

# Electoral Politics in Thoubal District, Manipur : *PRIs Elections and Rural Development*

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## Abstract

This article explains patterns of PRIs elections in rural areas, the role of voters, and the manner in which voters often pressure candidates for money. Candidates who lose panchayat elections frequently face serious financial distress due to heavy campaign spending, making it difficult for them to return to their previous economic position. In case of this trend continues, rural areas may experience serious social unrest. Despite the implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), no significant improvement in the living standards or economic conditions of villagers is visible in Manipur. Instead, the Act has contributed to a disturbing situation during panchayat elections by encouraging money-oriented electoral practices. It is, therefore, necessary to debate whether the Act should continue in its present form in Manipur or be restructured to prevent large-scale corruption and moral decline. The Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are constitutionally mandated to promote grassroots democracy and rural development in India. In Manipur, particularly in Thoubal district, PRIs play a crucial role in linking electoral politics with local development planning and implementation. This study examines the electoral politics of PRIs in Thoubal district and assesses their role in rural development. It analyses the structure and functioning of Gram Panchayats (GP) and Zilla Parishads (ZP), patterns of electoral competition, leadership dynamics, political party influence, and the impact of delayed or irregular elections on democratic participation. The paper also evaluates the role of PRIs in implementing rural development programmes related to infrastructure, livelihoods, sanitation, and social welfare. It argues that although PRIs in Thoubal district have the potential to function as effective instruments of participatory development, their performance has been constrained by political instability, inadequate devolution of powers and finances, excessive administrative control, and the prolonged postponement of elections. The absence of elected representatives has weakened accountability and reduced community participation in development processes. The study concludes that strengthening electoral processes, ensuring regular PRIs elections and deepening decentralisation are essential for enhancing rural development and democratic governance in Thoubal district, Manipur, highlighting about the apathetic towards the PRIs generally.

**Keywords:** grassroots democracy, electoral competition, social welfare, political instability, democratic participation.

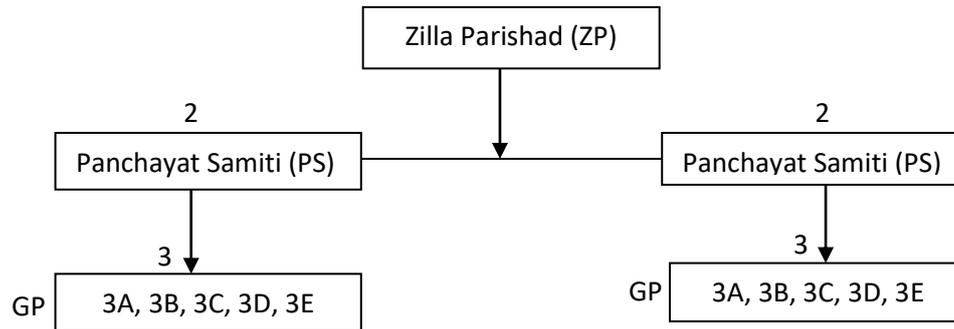
## 1. Introduction

The panchayat was traditionally a council of elders that administered justice and resolved various problems of rural life, including petty civil, criminal, and revenue cases, from time immemorial. It functioned as a form of local self-governance in village areas of India in general and Manipur in particular and represented not only the collective will but also the collective wisdom of the rural community. The guiding principle philosophy of the panchayat was '*Panch Parmeshwar*', meaning 'God speaks through the five.' Decisions taken unanimously by the panchayats were respected by the people as divine verdicts. The authenticated royal chronicle *Cheitharol Kumbaba* records that after the Manipur War of 1891, rural panchayats were established in 1892. Subsequently, traditional institutions such as, the *Garod* (military court) and *Pancha* (women's court) were abolished, and '*Cheirap*' and '*Sadar Panchayats*' were introduced. The Panchayati Raj (PR) system aims to widen people's participation in decision-making by decentralising political authority and transferring specific powers to the elected representatives at the grassroots level. Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) constitute the foundation of democratic decentralisation in India. Envisioned as institutions of self-government under the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992, PRIs were established to promote participatory governance and ensure that rural development is planned and implemented according to local needs and priorities. The amendment mandates regular elections, reservations for women and marginalised groups, and the devolution of powers and responsibilities to the local bodies, thereby deepening democracy at the grassroots level. In Manipur, the functioning of PRI presents a distinct case due to the state's unique political, social, and administrative context. Governed by the Manipur Panchayati Raj Act (MPRA), 1994, the Panchayati Raj (PR) system operates mainly in the valley districts, including Thoubal district. Despite constitutional provisions, PRIs in Manipur have faced challenges such as limited devolution of authority, administrative dominance, and irregularities in electoral processes. These factors have constrained their effectiveness as institutions of local self-governance and rural development. Thoubal district occupies an important position in Manipur's agrarian economy, with a majority of its population residing in rural areas and depending on agriculture and allied activities for their livelihood. Rural development in the district involves key issues such as infrastructure development, employment generation, poverty alleviation, sanitation, education, health, and social welfare respectively. In this context, PRIs are expected to play a crucial role in identifying local needs, mobilising community participation, and implementing development programmes. However, the nature of electoral politics at the PRIs level shaped by local elites, factional interests, political influence, and administrative intervention significantly affects their performance. Prior to the enactment of the MPRA, 1994, panchayat elections in Manipur were conducted irregularly and lacked constitutional status, as they fell under the Directive Principles of State Policy rather than enforceable constitutional provisions. Consequently, these institutions empowered the state government rather than the PRIs themselves. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 marked a significant transformation in the status, scope, and role of local self-government. In conformity with this amendment, the MPRA, 1994 was enacted, following which regular panchayat elections were conducted in Thoubal district. The establishment of the State Election Commission under Section 98 of the Act ensured the supervision, direction, and control of electoral processes.

The introduction of reservation for women and weaker sections significantly enhanced inclusive participation in local governance. Women began to contest and occupy leadership positions across PRIs.

For instance, Th. Tombi Devi serves as the Adhyaksha of the Thoubal Zilla Parishad (ZP). Reservation policies function as instruments of social justice and positive discrimination, enabling the participation of Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and women in rural administration. PRIs in Thoubal district have also played a role in resolving petty disputes, managing village-level committees, and implementing welfare schemes. They have been involved in education committees, health committees, sanitation committees, and arbitration of minor civil and social cases. Subsequently such activities reflect direct community participation in governance and contribute to social cohesion. The implementation of centrally sponsored schemes through PRI has furthered social and economic justice in the district. Programmes such as ICDS, Anganwadi services, rural water supply, employment schemes, and infrastructure development have benefited rural populations, particularly women and children. However, challenges such as, inadequate infrastructure, lack of awareness, financial constraints, and delays in fund utilisation have limited their overall impact. Economic justice remains a critical concern in Thoubal district due to persistent poverty, unemployment, and inequality. Political equality without economic equality renders democracy ineffective. Recognising this, successive governments have launched various rural development programmes since 1952 to address these issues. Despite these efforts, administrative inefficiencies, delayed utilisation certificates, and financial constraints have slowed development progress which is the crucial issues and challenges of PRIs in Thoubal district, Manipur.

