated similar characteristics at different points in time in their political history. The other State that stands out in the region is Mizoram. Organised violence has been mostly absent in Mizoram. That State has also successfully managed crises and has avoided collapse. Thus while Mizoram presents the counter-factual to the general situation of violence and breakdown in Northeast India, Manipur with its severe breakdown and spiral of violence, could be said to represent the crisis of the Northeast at its most aggravated.

Being States from the same region of India, the choice of Manipur and Mizoram allows for exercising control, thus helping make appropriate comparison - political, economic and social isolation, late colonisation and common efforts at post-Independence state and nation-building from the national capital. The two also face similar socio-political and economic environments and a national leadership that has used a similar set of policies and instruments to respond to the political and economic dynamics in the two cases. Societies in the two States also show similarity in terms of ethnic fractionalisation, linguistic multiplicity and ongoing attempts - some successful, others not so - with constructing collective identities. Use of these control variables helps us direct our attention to the dissimilarities in institutional arrangements in the two cases, specifically to difference in state capability and in state-society relations, determining the dependent variable - breakdown and collapse or its avoidance.

Could I have chosen the cases in any other way? It could be argued that a comparison of Mizoram and Nagaland, would allow for better control, especially on account of Nagaland's all tribal and all-Christian population and its late experience with state system, characteristics that it shares with Mizoram. However, the two cases hint at, at least a priori, less variance on my principal causal variable - state capability - than do Mizoram and Manipur. Perhaps a comparison with the politics of Nagaland could provide useful insights into another facet of the political economy of Northeast India - identity construction and mobilisation. Whilst both Mizoram and Nagaland are made up of a plurality of groups and communities, all autonomous of each other to begin with, the drive to construct and formalise a Mizo identity has been more successful than has been the attempt to forge a Naga 'nation'. But we will leave that comparison to some future date. A comparison of



Mizoram and Tripura could also be productive. Levels of violence in Tripura have been high and attempts by the political leadership there to respond to tribal demands have been more focused. But the similarities here in the control variables is even less, with the immigrants issue dominating everything else in the politics of Tripura. Ultimately, a 'method of difference' research design implies that it is cases that are the most dissimilar on the dependent variable – incidence of violence and disorder that must be chosen for the study. Manipur, with its widespread violence, the picture of total collapse and of the helplessness of its leaders to do anything about it, is a natural candidate as is Mizoram where violence is largely absent. In sum, the choice of Manipur and Mizoram for the comparison of conflict and breakdown in Northeastern India provides a fine balance of maximising the variance in the operative variables and minimising differences in the control variables. Moreover, given my logistic and time constraints, it would have been difficult for me to compare more than two States, with any degree of adequacy.<sup>363</sup>

The methodological task I then set for myself was to conduct a qualitative comparison of violence and breakdown between Manipur and Mizoram. My principal causal variable for the investigation is state capability and which determines not only the extent of violence but also the state's ability to act as the central entity in society, dominating the provision of security, public services and rule systems for all citizens. My intervening variables, which have a direct bearing on my principal causal variable, are: the historical process of state making in the two States; the nature of social structure; political, economic and social institutions structuring relationships between groups in the two cases; political organisation and the roles and interests of their leaders and the strategies they use to create and mobilise collective identities; and finally the capacity of the agencies of the state vis a vis that of non-state actors, to provide key political goods. Any comparative exploration of political violence and disorder must factor in both internal and external factors. The study therefore encompasses all three levels of analysis: survey of macroeconomic data and review of policies and strategies at the national level and the study of macro structures of conflicts and nationalism, combined with meso-level analyses of institutions and social structures in specific cases, and with context-specific micro-focus on interests and motives of actors as well as of changes and variations in institutional capabilities across space and time.

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<sup>363</sup> This number of cases also satisfies the rule of case choice that says that, one must have at least one more case than the number of hypothesised causes, for reasonable estimates of relationships to be made. (Geddes, 2003:135). My principal causal variable is state capability.

### iii. Data collection:

Data for this study were collected in the course of fieldwork I undertook in Manipur and Mizoram - and briefly in Shillong, Guwahati and New Delhi – between May 2004 and February 2005. In my original research design, I had planned to administer a survey questionnaire to investigate the structure of civil society in the two States, examining associational activity within and across different groups. By exploring the extent, nature, participation, agenda and activity of ‘modern’ as well as ‘ascriptive’ organisations in the two States, I had hoped to explain the variance in the region’s political outcomes. As the first results of my survey confirmed, exploring the structure of civic life meant falling into the trap that most similar voyages had been victims to: ‘endogeneity’, i.e. the fact that the presumed causes of the phenomenon were actually the consequences.<sup>364</sup> As I pushed on with my initial exploration of nature and extent of inter-community engagements in Manipur as against Mizoram, I began to recognise the pitfalls of differentiating between cause and effect, i.e. between associational life that may lead to violence and collapse and violence (among other factors) affecting the nature and extent of associational life itself. Hence the segmented habitation patterns in Manipur could be as much the effect of population polarisation caused by past violence (the Naga / Kuki clashes for instance) as the cause of the poor cross-group engagements in society precluding any associational activity across groups, making those societies vulnerable to further violence and breakdown. And as the Mizo case showed, where ethnic identities are themselves dynamic and nebulous, and where associational life is overwhelmingly based on ethnic lines, there are the additional problems of, first, determining whether the engagement is inter or intra-community in nature, and second, measuring the extent of this supposedly inter-community engagement.

