CHAPTER-V:
FEDERAL PARTY OF MANIPUR, COALITION POLITICS AND SOCIO-POLITICAL ISSUES OF THE STATE

5.1. Introduction:

Manipur has a long history of electoral politics dating as early as 1948. The state assembly elections held to constitute a 53 member Assembly that year was also the first ever elections based on universal adult franchise held in India after the departure of the British. Yet, till the last 2012 State Assembly Elections no party had ever won a majority in the history of electoral politics of the state. No party ever won a majority either in Territorial Council elections or Territorial Assembly elections. About the State Assembly Elections after she won statehood also, the closest a party ever came to winning a majority in the 60 member State Legislature was that of winning 30 or half of the seats in the assembly, a feat which the Congress completed on two occasions – in the 1984 and the 2007 Assembly Elections. It was only in the last 2012 State Assembly Elections that the Congress won a victory which was as never before, winning as many as 42 seats out of the 60. Naturally the party system which emerged inside the state has been one of multi-party system which was obviously followed by a tradition of coalition ministries with as many as 16 of the 21 ministries so far inside the state since 1972 being coalition ministries. Obviously, the regional parties of the state played a significant role in the formation of the coalition ministries inside the state. The FPM joined State Assembly Elections on three occasions, the 6th, 7th and the 8th held in 1995, 2000 and 2002 winning two, six and 13 seats respectively. The present chapter is an attempt to study the role of the FPM in state politics in terms of its participation in coalition ministries inside the state and in terms of the socio-political issues it tried to address as a political party.
The term "coalition" is derived from the Latin word 'coalito' which is verbal substantive of coalesce. "Co" means together and "alescere" means to go or to go together.\textsuperscript{409} Coalition also means an act of coalescing, or uniting into one body, a union of persons, states or parts into one whole. The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Politics defines coalition as "any combination of separate players (such as political parties) to win a voting game. The commonest form of coalition arises where legislation required a majority to pass, but no one party controls as many as half of the seats in the Assembly."\textsuperscript{410}

A coalition is also an alliance of parties formed for the purpose of contesting elections jointly and/or forming a government and managing the governance by a process of sharing power. So, coalition implies co-operation between political parties and this co-operation may take place at one or more of the following different levels - electoral, parliamentary and governmental.\textsuperscript{411} It is an astonishing chorus of discords. Though outwardly a coalition appears to be one solid mass inwardly it is riddled by party foibles and worried by party fervours and power struggle and it is for this reason that coalitions prove to be transient.

The formation of coalition government emerged in the context of a multi-party system where a number of minority parties join hands with a view to running a government, which is otherwise not possible in a democracy. It also occurs when no one party has the majority in the legislative body. It is formed when many splinter groups agree to join hands on a common platform.

\textsuperscript{411} N. Jose Chander, Coalition Politics: The Indian Experience, New Delhi, Concept Publishing Company, 2004, p.5.
by sinking their broad differences and cobble a majority in the house. It is rarely needed in a strong two-party system.\textsuperscript{412}

It is also to be noted that a coalition government comes into existence only when political parties fail to produce a majority in the legislature. It is a kind of solution to the problem faced by political party or parties to form a cabinet or ministry, when no party secures a majority in the legislature at the end of a general election. If politics is the art of the possibilities, then coalition politics is its highest expression.\textsuperscript{413} The art of forming a coalition involves passing through various bargaining, adjudging and sacrificing the ideologies and party or parties, at times, destroy the coalition formula or understanding at some opportune moment.\textsuperscript{414} In a single-party system, such a situation cannot arise. In two-party system in a strict sense also, the contingency of a coalition does not arise. It is only when there are more than two political parties that a situation calling for a combination of two or more parties coming together to form a coalition may arise. Even in systems having a multiplicity of parties a coalition may not be necessary if there is a single dominant party which generally secures a clear majority. The Indian political experience during the first two decades following independence is an outstanding example of coalitions being not necessary in spite of multiplicity of parties (1947-67).\textsuperscript{415} Party coalition also occurs when a nation is faced with overwhelming and imminent danger as in Great Britain during the World

\textsuperscript{412} Lamabam Satyabati Devi, Coalition Politics in Manipur (1972-2001), Unpublished Ph.D Thesis submitted to the Department of Political Science, Manipur University, 2008, p.1
\textsuperscript{413} Ibid. p.132.
Wars. Coalitions were then designed to stop partisan activities in times of conflict. 416

5.2. Coalition politics in Manipur:

The contemporary political history of Manipur is a history of coalition politics. Though it is basically a post-merger phenomena, some sort of coalitional alliances were witnessed during the colonial period also. “The State Darbar was a very important institution where the seed of a coalition administration was carried on between the British component and the Manipur representation.” 417 However, it was not a coalition form of government in the modern sense of the term. It was just a sort of an alliance made by the British with their subjects in order to administer the state. Coalition politics in its real sense started in the post-colonial period. The government which was formed in 1948 under the Manipur Constitution Act, 1947 was the first coalition ministry in Manipur. The government was formed by the Praja Shanti Sabha, the Socialist Party, the Communist Party and the Hill members. After the merger with the Indian Dominion, Manipur did not have a Legislative Assembly till 1963. In 1963, the Manipur Territorial Council was upgraded to Territorial Assembly. After that a government was installed in 1963 with Mairenbam Koireng Singh of the Congress as the Chief Minister. “The principle of a coalition ministry did not figure out prominently at that time as the Congress had already secured half of the total seats. But, since the help of the Independents was very much there, it may still be called a Congress-led coalition government.” 418 After that most of the governments which came into existence in Manipur have been coalitional in nature.

418 Ibid. p.87.
The coalition politics continued even after Manipur became a full-fledged state in 1972 as no political party has so far secured a clear majority in all the nine General Assembly Elections prior to the Tenth State Assembly Elections 2012. Though, the Congress party was part of the government, most of the time, it failed to secure majority in the legislature. The Congress party formed the government with the independent members or with small party or parties. People always gave a fractured mandate in the elections. As a result, no political party could dominate the political scene of the state. Manipur is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious state. As a result, ethnic-based political parties have also emerged in the state. Above all, many political parties emerged in the state after defecting from existing parties without having proper political agenda or ideology. These political parties did not last long. They either merged with one party or another or died a natural death. Because of the frequent mergers, splits and defections, ministries failed to last its normal tenure. Every now and then, changes of government took place in the state. From 1972 to 2007 there are 16 coalition ministries.

The details of the coalition ministries such as composition of parties, duration, type of government and the Chief Ministers can be seen from the following table.\(^ {419}\)

Table: 75
Coalition Ministries in Manipur

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No</th>
<th>Chief Minister</th>
<th>Name of the government</th>
<th>Party Composition of the government</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Y. Shaiza</td>
<td>Progressive Democratic Front</td>
<td>MHU, Cong(I), CPI, IND</td>
<td>10.7.1974 to 5.12.1974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>R.K. Dorendro</td>
<td>Democratic Legislature Party</td>
<td>Cong(I), CPI, MPP, MHU</td>
<td>23.7.1975 to 13.5.1977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Rishang Keishing</td>
<td>Progressive Democratic Front</td>
<td>Cong(I), Cong(U), MPP</td>
<td>27.11.1980 to 28.2.1981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Rishang Keishing</td>
<td>Congress(I)</td>
<td>Congress(I)</td>
<td>4.1.1985 to 4.3.1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>R.K. Joychandra</td>
<td>Congress(I)</td>
<td>Congress(I)</td>
<td>4.3.1988 to 7.2.1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>R.K. Ranbir</td>
<td>United Legislature Front</td>
<td>MPP, JD, Cong(S), CPI(M), KNA</td>
<td>23.2.1990 to 7.1.1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Leader(s)</td>
<td>Coalition Name</td>
<td>Party Affiliations</td>
<td>Formation Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Rishang Keishing</td>
<td>Congress(I) (I) led coalition</td>
<td>Cong(I), Cong(S), JD, KNA</td>
<td>14.12.1994 to 24.2.1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Rishang Keishing</td>
<td>Congress (I) led coalition</td>
<td>Congress (I), FPM, PJD, NPP, SAP, JD (Sephu Group), Congress (S)</td>
<td>25-2-1995 to 15-12-1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>W. Nipamacha</td>
<td>United Front</td>
<td>MSCP, MPP, FPM, CPI, IND</td>
<td>16-12-1997 to 1-3-2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>W. Nipamacha</td>
<td>United Front</td>
<td>MSCP, MPP(K), FPM, NCP (O), NCP (D)</td>
<td>2-3-2000 to 14-2-2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Radhabinod</td>
<td>United Democratic Alliance</td>
<td>SAP, MSCP, FPM, IND</td>
<td>15-2-2001 to 1-6-2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>O.Ibobi Singh</td>
<td>Secular Progressive Front</td>
<td>Cong(I), CPI, MSCP, NCP</td>
<td>7.3.2002 to 1.3.2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>O.Ibobi Singh</td>
<td>Secular Progressive Front</td>
<td>Congress (I)</td>
<td>2.3.2007 to 13.3.2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>O.Ibobi Singh</td>
<td>Congress (I)</td>
<td>Congress (I)</td>
<td>14.3.2012 to till date</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MHU*: a faction of MHU