In respect of Thoubal district, modern panchayat system was introduced in Manipur in 1960 by adopting the United Provinces Panchayati Raj Act (UPPRA), 1947. Generally, this Act provided Gram Sabha and Nyaya Panchayats in the village of Manipur. The Gram Sabhas are given the powers to carry out general administrative works, such as, sanitation and health maintenance and improvement of schools and hospitals; establishment of hospitals and dispensaries, assistance to government servants and co-operation. The Nyaya Panchayats (NP) discharged adjudicatory functions. They could try petty cases, such as, civil, criminal and revenue respectively. The said borrowed Act could not serve the desired goal of the people of Manipur. In 1978 the Manipur Panchayati Raj Act (MPRA), 1975 replaced the United Provinces Panchayati Raj Act (UPPRA), 1947. This Act envisaged a three-tier system such as, gram sabba at the village level, panchayat samiti at the block level and zilla parishad at the district level. This followed All India pattern of panchayati raj (PR) introduced in 1959. However, the zilla parishad (ZP) was not constituted under this Act owing to lack of state resources. In 1997 the Zilla Parishad (ZP) was constituted under the Manipur Panchayati Raj Act (MPRA), 1994. This Act provided gram sabha (GS) at the village level and zilla parishad (ZP) at the district level as a constitutional status. The panchayat samiti and nyaya panchayat (NP) were closed under this Act, because of having less population than 20 lakh according to 1991 census. It is very difficult to study the structural and functional system of Panchayati Raj (PR) in Manipur under the one particular Act. In my convenience, gram panchayat and panchayat samiti (PS) along with nyaya panchayat (NP) are associated with Manipur Panchayati Raj Act (MPRA), 1975 however, zilla parishad (ZP) is associated with the Manipur Panchayati Raj Act (MPRA), 1994. The following diagram shows clearly the structural organisation of Panchayati Raj (PR) bodies in the rural areas of Manipur.



Zilla Parishad (ZP) and the Panchayat Samiti (PS) as the above diagram show at a glance. However, Panchayat Samiti was abolished under the Manipur Panchayati Raj Act (MPRA), 1994, where 3A, 3B, 3C, 3D, 3E etc. stand for the Gram Panchayat (GP) at the village level in a Panchayat Samiti (PS) consisting of 15 Gram Panchayats (GP) at least.

Practically, while Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in Thoubal district have contributed to democratic participation, social justice, and rural development, their effectiveness is constrained by structural, political, and administrative challenges. Strengthening devolution of power, ensuring financial autonomy, enhancing transparency, and insulating PRIs from excessive political interference are essential for transforming them into effective instruments of inclusive and sustainable rural development. The panchayat, historically a council of elders, has been an integral part of rural life in India, providing local self-governance, resolving petty cases such as, civil, criminal, and revenue respectively, and representing the collective will and wisdom of the community since time immemorial. The goal of the Panchayati Raj (PR) system is to widen the scope of people's participation in decision-making, micro-level political authority, and autonomy through the transfer of specific powers to people's representative institutions at the grassroots. Thoubal district holds a significant place in Manipur's agrarian economy, with most of its population residing in rural areas and depending on agriculture for their livelihood. Rural development here encompasses crucial areas like infrastructure, employment, poverty alleviation, sanitation, and social welfare. PRIs are expected to play a critical role in identifying local needs, mobilizing community participation, and implementing development programs. The nature of electoral politics at the PRIs level influenced by political parties, local elites, factional interests, and administrative interventions has a substantial impact on the developmental efficacy of these institutions. Electoral politics is the contest for power through elections involving candidates, political parties, voters in order to make governance. In case of PRIs elections and rural development are directly or indirectly related to the study of the roles of voters who take part in the elections at the present situation in Manipur in general and Thoubal district in particular. The main theme of the study is to examine electoral politics impact on rural development initiatives at the present local governance.

## 2. Objective of the Study

This study aims to examine the electoral politics of PRIs in Thoubal district and analyze their resulting impact on rural development. By exploring the interaction between electoral processes, local power structures, and development outcomes, the analysis seeks to understand the extent to which PRIs in Thoubal district have contributed to democratic governance and rural transformation. Subsequently

such proper evaluation is essential for identifying the constraints facing grassroots democracy in Manipur and for suggesting measures to strengthen PRIs as vital engines of inclusive and sustainable rural development in the current scenario of Thoubal district Manipur.

### 3. Research Methodology

The study on the electoral politics and developmental impact of PRIs in Thoubal district, Manipur, adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative research strategies. This approach is necessary to capture both the objective development outcomes (quantitative data) and the subjective political dynamics and power structures (qualitative data) respectively.

#### 1. Research Design

Aspect	Description
Type of Study	Descriptive and Explanatory. The study would first describe the structure and functioning of PRIs in Thoubal district (descriptive) and then analyze the causal relationship between electoral politics, local power structures, and rural development outcomes (explanatory).
Approach	Mixed-Methods: Sequential explanatory design, where quantitative data development indicators, election results is collected and analyzed first, followed by in-depth qualitative data (interviews) to help interpret the quantitative findings.
Unit of Analysis	Primary: Gram Panchayats (GPs) within Thoubal district. Secondary: Panchayat functionaries such as pradhans, members, zilla parishad members, elected officials, administrative staff, and the local electorate respectively.
Geographical Area	Thoubal district, Manipur: Specific focus on a sample of gram panchayats within the district's community development (CD) blocks etc.

#### 2. Sampling Strategy

##### A. Geographical Sampling (Quantitative Survey)

- Stratified Random Sampling: The district would be stratified based on its Thoubal CD Block, etc., as mentioned in the introduction.
- Selection: A minimum of 10-15 gram panchayats (GPs) would be randomly selected from across these strata to ensure representativeness of different administrative and geographic areas including four villages comprise of one women pradhan, one pradhan from the scheduled tribe or caste, one from general category and another one pradhan of the remotest areas of backward GP from Thoubal district, Manipur.

*B. Respondent Sampling (Qualitative Interviews and Survey)*

- Panchayat Officials: Purposive sampling would be used to select key functionaries e.g., pradhans, ward members, zilla parishad members etc. from the selected GPs to understand the formal structure and political decision-making.
- Administrative Staff: Officials from the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) and CD blocks would be selected through purposive sampling to gather insights into administrative dominance and devolution of power.
- General public/beneficiaries: Random sampling or systematic random sampling would be used to survey approximately 200-300 rural households across the selected groups to measure public perception of development and participation. Quota sampling will be used to ensure adequate representation of reserved categories (SC/ST) and women beneficiaries.

**3. Data collection**

The study would rely on both primary data and secondary data.

*A. Primary Data*

Method	Description	Target Group
Structured Questionnaire	Used to collect quantitative data on voter behavior, political awareness, and household benefits from development schemes.	general electorate/households
Semi-Structured Interviews	Used to collect qualitative data on the nature of electoral competition, the role of political parties, elite groups, and administrative-political conflicts.	panchayat officials, political leaders, administrative staff etc.
Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)	Held separately for women members and marginalized groups to discuss the impact of reservation, electoral politics, and constraints on participation.	women panchayat members, SC/ST members, beneficiaries
Observation	Non-participant observation of gram sabha (GS) meetings (if held) and routine office functioning to assess community participation and transparency.	gram panchayat meetings

*B. Secondary Data*

- Official records: Election data from the State Election Commission (SEC), Manipur, detailing election results, participation rates, and reservation implementation e.g., percentage of women elected.
- Government documents: Detailed reports on scheme implementation and fund utilization from the DRDA and CD blocks e.g., data on funds released for schemes like MGNREGA, ICDS, and Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme respectively.
- Census data: Socio-economic data for Thoubal district to contextualize poverty, unemployment, and population demographics.
- Legislative documents: Review of the Manipur Panchayati Raj Act (MPRA), 1994 and subsequent amendments to analyze the legal framework for devolution of power.