I realised a better manner of engaging with inter-community dynamics leading to my dependent variable would be to engage with the more complex set of dynamics around identity construction and mobilisation, grounded firmly in the analysis of the history of state making and its impact on how groups relate to each other and to the state. This entailed visiting census and anthropological offices to collect historical and current statistics on

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<sup>364</sup> The classic example of this is of course Robert Putnam’s work on associational life in Italy (1993). Similar criticism has been leveled at Ashutosh Varshney’s account of the variance in communal violence in India (2003), though Varshney has tried to demonstrate that violence - his dependent variable – in his case studies followed and did not precede breakdown of associational life – his independent variable.

habitation and settlement patterns of communities and changes therein, and public (and sometimes private) archives to survey records of administrative notes, memos, communications and ethnographic accounts and gazetteers. Subjects I was interested in were the penetration of the colonial state systems in the States, how colonial administrators established the rule systems, what patterns of relationships they maintained with local 'strongmen', and how they managed social relationships.

I accessed government departments to obtain information on their plans, policies, projects and priorities as well as on the impact of their interventions in terms of providing public goods: security, development, economic management and management of inter-community relations. These visits also helped me to understand the working of the different agencies of the state, their relationship to non-state actors and the variety of ways in which they responded to contestations and crises. The agencies I was particularly interested in were the Police and Home departments, Finance and Planning departments, the development departments - Local Administration, Rural Development, Education and Health and that in charge of essential supplies. Together, these departments provide the essential complement of functions of the state. This research involved interacting with a variety of state actors, from chief ministers down to middle and lower rung officials in the bureaucracy, to conduct in-depth interviews and to access budget and plan documents, inquiry reports, programme evaluation studies and orders as well as published documents of government departments. Much of the macro-economic data and those on social well being are available from the websites of national and state level agencies. I have made use of these freely.

Survey of newspaper clippings and reports representing the working of government agencies and 'civil society' organisations and those involving inter-community dynamics, helped me to put government programmes and projects in their context and also perform a confirmatory test on the veracity of claims made by state agencies. Newspapers also provided me with a mine of data on political contestations and mobilising strategies of political actors. My attempt here was to cover important periods in the political history of the two States – such as outbreak of violence, periods of ethnic clashes, progress of peace talks, and to focus on periods when political contestations and mobilisations are generally high - such as during election campaigns. This survey was limited to English-language newspapers published from the State capitals and to regional and national newspapers from Guwahati, Kolkata and New Delhi.

A key aspect of my research was trying to understand the nature of the society and its relationships to the state. This part of my work involved studying organisations in 'civil society' - the many public organisations, particularly tribal authorities, community groups, youth and church-based organisations as well as groups that have taken to arms, to understand their composition and constitution, their activities and most importantly their ability to influence political outcomes, provide services to their constituents and demand obedience. This investigation was informed by in-depth unstructured interviews with senior leaders of key social organisations of the main ethnic groups in the provinces. My explorations also took me to offices of different political parties in the two States - both national and regional - to understand their ideologies, their organisation and their mobilising strategies, and how they link up with state and social actors to channel resources and influence political outcomes. Also fruitful for getting a grip over political contestations and the working of the governments was surveying records of debates in State Assemblies and the national Parliament.

Understanding social reality also meant my exploring how individual citizens relate to their surroundings - especially to agencies of the state - what their hopes and aspirations are; how public perceptions have been forged and what motivates people to act the way they do, in their understanding of the inter-community dimension. This entailed my travel to the districts inhabited by different communities and interacting with a variety of informants - at both elite and subaltern levels. In Manipur I wanted to capture dynamics that undergird both the alienation of peripheral communities as well as inter-community contestations within. While the central Valley region is inhabited overwhelmingly by the Meiteis, the Hills in the north are dominated by the Nagas. Kukis and their related tribes dominate the south, bordering Mizoram. I visited Tamenglong district in the North, home to the Zeliangrong Naga community, and also the district popularly known as the 'most backward' in the State, constantly on the boil due to the 'step motherly treatment' its inhabitants think they receive at the hands of the Meitei-dominated state government. Tamenglong was also the district that experienced large scale violence between Nagas and Kukis during the clashes in 1992-1996 and which triggered extensive internal migration of people, mostly Kukis, to Churachandpur district in the south. To understand intra-community dynamics within the Kuki-Chin group, I visited Churachandpur also to understand why the district, inhabited by the same groups

that inhabit Mizoram and where they have forged such unity, has suffered repeated conflicts and conflagration.

