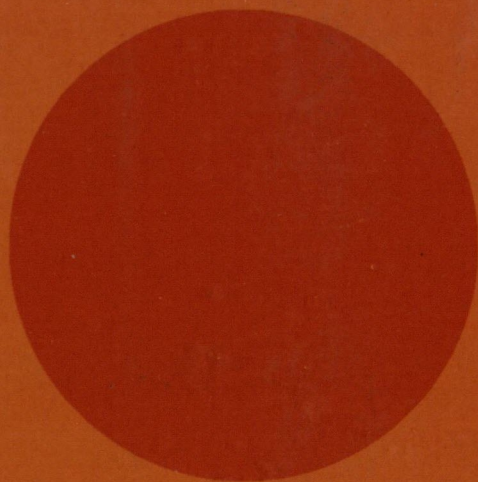


FEDERAL PARTY OF MANIPUR

1993-2000 AD



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NAOREM JOYKUMAR SINGH

In fact, a thorough study of political parties in historical perspective helps understand the dynamics of political system. Manipur has a very good experience of the working of the political parties. In the absence of documented records the common people are not fully aware of the nature of working of these political parties and their political participation in the governance of the state. Now a new trend has emerged in the state under which many researchers are trying to understand nature of working of the political parties in Manipur with an objective to visualize the possible future course of political trend and people.

'Federal Party of Manipur' which constitutes the subject of this study has a distinctive objective, ideology and agenda which are drastically different from other political parties. The objective and agenda of this political party is quite relevant to this present political scenario particularly in the context of the mainstream of Indian politics also.

Hopefully, this work will prove informative and useful for academics and researchers in the field.

Rs. 400

Prof. Naorem Joykumar Singh (b. 1950) Prof. & Head, Dept. of History, Manipur University, Imphal is a seasoned teacher and a noted scholar. A prolific writer, he has authored two books namely— *Social Movement in Manipur*, and *Colonialism to Demography: History of Manipur from 1819 to 1972*. He has published many articles in reputed national and international journals. He is General Secretary of Manipur Historical Society, and Member of North East History Association.

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CHAPTER ONE

PRELUDE

The first part of the twentieth century was a significant period in the political history of Manipur. Indeed, it may be treated as the gestation period for the emergence of the idea of the establishment of political parties in the state. The concept of political party was a direct outcome of the maturity of the growth of political consciousness among the common people of Manipur. The year 1934 may be marked as the year of the attainment of the maturity of the growth of political consciousness in the state. The birth of the 'Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha' as a socio-religious organization with an objective to promote the idea of pan-Manipuri identity may be treated as the foundation stone for the birth of political parties in the state. The concept of a distinctive identity of the Manipuri people was promoted by some young educated elites who were greatly influenced by the Indian national liberation movement. They strongly opposed the colonial and feudal system of administration. Their only dream was to establish a new system of administration and political concept based on democratic principle. At the same time they also tried to remove all sorts of social evils which were considered as an obstacle towards the establishment of social evils which were considered as an obstacle towards the establishment of social equilibrium among the different groups of people of Manipur.

The year 1938 was a great landmark in the history of the political parties of Manipur. It marked the beginning of the existence of political parties in the state. The birth of '*Nikhil Manipur Mahasabha*' as a political party with a basic objective for the 'establishment of a responsible government' in mNipur may be considered as a direct blow of the existence of the colonial and feudal system of administration in the state. Under the banner of this party, the people, who strongly believed in the democratic principles, have launched different types of political actions for the fulfilment of their demands like the 'establishment of responsible government' in Manipur and amalgamation of the administration of hills and plain etc. The demand for the establishment of a legislature of unilateral system with a hundred legislators of whom not less than 80 would be nominated by the Maharaja was a big contribution of this political party to the people of Manipur. These political parties were established in the pre-merger period of Manipur. The establishment of these political parties with political and social objectives has, undoubtedly laid a very good foundation for the emergence of other political parties with a new political concept based on social and economic reality.