5.3. Role of State Parties in Coalition Ministries:

State parties have been playing an important role in the formation of government. Of the 16 coalition ministries five were led by state parties, three led by MPP and two led by MSCP. In addition, there were eleven coalition ministries when regional parties from the state were coalition partners. The MPP was the first State Party from Manipur that led a coalition ministry. In fact it led two consecutive coalition ministries. The first one was formed under the banner of United Legislature Party under the Chief Ministership of Md. Alimuddin of the party. It was a coalition formed with SSP, Congress (O) and Independents. It survived for one year and five days, i.e. from 23 March 1972
to 28 March 1973. After an interval of President's Rule (PR), another MPP led coalition ministry was installed. It lasted from 4 March 1974 to 8 July 1974. The other coalition partners this time were the MHU, KNA, SSP and Independents. Of these three political parties, the first two were regional parties from the state thereby making the number of regional parties from the state in the ministry three.

The MPP was yet to lead another coalition ministry much later. It was formed under the banner of United Legislature Front with R.K. Ranbir Singh of the party as the Chief Minister. The coalition partners this time were the Janata Dal, Congress (S), CPI (M) and KNA. There were two regional parties this time – the MPP and the KNA. It was installed on 23 February 1990 and lasted till 7 January 1992.

The other regional party from the state to ever lead a coalition ministry in Manipur is the MSCP. It also led two consecutive coalition ministries. Both were formed under the banner of the United Front with W. Nipamacha Singh of the party as the Chief Minister. The first one was formed on 16 December 1997 and it lasted up to 1 March 2000 surviving two years, three months and fourteen days, a record till today for a coalition party led by a regional party from the state. The Front was formed with MPP, FPM, CPI and Independents.

The second coalition ministry led by MSCP was formed under the same United Front banner. This time there were two more regional parties from the state – the FPM and the MPP (K), along with NCP (O) and NCP (D) as the other coalition partners. It lasted from 2 March 2000 to 14 February 2001.

Apart from leading coalition ministries on five occasions, the regional parties from the state have also been an indispensable part of coalition ministries led by national parties in Manipur. It is evident from the fact that
they were there as coalition partners in as many as eleven coalition ministries in Manipur led by national parties. The first one was the Progressive Democratic Front Government led by Congress (I) with Y. Shaiza as the Chief Minister. The regional party from the state joining the coalition was the MHU. It lasted from 10 July 1974 to 5 December 1974. Then came the Democratic Legislature Party (DLP) Government. It was again led by the Congress under the leadership of R.K. Dorendro Singh. There were two regional parties from the state in the ministry - the MPP and the MHU, along with the SSP. It was installed on 23 July 1975 and it lasted till 15 May 1977. Both the MPP and the MHU were there in this ministry but the SSP was displaced by the CPI this time in the DLP ministry.

Later, both the MPP and the KNA were there in the Congress (I)-led coalition ministry formed under the banner of the Progressive Democratic Front (PDF), with R.K. Dorendro Singh as the Chief Minister. However, the MPP was not there when the ministry was replaced by another coalition ministry under the same banner but with Rishang Keishing as the Chief Minister though the KNA continued to be there. The first PDF ministry lasted from 14 January 1980 to 26 November 1980, and the second one from 27 November 1980 to 28 February 1981. The MPP was there again in the next coalition ministry led by the Congress under the leadership of R.K. Dorendro. It was there from 8 April 1992 to 31 December 1993.

The next two coalition ministry was also led by Congress (I) with Rishang Keishing as the Chief Minister. The first one was formed with one state party, KNA and two national parties, Congress (S) and JD as the other coalition partners. It lasted from 14 December 1994 to 24 February 1995. In the second ministry, two regional parties from the state – the MPP and the NPP were there in the coalition with a host of other national parties.
The next coalition ministry in Manipur with a regional party from the state as a partner was that of the Peoples' Front Government led by K. Radhabinod Singh of the Samata Party. Two regional parties from the state – the MSCP and the FPM were there. The ministry lasted less than four months, i.e. from 15 February to 1 June 2001. The last two ministries before the present Congress ministry were also coalition ministries and the MSCP was there in both these ministries. These two ministries, in spite of being coalition ministries lasted their respective full terms, something that had never happened before in the history of popular ministries in Manipur. Three important factors have contributed to this – emergence of stringent anti-defection laws since the coming of 91st Amendment, the growing dominance of the Congress, and the accompanying decline of regional parties of the state.

5.4. Role of the Federal Party of Manipur in the formation of government:

Regarding the role of the FPM in the formation of ministries inside the state, during the short span of its existence the party was a partner to four coalition ministries. The following table shows the details of these four ministries:\[420\]
### Table: 76

**Federal Party of Manipur in Coalition Ministries**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No</th>
<th>Chief Minister</th>
<th>Name of the government</th>
<th>Party Composition of the government</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Rishang Keishing</td>
<td>Congress (I)</td>
<td>Congress (I), FPM, PID, NPP, SAP, JD (Sephu Group), Congress (S)</td>
<td>25-2-1995 to 15-12-1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>W. Nipamacha</td>
<td>United Front</td>
<td>MSCP, MPP, FPM, CPI, IND</td>
<td>16-12-1997 to 1-3-2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>W. Nipamacha</td>
<td>United Front</td>
<td>MSCP, MPP(K), FPM, NCP (O), NCP (D)</td>
<td>2-3-2000 to 14-2-2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Radhabinod</td>
<td>United Democratic Alliance</td>
<td>SAP, MSCP, FPM, IND</td>
<td>15-2-2001 to 1-6-2001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first ministry of which the FPM was a coalition partner was the one led by the Congress (I) with Rishang Keishing as the Chief Minister. The other parties in the ministry were the Progressive Janata Dal, National People’s Party, Samata Party, Janata Dal Sephu Group, and Congress (S). The composition of the coalition ministry was: Congress (I) – 22, Federal Party of Manipur – 2, Progressive Janata Dal – 4, National People’s Party – 2, Samata Party – 2, Janata Dal Sephu Group – 1, Congress (S) – 1, Independent – 3.\(^{421}\) Explaining reasons for joining coalition, the leader of the party Gangmumei Kamei said that his party is committed to the establishment of a stable government in the state so that development programs of the state can be effectively pursued. Therefore, the party decided to support the party with the maximum number of seats won in the last elections.\(^{422}\) He, however, also insisted that it should be a ministry committed to the all-round development

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\(^{422}\) Huiyen Lanpao, a local Manipuri daily, dated 2 March 1995, p. 1.
of the state and promotion of the overall welfare of the people. As such his party was open to alliances with and other party winning a good number of seats in the assembly to pursue this goal.\footnote{Ibid.} The duration of the coalition government was from 25.2.1995 to 15.12.1997. However, the party was in the coalition only from 26 March to 3 July 1995.