In Mizoram, 'Mizos' inhabit the central regions around Aizawl and Lungleh - its principal towns - while minority communities dominate the fringes – Maras in Saiha, and Pawis in Longlai, both in the south; Chakmas on the borders with Bangladesh in the in the east, Brus on the borders with Tripura in northwest and Hmars in the north. While majority of Hmars and the Pawis are happy being 'Mizo', Maras, Chakmas and Brus have maintained their separate identity. To get a flavour of how non-Mizos look at Mizo mobilisation and how they relate to the state, I thought it essential to study in detail, one example from either category. Mara being a dominant non-Mizo community with heightened sense of separatism, albeit peaceful, was an instructive case to study. On the other hand, the separatist Hmars posed a curious challenge: while the majority counted themselves as Mizo, a section of the Hmars had rebelled against Mizo domination. And yet they had returned to the negotiating table having settled for a peaceful end to the armed movement. The Mara study required interacting with Mara public organizations and political leaders to understand elite interests and their mobilising of popular sentiments. As for the Hmars, besides engaging with Hmar social organizations and politicians, I visited Bilkawthlir and Vairengte villages. The first is the biggest Hmar village in the Sinlung Hills Development Council, a special development area for the Hmars. Most people have retained their Hmar ethnicity and cultural pride. The latter, a mixed habitation town (with Hmar majority) on the borders with Assam, was a useful laboratory to see how different communities related to each other.

All along I have used secondary sources extensively, as sources of information and insights as well as tools to interpret and triangulate data already collected. I have drawn from published works such as ethnographic accounts and historical studies to understand the nature of social structure and the processes and outcomes of elite contests, and for historical interpretations of the processes of state-making and society formation. I have also used online sources of information available on numerous websites.

**iv. Sources of data:**

Archives:

Manipur State Archives, Imphal  
 Mizoram State Archives, Aizawl  
 National Archives, New Delhi  
 British Library, India Office Collection, London

Newspapers:

- i. In Manipur:
  - The Imphal Free Press, Imphal.
  - The Sangai Express, Imphal.
  - Manipur Mail, Imphal.
  - Resistance, Imphal
- ii. In Mizoram:
  - The Highlander, Aizawl
  - Newslink, Aizawl,
- iii. National/Regional:
  - Northeast Tribune, Guwahati,
  - The Telegraph, Kolkata & Guwahati editions
  - Ananda Bazaar Patrika, Calcutta
  - The Times of India, New Delhi,
  - The Hindustan Times, New Delhi
  - The Pioneer, New Delhi
  - The Hindu, Madras
  - Indian Express, New Delhi

Government departments

- i. Interviews with (state government officials):  
 Senior officials of the Home / Police departments, commanders of Army formations deployed in the States; heads of Finance, Planning, Rural Development, Local Administration, Food and Civil Supplies, Health, Education and Personnel departments.

ii. Reports and data from the following state government departments:

State Assembly, Planning, Finance, Economics & Statistics, Local Government, Police, Food and Civil Supplies.

iii. Reports and data from the following national/regional agencies:

Ministry of Home Affairs, New Delhi

Ministry of Finance, New Delhi

Ministry of Development of Northeastern Region, New Delhi

Election Commission of India, New Delhi

Northeast Eastern Council (NEC), Shillong

Guwahati High Court, Guwahati

#### Political parties:

Interviews with senior members of the following parties.

i. In Manipur:

The Congress party, Communist Party of India (CPI), Manipur People's Party (MPP), Federal Party of Manipur (FPM), Naga National Party (NNP)

ii. In Mizoram:

The Congress party, Mizo National Front (MNF), People's Conference (PC), Zoram National Party (ZNP) and Mara Democratic Front (MDF).

Also collected accounts of their agendas, their election manifestos, constitutions and programmes.

#### Social organisations:

Interviewed senior leaders of the following organisations.

i. In Manipur:

All Manipur Students' Union (AMSU), All Manipur United Clubs Organisation (AMUCO) and United Committee Manipur (UCM) among the Meiteis; the All Naga Students' Association, Manipur (ANSAM), Rongmei Council (RC), United Naga Council (UNC), Zeliagrong Union (ZU); besides church-based ones such as Manipur Baptists Council (MBC) and Tangkhul Baptist Church of Imphal (TBCI) among the Nagas and the Kuki

Baptist Church (KBC), Kuki Inpi and Kuki Students Organisation (KSO) among the Kukis. It also involved interaction with ex-cadres of militant groups such as National Socialists Council of Nagalim (NSCN -IM), Kuki National Army (KNA) and United National Liberation Front (UNLF); with human rights organisations such as Human Rights Alert and Naga People's Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR) and with cultural organisations as the *Sahitya Academy* (Academy of Letters).