## 4. Data analysis

### A. Quantitative analysis

- Descriptive statistics: Bar chart, pie chart, histogram, ogive to summarize demographic data, political participation rates etc.
- Inferential statistics:
- Regression analysis to determine the relationship between the independent variables such as electoral variables, political party involvement and the dependent variable such as level of rural development, measured via infrastructure and scheme delivery.

### B. Qualitative Analysis

- Case studies: Detailed case studies of a few high-performing and low-performing gram panchayats would be developed to provide in-depth context and illustrate the findings. This methodology provides a robust framework to address the study's aim of exploring the interaction between electoral processes, local power structures, and development outcomes in Thoubal district, Manipur.

## 4. Review of Literature

Bardhan, P., and Mookherjee, D. (2006); 'Decentralization and Local-Governance in Developing Countries', he expressed about the increasing rural participation in governance, empowering local communities to drive development. Kumar, A. (2017); 'PRIs and Rural Development in India', he expressed and focused on PRIs infrastructure such as, roads, water, health, education and livelihood projects impacting rural development. Rao, V. (2019); 'Challenges of Decentralization in India', he expressed and indicated mixed effectiveness of PRIs due to some factors like limited autonomy funding constraints and local politics. Sharma, R. (2020), 'PRIs in Manipur': 'Challenges and Opportunities', he expressed that the coexistence of traditional institutions with PRIs has created overlapping authority structures. Singh, S. (2018); 'Decentralization and Rural Development in India', he expressed that the absence of elected representatives reduces transparency and shifts control to bureaucratic or ad hoc administrative arrangements, negatively affecting rural development outcomes. Tinlako R., (2015). 'Rural Development in India: PRIs and Governance', he studied and published dissertations indicate that gram panchayats (GP) in Thoubal district have potential in areas such as rural infrastructure, self-help group promotion, and welfare delivery, however their performance is constrained by political interference, factional rivalry, and dependence on state departments.

Then scholarly literatures on Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in India broadly agreed that decentralised governance is essential for deepening democracy and promoting inclusive rural development. Following the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (1992), PRIs were envisioned as institutions of self-governance with regular elections, devolution of powers, and people's participation (Rao and Singh, 2001). However, several studies highlight a significant gap between constitutional ideals and ground realities, particularly in states with weak decentralisation practices. Early works by B.R. Ambedkar Institute of Social Research and Planning Commission reports underline that electoral politics at the grassroots often mirrors state-level power structures. Scholars such as, Mooij (2003) and Mathew (1994) argued that PRIs elections are frequently influenced by political parties, elites, and factionalism, which shape leadership patterns and decision-making in rural areas. While elections increase political awareness, they do not automatically ensure effective development outcomes unless supported by real autonomy and capacity building. Studied focusing on rural development and PRIs

(Crook and Manor, 1998; Shah, 2006) suggested that elected local bodies play a critical role in identifying local needs, implementing development schemes, and ensuring accountability. However, these studies also pointed out that insufficient financial resources, bureaucratic dominance, and lack of technical expertise limit PRI's effectiveness. In many cases, PRI's function is more as implementing agencies of higher governments rather than autonomous planning bodies. In the context of NE-India, literature highlights unique challenges. Scholars such as Baruah (2005) and Hausing (2013) noted that historical, ethnic, and political complexities have shaped local governance differently from mainland India. In Manipur, the coexistence of traditional institutions with PRI has created overlapping authority structures. Studies by Singh (2010) and Devi (2016) expressed that PRI's functioning in Manipur remained weak due to partial implementation of the Panchayati Raj (PR) system, limited devolution, and irregular elections. Specific research on Manipur's PRI's emphasized electoral discontinuity as a major obstacle. Government reports and academic analyses pointed out that delayed or postponed PRI's elections undermine democratic legitimacy and weaken people's participation in development planning. Devi and Ningombam (2018) argued that the absence of elected representatives reduces transparency and shifts control to bureaucratic or ad-hoc administrative arrangements, negatively affecting rural development outcomes. Literature on Thoubal district, though limited, reflects these broader state-level trends. District-level studies and published dissertations indicate that gram panchayats in Thoubal district have potential in areas such as rural infrastructure, self-help group promotion, and welfare delivery, however their performance was constrained by political interference, factional rivalry, and dependence on state departments. Electoral politics at the PRI's level often revolved around kinship, local elites, and party affiliations rather than development agendas. Overall, the existing literature revealed a consensus that PRI's were vital for rural development, however their effectiveness in districts like Thoubal depends heavily on regular elections, genuine decentralisation, and capacity enhancement. The review also indicates a research gap in district-specific empirical studies linking electoral politics of PRI's directly with development outcomes in Thoubal district. Addressing this gap forms the basis of the present study. Regarding this theme, electoral politics in Thoubal district, Manipur particularly PRI elections and rural development is significantly different from the other topics discussed above. It is quite unique and poses specific challenges for the present research work.

## 5. Importance of the study

These views are more relevant even today because both globalization and privatization have failed to solve many social issues and challenges such as, poverty, unemployment, inequality, environment degradation, and communal conflict and so on. Hence there is a need of rethink and recheck about the idea of electoral politics in Thoubal district, Manipur: PRI's elections and rural development in order to get real democratic elections to solve the economic problem in connection with rural masses in Manipur in general and Thoubal district in particular.

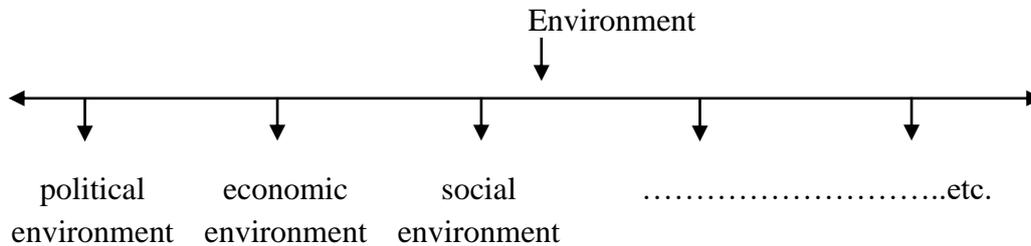
## 6. Statement of the problem

The genres of literature produced so far discussion panchayat elections expenditure and rural development which found different viewpoints written by different writers. Generally common people thought that PRI's elections and rural development is above all the subjects so that such simple thought is very much challenging and also inspiring to take up the present research paper due to the fact that real

democratic elections are highly needed to solve of all our problem particularly in rural areas. Therefore, this study is still lagging behind and quite distinct from the others' write ups.

**7. Different facets of PRIs elections and Rural Development:**

**7.1 Political and Socio-Economic Environment**



This paper examines the importance of PRIs elections and how elections have been reduced to festivals and rituals sponsored by few individuals and groups or parties for their own interests in Manipur in general Thoubal district in particular. It also makes an attempt to find out the reasons for such disturbing situation in the state. It argues the need for democratic elections where voters have choice of the candidates with their conscience and need to stop elections as means to empower few individuals and families. It also emphasizes necessity to reduce or prevent the dominant role of money, locality, clan, family and personal ties, region, ethnic identity and traditional institutions in electoral politics in Manipur. This difficult task can be achieved to a great extent only when the intellectual class, enlightened individuals, women groups, civil society groups and mass media must come out of their present comfort zones and play proactive role in the politics specially the electoral politics in Thoubal district, Manipur associated with rural development. Before discussing the nature and causes of electoral politics in Thoubal district, Manipur which is necessary to go back to history and understanding of socio-economic environment on which electoral politics takes place for proper perspective and understanding of electoral politics in Thoubal district in particular. Some form of forced political and administrative unity was brought over the large territories now called India by long British colonial rule (1600-1947) for the first time. However the idea of an independent and united India was put into pieces with large scale political violence on the eve of independence in 1947. Partition on the basis of religion into India and Pakistan and division of India into British directly administered India and over 500 Princely States.