Even though the coalition government led by Shri Rishang Keishing was sworn in on 25 February, 1995, his Ministry was expanded in three phases. The first two expansions took place in the month of March and the third one in the month of July. The two MLAs of The Federal Party of Manipur, namely, Prof. Gangmumei Kamei and W. Thoiba Singh were inducted in the first phase itself which took place on 29 March 1995. Gangmumei Kamei was the Minister of Higher and Technical Education and also of Science, Technology and Environment whereas W. Thoiba Singh was the Minister of Publicity and Information, and Tourism. The very fact that all the two MLAs of the party were given ministerial berths in the coalition ministry says a lot about the significance of the party during the formation of the ministry. However, the two MLAs of FPM resigned on 3 July, 1995 on the ground that they were not satisfied with the Rishang Keishing's Ministry.\footnote{Lamabam Satyabati Devi, Coalition Politics in Manipur (1972-2001), Unpublished Ph.D Thesis submitted to the Department of Political Science, Manipur University, 2008,p.240.}

The next coalition ministry joined by the FPM was the one led by Manipur State Congress Party (MSCP) under the Chief Ministership of W. Nipamacha Singh. The partners of the coalition ministry were Manipur State Congress Party (MSCP), Manipur People's Party (MPP), Federal Party of Manipur (FPM), Communist Party of India (CPI), and Independent. The
composition of the coalition was MSCP – 23, MPP – 14, FPM – 2, CPI – 1. W. Nipamacha Singh was sworn in as the Chief Minister along with 25 other cabinet ministers on 16 December 1997.

Prof. Gangmumei Kamei of the FPM was also sworn in as one of the cabinet ministers. When the portfolios were distributed on 22 December 1997 he was given the Ministry of Forest and Environment. Later, he was also given the Law Department. Later, the other MLA of the party, W. Thoiba Singh was also appointed to the Cabinet post of Co-operatives and Arts and Culture. The fact that both the two MLAs of the party got ministerial posts both in the coalition ministry led by the Congress and in the other led by the MSCP, further proves the very crucial role the party, in spite of winning only two seats, played in time of formation of the ministries. The ministry lasted till the next State Assembly Elections held in 2000.

In the State Assembly Elections held in 2000, the MSCP emerged as the party winning maximum number of seats with 23. This time the FPM won 6 seats. The elections were followed by another MSCP led coalition ministry inside the state, again with W. Nipamacha Singh as the Chief Minister. The new coalition included MSCP – 23, FPM – 6, NCP (D) – 4, and MPP (K) – 3. The new ministry was a jumbo-sized one. It was sworn in on 2 March 2000. It had 23 cabinet ministers and 11 state ministers. There were five from the FPM included in the ministry – three as cabinet ministers and two as state ministers with independent charges. The three FPM MLAs who got Cabinet berths were Prof. Gangmumei Kamei, W. Thoiba Singh and Haokholet Kipgen, and the other two FPM MLAs who got Minister of State berths with independent charges were L. Bhagyachandra Singh and Dr. Khasim Ruivah. The other MLA

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of the party K. Raina was the only remaining MLA of the party which did not get any ministerial berth. Among the cabinet ministers, Gangmumei Kamei was given Forest and Environment and Law; W. Thoiba Singh was given Co-operation, and Art and Culture; and Haokholet Kipgen was given Transport, and Weights and Measures. For the other two ministers of state with independent portfolios, L. Bhagyachandra Singh was given Higher Education; and Dr. Khasim Ruivah was given Tourism, and Science and Technology. Once again, the FPM succeeded to secure five ministerial berths for itself though it won only six seats. This bears ample testimony to the bargaining prowess the party had in time of formation of the coalition ministry. The ministry lasted till 12 February, 2001.

The fourth and the last coalition government which the FPM joined was the United Democratic Alliance, also known as People’s Front Alliance. It was led by Samata party under the leadership of Radhabinod Koljam. The composition of the coalition ministry was: SAP – 12, MSCP – 23, FPM – 4\(^{426}\), BJP – 6, JD(S) – 1, NCP – 2, MPP – 1, IND – 1. It is important to note that by this time there was a clear cleavage in the legislative wing of the FPM. One comprised Gangmumei Kamei, Haokholet Kipgen, L. Bhagyachandra Singh and Dr. Khasim Ruivah and the other comprised W. Thoiba and K. Raina. Of these two groups, it was the former who joined the new coalition, and the later did not join the coalition. The two who did not join the coalition soon formed a new party on 26 February called the Democratic Federal Party of Manipur,\(^{427}\) and set in opposition. Later it merged into the BJP.\(^{428}\) The duration of the ministry was from 15 February 2001 to 1 June 2001.

\(^{426}\) The other two MLAs of FPM were in the opposition.
\(^{428}\) Poknapham, 23 April, 2001 p.1.
It was not smooth sailing for the other group of the party which joined the coalition ministry. On 12 May, 2001, seven members were expelled from the ministry by Chief Minister Radhabinod Koijam, including two from the FPM and five from the MSCP. The two from FPM were Prof. Gangmumei Kamei and Dr. Khasim Ruivah. The five from the MSCP were M. Kunjo, Ksh. Biren. S. Rajen. Md. Alaudin and A. Biren.429

Following the fall of the Radhabinod ministry which lasted for only about three months, Manipur was put under the President’s Rule. This was followed by the dissolution of the Assembly due to the June Uprising in the valley against the extension of the Indo-NSCN (IM) Cease-fire Agreement without territorial limits thereby bringing the Naga-inhabited areas of the state within the purview of the Agreement. It was a time when people were closely examining political parties’ commitment to the protection of territorial integrity of the state. In such a situation, the FPM was the party, national or regional whose credibility was least affected by the crisis as it had been understood as a party that has been formed with the protection of the territorial integrity of the state and that of the basic unity and oneness of the people living inside the state. As a result, a number of prominent politicians from other parties including the Congress joined the FPM thereby enhancing the chances of the success of the party in the 2002 assembly elections.

Yet, once the 2002 elections were over, the FPM found itself excluded from the ruling coalition. This, is in spite of the fact that it won as many as 13 seats in the state legislative assembly, the maximum it ever won in any of the elections till then. It may be noted that, by this time, the FPM and the MSCP had parted ways though they joined hands together earlier to form a coalition ministry following the 2000 assembly elections. The Congress which had won

20 seats this time had entered into an alliance with the CPI and the NCP at the Centre about that time and was in opposition. Given that, the three joined hands together in the state also to form a coalition ministry with CPI winning five seats and NCP three in the 2002 assembly elections, and to muster up the required majority, it opted for the MSCP which have won seven seats thereby leaving out the FPM. Perhaps, the sidelining of the FPM also had to do with the fact that many leading Congressmen had left the party and had joined the FPM on the eve of the 2002 assembly elections and many of them have actually won the elections as well.

5.5. FPM and socio-political issues of the State:

Throughout the period of its existence the FPM was known for its avowed commitment to a number of goals which the people came to easily associate with the party. These goals have been highlighted time and again in the manifestoes of the party published in connection with the assembly and Lok Sabha elections the party contested. Naturally, the party addressed itself to the realization of these goals. The following paras throw light on the efforts of the party to address them.

5.5.a. Federal Restructuring and Autonomy Rights of the State:

Given the name of the Party, it is only natural that the Party stood for an Indian political state which will be truly federal, and not something of a quasi-federation, and that it always stood for the protection of the autonomy rights of the state. These have been things that have been emphasized at the very outset of the party’s constitution,\textsuperscript{430} and also in all the manifestoes which the party released in connection with the 1995\textsuperscript{431}, 2000\textsuperscript{432} and 2002\textsuperscript{433}

\textsuperscript{430} Constitution, Federal party of Manipur, p. 2.
Assembly Elections and also in connection with the 1996\textsuperscript{434}, 1999\textsuperscript{435} and 2004\textsuperscript{436} Lok Sabha Elections. Indeed, "To restructure the relationship between Manipur and the Federal Government of India on the federal principles and the historical rights of Manipur based on the pre-merger political status"\textsuperscript{437} has been one of the main objectives of the Party. The main purpose behind this emphasis has been that of promoting the autonomy rights of the states including Manipur. As such, the party strongly reacted against any attempt or instance of trespassing by the Centre into the autonomy rights of the state. The very first Convention of the Party expressed "a deep concern at the dilution of the federal principle of the division of powers between the Federal Government and the States of the Union" as a result of which there has been an "over centralization" of power into the hands of the Centre which means "weakening of the states."\textsuperscript{438}