ii. In Mizoram:

Young Mizo Association (YMA), Mizo Zarlai Pawl (Mizo Students' Union), Presbyterian Synod, the Baptist Church, the Catholic Church, Young Chakma Association (YCA), Young Mara Association (YMA), Hmar Students' Association (HSA), Mizo Academy of Letters, Human Rights and Law Network of India (HRLNI), Peoples' Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), Mizoram Journalists Association (MJA), All Mizoram Bar Association (AMBA), Village Council Presidents' Association (VCPA), ex-cadres of Mizo National Front and the Hmar People's Convention (HPC)

Online sources of data:

Comptroller and Auditor General of India:	<a href="http://www.cag.gov.in">www.cag.gov.in</a>
Election Commission of India:	<a href="http://www.eci.gov.in">www.eci.gov.in</a>
E-pao. News portal from Manipur.	<a href="http://www.e-pao.net">www.e-pao.net</a>
Government of Manipur, Official website:	<a href="http://manipur.nic.in">http://manipur.nic.in</a>
Government of Mizoram, Official website:	<a href="http://mizoram.nic.in">http://mizoram.nic.in</a>
Guwahati High Court	<a href="http://ghconline.gov.in">http://ghconline.gov.in</a>
Institute of Conflict Management, New Delhi.	<a href="http://www.satp.org">www.satp.org</a>
Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi.	<a href="http://www.ipcs.com">www.ipcs.com</a>
Kanglaonline, News portal from Manipur.	<a href="http://www.kanglaonline.com">www.kanglaonline.com</a>
Ministry of Development of Northeastern Region:	<a href="http://mdoner.gov.in">http://mdoner.gov.in</a>
Ministry of Finance, Government of India:	<a href="http://finmin.nic.in">http://finmin.nic.in</a>
Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India:	<a href="http://mha.gov.in">http://mha.gov.in</a>
Ministry of Law, Legal Affairs & Justice, Government of India:	<a href="http://lawmin.nic.in">http://lawmin.nic.in</a>
National Crime Record Bureau, Government of India:	<a href="http://www.ncrb.nic.in">www.ncrb.nic.in</a>
Northeast Tribune, Guwahati, Online edition	<a href="http://www.northeasttribune.com">www.northeasttribune.com</a>
Planning Commission, Government of India:	<a href="http://planningcommission.gov.in">http://planningcommission.gov.in</a>



## Appendix II

### Key political and social organizations in Manipur/Mizoram

#### A. In Manipur

i. **All Manipur United Clubs Organization (AMUCO)**. Set up in 1997 after the ceasefire agreement signed between Government of India and the NSCN (IM) by public organizations to act as a forum to work for preventing the possible division of Manipur. Basically a Valley-based organization, it seeks to uphold territorial integrity of the State. It has also sought to build bridges with Hill-based communities in an effort to win their support.

ii. **Apunba Lup** ('United Committee'): An umbrella organization of some 24 non governmental organisations and human rights groups, mostly from the Valley, set up in 2004 to coordinate public protests against human rights violations by Central security forces and to give voice to the mobilization against the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) 1958.

iii. **Federal Party of Manipur (FPM)** was formed to act as an alternative to national parties like the Congress. It seeks to promote itself as "a regional party with national outlook with deep commitment to federalism and autonomy". The leadership of the party has sought to build Hill-Valley linkages, its founder-President - Gangmumei Kamei, himself being a Naga. In the current 8<sup>th</sup> State Assembly FPM emerged as the second largest party with 13 MLAs, most from the Valley. Recently, a section of the FPM decided to merge with a clutch of regional parties to contest general elections to the State Assembly slated in early 2007. This sparked off contestations within the party and led to the resignation of its founder-President.

iv. **Kuki National Assembly (KNA)** was established in 1946 by a section of the tribal elite to provide leadership to the non-Naga sections of the tribal population in the State. Its

leaders such as Paolen Haokip and T. Kipgen sought to bring the fragmented non-Naga tribes under the Kuki banner to be able to provide unity and socio-economic advancement. But sections of the non-Nagas, refusing to be called Kukis, claimed KNA represented only the Thadou speaking sections of this grouping. Paite and Hmar leaders, with substantial numbers backing them, refused to be led by Thadou-Kuki leaders, who they accused of being dominating and seeking to promote narrow Thadou interests. This has prevented the rise of KNA, although it could win two seats in the 1952 elections.

v. **Khulmi National Union (KNU)** was set up in 1946 by Kuki-Chin leaders who did not see face to face with the Thadou-Kuki leaders. It was led by men like T. Thangkhai, TC Tiansham, T Twalchin and Teba Kilong, belonging to the Paite, Hmar, Kom, Moyon-Monsang and Anal tribes of the Kuki constellation. KNU was intended to act as a political formation of all Kuki-Chin tribes of Manipur. Its chief competition for that constituency was of course the KNA. With its leaders being appointed to high offices in the State, KNU slowly fizzled out.