Just after the merger of Manipur into India in the year 1949 the people of Manipur again witnessed political activities of different political organizations. The establishment of *Praja Socialist Party (PSP)*, *Nationalist Socialist Democratic Party (NSDP)*, *Kuki National Assembly (KNA)*, *Manipur People Party (MPP)*, *Kanglei League*, *Manipur Hill Union (MHU)*, etc. have produced a new political outlook among the people of Manipur. With the growth of these state based political organizations, the idea of regionalism within the framework of the national political mainstream also gradually emerged in the minds of the people. The assertion of local interest or regional political identity particularly in the context of Manipur was mainly due to the birth of these political organizations. Therefore the establishment of the Federal

Party of Manipur may be taken as a step towards the reassertion for the promotion of the political identity of Manipur within the framework of the national political arena.

Federal Party of Manipur was established as a state level political organization on the foundation of some historical facts. It was an outcome of a series of informal discussions and debates of some prominent academicians and social workers of the state. The focal point of their debate and discussion was based on certain key issues of political, social, economic and cultural conditions of the state which was developed just after the merger of Manipur into India in the year 1949. While discussing the overall issues of the state they also made an intensive critical study of the integrity, sincerity and political wisdom of the national level political parties particularly in their relationship with the political situation of Manipur. Apart from this they also studied very carefully the political concept and principle of some regional political organizations. After having a close observation of the political attitude of these existing political parties they came to a conclusion that in exercising their political wisdom in the state they had little degree of sincerity and honesty in their approach. Therefore they were not able to understand fully the feeling of the people of Manipur. On the basis of this conclusion they were of the view that the existing undesirable political situation in the state was the outcome of the relationship between the national political parties and common people.

Manipur was integrated into India through a rough political weather. As a result of this, a serious debate is going on among the academicians and social activists on the nature and response of the common people on the merger issue and the political motive of the leaders of the Congress Party of both the 'State' and the 'Centre'. But one point was very clear in the mind of the people particularly the younger generation that the merger of Manipur into India was not on the line of the policy and

principle of transparency. Therefore, they expressed their resentment to the blunder committed by the Maharaja of Manipur. The Indian Independence Act 1947 empowered the princely states of India either to join India or Pakistan or to become an independent state. But the Maharaja of Manipur did not opt for an independent Manipur. Instead of this he signed the '*Stand Still Agreement*' on the 11th August 1947 by which Manipur accepted the Indian suzerainty in respect of some key affairs like, 'Foreign Affairs, Finance, Communication, Defense', etc., The Maharaja also signed the Instrument of Accession Act on the same date. So, the signing of these two treaty documents produced a confusion in the political status of Manipur. Some writers made an attempt to project the political status of Manipur from 1947 to 1949 i.e. pre-merger period. as that of an independent state. This matter is still a subject of serious debate and further observations and interpretations may be required. Then on the 21st September 1949 the Maharaja of Manipur signed the merger agreement and on the 15th October Manipur was officially merged into India. A general feeling existed in the mind of the common people that the Maharaja of Manipur was compelled under duress to sign the 'Merger Agreement'. This is of one of the most important factor for the growth of unhappiness among the people particularly towards the Government of India. Indeed, if we go a bit deeper into detail on the whole political drama which was going on in Manipur and the activities and policies of the leaders of the Indian government, we can come to a safe conclusion that the Maharaja of Manipur might have been compelled to sign the merger agreement due to a serious psychological torture inflicted on him by the Indian political leadership. Thus one silly mistake on the political decision of the government of Manipur or the ignorance of the ruler of the state had brought a drastic negative change to the future political status of Manipur.

The elements of the pro-merger group had strongly

advocated that the integration of Manipur into India would bring peace and development in the state. But when it comes to reality things began to change beyond expectation and desire. This stage was the most pitiable political position of Manipur. Even the leaders of the pro-merger elements was also quite taken aback to see the new political development. Instead of giving the equal political status with the other states of India, the central government abolished all the democratic institutions which were established under the Manipur State Constitution Act 1947 and entire responsibility of the administration was put under the care of a single bureaucratic officer. The refusal of the Government of India to establish the responsible government in Manipur was based mainly on the pretext of the lack of democratic experience. From the evidence it can be observed that their view was highly politically motivated because the people of Manipur had more political experience than the people of the rest of India. Then on the 22nd January 1950 the Government of India by an official declaration, granted Manipur the political status of a 'Part C' state under the Constitution of India. After twenty three years of central rule Manipur was granted 'Statehood' in 1972. That too happened after having witnessed a series of political agitations, which caused bitterness and mutual mistrust. The people, after getting the experience of unfair deal from of the Government of India, felt that the central leaders neglected them and gradually their sense of dissatisfaction and alienation were expressed in different forms.