The concern for restructuring the federal structure of the Indian Union with a view to secure autonomy rights of the state including Manipur was particularly evident while debating the Governor's issue in the Assembly during the first session of the 6\textsuperscript{th} Manipur State Legislative Assembly. Participating in it Gangmumeei Kamei regretted the role of the office of the Governor during the trial of strength of the Congress (I) ministry. He alleged the Governor of acting as an agent of the ruling party at the Centre and the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item[432] *Agenda of United Front, Manipur, 2000 comprising the MSCP and the Federal Party of Manipur, published by the United Front, pp. 6-7.*
  \item[434] *The Federal Agenda, 1996, the manifesto of the Federal Party of Manipur, p. 2.*
  \item[435] *Federal Agenda 1999, the manifesto of the Federal Party of Manipur.*
  \item[436] *The Common Manifesto of the Democratic People's Alliance comprising the MPP, MNC, DRPP, JD (U) and Federal Party of Manipur, 14\textsuperscript{th} Lok Sabha Elections 2004, published by Kh. Mohendro Singh, General Secretary of the FPM on behalf of the DPA, p. 5.*
  \item[438] *Federalism and Autonomy for Manipur, Resolutions of the First Convention of Federal Party of Manipur, 21\textsuperscript{st} October 1994, Imphal, p. 1.*
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
state. He pointed out that as India is a Union of States, the states should have more autonomy, and that the present provisions of distribution of power do not provide adequate autonomy to the states. He also demanded that there should be equal representation in the Upper House of the Federal Assembly so that equality of statehood of all the federating unites are given due recognition irrespective of size and population. He also strongly argued for the amendment of those provisions dealing with distribution of power between the Centre and states, particularly the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution so that a just federal power equation between and the Centre and the states could be secured. He was also in favour of abolishing Article 356 of the Constitution which he described as “an instrument of Central intervention” in the autonomy rights of the states. Speaking specifically for the autonomy concerns of Manipur, he said:

“Manipur was merged with India in 1949. At that time the autonomy and the status of the State were not negotiated, but Manipur had its own Constitution known as “Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947”, and the Standstill Agreement respectively to administer her own State and to regulate relation with India. These two documents were not abrogated. The status of Manipur has to be renegotiated and the Pre-Merger Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947 and the spirit of Article 370 (Kashmir) and Article 371A (autonomy for Nagaland) should be applicable for Manipur also.”

In a letter sent to the PM, the President of the party demanded remoulding of Centre - state relations in India on truly federal lines. He also

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440 Ibid, pp. 75-76.
441 Ibid., p. 76.
443 Letter sent to the Prime Minister Devi Gowda by Gangmumei Kamei, President of the Federal party of Manipur dated 3 July 1996.
insisted that reorganization of the Indian political system on the basis of true federal principles thereby securing just autonomy rights for the state as one of the most important desires of the people of the state.\textsuperscript{444} The President also demanded special constitutional status to be granted to Manipur just like it has been done for Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 and for Nagaland under Article 371 A of the Constitution.\textsuperscript{445} Further, he also demanded restructuring of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution to better secure autonomy rights of the states.\textsuperscript{446}

5.5.b. Territorial integrity of Manipur:

One of the basic objectives of the Party as mentioned in its Constitution was that of the protection and preservation of the territorial integrity of the state and the basic unity and oneness of the people living inside it.\textsuperscript{447} This is a commitment the party reiterated in the manifestoes of all the State Assembly and Lok Sabha Elections which the Party contested. It was there in time of the State Assembly Elections 1995\textsuperscript{448}, 2000\textsuperscript{449} and 2002\textsuperscript{450}, and also in time of the 1996\textsuperscript{451}, 1999\textsuperscript{452} and 2004\textsuperscript{453}. Naturally, when the issue came up for discussion in the first session of the 6\textsuperscript{th} Assembly of the state the Party actively participated in the discussion. It was the first ever session the FPM ever joined.

\textsuperscript{444} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{445} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{446} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{447} Constitution, Federal Party of Manipur, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{449} Agenda of the United Front, Manipur, 2000 published by the Front comprising MSCP and FPM, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{450} The Federal Agenda 2002, a blueprint for a new united and prosperous Manipur, published by the federal party of Manipur on the eve of 2002 elections, p.3.
\textsuperscript{451} The Federal Agenda, 1996, Manifesto of the Federal Party of Manipur published by the Party on the eve of the 1999 Lok Sabha Elections, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{452} The Federal Agenda, 1999, Manifesto of the Federal Party of Manipur published by the Party on the eve of the 1999 Lok Sabha Elections, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{453} Common Manifesto of Democratic People's Alliance comprising MPP, MNC, DRPP, JD (U) and FPM, 2004, p. 1.
since its formation. The issue became a burning one in view of a resolution unanimously passed in the Nagaland State Assembly in September 1994. The resolution was moved by an opposition member in the Nagaland assembly named Vamuzo and was for the unification of all the Naga-inhabited areas in Manipur, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Myanmar into one political unit. It was a time when many complaints about collecting taxes from Manipuris by Naga militants were also there. There were also complaints of collecting taxes from even essential commodities brought for Manipur through Nagaland. Owners or drivers of private vehicles passing through Dimapur while coming to or going from Manipur were also regularly subjected to extortions on the national highway. The extortions became so serious that it was difficult even for the government's civil supply vehicles to pass through Dimapur with ten of the departments drivers forcibly detained with demands for money. Reports of collecting Rs 50/ from each and every other commercial vehicle plying through Dimapur were also there. Even the Mao gate at the area bordering Manipur and Nagaland was attacked and vandalised by alleged supporters of Naga integration saying that it is not Manipur. In addition to all these a book titled ‘Why Not South Nagaland’ published by the Naga Students' Federation had also emerged where demands for the inclusion of Naga-inhabited areas of the state to the so called South Nagaland was made. The issue has become so serious an issue that it was reflected in the Governor's address at the start of the session. Participating in the debate on a draft resolution moved by an opposition member to condemn the

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455 Ibid., p. 32.
456 Ibid., p. 38.
458 Ibid., p. 98.
Nagaland Assembly’s resolution and to uphold the territorial integrity of the state, the leader of the legislative wing of the party Gangmumei vehemently argued for the protection of the territorial integrity of the state. He pointed out that the people of Manipur have a common historical legacy for the last two thousand years or so, and that the territorial boundary of the state has been internationally recognized as early as 1471. Her status as a separate state was recognised by the British and Burmese during the 19th Century. While granting statehood to Manipur in 1972, the Constitution of India defined the boundary of Manipur as the territory which immediately before the commencement of the constitution was being administered as if it were a Chief Commissioner’s Province under name of Manipur. Thus supporting the spirit of the resolution, he pointed out that the territorial boundary of Manipur is something that has been “constitutionally guaranteed” and “internationally recognised”.

During a special session on the issue of the territorial integrity of the state in 2002 also, the MLAs of the party actively participated in it. Participating in it, M. Nilachandra of the party pointed out that the Nagas are also indigenous people of the state who have been living with other different communities inside the state for about 2000 years, and that the Meiteis, Nagas and Kuki-Chin-Mizo group of people are all brothers and sisters forming a unity called Manipuri people. For him, the bond these three communities inside the state share is something that can never be broken. In order to better safeguard the interests of the territorial integrity of the state he further demanded the Amendment of Article 3 of the Constitution which gives the

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460 Ibid., Vol. 3., p. 78.  
461 Ibid., Vol. 3, pp. 79-81.  
462 Ibid., p. 81.  
463 Manipur Legislative Assembly Proceedings, 2002, Special Session on Territorial Integrity of Manipur.  
464 Ibid.
Union Legislature the power to change the boundaries of the existing states and also to create new states.\textsuperscript{465} The same was reiterated by another MLA of the party L. Hemochandra Singh during the discussions.\textsuperscript{466} Shri. L. Ibomcha, another MLA of the party also suggested a number of ways and means to be adopted for strengthening the bond of unity and oneness among the different communities in Manipur so that the interests of territorial integrity of the state is better protected. These included frequent visits by heads of departments, Commissioners and Secretaries in far flung areas of the state assuring the people there that their interests will be justly taken care of by the government; holding cabinet meetings in different district headquarters from time to time; etc.\textsuperscript{467}

The Party also resolved to extend support to and participate in the rally to be organized at Imphal on 4 August 1997 by numerous voluntary organizations for the protection of the territorial boundary of Manipur.\textsuperscript{468} The Party also joined hands with the BJP and MPP to form a Democratic People's Alliance on 8 November 2002. When the alliance announced its common minimum program, the protection of the territorial integrity of the state was also there as one of the 30 points listed.\textsuperscript{469} The Party also went to different parts of the hills of Manipur with a view to promoting the interest of the territorial integrity of Manipur.\textsuperscript{470} The Party also demanded the Amendment of Article 3 as it renders the territorial integrity of Manipur more vulnerable under the existing circumstances.