vi. **Kuki Inpi Manipur (KIM)** was set in 1993 up by Kuki leaders during the Naga Kuki clashes to represent and protect Kuki interests. They particularly aimed to find a solution to the differences between the Nagas and the Kukis, restore lands that Kuki villagers had lost having fled due to attacks by Naga organizations. KIM also provided support to the victims of the clashes. Internal differences have made KIM a weak organisation.

vii. **Kuki National Front (KNF)** is an armed Kuki outfit, formed in 1988 primarily to counter the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM) influence in Kuki-inhabited areas of the State. The larger objective of the KIM is to secure a separate State or Union Territory for the Kuki community and to unify all scattered Kukis in the proposed 'Kukiland' homeland. In 1995, KNF split, with one unit identifying itself as the "Presidential" faction and the other as the "Military Council". KNF (Presidential) remains the most powerful of all the factions and has claimed to be the 'real KNF'. ([www.satp.org](http://www.satp.org))

viii. **Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL)**, meaning "the Organisation to save the revolutionary movement in Manipur" is a Meitei armed group formed in 1994 following

merger of the Oken faction of the United National Liberation Front (UNLF), the Meiraba faction of People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK) and the Ibo Pishak faction of the Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP). In 1996, KYKL split into the KYKL (O) led by Namoijam Oken and KYKL (T) led by Achou Toijamba. However, after five years of inter-group rivalry, the Oken and Toijamba factions reunited in 2002. KYKL has been known for its ruthless measures against civilians and for its campaigns to 'cleanse' the education system of the State. ([www.satp.org](http://www.satp.org))

ix. **Manipur People's Party (MPP)** is a regional political party, formed in 1967 by some disenchanted leaders of the ruling Congress party. It sought to channel the growing sense of disenchantment among the educated youth in Manipur by voicing sentiments against the Central government and the leadership of the ruling Congress party. The party's poll plank has been 'Manipur for Manipuris', demanding economic opportunities for the youth and for greater autonomy for the State and for removal of special laws such as the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958. Although MPP has from time to time sought to act as a State-wide party, its popularity has been confined to the Valley. Over the years, the MPP has lost much of its sheen. A recent case of drawn-out public show of internal wrangling has further compromised the party's image.

x. **Manipur State Congress (MSC)** was formed in 1946 when leaders of the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha and those of other smaller parties in the Valley, joined up to oppose the mass based politics of Hijam Irabot and Krishak Sabha and Praja Sangha parties. MSC was the first political party in the State and espoused the interests of the educated classes among the Meiteis. Influenced by the politics of the Indian National Congress, MSC mobilized and led movements for political reforms in Manipur in the days prior to Independence and later mobilized support for integration of the State with the Indian Union. MSC claimed the role of the state making party. It grew to be the strongest political formation in the State in the post-merger phase of its politics and later became a part of the Indian National Congress.

xi. **Manipur State Congress Party (MSCP)** was established in 1997 by a section of the Congress party that did not see face to face with the then State Chief Minister, Rishang Keishing - a Tangkhul Naga. The former Speaker of the State Assembly, W Nipamacha

Singh led the disgruntled sections to cause a split in the Congress party and later formed a MSCP-led government in 1998. The party was returned to power in the 2000 general elections. But MSCP's steam soon ran out and by 2001, following large scale erosion in its ranks, the MSCP ministry collapsed. Though the party was the third largest in the current House - with seven out of sixty seats – its position has been further compromised with continued splits and internal contests over leadership and control.

xii. **Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha (NMM):** Established in 1937 as the Nikhil Manipuri Hindu Mahasabha, NMM was the first social reforms organization in Manipur. The organization began initially with the patronage of the Maharaja, with focus more on religious and social reforms of the Meitei society. Later, middle class aspirations for political and economic reforms encouraged NMM leaders to begin demands for reforms which also meant they had to sever their links with the ruling elites. The organization was behind much of the social and educational reforms in the Valley in the first part of the last century. It also formed the basis of the rise of the Manipur State Congress, the first and the principal political formation in the State.

xiii. **Naga National Council (NNC)** was established in 1946 as a platform for the Naga middle class to articulate their aspirations for political and economic development of the different sub tribes of the Naga grouping. It was made up of 29 members representing the various Naga sub-tribes. NNC stood for and voiced the aspiration - dominant among the Naga intelligentsia - for political autonomy. In 1947, under its charismatic leader Zapu Phizo, NNC declared independence of Nagaland and began mobilizing for self-determination for the Nagas. In 1949, onward NNC was forced to go underground and start a guerilla war with Indian security forces. In 1962 a peace agreement was signed between the Government of India and a section of the NNC, and which led to the formation of the State of Nagaland, from the existing Naga Hills district of Assam.

