

DISTRICT COUNCILS IN MANIPUR

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RAJENDRA KSHETRI

One of the basic policies of the Government of India is to give a special priority to promote and protect the distinctive identity of the tribal people. The idea of autonomy and self-government are the main themes under this policy. With this basic objective the Government of India, through the Constitution of the country, provides district level autonomy for tribal people. This is known as the VI Schedule of the Constitution. However, most of the common people, particularly, of Manipur are not able to have a detailed information about the nature of the working of the District Council in the tribal area. So, sometime a sense of confusion was developed in their attempt to understand the working system. This monograph is the first of its kind of study on the functioning of District Council. In this work author analysed very critically about the nature of the functioning of the system of the autonomy in the District Council of tribal inhabited area. Indeed, it is a good exercise to bring awareness among the common people in general of the character of autonomy at district level. The publication of this monograph itself is also a big contribution to those research scholars who are intending to do further research work in this area.

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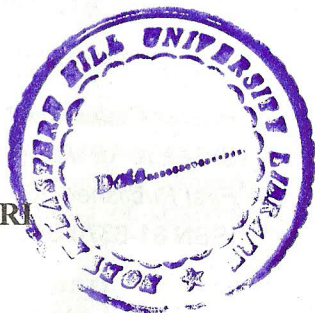
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RAJENDRA KSHETRI



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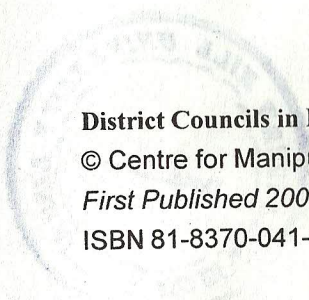
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MANIPUR UNIVERSITY
CANCHIPUR
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Vice-Chancellor

From the Vice-Chancellor's Desk

I am delighted to introduce the monograph series on history, culture, ethnography and polity of Manipur, brought out by the Centre for Manipur Studies. Dr Rajendra Kshetri researched on the Formation and Functioning of District Councils in Manipur Hills.

This volume **District Councils in Manipur (Formation and Functioning)**, by Dr Rajendra Kshetri has focussed on a relatively ignored but important theme of research in Manipur hills. Under the Manipur (Hill Areas) District Council Act, 1971, the local bodies known as the District Councils with decentralised administrative powers were formed so that the people in the hill areas of Manipur could exercise their franchise in the democratic governance of their districts. The decision for formation of the District Councils in Manipur were taken, keeping in view the constitutional provision of the devolution of powers to the local bodies and also the introduction of Sixth Schedule in some of the neighbouring States. The Centre for Manipur Studies has taken up a commendable step in publishing the present work.

N BIJOY SINGH
Vice-Chancellor

Director's Note

One of the basic policies of the Government of India is to give a special priority to promote and protect the distinctive identity of the tribal people. The ideas of autonomy and self-government are the main theme under this policy. With the basic objective the Government of India, through the Constitution of the country, provides district level autonomy for tribal people. This is known as the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. However, most of the common people particularly of Manipur are not able to have a detailed information about the nature of the working of the District Council in the tribal area. So, sometime a sense of confusion was developed in their attempt to understand the working system. This work prepared by Dr. Rajendra Kshetri, perhaps, is the first of its kind of study on the functioning of District Council. In this work he analysed very critically about the nature of the functioning of the system of the autonomy in the District Council of tribal inhabited area. Indeed, it is a good exercise to bring awareness among the common people in general of the character of autonomy at district level. The publication of this work itself is also a big contribution to those research scholars who are intending to do further research work in this area.

Prof. N. JOYKUMAR SINGH
Director
Centre for Manipur Studies
Manipur University

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Soon after India attained her Independence, the importance of local government in the country has been increasingly recognised. The problem of training the rural masses into the art of self-government has now acquired, as never before, an urgency that can no longer be overlooked. Of late it has been felt that people's participation in all the development schemes at the grass roots level is one of the most important prerequisites for the successful implementation of the planned policies of the country. It means that planning and its implementation must be a democratic process.