\textsuperscript{465} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{466} Ibid, p.80.
\textsuperscript{467} Ibid,p.127.
\textsuperscript{468} Poknapham, 3 August 1997, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{469} Poknapham, 9 November 2002, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{470} Poknapham, 22 October 2003, p.1.
5.5.6. Peaceful settlement of the problem of insurgency:

At present, one of the most serious problems the state is facing is that of insurgency. The rumblings of the problem were heard first in the Naga-inhabited area of Ukhrul during the mid-1950s. The problem as it started then was more of an extension of the problem of Naga insurgency in the then Naga hills of the state. By mid-1960s insurgent organizations like the UNLF and the Meitei State Committee also emerged in the valley. The state witnessed a decline in the activities of insurgent organizations for a few years following the grant of statehood to Manipur and the grant of general amnesty which was extended to the insurgents along with the grant of statehood. However, the late 1970s saw the emergence of the problem with renewed intensity. This was due to the formation of new insurgent organizations like the PREPAK (1977), PLA (1978), KCP (1980), etc. and also because of the resurfacing of the UNLF from 1980 onwards after remaining dormant for the most part of the 1970s. All the parties inside the state, national and regional, were for finding a meaningful and lasting solution to the problem, and the FPM of Manipur was not an exception to it. Finding a peaceful solution to the problem through political dialogue has been one of the important agendas of the party. It was prominently there in the manifestoes of the Party when it contested the 1995\textsuperscript{471}, 2000\textsuperscript{472} and 2002\textsuperscript{473} Assembly Elections and the 1996\textsuperscript{474}, 1999\textsuperscript{475} and 2004\textsuperscript{476} Lok Sabha Elections.

\textsuperscript{472} Agenda of United Front, Manipur 2000, pp-8-9.
\textsuperscript{473} The Federal Agenda 2002 A Blueprint for a New United and Prosperous Manipur, Federal Party of Manipur, pp 4-5.
\textsuperscript{474} The Federal Agenda, 1996, Manifesto of the Federal Party of Manipur published by the party on the eve of the 1999 Lok Sabha Elections, p.4.
\textsuperscript{476} Common Manifesto of Democratic People's Alliance, (MPP, MNC, DRPP, JD (U) & FPM), p.1.
In pursuance of the commitment it gave to the people of Manipur to work for a peaceful solution to the problem of insurgency inside the state, the party missed no opportunity to participate in the debate and discussions in state assembly whenever the issue came up for discussion. Participating in a discussion in the Assembly house in connection with the Operation Sunny Vale, the Party came out strongly in favour of finding a peaceful solution to the problem through dialogues between the government and the insurgent organizations. The Operation Sunny Vale was launched in the Manipur Valley in 1993 with a view to “checking and thwarting the subversive activities of the various extremist outfits operating in the valley.” Participating in the debate, the then Chief Minister had said that the ultimate solution will be political. In this regard, the MLAs of the FPM in the House pointed out that though the term political solution was used by the Governor as well in his Address to the House the term was not properly spelled out neither in the Address nor anywhere by the government, and that there was the need for it. They also pointed out certain inconsistencies in the government’s approach to the problem. For instance, both the Central and the state governments use the term “political solution” as the means to solve the problem. Yet, both have taken the problem not as a political one but as a “law and order problem” and the insurgent organizations and the insurgents as “terrorists”. They also pointed out their reservations about the terms and conditions within which the desired peaceful solution was to be sought, and also about the readiness of the insurgent organizations to negotiate a settlement within the framework of the Indian Constitution. Therefore, they insisted that a sincere, consistent and firm political will on the part of the governments to really succeed in solving the problem of insurgency inside the

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478 Ibid., p. 7.
479 Ibid., p. 7.
state was necessary, and that the talks should be without any precondition.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 7-9.}

They further criticized the government saying that though the state government says it "believes in solving the problem of insurgency through peaceful means", and have appealed to "the insurgents to come forward, lay down arms and adopt democratic approach for resolution of their problems", it has not come out with any specific proposals.\footnote{Assembly Proceedings, 8\textsuperscript{th} Manipur State Legislative Assembly Manipur, Vol. 79, 11\textsuperscript{th} Session, 2005, p. 59.} For its part, the party believed that operations like that of Operation Sunny Vale will not solve the problem, and insisted on peaceful negotiation between the Government of India and the insurgent groups without any pre-condition.\footnote{Huyen Lanpao, a local Manipuri daily, 17 September 1995, p. 1.} The Party also wanted to enlist the support and co-operation of civil society groups and persons of stature with credibility for the purpose.

\textbf{5.5.d. Human Rights of the people:}

Protection and promotion of human rights interests of the people was another major commitment the party gave to the people. This was in view of the fact that the human rights interests of the people of the state have become very much vulnerable in a situation of conflict between the insurgent organizations and the state in Manipur which has been accompanied by the introduction of a number of extraordinary acts like that of the AFSPA, TADA, Punjab Security Act, etc. As the party once said: "Manipur with military, paramilitary and police forces stationed all over the state looks like a police state and a vast concentration camp" and that the "human rights violations committed by the security forces have been known throughout the world".\footnote{The Federal Manifesto, 1995, Federal Party of Manipur, p. 6.} One specific step the party wanted to take up to realize this goal was that of the establishment of a Human Rights Commission for the state. In conformity
with the party’s commitment to the protection of the human rights of the people, its MLAs strongly supported by a private member resolution moved by the then opposition leader for the formation of a state human rights commission in 1995. Saying that the people of Manipur want “to live with human dignity”, the party pointed out that the establishment of such a commission, along with the efforts of Meira Paibis (women fighting for the protection of human rights who started by taking patrols at night with torches in their hands) and other human rights groups inside the state fighting for the protection of these rights, will go a long way in protecting the human rights of the people and in securing a life of dignity to the people.\textsuperscript{484} The party further supplemented its demand for the establishment of a State Human Rights Commission with their demand for the removal of AFSPA from the state.\textsuperscript{485} It also demanded the removal of other acts like the TADA and Punjab Security Act, and also political prisoner status for the insurgents of various groups arrested or imprisoned by the State for the protection of human rights of the people.\textsuperscript{486} In a letter to the then PM Deve Gowda, dated 3 July 1996, the party’s President Gangmumei Kamei complained about human rights violations by the security forces in the name of counter-insurgency.\textsuperscript{487} Ultimately, the Manipur Human Rights Commission was formed by the United Front Government (a coalition Government formed by the FPM and MSCP) in the year 1998. Later, the FPM as an ally of Democratic People’s Alliance (DPA) which was formed by opposition parties after 2002 State Assembly Elections demanded the strengthening of the State Human Rights Commission. The DPA was also opposed to the introduction of POTA in the State and it stood for the

\textsuperscript{484} Assembly Proceedings, 6\textsuperscript{th} Manipur State Legislative Assembly, third Session, Vol. 12, 1995, pp. 109-112.
\textsuperscript{485} Manipur Legislative Assembly Proceedings, 2004, Vol-71, 9\textsuperscript{th} session.
\textsuperscript{486} The Federal Manifesto, 1995, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{487} Letter sent to the Prime Minister Devi Gowda by Gangmumei Kamei, President of the Federal party of Manipur dated 3 July 1996.
Rule of Law inside the state. The parties MLAs like L. Ibomcha Singh and L. Hemochandra Singh also fervently argued in the state legislature for the removal of the AFSPA.