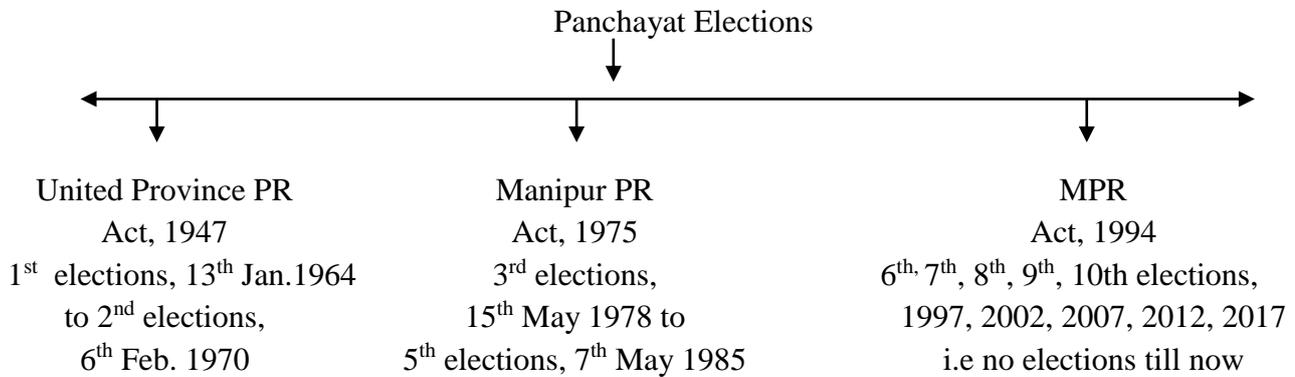
India adopted parliamentary model of democracy with universal adult suffrage at a stroke since 1950s by largely imitating historically evolved parliamentary system of former the British colonial master. The republican constitution also have federal arrangement which was significantly borrowed from discarded Government of India Act 1935 created by British parliament and fellow colonies of British like Canada. Significantly Constitution of India which provides parliamentary system with some federal features was adopted by a constituent assembly created by British and dominated by British educated Indian lawyers. The constituent assembly was not a completely representative body and did not reflect the wishes of many states as well as people of Manipur. Thus the constitution was absolutely determined by the leaders of freedom struggle' who became the new rulers of Republic of India since 1950s. So there seem to be biases and legacy of British colonial era both in political administration and cultural orientation of the political and bureaucratic leaders and people in independent India's democracy. Manipur was an independent kingdom situated between South Asia and South East Asia for

centuries till her annexation in 1891 by the British who defeated Manipur in the war. Manipur with an area of 22,327 sq. kms. more or less had remained annexed since the controversial transfer of Kabow Valley to Burma in 1834. As a Princely State, king had control over the socio-cultural life but reduced role in the administration and almost had no role in the external affairs during the British colonial rule. The king also had no significant role in the administration and life of the people of the hill areas which were managed and controlled by the British Political Agents who came from Britain. The separate administration for hills and valley was deliberate and proved to divide people on religion and political orientation with mass conversion/acceptance of the people in the hill areas into Christian religion. Thus the seeds of distrust and political divides among the people of Manipur were sown during and by the British colonial rule. It was become a great challenge to the people of Manipur in general and Thoubal district in particular. In this way, there are many social issues and challenges among different sections of the population, particularly between the hill and plain communities, based on identity politics in present-day Manipur.

Princely State status during British colonial rule had two major impacts in the politics and later electoral politics in Manipur. One is the level of political culture and orientation of the people in the state which proved to be socially conservative and different from the rest of India. The second is the impact of segregation in the administration, politics and socio-economic life in terms of valley and hill areas during 1891 and 1947 which was deliberately adopted by the British colonial rulers. Subsequently such impact of British colonial rule continued even after India became republican democratic country. The forceful merger of Manipur into India in 1949 and total control of administration, politics and economy by the outsiders of Manipur without responsible government from 1947-1972 had contributed to political protest and movements. This factor along with the two major impact of the British colonial rule had divisions within Manipur as well as between Manipur and the rest of India which influence the process of integration of Manipur into India and such dirty electoral politics which continues even today. The socio-cultural diversity and divides have influenced the political development and electoral politics in Thouba district, Manipur in respect of PRIs elections and rural development. There are more than 37 distinct social groups in Thouba district, Manipur which are politicized having direct or indirect influence in electoral politics in Manipur. Socially people are conservative and elites stands for status quo specially in the hill areas for preservation of their traditional political institutions and rights at the cost of common people. There are political and administrative demands based on tribe, ethnicity or region which have a great bearing on political process and electoral politics. Economically agriculture continuous to the dominant occupation, government is the biggest employer, large scale unemployment, good number of illiterates, poverty, ill health, low level of economic growth and production, heavy dependence on the centre financially and emergence of Manipur as the market for rest of India and neighboring and ASEAN countries. There have been ethnic tensions, demands for separate states, armed movements for independence and demands for separate administration like Sixth Schedule and alternative arrangement etc. which are present ongoing crisis phenomena in Manipur. There are also allegations and perception or reality of corruption at the public life and absence of rule of law and mis-governance of complex nature which is going on endlessly. In such an environment of the electoral politics in respect of PRIs elections and rural development in Thoubal district in order to get an equitable society, ensuring fair distribution of resources and opportunities among all sections of society specially marginalized groups like SC/STs, women and minorities respectively. It is obviously a complex nature and difficult task to transform towards the real democratic elections i.e. devolution of power in Thoubal

district, Manipur because the government is always apathetic towards the PRIs elections and rural development in Thoubal district, Manipur.

### 7.2 Panchayat Election since 1964



There are 10 general panchayat elections since 1964 to till now due to political instability as well as President’s Rule enforced in Manipur. Generally panchayat elections have been playing a big role in the parliamentary democracy for choosing the representative of all the people and to bring village socialism. All the members are directly elected by the people. Its form of panchayat is like nyay panchayat. Its main functions were to dispose of civil and criminal cases in the rural areas. So far, panchayat elections have been done through three different Acts in Manipur. In recent panchayat elections, there was tremendous increase in election expenditure. Truly speaking, two decades back people did not take much seriousness towards the elections of local self-government. Numbers of candidates were less and candidates frequently won without much contest. Neither candidates remembered of distributing money nor voters thought of taking money. On the other hand, the powers of the elected members were considerably less. It is even said that panchayat members remained to witness the selling deeds or for reconciling disputes, presiding meeting in rural areas. During those days, voters could not enjoy any feast party or tea party which is the old trend of the panchayat elections in 1990's and before earlier. Panchayat elections were not much popular in Manipur, then what makes it so important today. Some of the important factors are women reservations and implementation of MGNREGA, for rural development under democratic decentralization of power after passing of 73rd constitutional amendment Act, 1992 at centre which is the empowerment of PRIs. The earlier two Acts did not provide such provision. The members of panchayat are directly co-related to the implementation of MGNREGA from 2005 onwards under the directive of democratic decentralization. For the implementation of its Act, the panchayat members could easily manipulate for the work of job card. Subsequently such Act is the dream project of Mahatama Gandhi's 'Ram Rajya' that tries to ensure self- governance at the village level on the concept of right to work is the only means to remove poverty in the rural areas. It increases people's participation and responsibility in respect of MGNREGA which guarantees the 'right to work' to Indian citizen. It is regarded as a legal right thereby making it compulsory for every state government to provide at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in every financial year to each rural household whose adult member volunteers belong to BPL ready to do unskilled manual works. Constitutionally its aim is to give mass employment to sustain income in the royal areas of Thoubal district, Manipur. The panchayat elections and rural development are incorporated complementary and supplementary because PRIs are the instrument of rural development. Further, payment of the daily