xiv. **National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN)**, an armed Naga organisation, was formed in 1980 by Isak Chisi Swu, Thuingaleng Muivah and S.S. Khaplang to oppose the 'Shillong (peace) Accord' of 1975, signed by the Naga National Council with the Indian government. Later, differences surfaced within the outfit over the issue of commencing a dialogue process with the Indian Government and in 1988 the organization split into two factions: the NSCN (K) led by S S Khaplang, and the NSCN-IM, led by Isak Chisi Swu and

Thuingaleng Muivah. NSCN (IM) aims to establish a 'Greater Nagalim' to bring all sections of the Nagas, claimed to be scattered in different States in Northeast India as well as in pockets in Myanmar, together under one political unit. The NSCN-IM has influence in Nagaland, Naga Hills of Manipur, Naga-inhabited areas of North Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong districts of Assam and some parts of Arunachal Pradesh. In 1997, NSCN(IM) signed a ceasefire agreement with the Central government. Talks for a final peace agreement have been underway for the past almost ten years. ([www.satp.org](http://www.satp.org))

xv. **Paite National Council (PNC)** was set up in 1949 by leaders of the Paite sub tribe of the Kuki-Chin family such as TC Tiankham (the first speaker of the State Assembly) and Teba Kilong (a State minister) to promote and protect Paite interests. Its formation was initially seen as a response by Paite leaders to the perceived domineering attitude of the Thadou speaking Kukis of the Kuki National Assembly. Today PNC enjoys much support among its large Paite constituency in Churachandpur district and takes active role in local politics.

xvi. **People's Liberation Army (PLA)** is an armed rebel group, established under the leadership of N. Bisheswar Singh in 1978, to organize, in its own words, a revolutionary front covering the entire North East and to unite all ethnic groups, including the Meiteis, Nagas and Kukis, to liberate Manipur. Though a Meiti outfit, PLA claims to be a trans-tribal organisation seeking to lead the non-Meiteis as well. In 1989, the outfit formed a political body called the Revolutionary People's Front (RPF). ([www.satp.org](http://www.satp.org))

xvii. **Pan Manipuri Youth League (PMYL)** - a band of educated Meitei youth – was formed in 1968 to voice resentments at the lack of economic opportunities for the youth in the State. PMYL mobilized against 'outsider' control of public sector jobs and commerce and against Central policies favouring advancement of tribal candidates in jobs. The organization acted as the fountainhead for the rise of Meitei nationalism and armed rebel groups in Manipur Valley from the late 1970s.

xviii. **People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK)**, an armed Meitei organization, was formed under the leadership of R.K. Tulachandra in 1977. PREPAK's main demand was the expulsion of 'outsiders' from the State. Today it is part of the Manipur

People's Liberation Front (MPLF), along with United National Liberation Front (UNLF) and the People's Liberation Army (PLF). (www.satp.org)

xix. **Krishak Sabha and Praja Sangha** were mass based political parties formed by Hijam Irabot, the popular leader of the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha, to organize mass based support for political and economic reforms in Manipur. While the former worked with the peasantry, the latter worked in urban areas. The two parties played key roles in political movements demanding full responsible government in Manipur as opposed to constitutional monarchy that the colonial administrators and the Manipuri Maharaja were ready to concede. The principal agenda of these parties remained economic advancement of the rural and urban poor - compulsory land rights for tenants, fair price for agricultural products and reduction in land tax, protection of the interests of local businessmen and imposition of restrictions on the entry of outsider traders. These radical demands made the parties (and Irabot) the target of attack by all political actors in Manipur in the run up to the State's merger with the Indian union – the Maharaja, the Manipur State Congress and the Central leadership of the Indian union.

xx. **Praja Shanti** was a political party formed with the support of the Maharaja of Manipur in 1948, to contest the mobilization by the Manipur State Congress for integration of Manipur with the Indian Union. The party had its support base among the nobility and those that had a stake in the continuation of the constitutional monarchy, with the Maharaja in command. After elections to the State Assembly in 1948, Praja Shanti formed the government with the support of Hill based members of the House. Much of the relevance of the party was lost with the merger of Manipur in 1949. It performed poorly in the 1952 elections and then disappeared from the political field.

xxi. **United Committee, Manipur (UCM)** was set up in 2001 as an umbrella organisation of Valley-based public organisations to mobilise public opinion against the extension of the ceasefire agreement of 1997 signed between the Government of India and the Naga rebel group, NSCN (IM) to districts in Manipur. This was meant to prevent a possible carving out of the extensive Naga dominated areas of Manipur and their amalgamation with Nagaland State, a key demand of the NSCN(IM). UCM was behind much of the sustained public protests that rocked the Manipur Valley starting 18 July 2001. Later, its leaders formed the Democratic Revolutionary Party (DRP) to contest state

elections in 2002. Their hopes for a clean sweep of votes were dashed when DRP could manage to win only two seats in the State Assembly. Today UCM leads the annual observance of the 'Great July uprising', commemorating the anti-Ceasefire public protests of 2001, and which had resulted in the death of 18 activists in police firing.