5.5.e. Shifting of the Assam Rifles from Kangla:

Describing Kangla as “the ancient capital of Manipur and sacred seat of religion and culture”\textsuperscript{488} of the people, shifting of Assam Rifles from Kangla was one basic commitment the party made to the people of the state. It was also for the protection and preservation of it as a historical and cultural site.\textsuperscript{489} Ever committed to the protection of the sanctity of Kangla, the MLAs of the party actively supported different debates in the assembly towards this goal. Kangla is the ancestral palace site of Manipur. It is a sacred place for the people of the state both in the hills and plains and is irrevocably associated with the socio-religious, cultural and political traditions of the people right from ancient times. It is also the site from where numerous kings of Manipur have ruled for about 2000 years.\textsuperscript{490} As such, for the Manipuris, the site has been a symbol of their sacred past history, independent political existence and rich socio-cultural heritage. However, the site was occupied by the British since 1891 till their departure in 1947. After their departure it continued to be occupied by the Assam Rifles. Given this fact, the continued placement of the Assam Rifles in the sacred site has always been some sort of an affront to pride and prestige of the people of Manipur. It comes as a symbol of colonial domination of them and their state, and as a “symbol of

\textsuperscript{490} Assembly Proceedings, Vol. 3, the Sixth Manipur State Legislative Assembly, 24 March 1995, First session, Manipur State Legislative Assembly, p.40.
India's imperial legacy. As such, the demand for the removal of the Assam Rifles from Kangla was raised as early as 1953. The demand was pursued by subsequent governments of the state after Manipur got statehood also. However, as the issue required approval of the Centre, it remained unfulfilled for a long time. Participating in the discussion of a private member resolution for the removal of Assam Rifles from Kangla, the party's MLA Gangmumei described Kangla as the site of origin for the Sanamahi religion (the traditional religion of the Meiteis before the coming of Hinduism) and also of the religion of other non-Hindu communities inside the state. He also pointed out that there are 108 holy sites inside Kangla, all closely related with the socio-religious and cultural beliefs and practices of the people of the state, and that the site has already been protected under the Historical and Archaeological Remains Protection Act. Describing the demand for the removal of Assam Rifles from Kangla as a long-cherished democratic wish of the people, during the British colonial period as well as after independence, Gangmumei strongly demanded the removal of Assam Rifles from the site as soon as possible. He believed that it will go a long way in strengthening the people's faith in India as a free country with Manipur as a free part of it.

5.5.f. Development of transport and communication:

Participating in the discussion of budget in the First Session of the Assembly in 1995, Gangmumei strongly demanded development of National Highway No. 39 and 53 so that not only the essential commodities could be

491 Assembly Proceedings, Vol. 4, the Sixth Manipur State Legislative Assembly, 24 March 1995, First session, Manipur State Legislative Assembly, p.55.
492 Assembly Proceedings, Vol. 4, the Sixth Manipur State Legislative Assembly, 24 March 1995, First session, Manipur State Legislative Assembly, p.44.
493 Ibid., p. 48.
494 Ibid., p. 55.
495 Ibid.
496 Ibid.
brought to the state without any disturbance throughout the year but also other materials necessary for the development of infra-structure of the state.\footnote{Assembly Proceedings, Vol. 2, the Sixth Manipur State Legislative Assembly, 23 March 1995, First Session, Manipur State Legislative Assembly, p.57.} He pointed out that development of the two highways and providing proper security there will ensure freedom of movement to the people at large.\footnote{Ibid., p.58.} The issue was a very significant one in view of the constant problems people travelling in the hills through these highways experience in the form of extortions, kidnappings, attacks on vehicles, etc., particularly on National Highway number 39 passing through the Naga-inhabited areas where Naga militants are active. He also pointed out the threats and constant sense of insecurity people travelling in the Imphal-Dimapur, Imphal-Jiri and Imphal-Churachandpur, and also in areas like Sugnu, Thanlon, Tipaimukh, etc. experience while travelling in the hills.\footnote{Ibid.}

5.5.g. Development of infrastructure:

Infrastructure development for the state was also one of the main concerns of the party. This required development of highways No. 39 and 53 and proper protection of them so that those materials and other things essential for the development could be transported into the state undisturbed throughout the year. This is a concern the party always emphasised inside the assembly whenever occasions permitted. It also reiterated the need for the proper and effective management of the Loktak Project which is a project of the Government of India, and the Loktak Down Stream Project which is a
project of state government, so that the power supply necessary while developing infrastructure of the state could be secured.\textsuperscript{500}

5.5.h. Miscellaneous:

Apart from the above mentioned important issues, there were also some other issues concerning the state and its people which the party pursued inside the state assembly. For instance, the party raised the need for framing a cultural policy for the state. The party has always committed itself to the formulation of a cultural policy for the state for the "development of culture of Manipur which has a place of honour in Indian culture and civilization."\textsuperscript{501} The party lamented that Manipur in spite of being a very culturally very rich state, and in spite of the fact that her culture is one for which the state is known throughout the country as well as abroad, the government has not taken up any significant step towards formulating a proper cultural policy for the state.\textsuperscript{502} Similarly, the party also pleaded in the assembly for framing a comprehensive sports policy for the state. Pointing out that the youths of state has shown huge potential to excel in sports at international levels, the party demanded proper incentives, financial or otherwise, for those who have excelled themselves in sports as well as those who have shown potential.\textsuperscript{503}

The party also raised the issue of giving proper compensation to those people who have been affected by the development projects taken up by the government. For instance, the party drew the attention of the state government and that of the assembly to the fact that many areas of land in

\textsuperscript{500} Assembly Proceedings, Vol. 4, the Sixth Manipur State Legislative Assembly, 25 March 1995, First Session, Manipur State Legislative Assembly, p.20.
\textsuperscript{502} Assembly Proceedings, 6\textsuperscript{th} Manipur State Legislative Assembly, Vol. 12, 1995, pp. 9-10.
\textsuperscript{503} Assembly Proceedings, 8\textsuperscript{th} Manipur State Legislative Assembly, Vol. 42, 6\textsuperscript{th} Session, pp. 69-70.
the hills have been taken over by the government for development projects. However, due compensation for these lands have not been given to the villages by the government. This happened mainly with regard to land taken over by the power department of the state. The party alleged that the government has taken these lands for granted as if they are valueless. Condemning such “negative attitudes” of the government, the party demanded due compensation to be given to the villagers. The party was also particular about the people whose land and property have been affected by road expansion plans, for national as well as state highways, in different parts of the valley, and also by the expansion of Imphal Airport; and demanded prompt and adequate compensation to be given for them. Proper implementation of development programs in Manipur in general and in the hills in particular, promotion of social forestry in the hills, adequate supply of essential services like that of electricity and water supply, etc. were also some other issues concerning the people of the state at large which the party raised in the state legislature. The Party also pursued issues like the proper development of irrigation and flood control measures, promotion of social welfare interests of the people, and development of science and technology. The party’s MLAs also raised the issue of granting due ex-gratia and other compensations to those common people who were victims of clashes between underground outfits and security forces. The Party also drew the attention of the government to the way Ashram schools were being

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run in the hills of Manipur. These schools were established in the state under guidelines provided by the Ministry of Tribal Welfare, New Delhi. Raising the issue in the legislature, the party complained that the teachers in these schools have not been given their salaries for months and that these schools have not been given the benefits of schemes like that of Mid-day meals, free school uniform, free education, etc. The party also strongly supported the formation of a 60 member Upper House for Manipur. Supporting a private members resolution moved by O. Joy Singh of the MPP, the party argued that this will facilitate serious involvement of the intellectual and experts in different fields in the policy decision making process in general and at the time of making development programs for the state in particular. The Party’s legislators also tried to secure a healthy and effective public distribution system both in the rural and urban areas, and both in hills and the valley.