wages working under MGNREGA has been increased from Rs. 175 to Rs. 197. The new rate would benefit around 5.2 lakhs job card holders of the state of Manipur. Sources available to the media informed that the centre had decided the rate of MGNREGA with the commencing of the new fiscal. Manipur used to pay Rs. 175 to job card holders under the scheme till last year, other states would lesser pay include those of Bihar and Chhattisgarh which provide Rs. 162 and Rs. 159 respectively. Meanwhile, it is learnt that manipulation of the scheme by members of zila parishad, pradhan and members by withholding job cards and bank pass book would be dealt with firmly. Complaints filed by workers would be considered seriously. Those who continued to withhold job card would be fined a sum of Rs. 1000 under section 25 of the Act. The ministry concern has instructed that criminal cases be lodged against those who forcibly withhold pass books of bank or post office of daily wage workers. Any complaint should be filed to the Ombudsman of the district following which the Ombudsman would conduct an enquiry to see the validity of the complaints. On the other hand, it is also learnt that the fines are to be paid to the government while the Deputy Commissioner (DC) has to direct the police or lodge an FIR in case of withholding of pass book. Manipur has a total of around 6 lakhs workers. A total of Rs.260 crore including Rs. 166.50 crore for wages component were expended by the state in the 2024-25 fiscal as a part of MGNREGA.

As regards to the inconsistent sanctioning of funds by the centre, the source informed that under this Act, the labour budget is to be submitted annually before December 31 to the Ministry. However, districts are not able to file their reports on time which is to say that the state finds it hard to submit the authority concern before the stipulated time thereby causing delay in sanctioning of funds. Additionally, detailed information regarding the scheme could not be uploaded to MIS. In the case of the state is able to submit such reports on added the source, time, such delay in fund sanctioning could be thing of the past. Subsequently the first panchayat elections were held in Manipur on the three different dates such as 13th, 14th and 22nd January 1964 under the United Provinces Panchavati Raj Act. 1947 which was the borrowing Act. There were 227 gram panchayats, 43 nyay panchayats but not the provision of panchayat samiti and zilla parishad under this Act. This borrowing Act did not come up to the expectation of the people after conducting the two general panchayat elections. Keeping in this view the state government made of own Act which was called the Manipur Panchavati Raj Act. 1975 and replaced the United Provinces Panchavati Raj Act (UPPRA), 1947. This Act envisaged a three tier system, gram panchavat at the village level, panchayat samiti at the block level and zilla parishad at the district level. This followed all India pattern of panchayati raj introduced in 1959. However the zilla parishad was not constituted under this Act owing to lack of state resources. The two Acts such as. U.P. Panchavati Raj Act 1947 and Manipur Panchavati Raj Act 1975 were not provided constitutional status and so panchayat elections were done according to Article 40, Directive Principal of State Policy so that the provision of these two Acts were the empowerment of the government but not the empowerment of the PRIs. From this point of views the elections were conducted by the Directorate of the Panchavati Raj and Rural Development so panchayat elections were held untimely. In course of time the constitution of India as amended in December 1992 introduced 73rd amendments. These amendments brought about a sea change in the status ambits and role of the local self-government. In conformity with the provision of the constitution 73rd amendment Act 1992, the Manipur Panchayati Raj Act 1994 was passed by the parliament and the received the assent of the president,. Under this Act. the 6th, 7th, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> panchayat general elections were conducted timely during the stimulated time because it is having

constitutional status as well as empowerment of the PRIs. Women reservation was also given to this Act so that women can become candidatures at the large scale everywhere and every place. We, the people of Manipur highly demanded the fruitful form of democratic election for giving development programmes to the needy persons of rural masses in Thoubal district, Manipur .

The State Election Commission (SEC), Manipur was constituted under section 98 of the MPRA, 1994 for superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls and for the conduct of all elections to the panchayat bodies. This Act also envisaged a three tier system, gram sabha at the village level, panchayat samiti at the block level and zilla parishad at the district level, however panchayat samiti was abolished because the population of Manipur was below 20 lakhs during the enforcement of this act and according to 1991 census. So far MPRA 1994 underwent 7 amendments in Manipur but not achieved the desire goal of the masses. From the first panchayat general election 1964 to 5th panchayat general election, 1991 had been conducted by the Directorate of RD and PR, Imphal. In those days, the panchayat general elections could not be done timely by the above Directorate because its office building was shifted very frequently such as, Lamphel to Babupara, Babupara to Dewlahland, Dewlahland to Lamphel. Lamphel to Porompat due to the convenient of the government of Manipur. Subsequently most of the important documents were found missing. From the 6th panchayat general elections 1997 to 10<sup>th</sup> panchayat general elections 2017 had been conducted by the State Election Commission, Manipur and held the panchayat general elections timely. However 6<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> the panchayat general elections were many social problems, such as, snatching of the ballot boxes, public mob, force voting, booth capturing, destruction of ballot boxes, mass public violence, group clash etc. Besides the documents of the panchayat elections were not easily available because of the devastation of Sub-Divisional Officer offices (SDO), such as, Thoubal, Kakching, Sawombung, Iribung, Moirang, etc. All the documents were burnt in those incidents. Some other means were gathered from other sources, such as, questionnaire or personal interview. Table no. 1.1

Table 1.1 General panchayat elections in Manipur since 1964

Sl. No.	Name of Act	Date of Election Held	No. of Gram Panchayat	Nyay Panchayat	Panchayat Samiti	Zilla Parishad
1	United Province Panchayati Raj Act-1947	13, 14, 22 January 1964	227	43	X	X
2	United Province Panchayati Raj Act-1947	31 <sup>st</sup> Jan, 6 <sup>th</sup> Feb, 1970	221	44	X	X
3	Manipur Panchayat Raj Act-1975	15 <sup>th</sup> & 24 <sup>th</sup> May 1978	107	37	6	X
4	Manipur Panchayat Raj Act-1975	7 <sup>th</sup> May 1985	166	42	9	X
5	Manipur Panchayat Raj Act-1975	7 <sup>th</sup> May September 1991	166	42	9	X

6	Manipur Panchayat Raj Act-1994	31 <sup>st</sup> January 1997	166	X	X	3
7	Manipur Panchayat Raj Act-1994	31 <sup>st</sup> Aug, 2002	164	X	X	4
8	Manipur Panchayat Raj Act-1994	19 <sup>th</sup> Sep. 2007	165	X	X	4
9	Manipur Panchayat Raj Act-1994	13 <sup>th</sup> Sept. 2012	161	X	X	4
10	Manipur Panchayat Raj Act-1994	16 <sup>th</sup> Oct. 2017	161	X	X	4

Source: The Manipur State Panchayat Parishad, Manipur Panchayat Bhavan, Porompat.