The post-merger economic condition in Manipur was not to the satisfaction and desire of the people. After having a close observation of the economic trend in this state from the time of the integration the general people began to feel that Manipur had become a victim of neo colonialism. Though it is not required to go into detail it can be recalled that the present trend of economic growth in this state was the outcome of the removal of restriction

imposed on the non-Manipuri people on the 18th November 1950. If the merits and demerits of this system are to be analysed it can be suggested that it rendered a great help to the people of Manipur in general in the process of the protection of local people from all possible aspects of the economic exploitation from the capitalist elements of other areas. But just after the removal of this system the traders from outside the state began to enter into Manipur without any restriction and started to play a dominating role in the economic life of the state. To see these undesirable economic conditions of the state and the role played by the outside traders, the members of the 'Assembly Demand Co-ordination Committee' submitted a memorandum to the President of India in which they regarded the new administrative policy of the Central Government as a systematic practice for 'gradual-de-Manipurization'. These deteriorating economic positions of the Manipuri people were further intensified by the rampant corruption in the administration led by a highly irresponsible political leadership and manned by a non-committed bureaucracy. They were not ready to take any type of responsibility either for the development of the state or to take care of the feeling, aspiration and interest of the common people of Manipur. The developmental funds have not reached to the needy persons of urban, rural and tribal areas. They were not prepared to provide the scope for the promotion of a self-generating economy. There was no industry and no factory which could provide job facilities to the educated youth. The cheap money created by the ill regulated spending of the Government promoted a market consumerism. Instead of self-sufficiency in her economic position Manipur had become dependent heavily to the Central Government. Practically, the production level was very much far below the consumption requirements. All the state enterprises and undertakings have failed. The people in the Government also were not prepared to extend all type of possible help to promote the private enterprises. Rather they tried to kill the efforts of private enterprises

in collusion with the people from outside Manipur. As a result of this the opportunity for giving employment to the educated youth was completely stopped. There was no employment generating enterprises or undertakings. The state Government did not take any keen interest in the development of the state. They were not able to do anything for the welfare of the people and gradually they were acting as a salary giving agency only. There was no justice in the process of getting job and it depends entirely to the system of the highest bidder. All the financial institutions were not able to make any effective investment either for one reason or other. As a result of this, Manipur was under a situation of complete economic stagnancy. There was no capital investment. On the other hand the capital was fleeing from Manipur. Practically the Manipur State was not able to get much benefit under the New Economic Policy of the Government of India. In fact there was a complete financial bankruptcy in the state of Manipur. The political leadership and bureaucracy remained as a silent spectator as if nothing was happening in the state.

In the midst of this economic condition the state again witnessed a new social development, i.e. exploitation of poor by the rich and powerful groups. The gap between the haves and have-nots had widened beyond reparable stage. A new social class emerged in the state. This social class, i.e. neo-rich which was the creation of the new economic condition has controlled the Government and economy of Manipur. Under this non-economic trend and financial management the rural and tribal peasantry became a deprive group of the society. The helpless urban middle class people also began to depend for their existence on this new economic system. In the meantime a large scale influx of foreigners and the people from the other parts of the country have aggravated the economic situation of the state. The large scale influx of unchecked immigrants had caused constraints on land, natural resources, trade and commerce. Apart from this it also caused a serious demographic imbalances and social

tensions. This new changes became a serious concerned among the people. They thought that this new development was a threatening call for the loss of their identity. Indeed, the new economic trend that was developed just after integration had produced a serious social impact in the state. Due to the lack of facilities of income generating unit and absence of the provision for development, Manipur became an important market place for the finished products of the big industries of the other parts of the country. No doubt the central government gave certain amount of money annually to the state government mainly for developmental purposes. But the present system of financial administration in state did not make any positive room for developmental works. Therefore the money which they have given to the state for developmental purpose again went back to the centre. This system of policy was nothing but to change the money from right hand to left and vice versa without any concrete objective. The ultimate result was that the status of the people of Manipur was changed from the position of master to the level of beggars. Under this economic position the life of the people of Manipur was at the mercy of the central government of India. Such type of system was the practice of neo-colonialism. The coming of a large quantity of industrial products from the mainland India finally gave a good shape for a complete destruction of the whole economy of the Manipur state. From this economic condition many people of the state began to feel that the people of Manipur became a victim of the internal colonialism.