5.6. Withering away of Federal Party of Manipur:

The Federal Party of Manipur was launched with much fanfare in 1995. From there the party grew from strength to strength with it winning two, six and 13 seats in the State Legislative Assembly in the 6th, 7th and 8th State Legislative Assembly Elections. Yet by the time 2007 Assembly Elections came, the party had already ceased to exist. In the records, it was the result of the party’s “merger” to the MPP on 18 September 2006 which led to the exit of the party from state politics which was the result of a process “for unification of regional political parties”. Yet, it was much more than that. It was rather a part as well as the result of an ongoing process of decline of regional parties

509 Ibid., p. 6.
510 Ibid., pp. 104-105.
inside the state. Therefore, the disappearance of the party from state politics has to be explained at two levels – a) at the level of a changed political scenario in state politics which saw a steady decline about the significance of regional parties in state politics, and b) at the level of a process of unification of regional political parties with a view to strengthening regional forces in state politics which started sometime in the closing months of 2005 and culminated in the merger of the FPM, the DRPP and Manipur Nationalist Party (MNP) into the MPP in September 2006.

Regarding the changed political scenario inside the state, it is true that the 8th State Assembly Elections saw one of the greatest ever successes of regional parties in Manipur. In that election, regional parties from the state won as many 25 seats out of the 60 seats in the state assembly with the FPM winning 13, MSCP winning 7, MPP winning 2, DRPP 1 and MNC 1. Yet, the Congress which had won 20 seats formed a coalition ministry and while doing it favoured the MSCP as the party was not in good terms with the FPM for reasons already explained earlier. This in a sense, led to the marginalization of the FPM party to the periphery of state politics as it was no longer a part of the government. Earlier, the party was a part of coalition ministries which were formed immediately after the 6th and 7th Assembly Elections, at least for a while. More significantly, with the coming of stringent anti-defections laws, defections, individual as well as group ones became unthinkable with the result that the Congress-led party, for the first time in the history of electoral politics in Manipur actually lasted the normal full term of five years. In a state where people usually vote for the party in power at the Centre as well in the state, the situation was extremely conducive for the Congress for greater glories in the coming years. Obviously, it also meant hard times for regional parties inside the state. Earlier, though individual defections were banned,
there was still room for split and merger which meant bulk defections were still possible. As a result, political horse-trading continued with party splits and mergers taking place. The situation helped even the smallest parties to play a significant bargaining power at the time of forming coalition ministries. Now in the changed circumstances, the significance of the regional parties except for the MSCP which had joined the coalition ministry got drastically reduced. Indeed, it was not only the FPM but the MNC and the DRPP were also to wither away completely from state politics by the time the 9th Assembly Elections were held in 2007.

While the complete demise of DRPP and MNC after the changed situation in the next five years following 2002 was understandable (they had won only two and one seats respectively in the election of that year), the complete disappearance of the FPM after having won 13 seats in the 2002 elections needs further more explanations other than the party's not being a part of the government for the next five years or getting reduced to the status of an opposition party all the while as the Congress-led ministry lasted for five years. Indeed, there was one more significant factor which contributed to the disappearance of the party in 2006 and that was the fact that the party was under extreme pressure from elements supporting Naga integration movement in Naga-inhabited areas of the hills of the state.

Indeed, the President of the Party Gangmumel Kamei got defeated in the 2002 elections from Tamenglong AC after having won from there in 1995 and 2000. It may be noted here that Tamenglong District has already emerged as a stronghold area for the Congress with the President of the Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee hailing from Nungba, one of the three AC segments in the district, and the FPM was not in a position to rival the Congress there. The defeat of Gangmumel Kamei was a huge blow to the
party because he was the main moving spirit behind the party and the leader with which the general masses identified the party with. Other prominent leaders of the party like W. Thoiba Singh and Dr. L. Bheigo Singh who were ministers in earlier coalition ministries were also defeated in the 2002 elections. Many of the 13 MLAs of the party winning the 2002 elections also had joined the party after leaving other parties on the eve of the elections, particularly after leaving Congress. This left the legislative wing of the party without any prominent member of the party whom the people could immediately identify with the party.

Regarding the process of unification for regional parties inside the state, it started as already mentioned elsewhere sometime around October 2005.\footnote{O. Joy Singh, the then MLA of the MPP at a press conference on 27 April 2006, Poknapham, 28 April 2006, p.5.} This was a time when the regional parties have already realized the decline of their significance in state politics in spite of their winning as many as 25 seats together in the 2002 Assembly Elections. The regional parties were also at that time well aware of the municipality elections to be held around the middle of 2006 and the State Assembly Elections which will be held at the beginning of 2007. The move for unification emerged with a view to facilitating re-emergence of a strong regional force inside Manipur which the people of the state wanted to see.\footnote{O. Joy Singh, the then MLA of the MPP at a press conference on 27 April 2006, Sangai Express, 28 April 2006, p.1.} However, even though the FPM and the DRPP had already agreed in principle to come together as one political party, there were some problems regarding the MPP due to inter-party conflict within it over the issue of election of its party President.\footnote{Ibid.} The inter-party conflict continued for months and it was only at the Special Session of the
Party's Convention held at Kuki Inn on 26 April 2006 that the MPP took a formal decision in support of unification of regional parties into one party.\textsuperscript{516}

The next day, i.e., 27 April saw announcement of the decision of the three parties – the MPP, FPM and the DRPP, to constitute themselves into one united political party.\textsuperscript{517} It was announced at a press conference held at the residence of the MPP President O. Joy Singh at Kakwa. It was attended by the respective Presidents and Vice Presidents of the three political parties. The formation of a Preparatory Committee for the unification of the three parties was also announced in the same press conference.\textsuperscript{518} Dr. Nimaichand Luwang, an MLA of MPP, was the Convener of the Preparatory Committee. The other members of the Preparatory Committee were Dr. L. Chandramani, President, FPM; P. Achou, Vice-President, FPM; S. Ibohal, leader of the legislature wing, FPM; O. Joy Singh, President, MPP; Kh. Brajamani, Secretary, MPP; Udoi Thongam, President, DRPP; and R.K. Anand, Vice-President, DRPP.\textsuperscript{519}

The important objectives of the Preparatory Committee were:

i. To lay out modalities for unification of the three regional parties without disturbing the interest of the parties.

ii. To select the President, flag and symbol of the new regional party.\textsuperscript{520}

The Committee was to prepare a report about these matters and if it was acceptable to the three parties, they will evolve into new political party. It was also announced that a combined general conference of the three political

\textsuperscript{516} Resolution passed in the Special session of the Manipur People’s Party Conference, held at Kuki Inn, Imphal on 26 April 2005, Poknapham, a local daily, Imphal, 27 April 2005, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{517} The Sangai Express, a Local daily, Imphal, 28 April 2006, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{518} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{519} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{520} Ibid.
parties shall be held sometime in the first week of the next month.\textsuperscript{521} Explaining the move for the unification of the three regional parties, O. Joy Singh said that the rule of national parties in the state has not done anything to promote the interests of the people of the state and as such the people are suffering very much. Therefore, there is a wish on the part of the people for regional political parties to come together so that they may together emerge as a strong force in state politics capable of promoting the interests of the people. It was in view of this desire on the part of the public at large that the three parties decided to come together and form one united regional party together.\textsuperscript{522} He also said that it was a historical beckoning that the regional parties of the state should come together to strengthen regional forces inside the state so that the interests of the people are better protected.\textsuperscript{523} In a press conference, Dr. L. Chandramani Singh, President of the FPM also said that it will not be a case of the parties getting merged to any of the three parties. Instead, he said, it will be like the waters filled to brim of three different pots being poured together into a fourth empty pot.\textsuperscript{524} P. Achou Singh, the then Vice President of the FPM, also said that Mizoram and Sikkim were having regional parties; and while the law and order situation there is very good, in Manipur, where the government was led by the Congress law and order problem have become very bad with instances of violence taking place every now and then.\textsuperscript{525} It was also announced that if the unification process is not completed in time for the then coming municipal elections scheduled for 30

\textsuperscript{521} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{522} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{523} Poknapham, a local Manipuri daily, Imphal, 28 April 2006, p.1.
\textsuperscript{524} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{525} Ibid., p. 5.
May 2006, the three parties for the time being will contest the municipal elections individually.\textsuperscript{526}