Table 1.2 Re-poll Panchayat General Elections in 2012

Sl. No.	Name of the District	No. of Polling Station	Name of the Polling Station	Reason (s)
1	Imphal East	12/9/10	Phunal Maring Jr. High School	Ballot boxes snatched
2		17/24/1	Andro Khunou UJB School	Polled ballot papers inside the ballot box spoilt
3	Imphal West	3/9/1	Yengkhom Leirak Community Hall (W/W)	Ballot Papers snatched
4		12/8/4	Nambul Mapal High School (N/W)	Ballot boxes & polling materials destroyed
5	Thoubal	16/14/1	Wangjing Khunou L. P. School	Ballot papers snatched & counterfoils destroyed
6	Bishnupur	6/13/1	Phuballa High School (W/W)	Ballot papers snatched & destroyed
		9/6/4	Thanga Samukol Primary School	Ballot boxes & polling materials snatched
		9/6/10	Thanga Salam Government High School (S/W)	Ballot papers for zilla parishad spoilt.

Source: The Manipur State Panchayat Parishad, Manipur Panchayat Bhavan, Porompat

shows the panchayat general elections at a glance since 1964. Conducting the panchayat general elections are many social problems in Manipur because, it is the game of power struggle of the small villages through money, muscle power etc. This circumstances lead to highly keen competition among the candidates as well as sympathizers of the different candidates in the small areas. These critical and serious situations of the different candidates may go higher and higher continuously and finally, it can turn into life attempt. Subsequently such problem was happening in Purum Khulen and Irengband, Gram Panchayat (GP), Thoubal district, Manipur. Recently one sympathizer of the rival candidate namely L. Thoiba Singh was gunned down by the defeated candidates in the last panchayat general elections and

besides re-poll panchayat general elections were done particularly for eight polling stations in the year, 2012 shown table no. 1. 2 conducted an interview with Th. Sanjit, Pradhan of Purum Khulen Panchayat of the above account. Subsequently in exercise of the powers conferred under clause (a) of sub-rules (2) and (3) of Rule 50 of the Manipur Panchayati Raj (Election) Rule, 1995 the State Election Commission hereby declared the polls held on 13th September 2012 (Thursday) at the eight polling stations specified below to be void for the reasons indicated against them. That the State Election Commission (SEC) hereby notified that a fresh poll would be taken in respect of the aforementioned polling stations on 15th Sept. 2012 (Saturday) between the hours from 7:00 am to 4pm. However, in respect of polling station no. 9/6/10 shown against at S1. No. 8 above. fresh poll would be conducted only for the member of zilla parishad constituency shown table no. 1.2. Subsequently such unwanted incidents may be occurred everywhere and every place until and unless conducting the free and fair, real democratic panchayat elections in Manipur and Thoubal district in particular. As per 10<sup>th</sup> general panchayat elections held on 16<sup>th</sup> October, 2017 without any repoll despite minor problems in Thoubal district, Manipur, there have been no elections since then due to political instability. Normally election would have been due in 2022. Subsequently the elections were marked by some incidents of violence, however overall it considered peaceful atmosphere of elections in Thoubal district, Manipur.

### 7.3 Finding

1. Democratic grassroots governance has been weakened by delayed PRIs elections.
2. Legal pressure is pushing the state towards holding overdue elections and restoring local political agency.
3. Despite institutional hurdles, rural development continues through scheme implementation e.g., livelihood programmes and civil society engagement.
4. Once elections resume and constitutional governance is restored at the village level, PRIs could become more effective platforms for local development, accountability, and community participation.
5. In the recent PR elections held in September 2017, candidates spent huge amounts of money that were clearly disproportionate to their honorarium. For example, a Zilla Parishad member reportedly spent around one core, while the monthly honorarium is only about ₹3,000. The number of contestants has increased sharply, leading to intense competition and the use of unfair means to capture power. Electoral politics in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) has become more crucial than ever due to several factors. A high rate of voter participation has made these elections politically significant. In Manipur, many flagship programmes of the central government are easily manipulated by elected members of the Manipur State Legislative Assembly and PRIs. Among them, MGNREGA has become the most vulnerable scheme to manipulation. Consequently, the sudden rise in elections expenditure in PRIs is closely linked to the implementation of MGNREGA in Manipur.
6. Candidates who lose panchayat elections frequently face severe financial distress due to heavy expenditure, making it difficult for them to return to their former economic status. In case of this trend continues, rural areas may face serious social unrest. Despite the implementation of MGNREGA, no significant improvement in living standards or economic conditions of villagers is visible in Manipur. Instead, the Act has created a disturbing situation during panchayat

elections. It is, therefore, high time to debate whether the Act should continue in its present form in Manipur or be restructured to prevent large-scale corruption and immorality.

7. PRI is the system of local self-governance in rural India. It was Mahatma Gandhi's dream under the concept of Ram Rajya to ensure self-governance at the village level. It represents the largest experiment in democratic decentralization in the world, increasing people's participation and responsibility at the grassroots level.
8. After the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, PRIs underwent a major transformation. They were included in the Eleventh Schedule, which contains 29 subjects assigned to panchayats, and Articles 243 to 243(O) were added to Part IX of the Constitution. In Manipur, the panchayati raj system came into force with the enactment of the MPR Act, 1994. Due to population size of the Manipur, state below 20 lacs according to 2001 census as per Indian constitution, a two-tier system was adopted such as gram panchayat at the village level and zilla parishad at the district level. This argument however thus not carry much weight in respect of the state of Arunachal Pradesh which has much less population than Manipur has already incorporated PS under this Act.
9. The government of India renamed the NREG Act, 2005 as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee (MGNREG) Act in 2009–10, acknowledging the importance of Gandhian principles in uplifting the rural poor. MGNREGA guarantees the right to work to rural households by providing at least 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to adult members willing to perform unskilled manual labour. In case of employment is not provided within 15 days of application, the applicant is entitled to an unemployment allowance as specified by the state government. The Act is regarded as the world's largest employment programme and aims to improve the purchasing power of rural people, alleviate poverty, and reduce inequality. At least one-third of the workforce must be women. MGNREGA also seeks to strengthen grassroots democracy and promote transparency and accountability in governance.
10. Key features of MGNREGA include such as:
  - a) Implementation through Panchayati Raj (PR) bodies
  - b) Provision of local work within a 5 km radius
  - c) Weekly wage payments
  - d) 33% reservation for women
  - e) Labour-intensive works with a wage–material ratio of 60:40
  - f) Integration with other schemes such as Bharat Nirman
  - g) Emphasis on sustainable development works like water conservation, plantations, canals, land development, and rural connectivity
11. According to the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, the term of panchayats is five years, and elections are conducted by the State Election Commission. In recent Panchayati Raj elections, expenditure has increased tremendously, far exceeding the modest honorarium of elected members. In the 1990s and earlier, panchayat elections in Manipur attracted little attention. The number of candidates was low, many seats were uncontested, and money distribution was rare. Panchayat members had limited powers and were largely confined to minor administrative roles. Consequently, elections involved no feast parties or monetary inducements. However, the situation has changed significantly. Panchayat members are now more accessible

to villagers than MLAs, who usually reside in Imphal with tight security. Complaints and demands are therefore directed more towards panchayat representatives. The growing importance of PRIs is closely linked to the implementation of MGNREGA since 2006–07, which has expanded the financial and administrative power of panchayat members.