The frightful increase of the number of educated unemployment people was also an immediate outcome of the new economic policy. Since there was no employment generating enterprises or understanding, the educated youths had no employment opportunities. The state Government was not able to provide any type of self-generating employment opportunities. Rather they became purely a salary-giving agency. The apprehension

of the common people was that under this economic condition Manipur would be strangled to death economically.

Apart from these political and economic conditions the people of Manipur had also witnessed a series of violent type of separatist movement which vehemently emphasized for the establishment of a distinctive political identity of the Manipuris outside the political boundary of the Indian Union. The outbreak of such type of revolutionary movement may be treated as an immediate outcome of the deteriorating political and economic conditions in the state and a kind of expression of dissatisfaction to the integrity and sincerity of the leaders of Indian Government, which was developed since the integration of the state into India. On the other hand it also had greatly weakened the state and created a cause for a social tension among the ethnic groups of people. This trend of social tension was continuing for about two decades and it costs the life of the common people. However the state machinery did not make any serious attempt to protect the life and property of the common people. Rather in the name of maintaining the law and order situation they actively indulged in the act of state terrorism. Here lies a big question on the sincerity, integrity and motive of the people who were in the driver's seat of the administration. State terrorism is not the direct answer to the solution of the problem. Because of the lack of sincerity and unclear motive of the law enforcing mechanism like the military, para-military and police Manipur was made a police state. On the other hand the ruling group of the state which was constituted mostly by the opportunist politicians and selfish bureaucrats was not able to perform their duties effectively because in every inch of their work they were highly influenced by their selfish and opportunistic mentality. Thus due to the lack of political will and vision the people in the ruling clique was not able to see the real situation the same time they were not able to protect the life and property of

the people of the state. Finally it led to the outbreak of serious violation in the basic human rights of the people of Manipur.

To see this highly undesirable new political and economic situation which was witnessed after the integration, the people began to question the sincerity and wisdom of the national and regional level political parties in the state. One of the important questions was whether what type of role they have played so far to protect and maintain the historical identity of the people of the state from the clutches of the new economic and administrative policy. It is quite obvious that just after the merger of Manipur into India and being a democratic state the whole responsibilities of the people and state was in the hand of political parties. It is also convinced that they were not able to act effectively to safeguard the interest of the people. In that case what was the most important reason which compelled them not to take any political decision in the interest of the people of Manipur? In this respect two issues can be discussed first they are not able to take any political steps to the desire of the people because of the lack of political wisdom of the leadership of political parties. Secondly they were compelled not to act freely by their ideological principles.

While analyzing these problems it became an imperative to reopen the chapters of the political history of Manipur which was developed from the merger of the state. In this respect the role played by the national level political parties at the time of the crucial political juncture of the state of Manipur may be recalled. Among the national level political parties the role of the Congress Party was the most important. It is a well-known fact that the Congress Party was the torchbearer of the pro-merger elements of the people of Manipur. Their strong view was that if Manipur merged into India there would be a significant development in all aspects of the life of the state and it would bring welfare of the masses. Most of the educated people of that time were in favour of the

integration. Taking the opportunity of the political environment of the given situation of that period the Manipur State Congress party in collusion with the Congress leaders of India brought Manipur state as a political unit of the Indian Union. However, its subsequent result was not to the expectation of the people of the state. Even the members of the State Congress party were not happy at the new political development. But they were not able to do anything on the tune of the desire of the people, as they were not able to go out beyond the boundary of the party principle. Their only duty was to act on the dictation of the Central leaders. Due to this limited position they were not able to represent the feelings of the desire of the people of Manipur. Another political parties of national level stature were Praja Socialist Parties and Samjukta Socialist Party. The local leaders of these parties also were not able to go against the interest of the outlook of other central leaders. Rather these parties made one step forward on the line of the Indianization principle. It was mainly from their demand that the government of Manipur have abolished all rules of restriction given to the non-Manipuri people. The removal of this system gave a good opportunity to the non-Manipuri people to enter into Manipur without any restrictions. They justified their demand on the ground that since Manipur was part of India there should not be any type of restriction to the other people of India while entering into Manipur. Free movement of people inside the boundary of India should be encouraged. The argument of the Socialist Party was also endorsed by the Congress Party. The removal of this system had rendered a great contribution in the process of the deteriorating economic position of Manipur. After the removal of this system many traders and businessmen from outside had entered into Manipur freely and started their business. The outbreak of a serious economic exploitation was the immediate outcome of this view policy. So far their political attitude to Manipur was concerned the Socialist Party as a main opposition political party of the state had severely