xxii. **United Naga Council (UNC)** is an umbrella organization of apex tribal groups of the Nagas of Manipur. The organization gained in prominence in the early 1990s with the onset of the Kuki-Naga clashes and UNC's alleged complicity with NSCN(IM) in triggering the large-scale eviction of Kukis from villages in Naga dominated districts of the State. UNC seeks to represent the Naga population of the State and work for Naga interests. Its seemingly internal democratic functioning and the equal access the organization is said to provide to different sub tribes of the Naga constellation have been instrumental in attracting many quasi-Naga groups in the State to the Naga fold. Of late, UNC has been at the forefront of political mobilization to demand the merger of the four Naga dominated districts in Manipur with Nagaland State to create 'Greater Nagaland'. In this, UNC has been seen to work closely and in coordination with the NSCN (IM). UNC has also been at the forefront of efforts for better intra-Naga relations, between its many constituent sub-tribes.

xxiii. **United National Liberation Front (UNLF)**, one of the oldest Meitei insurgent group was formed under the leadership of Arambam Somarendra Singh in 1964 with the purpose to achieve independence and a socialist society for Manipur. UNLF was closely associated with the Pan Manipuri Youth League, the latter functioning as the over ground body for the UNLF. Later, differences within the outfit surfaced over the issue of strategies to be adopted. While Samrendra Singh was in favour of spreading ideological consciousness before launching an armed struggle, the more radical leader Oinam Sudhir Kumar established a Revolutionary Government of Manipur (RGM) for immediate armed movement. In 1990, UNLF decided to launch an armed struggle for the liberation of Manipur from India. In the same year, it formed an armed wing called Manipur People's Army (MPA). UNLF aims to establish an independent socialist Manipur. Rajkumar Meghen alias Sana Yaima is the current Chairman of UNLF. ([www.satp.org](http://www.satp.org))

xxiv. **Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZRA)**, an armed group of the Paites, was formed in 1997, following an escalation of ethnic conflicts between Kukis and Paites in the Churachandpur district of Manipur. The purported objective of the ZRA is to protect the

interests of the Paite community from the 'onslaught of any community or group'. It further attempts to bring all Zomi people living in Northeast India (Manipur and Mizoram), Myanmar (Chin State) and Bangladesh (Chittagong Hill Tracts), together under one administrative unit - 'Zogam' meaning the land of the Zomis- under the Indian Union. (www.satp.org)

xxv. **Zeliangrong Union (ZU):** The apex political organization of the Zeliangrong community (made up of Zemei, Liangmai and Rongmei Nagas) inhabiting Tamenglong district and pockets in Churachandpur, Senapati, Imphal and Bishnupur districts. It was established in 1947 as a platform to bring the different Zeliangrong groups (then called Kabui and Kacha Naga) together, enable their social integration and to preserve their culture. ZU's earlier incarnations were the Kabui Samiti (1934), the Kabui Naga Association (1946) and the Zeliangrong Council (1947). Demands for Zeliangrong integration were strongest in the 1980s and 1990s, under the Zeliangrong Peoples' Convention (ZPC), but they later fizzled out. Today ZU seeks to speak for all Zeliangrongs all over Northeastern India and to keep the unity intact, although there are signs that the Zelinagrong alliance between its constituents (Zemeis, Linagmeis and Rongmeis) may be coming under increasing strain. Political organizations of individual sub tribes, such as the Rongmei Council, have been exerting their separate identity.

#### **In Mizoram:**

i. **Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF)** is an armed outfit of the Reang community and is currently engaged in peace negotiations with the Mizoram government. It was formed in 1996 following violent clashes between Mizos and Reang tribesmen in the Mamith sub-division of Mizoram. The immediate cause of the conflict was the demand by the Bru National Union (BNU), made in 1997, for the creation of an Autonomous District Council (ADC) for the Reangs. The BNU anchored its demand in the presence of a majority of Reangs in the sub-division, and declared that their rights—political, economic and cultural among others—were not adequately protected under the prevailing political arrangement. These demands did not go down well with Mizo organisations like Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP) and Young Mizo Association (YMA) who, it is alleged, helped organise violent attacks on