12. MGNREGA, commonly known as the job card scheme among villagers, is widely misused in Manipur. Funds are allegedly distributed informally among MLAs, Zilla Parishad members, Pradhans, and ward members, raising serious doubts about actual implementation. The material component of the scheme is often manipulated, as villagers typically use their own tools while expenditures are shown on paper. Job cards are frequently issued in the names of relatives or migrants living in Imphal, allowing panchayat members to inflate the number of beneficiaries. Machines are used instead of manual labour, even though the Act prohibits mechanization. Villagers often accept wages without working, as money is shared informally. Thus, MGNREGA functions largely on paper while reports submitted to the Ministry of Rural Development project a false image of success. Due to these inflated records, Manipur has been portrayed as economically better-off, affecting central funding allocations. Ironically, despite awards and official recognition, real development on the ground remains absent. Even Union Ministers have expressed dissatisfaction with the scheme's implementation in the state of Manipur.
13. Voting behaviour in PRI elections differs significantly from State Assembly elections. Personal disputes, family decisions, and monetary considerations heavily influence voting. Voters often extract money from multiple candidates by making false promises. Moral and ethical standards have deteriorated, with voters and candidates both contributing to the problem.
14. Money is spent under several conditions:
  - a) Voters frequently blackmail candidates for personal expenses such as medical treatment, marriages, or travel etc.
  - b) Feast parties are organized repeatedly in each locality, far exceeding those in State Assembly elections.
  - c) Donations are demanded by various clubs and organizations, often of questionable legitimacy.
  - d) The number and financial capacity of candidates directly influence total expenditure.
  - e) Votes are informally calculated based on the amount of money distributed per voter.
15. The sharp rise in panchayat election expenditure in Manipur is closely linked to the manipulation of MGNREGA. The job card system has become an easy source of illicit income for elected representatives and officials. Despite the promise of 100 days of employment and the creation of durable assets, villagers receive minimal benefits, with most works existing only on paper. MGNREGA has failed to improve living standards or bring economic betterment to rural Manipur. Instead, it has contributed to corruption, financial distress among candidates, and moral degradation in rural electoral politics. Panchayat elections have become increasingly unethical and money-driven, undermining the very purpose of grassroots democracy. Urgent attention from civil society, media, and intellectuals is required to prevent further deterioration and restore integrity to rural governance.
16. Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia Gandhi on Monday warned that the demolition of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) would have

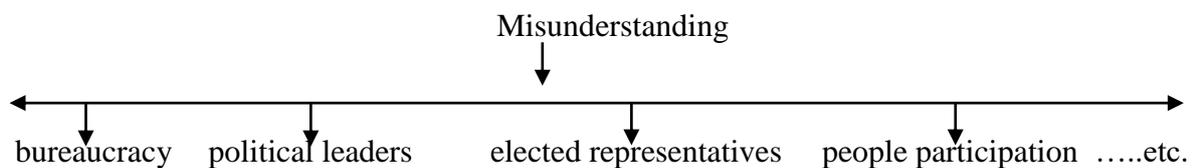
catastrophic consequences for crores of rural Indians. In an editorial in *The Hindu* titled “*The Bulldozed Demolition of MGNREGA*”, she described the replacement of MGNREGA by the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Bill as a collective failure. Gandhi said MGNREGA, inspired by Article 41 of the Constitution, realised Mahatma Gandhi’s vision of *Sarvodaya* and ensured the right to work. She alleged that the Modi government abolished the scheme without consultation or parliamentary debate, dismantling its rights-based structure. Criticizing the new law as bureaucratic and restrictive, she said it caps employment days, weakens states’ role, erodes rural workers’ bargaining power, suppresses wage growth, and places additional financial burden on states. She urged all to unite to safeguard the rights that protect everyone.

17. PRIs elections in Thoubal district, Manipur has not been held since 2017, even though their five-year terms ended in 2022, due to political instability, ethnic conflict, and President’s Rule, further elections were postponed, which has led to appointed administrative committees replacing elected representatives at the local level. In 2025, the Manipur High Court ordered fresh panchayat elections within six months and invalidated prolonged appointments of interim bodies, effectively demanding a return to democratic grassroots governance.
18. The absence of regular elections in Thoubal district, Manipur and other valley districts has eroded accountability and local engagement in rural governance, halting the democratic mandate that PRIs are intended to uphold elections are a necessary condition of political representation and the very heart of democracy. The functions of elections include political recruitment, representation. making government, influencing government policy educating voters, building legitimacy, strengthening elites etc. Elections are also seen as means through which government and political elites can exercise control over their population and make them governable. The elections whether Lok Sabha, state assembly and local bodies like PRIs, municipalities and autonomous district councils have performed all these functions with some significant differences. The nature of electoral politics differs according to national, state and local bodies. Electoral politics in Manipur has been fought on vote banks of locality, clan, family and personal ties, region, ethnic identity and traditional institutions. However the degree and nature of the interaction and role of these factors vary according to parliamentary, state assembly or local bodies-panchayati raj institutions, municipalities and autonomous district council elections. Comparatively role of political parties, issues and personality seem to play more important role in the valley areas in parliamentary elections.
19. While in the hill areas ethnic factor is more important in parliamentary elections due to active intervention by the separatist groups including armed groups. In state assembly elections locality, 'clan, family and personal ties, region, ethnic identity and traditional institutions in addition to money and muscle power are appeared to play dominant roles. In the hill areas ethnic factor is significant factor in the electoral politics in the selection of the candidates, voting behavior and electoral violence and outcomes. In the electoral politics of local bodies like PRIs, municipalities and autonomous district council elections there are marked differences from parliamentary and state legislative assemblies. Local factor, tribe or community, gender, clan, yumnak (surname), family and personal ties seem to play dominant role in local bodies rather than political parties and personality of the candidates. In fact in the valley areas elections are fought not on party basis though the ruling party, MLAs and Ministers play significant roles. In



accrued to richer farmers. This trend continued into the 1970s, prompting a shift towards poverty focused and employment-oriented schemes like CSRE, DPAP, NREP etc. These programmes faced issues of poor implementation, corruption, and lack of coordination. In the 1980s, the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) was launched to directly address rural poverty through asset creation and skill development. Employment schemes such as, NREP, RLEGP etc. generated substantial man-days, though structural limitations persisted. The 1990s and 2000s saw further consolidation of schemes, including SGSY, PMGSY, SGRY, and watershed-based programmes, with greater emphasis on infrastructure, self-employment, and decentralised implementation through PRIs. Overall, while sustained efforts were made across decades to improve rural conditions in Thoubal district, outcomes remained uneven, with limited success in reducing poverty and inequality due to implementation challenges and structural constraints at the present condition of Thoubal district, Manipur. There were so many as rural development programmes in Thoubal district, Manipur since 1952 till now. One of the most significant and contributinal initiatives in rural development was the MGNREGA alongside other impactful programmes like VBGRAMG through MGNREGA stands out as a landmark legislation. MGNREGA is built on the principle of right based approach, guaranteeing employment to those who demand it. This empowers workers and ensured a basic income on the other hand VBGRAMG could have a broder impact on village level social and economic growth potentially empowering quality of life through better infrastructure and services. MGNREGA guarantees wage employment rural house hold while VBG-RAMG focuses on village-centric initiative based on holistic village development and infrastructure growth. As a matter of fact we came to know that despite the abundance and surplus of rural development programmes and initiatives implemented in Manipur, the anticipated transformative impact has been elusive, with the ground reality remaining obstinately unchanged, and little to no significant improvement evident in the quality of life, infrastructure, or overall socio-economic fabric of rural communities, thereby underscoring concerns regarding the efficacy and effectiveness of implementation strategies and mechanisms.