criticized the Congress Party for their deliberate refusal to grant a responsible government in this state. But because of their ideological and constitutional bindings the members of the Socialist Party in Manipur was also not able to speak much for a distinctive political identity of the state. The same trend was also in the case of the Communist Party of India. No doubt Manipur had an experience of left movement under the leadership of Hijam Irabot Singh in which they strongly advocated for the welfare of the peasantry in the state. They also strongly demanded for the abolition of feudal system of administration and existing class discrimination in the society. In addition to this Hijam Irabot Singh also emphasized to promote and foster the distinctive features of the identity of the people of Manipur. But in later years the political motive of the new leadership of Communist Party was quite contradictory to Irabot and their approach was not in the same political line of their one time leader. Rather their mind and political culture also were influenced by the political principles of their parent organisation. Therefore, like other national parties they also were not able to give much thought for a distinctive identity of Manipuri people.

Apart from the political objectives and characters of the various national level political parties Manipur also had enjoyed a very good experience of other local or state level political parties. Starting from the *Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha*, a local party of pre-independence period the people had witnessed the political activities of *Praja Sanmeloni*, *Praja Sangha*, *Krishak Sabha*, *Praja Mandol*, *Praja Shanti*, *Manipur National Union*, *Nationalist Socialist Democratic Party (NSDP)*, and *Manipur People's Party (MPP)* etc. In addition to this there were some local political parties which were based mainly on the ethnic line in the hill area like, *Kuki National Assembly (KNA)*, *Paite Union* etc. Among them the most important political party is *Manipur People's Party*. The main ideological foundation of this party is for the welfare and promotion of a

distinctive identity of the state. On the basis of this ideological plank even the people of Manipur had voted this party to power. But this party, though they had enjoyed the confidence of the people, was not able to come up to the expectation of the people so far as the unity move of all the different ethnic groups of people of Manipur was concerned. Indeed, from the experience of their long existence as a political party, it can be observed that though they were able to lead the people in the valley area they were not able to penetrate into the hill areas very successfully. It seems that there were some kinds of gap of understanding, so far the aspect of political agendas between the leadership of the party and hill people. Though it is very difficult to give a clear picture of the reason of the gap of understanding it was quite evident from their nature that the tribal people had some reservation to the political approach of this regional party. As a result of this the Manipur People's Party, in spite of their best possible attempt, could not penetrate into the interior hill areas.

After having a good experience of the political nature of both national and state level political parties and to see the undesirable political development in the state which caused a good reason for instability in the natural identity of the people and state, a large section of the people, who strongly believed in the democratic process of change began to look for a better alternative political platform which can represent the feeling of the masses of both hills and plains. As a first step they started to make a close observation about the inner feeling of the masses as they thought that the strength of their political activities would come out from them.

Then they also analysed the history of the political developments in the state from the time of the integration and its impact. At the same time they also discussed the position of Manipur in the 'Indian Federation'. The Indian Constitution is very clear on the question of federation. The Constitution mentioned that "India is a Union of

States” It provides a political structure which according to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar is federal in normal time and unitary in extra-ordinary situation. In regard to the necessity of federal polity A.C. Kapur said “The constitution makers of independent India were in no doubt that a large new state, faced with the problem of establishing a central authority strong enough to govern a vast area inhabited by millions of people with different historical and linguistic backgrounds and interests, must inevitably be some form of federal structure. With the integration of princely states, the formation of federation had become a *fait accompli*”.¹

As we have mentioned above the undesirable and critical relationship between Manipur and the Government of India. Indeed to keep Manipur for 23 years under central rule was nothing but to violate the basic principle of Indian Constitution by the law enforcing agencies of the Central Government and breach of the basic fundamental right of the people of Manipur. To grant statehood in 1972 after several political agitations did not make any positive healthy atmosphere in the people to people relationship. Because during this long period of time people had witnessed a lot of undesirable and unexpected political scene which caused for the development of bitterness and mistrust mindset among the people particularly the younger generation group. Finally it led for the creation of a serious gap of understanding between the people of Manipur and Government of India. The people of Manipur had an impression that the central leaders had deliberately neglected the people of the state for reasons not known to them and a sense of dissatisfaction was developed to the attitude of the Government of India. Such type of attitude was regarded by the people as a policy of colonialism under the garb of democratic fineness’.² After having an experience of the nature of deliberate ignorance the people began to express their dissatisfaction and alienation in different forms.