In a country like India with so many different ethnic communities, the conceptual idea behind the establishment of local bodies would obviously vary from region to region and state to state and even within the region. For example, in the north-east region of India autonomous district councils were established under the Sixth Schedule to the constitution of India for the primary purpose of enabling the hillmen to participate in the administration of their areas and also to protect and safeguard the tribal culture. Autonomous district councils were also established in Manipur under the pattern of the Sixth Schedule. Not much has been written on the district councils in Manipur. The district councils are the most important local bodies in the administration of the hill areas. Their significance and full importance are however, yet to be appreciated even after two decades of their existence. The demand for the extension of the Sixth Schedule to the hill areas of Manipur has now become a big issue with the

successive state governments recommending the same to the centre. And it is not unlikely that the Sixth Schedule would be extended to the Manipur Hills. It is therefore important and in fact necessary to make an appraisal and study the existing District councils in Manipur established under the Manipur (Hill Areas) District Councils Act 1971. It is all the more necessary to analyse the actual workings of the District Council before they once again start functioning not under the 1971 Act but under the rules framed under the Sixth Schedule to the constitution of India.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

From a brief summarisation of the traditional policy of the then Meetei kingdom to the hill tribes to a history of the administration of the hill areas before, during and after the colonial rule, the formation of District Council in Manipur Hills has been given in a detailed manner. The differences between district council in Manipur and those under the sixth schedule has also been highlighted. We have also examined the actual workings of District Council by taking up the case of the Churachandpur ADC. It only remains now to say a few words about the constitutional provisions *vis-a-vis* tribal development which could not and did not appropriately come under the foregoing heads but which is nevertheless too great an importance to be omitted altogether.

The unpopularity of district council with the hill people and its failure to contain the simmering discontent of the tribals can be overcome, the tribal leaders/students feel, if the provisions of the sixth schedule is immediately extended to the hill areas of Manipur. But then, the sixth schedule itself did not, it has been pointed out by many, have the desired result. It has been generally agreed that inspite of having so many constitutional provisions (Fifth Schedule, Sixth Schedule etc.), the dismal plight of the scheduled tribes still continue to exist in the country. Some has even opined that the district council under the sixth schedule have become "counter productive in that they only increased the political aspirations of a larger number of people"¹. The sixth schedule may have satisfied and/or may, in future, satisfy the political aspirations of the tribal middle class/tribal elites but its *raison deter* is

now increasingly questioned as far as the tribal development is concerned. This has only strengthened the much held contention and funds allotted for tribal development under various central/state schemes has not really gone down the tribal stream of development. The development schemes under the constitutional provisions do not benefit those they are meant for. On the contrary, these constitutional provisions have actually given birth to the emergence of a new class the "twice-born" class among the tribals who have concerned and are cornering all the material benefits to such an extent that the rich becomes richer and the poor poorer. The constitutional provisions have become a tool in the hands of a handful to fool and rob the illiterate tribal masses. Given this, is not it time now to reflect on the nature and the validity of having constitutional provisions for tribal development.

With or without constitutional provisions, the tribal community must be allowed to develop and safeguard its cultural heritage. They must be given every possible opportunity and every help by the government both the centre and the state to participate themselves in the art of self-management. Self management is crucial for their economic and cultural development. While this responsibility rests by and large with the government, the responsibility to see that funds for tribal themselves. Most of the funds were spent on such administrative expenses like purchase of vehicles etc. far in excess of their needs having very little for welfare and development measures. This can be checked if the tribal themselves decide, formulate and implement what is good for them. Novices and ill-equipped as they are in the art of administration, this can possibly be done only with the eradication of the problem of mass illiteracy among the tribes. After almost 45 years of independence, the problem of mass-illiteracy still continue to exist and is therefore the crux of the problem as far as the question of tribal development is concerned. This in fact is the issue where the government and the tribal leaders and social workers should address and pay utmost attention to. Mass education among the tribals could be achieved when their mother tongue is developed and it is therefore imperative that the planner's efforts be directed, first,

at developing the mother tongue of each and every tribe. The problem of mass illiteracy must be tackled without delay if the tribals are to be brought at par with the general development of the country/state. It must be stated, even at the risk of repetition, that a literate and an educated people and their active participation is a *sine qua non* for the success of any development scheme.

NOTE

1. See L.P. Vidyarthi, *Art and Culture of North East India*, Publication Division, Government of India, 1986, p. 109.

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4649-B/21, Ansari Road, Darya Ganj, New Delhi-110 002 (INDIA)

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