### 7.5 Problems and Prospects of PRIs and Rural Development



Since its introduction in 1961, PRIs in Manipur, particularly in Thoubal district, have faced persistent neglect from both political leaders and bureaucrats. Their marginalisation was further aggravated by the proliferation of registered societies, corporations, and centrally sponsored agencies that bypassed elected local bodies in implementing rural development and anti-poverty programmes. As a result, PRIs remained weak and ineffective. The functioning of PRIs suffered due to irregular elections, frequent supersession, inadequate financial resources, and poor coordination among Gram Panchayats (GPs), Panchayat Samitis, and Zilla Parishads. Although constitutional and state-level amendments aimed to ensure regular elections and strengthen grassroots democracy, institutions like the Gram Sabha largely remained passive, limiting people’s participation in development processes. The government of Manipur has also shown reluctance in devolving adequate powers, funds, and

responsibilities to local bodies. A major challenge has been the strained relationship between elected representatives and government officials, particularly Block Development Officers (BDOs), arising from unclear role definitions, lack of coordination, mutual distrust, and political interference. Elected representatives often lack administrative knowledge, while officials tend to undermine local leadership, resulting in ineffective governance and stalled development initiatives. Additional constraints include low political consciousness among the people, dominance of local elites, weak training mechanisms, insufficient autonomy, and poor accountability structures. The limited extension of Panchayati Raj (PR) to hill areas and inadequate decentralised planning further restrict the effectiveness of rural governance in Manipur. Despite these challenges, PRIs have significant potential to strengthen democratic decentralisation and rural development in case of supported by genuine devolution of powers, adequate funding, capacity building, cooperative functioning between officials and non-officials, and active people's participation. Strengthening PRI is essential for achieving sustainable rural development in Thoubal district and Manipur as a whole. The panchayati raj has a great role to play in our parliamentary democracy. However the government of Manipur has not been satisfactorily dealing with the problems relating to it'. Thus, the PR in Manipur in general and Thoubal district in particular, hardly achieves any tangible and substantial achievement success in its successful working. In its functioning, some evidential defects are found and these are enumerated below such as: (a) Lack of will, determination, dedication and missionary zeal amongst the members of gram panchayat, Panchayats samitis and zilla parishads to take up various development activities; (b) Inadequate honorarium or non-payment thereof for the members such as; (c) lack of co- operation between the members and the bureaucrats such as; (d) want of proper fund; (e) unreasonable and illegitimate political pressure and interference at all levels; (f) ignorance of the members about their powers and functions and the role of panchayati raj in our parliamentary democracy; (g) presence of the locally dominant persons or groups that are also in most cases socially and economically dominant and co- operation. Besides the above defects, there has been a very poor political background in the state. It is learnt from our history that the characteristics of a despotic form prevailed such as:

- (a) Manipur had a highly centralised system of administration from early times till her attainment of statehood under the Constitution of India on 21st January, 1972.
- b) The all India pattern of panchayati raj under the Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1975 was enforced in Manipur only on 10th January, 1978; prior to that, the U.P. Panchayat Act, 1947 envisaging only one tier structure namely gram sabha had been enforced.
- (c) People are poor in social political and economic consciousness and also in the habit of the responsiveness and responsiveness; institutions regarding their powers and functions.
- (d) Responsibleness and responsiveness of the concerned Ministry or Department:
- (e) Grant of administrative power and autonomy including political non-interference and co-operation. Therefore, the government of Manipur must make all possible efforts to fulfill these conditions as that PR, may make a success in Manipur.

The state official argued that generally the elected representatives of the panchayats have little knowledge of their rights and duties. Most of the elected representatives are illiterate, lacking of administrative knowledge and selfish in nature. Psychological warfare is being ensured lingering on between bureaucracy or political leaders and the elected representatives of the PR system in Manipur

and it has its impact in Thoubal district too, There is delay or slow pace in its implementation. State politics is apathetic towards the PR and rural development in Manipur in general and in Thoubal district in particular. Without proper assessment of the weakness in the planning process, without identifying the operational constraints and also without ascertaining convincing vision, a new two tier system has been introduced in 1997 under the Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1994. The elsewhere panchayat samiti has been replaced by the zilia parishad. In other words, this is an attempt to establish direct functional link between village and district. In fact no concrete attempt has been made to consolidate the foundation of earlier experiment i.e. the development experience with village panchayats, PS respectively. The level of capacity for development has not properly analysed. Besides, attempt also has not been made to strengthen district administration. The recommendations of the State Finance Commission, it appears were made without comprehensive exercises on development needs fiscal potential and pattern and rate of development of the state. There is a big misunderstanding among bureaucracy, political leaders, elected representatives of the PRIs in Manipur in general and Thoubal district in particular so as it has its impact in the Thoubal district also. Hence, there is a delay or slow pace in its implementation for rural development in this district. Therefore, all the power politics of authority is always apathetic towards the PRIs and rural development in Manipur in general and Thoubal district in particular.

## 8. Conclusion

The financial responsibilities of PRIs are very much important for rural development. Devolution of power has no practical meaning without actual transfer. People themselves take the responsibilities of their own development. Fund can be utilized without any leakages. Subsequently implementation of three different Acts such as, UP. PRA 1947 and MPRA 1975 which came into enforce panchayat samiti unluckily there is no provision for PS in Manipur under MPRA, 1994 because of the population of the state below 20 lacs according to 2001 census as per Indian Constitution. This argument however does not carry much weight in respect of the state of Arunachal Pradesh which has much less population than Manipur has already incorporated PS under this Act. While the cabinet decided to devolve departments to panchayats on 2nd September, 2005, now only 4 departments such as, Fisheries, Horticulture, Tribal Development and Rural Development have been transferred nominally with negligible amount. The conditions of the financial responsibilities of PRIs are very much disappointed compare to the other states of India. The main reason is that the government is always apathetic toward the PRIs. The present age is the age of knowledge and experience sharing Knowledge connectivity is new article of development. PR is a system of governance that each village is responsible for its own affairs. The study of the electoral politics of PRIs and rural development in Thoubal district, Manipur, reveals a complex relationship between democratic processes and local development outcomes. PRIs were constitutionally designed to function as institutions of grassroots democracy, enabling people's participation in decision-making and ensuring that development reflects local needs. In principle, they provide an effective platform for inclusive and participatory rural development. However, the findings indicate that in Thoubal district the functioning of PRIs have been significantly constrained by political and administrative factors. Irregular and delayed elections have weakened democratic legitimacy and disrupted continuity in local governance. In the absence of elected representatives, accountability mechanisms have declined, and decision-making has largely shifted to administrative arrangements, reducing community participation in development planning. Electoral politics at the PRIs level, when

active, has often been shaped by party influence, local elites, and factional interests rather than development-oriented agendas. Despite these challenges, PRIs in Thoubal district have demonstrated potential in implementing rural development programmes related to infrastructure, livelihoods, sanitation, and social welfare when provided with institutional support. The study of the effective rural development cannot be achieved without strengthening the electoral foundations of PRIs. Regular elections, meaningful devolution of powers, adequate financial resources, and capacity building of elected representatives are essential for revitalising grassroots democracy. In conclusion, the success of rural development in Thoubal district is closely linked to the democratic atmosphere of PRIs and electoral politics in respect of rural development. Reviving democratic processes at the grassroots level and reinforcing decentralisation are crucial steps towards ensuring sustainable development, social inclusion, and responsive local governance in Manipur and Thoubal district in particular.

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