Such type of development in the relationship between

the Central Government and state of Manipur was not a healthy political atmosphere under the democratic norms. Therefore the people who were the strong preacher for the growth of the value of parliamentary democracy had expressed their desire to re-examine and redefine the relation between the centre and the state. There was an impression among the political and social observers in the state that the problem of political, economic and psychological nature of Manipur would be able to resolve if the principle of federalism as provided in the Indian constitution were fully implemented. Apart from this the problem of the plural society is also another important feature which sometimes creates problem in the process of democratic functioning. It is believed that in order to operate the democratic principles successfully a cohesive society based on social justice and social harmony with full protection of the cultural identity of the people should be established. The concept of unity in diversity in social and cultural life should be encouraged because such a society will fulfil the social aspiration of various communities. So, it is said that the social chaos and social fissures which is now a problem in Manipur can be resolved and eradicated by a political system, based on ethnic pluralism and social federalism.³

In addition to this the people of Manipur also faced a serious problem of economic stagnancy which was created by the corrupt administration and unprincipled political leadership. As already been mentioned above the people of Manipur, particularly of the younger generation group, felt that 'Manipur is the victim of neo-colonialism' and Manipur's economy was at the mercy of the 'Capitalist economic system of mainland India'. This economic crisis in Manipur was caused by the rampant corruption in the administration led by a highly irresponsible political leadership and manned by a non-committed bureaucracy.⁴ While this was the situation in the state the people who witnessed a serious problem of instability due to the outbreaks of revolutionary movements. Such

type of development had greatly weakened the state and caused social tensions. On the other hand in the name of maintaining law and order situation the law enforcing machineries namely military, para-military and police forces are choking the state and they have made Manipur a police state.⁵ To see all these undesirable and unprecedented developments, it is observed that "the state as an 'institution' has declined in Manipur, if it has yet to wither away in the Marxian way".⁶

Finally it has come to a safe conclusion that the only possible way to pull out Manipur from the present political and social instability was to bring a positive drastic radical change in every life of the people of the state. In this respect a group of political activists and intellectuals felt that there are only two possible ways. One was violent type of political movement and another was non-violent type of political movement. But most of them were the strong believers in the democratic process. Therefore they opted for a non-violent political movement which is based on the basic principles of democratic process. They are of the view that since the Indian Government is enjoying the democratic principle of parliamentary form of government, a vision for a radical change of the Manipur state would be possible only through the ballot war. In this connection they also believed that the problem of Manipur could be highlighted very successfully through a platform of a political party which has a capacity to represent the feeling of the people. But they are not in favour of existing national and local parties. They thought that since they had an experience of the terrible failure on their basic duty it was not advisable to test them again. Therefore they preferred for a new party with a clear-cut ideology and basic political agendas. They also believed that regional party would serve the local interest better than other national parties.

It is said that the emergence of regional political parties in Indian polity is a "national expression of the democratic will of the people for extension of autonomy based on

federalist sentiments under the constitution".⁷ The expression of the democratic will of the people on the issue of the local interest is an outcome of the dialectical response to the hegemonic centralism of the government of India. It is a fact that the national level political parties who are now playing the major role in Indian policies and who controlled the government are the representatives of the capitalistic and chauvinistic vested interest of the Indian upper castes and classes.⁸ Apart from the political issues the disparity in the level of economic development is also another strong factor for the growth of regionalism in the minds of the people of the state. It is said that the greatest endogenous factor is the strong urge of the people to preserve their cultural, linguistic and ethnic identity.⁹ So those regional issues and aspiration are expressed through the political movements.

On the basis of this understanding and keeping in view of the immediate need for a democratic political change they have decided to form a new political platform which could represent all the feelings and aspirations of the people of Manipur. It is a fact that "a political party in a democracy is an instrument of social change". They were also of the view that this new proposed political party would be formed on the federal principle which aims at restructuring the relationship between the Federal Government and state. They also believed that this party would delivered the best alternative to redeem the people of Manipur from the present mess and built up a bright future.

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