Reang settlements. Some 32,000 Reangs are claimed to have been displaced in the conflict and have since been staying in refugee camps in neighbouring Tripura State. (www.satp.org)

ii. **The Hmar People's Convention (HPC)** was set up in 1986, as a political party to spearhead the movement for self-government for the Hmar community in the north and northeastern parts of Mizoram. This was partly an outgrowth of the disappointment of the Hmar community, and of other Mizo clans outside the Mizo Hills, at the Mizo Peace Accord signed between the central government and the MNF in 1986, failing to address their demand for integrating all Mizo areas in Manipur, Tripura and Assam with Mizoram to create 'Greater Mizoram'. Separatist tendencies among the Hmars have also been strong with demands for a separate autonomous Hmar territory, bringing together Hmar areas in Manipur, Assam and Mizoram. In April 1987 HPC began an armed struggle for pressing their demands. In the succeeding years, HPC representatives and the Government of Mizoram initiated peace talks that resulted in the signing of the Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) in 1994 and the establishment of the 'Sinlung Hills Development Council', a quasi-autonomous areas for the Hmars in Mizoram. But dissatisfied with the reintegration process, a section of the HPC cadres split to form the HPC (Democratic) in 1995 and have gone back to the jungles. (www.satp.org)

iii. **Mizo National Front (MNF)**, the ruling political party in Mizoram today, it was established as the Mizo National Famine Front in 1959 as a social service organisation to respond to the famine caused by the failure of the rice crop in the Mizo Hills district. MNFF under its charismatic leaders Laldenga, became the MNF, contested elections to the Mizo District Council and the Assam State Assembly and in 1966 revolted against the Central government sparking off an armed rebellion for independence of Mizoram. In 1986, MNF with Laldenga still at its head, entered into a peace agreement with the Centre. Laldenga was made the State Chief Minister, MNF having established a political alliance with the then ruling Congress party. Today the State CM is Zoramthanga, the second in command in the MNF in its rebel form.

iv. **Mizoram Presbyterian Synod:** The Mizoram Presbyterian Church was established by the Welsh Missionary, Rev. D.E. Jones. The Synod is the administrative nerve centre and the highest decision making body of the large Presbyterian Church network in the State. Of the State's total population of 891,058, almost half are members of the Synod (4,95,717).

The administrative set up of the Mizoram Presbyterian Synod is highly centralized. The Synod has 14 departments, such as Finance, Education, Theological Education, Hospital, etc. Among the social services provide by the Synod are giving funds and grants, providing medical services and helping with self-help programmes for the training of poor youth in economic activities. (Mizoram Presbyterian Church Synod)

v. **Mizo Union (MU)** was the first political party of Mizoram, established initially in 1946 as the Mizo Commoners' Union. Led by Vanlawma, Sabrawnga and Bawichuaka, it later became the MU to attract and mobilize broad-based support among all sections of people inhabiting the Lushai Hills District. For the next decade, MU was the principal political force in the district and continued to enjoy widespread political support even after the outbreak of the MNF rebellion. In 1973, the party merged with the State unit of the Indian National Congress.

vi. **People's Conference (PC)** was established in 1973 by V. Sailo, a decorated Mizo officer of the Indian Army, who had resigned to raise public awareness nationally about human rights abuses in the course of the Army's counter-insurgency operations against the MNF in the Mizo Hills. Cases of human rights violations by the Army had been on the rise and these provide 'Brigadier Sailo' with a ready constituency for his political mobilization. PC gained further legitimacy due to Sailo's principled stand against the violence and intimidation that MNF cadres were themselves perpetrating on their political rivals. Today PC is a part of the opposition.

vii. **United Mizo Freedom Organization (UMFO)** was formed in Mizo Hills district by the Chiefs to protect their interests against the rising popularity of the Mizo Union (MU). Besides opposing the Mizo Union, UMFO also demanded merger of the district with Burma rather than its incorporation into Assam and India. Later UMFO became the party of choice for some sections of the MU who were unhappy with the way political and cultural rights of the Mizos were being handled by the State and Central governments. Despite these developments UMFO could not match the popularity of the MU among the electorate. In 1957, the UMFO, in a bid to outdo the MU and enhance its electoral fortunes in the district, merged with the Eastern India Tribal Union, a pan North East political platform set up to demand a separate State for Assam's tribal communities. With the onset of the famine and

the growth of resentment among the Mizo masses against the State government, those making up the UMFO gravitated towards the newly organized MNFF and the MNF.

viii. **Young Mizo Association (YMA)** was established as the Young Lushai Association in 1935 by Welsh missionaries Rev. Lewis Evans and Miss Katie Hughs. It acquired its present title in 1947. Modeled as a social service organization to channel the energies of the Mizo youth, it soon began to play an important part in promoting and preserving Mizo culture and way of life and today claims to act as the glue holding different sections of Mizos together. It sees itself playing a role in all round development of Mizoram and in the promotion of good Christian life for the Mizo people. According to the YMA, its total membership is 2,50,000 with over 750 branches spread all over Mizoram and in neighbouring States. In recent years, YMA has also earned a bit of an infamy for meddling in politics and in targeting non-Mizo sections of the State's population.

ix. **Zomi Reunification Organisation (ZoRO)** was founded in 1993 to spearhead the movement for the re-unification of Zomi peoples, scattered in the hilly areas of Manipur and Mizoram States in India, the Chin State in Myanmar and the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh. Its objectives are social integration of all Zomis, territorial integration of Zomi inhabited areas under one administrative unit, and self-determination for the Zomi people, to be gained politically. (<http://zogam.tripod.com>)