Accordingly, the Preparatory Committee convened a Political Convention on 7 May 2006 at the G.M. Hall, Imphal. It was attended by the leaders of the three political parties. The Convention was an important step towards the unification of the regional political parties of Manipur. Presenting the key-note address of the Convention, Dr. Nimaichand Luwang said that the Convention was organized in view of the desire on the part of the people of the Manipur, and different NGOs from different parts of the state, to see the regional parties coming together and unite themselves into one party so that there emerges a strong regional party inside the state to protect, promote and further the genuine interests of the state and its people.\textsuperscript{527} He also pointed out that in the history of electoral politics of the state which is characterized by the failure of any party to win a majority of the seats in the legislature, there has always been a tendency on the part of national parties to devour regional parties after election to gain the required majority for forming a ministry which is followed by efforts to absorb these regional parties into their party itself.\textsuperscript{528} All these problems can be solved only when there is a strong and united regional political party committed to the welfare interests of the state. Three important resolutions were taken in the convention. One was the agreement by all the leaders and workers of the three political parties to unite themselves into one political party that will really endeavour to solve the problems facing Manipur and realize a society therein characterized by peace, security and progress. The second one was to entrust the task of finalising the constitution, flag, symbol, office, office bearers, etc. for the new party to

\textsuperscript{526} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{527} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{528} Ibid.
Preparatory Committee; and also that of the task of appealing to all the other political parties and people having faith in the same objectives of the convention to join the new party. The third one was to contest the municipal elections scheduled at the end of the month under a common platform using a common flag and common symbol.⁵²⁹

Describing the developments as a new epoch, O. Joy declared that the new party shall work to promote the interests of the state first and foremost, whether it pleases the Central government or not.⁵³⁰ He also lamented that there is an unfortunate tendency on the part of the Central Government to view regional parties of the state as supporters of insurgents and their organizations.⁵³¹ He said that if the regional party to be newly formed come to power, it will definitely secure rule of law inside the state and also remove AFSPA from the state.⁵³² Describing the emerging steps as the natural outcome of the desire of the people of the state to see a strong regional party emerging inside the state to promote the interests of the state and people living inside it, Udoj Thongam, the President of the DRPP said that many regional parties from outside the state had already started finding their way into the politics of the state. He said that the trend needs to be discouraged as it undermines the significance of regional parties from Manipur and also the leaders of the state.⁵³³ The following were also spelled out as other basic policies and programs that the new party:⁵³⁴

i. Political solution of the problem of insurgency through peaceful dialogue, and even plebiscite if necessary.

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⁵²⁹ Poknapham, a local Manipuri daily, 8 May 2006, p. 1.
⁵³⁰ Ibid., p. 5.
⁵³¹ Ibid.
⁵³² Ibid.
⁵³³ Ibid.
⁵³⁴ Ibid.
ii. Granting a general amnesty to the insurgents.

All-round and balanced economic development for the state and equal representation of the states in the Council of States at the Centre were also other important goals which the new party would strive to achieve.\textsuperscript{535}

The actual unification of the regional parties however got delayed for a few months more. This was mainly because of a problem within the MPP. It involved a court case between two factions within the party over the issue of the party’s presidential election which took place in the previous year. As long as the case remains pending in the court, the process of unification could not be completed.\textsuperscript{536} However, by the end of July 2006, the differences within the MPP got sorted out thereby removing the stumbling block obstructing the final and formal unification of the three regional parties.\textsuperscript{537} This was followed by the announcement to expand the earlier Preparatory Committee to further accelerate the process of unification of regional parties. A convention was also announced to be organized within August.\textsuperscript{538} The newly expanded Committee also appealed to the other regional parties including the MSCP to join the process of unification.\textsuperscript{539}

It is significant to note that of the three regional parties involved in the unification process, the FPM was the one having far greater number of MLAs at that moment than the MPP and the DRPP which had two MLAs each only. Yet, right from the very beginning, the pivot round which the unification process moved was the MPP. Certain factors were responsible for this. For one, the two MLAs of the DRPP had already merged into Congress not long

\textsuperscript{535} O. Joy Singh, former President and ex-MLA of the MPP, speaking in the meeting of the Preparatory Committee for Unification of Regional Parties held on 7 August, 2006.
\textsuperscript{536} The Sangai Express, a local Manipuri daily, 3 July 2006, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{537} Ibid., 3 August 2006, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{538} Ibid., 4 August 2006, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{539} Ibid., 8 August 2006, p. 1.
after it joined the Congress-led coalition ministry. So it became a party without any sitting MLA. About the FPM also, in spite of the fact that the party was having all the 13 MLAs intact, there was a clear division between the party’s organizational wing and its legislative wing. The former President Gangmumeei Kamei also had already been marginalized due to his failure to win the 2002 Elections and Dr. L. Chandramani had become the party President. The latter himself failed to win the 2002 elections and was a veteran of state politics for long who have already become a spent force by then in state politics. He also could never gain the immediate identification with the FPM to the extent Gangmumeei Kamei did as he had sort of gained notoriety for defecting from one party to another by this time. Gangmumeei Kamei also did not join the process of unification at all. Most of the MLAs of the Party themselves, having reduced to insignificance during Congress ministry which was to last the full term of five years for the first time in the history of Manipur, were also roaring to go on looking for greener pastures keeping in view the coming Assembly Elections to be held in 2007. Indeed most of them will contest the 2007 Assembly Elections as candidates of other political parties. Thus, the Party had already lost its potency as a strong political force by this time. In fact, the Party’s earlier suggestions like that of making the name of the new party Manipur People’s Federal Party, putting a symbol of the sun (which is also the symbol of FPM) in the middle of a cycle (which is the symbol of the MPP), etc. were sidelined by and by, as the unification move proceeded further and further. So, it had to be the MPP around which the whole process of unification revolved. The fact that the MPP, compared to other regional parties from the state, had been the most significant regional party since 1968 sustaining itself over a long period of time with a far greater overall success both in assembly and Lok Sabha elections.
inside the state, also enhanced the MPP's standing compared to that of the other two parties involved in the process of unification.

Finally, the FPM was dissolved on 30 August 2006 at a Special General Assembly Session held at the party office. The same Assembly also decided that the party will join the MPP as a part of the process of the unification of regional parties of the state. The Session was presided by the party's President Dr. L. Chandramani Singh and the resolutions were passed unanimously and without any pre-condition.\textsuperscript{540} The Session also agreed, as the party has been dissolved, to use the constitution, flag, symbol, the registration number, etc. of the MPP.\textsuperscript{541} Tellingly enough, only three of the 13 sitting MLAs of the party attended the meeting.\textsuperscript{542} It may also be noted that prior to the Session, in the meetings of the Preparatory Committee for the Unification of regional parties, the FPM had put forward certain conditions like once dissolved the party shall be allowed to use the Constitution, flag, symbol, registration number etc. of the MPP and that the office bearers of the party shall be absorbed in the party organization of the MPP by giving them similar posts as they earlier enjoyed in the FPM.\textsuperscript{543} These conditions were later discussed and accepted by Central Committee meeting of the MPP held on 31 August.\textsuperscript{544} The meeting also appreciated the understanding and cooperation which the FPM had shown for affecting the unification of regional parties of the state in a manner that will in no way affect the identity of the MPP which is one of the oldest regional parties in North-East India.\textsuperscript{545}

\textsuperscript{540} Ibid., 31 August 2006, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{541} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{542} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{543} Ibid., 1 September 2006, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{544} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{545} Ibid.
As the process of unification of regional parties was approaching towards its end, one more regional party named Manipur Nationalist Party (MNP) also merged itself to the MPP without any precondition. The MNP was a party formed by Haobam Bhubon Singh on 13 August 2006 after having left the BJP on 1 July of the same year. This was followed by a meeting of the Central Committee of the MPP on 14 September with a view to further discuss the matter of “Unification of all Regional parties in Manipur”. Following the meeting, all the office bearers of the MPP including the President resigned from their respective party posts to further serve the interests of the unification and also by way of paving the way to accommodate members from other political parties to join the party on an equal footing. Finally, the FPM and the DRPP got formally merged into the MPP late in the evening of 18 (almost nearing mid-night). That Dr. L. Chandramani Singh, President of the FPM at the time of the party’s dissolution became the new President of the MPP came as a last saving grace for the FPM.

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547 Ibid.
548 Notice of the MPP dated 12 September 2006 issued by M. Sharat Singh, General Secretary (Orgn.), MPP.
549 The Sangai Express, a local Manipuri daily, 17.9.2012, p. 1.