

The Bearing of Traditions in Contemporary Village Governance System Among the Hill Tribes of Manipur: A Case Study of Tangkhul Naga Society

Shimreipam R.S.

(Department of Sociology, Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi

Email: shimreipamronra@gmail.com)

Abstract:

The political formation process among the tribes of Manipur is layered with multiple challenges and issues. One of the main concerns is the question of whether or not traditional institutions are compatible with the framework of the modern state. Taking the case study of the Tangkhul Naga society, the study examines the village governance system and argues that the aspect of governance at the village level has its own political reality, in which the claim to authority as legitimate is determined by 'the belief in the legitimacy' of the people involved. The study outlines the interface of the traditional authority and the legal-rational authority, and the creation of wider political space in its interaction process.

Keywords —Tribe, Traditional Authority, Legal-rational Authority, legitimacy, governance, Tangkhul Naga, Hanga-shim.

I.INTRODUCTION

The political formation process among the tribes of Manipur is layered with multiple challenges and issues. One of the main concerns is the question of whether or not traditional institutions are compatible with the framework of the modern state. Since the post-independent India, the democratization and decentralizing policies of the state to provide local autonomy and strengthen its grassroots democracy have stood as a litmus test against the backdrop of the traditional institutions in the tribal societies of Manipur. This paper examines the implication of the formal laws in the village governance system by examining the interface of 'traditional authority' and 'legal-rational authority' (Weber 1978). The interface of the traditional authority and the legal-rational authority with different legitimizing sources of authority has not only interacted themselves as an opposing force but in its interaction process, a wider political space has also been created.

Within this fabric of political space, the tribal people have experienced many forms of conflicts and contestations at many levels over various concerns and interests. As the study will demonstrate, there exist two-layered struggles that are of the external and internal struggles. Here, the external struggle refers to the struggle of the tribal people against the state for autonomy and traditional space, and the internal struggle refers to the struggle that is emerging from within for the democratization of traditional institutions. In this paper, the theoretical analysis is carried out by considering the Weberian perspective of legitimacy to elucidate the actual political authority structure of the Tangkhul Naga villages. It argues that the aspect of governance at the village level has its own political reality, in which the claim to authority as legitimate is determined by 'the belief in the legitimacy' of the people involved (Weber 1978:213).

Without diving into the debates on the definition of tribes, in this paper, I have used the term 'tribes'

or 'tribal' as a social category as identified in the constitution of India, but in the sense of 'indigenous community' (Xaxa 2008). For the tribal of Manipur, the usage of the term 'tribe' has become a form of identity assertion that symbolizes the notion of indigeness (Kumar 2005). In broad categorization, the tribal of Manipur is divided into two major ethnic groups i.e. the Naga and the Kuki, where numerous tribal communities and sub-communities belong to either one of these ethnic groups (Kipgen 2018). Although, both the Naga and the Kuki are categorized as tribal, they are not a homogenous group as they differ from one another in terms of their political organization and have their own indigenous village governance system. However, uniform legislative Acts of the state have been applied in the hill areas that precluded their existing traditional authority structures. Because of this, the tribal communities as a whole shared a common ordeal and faced the challenges of integrating their existing traditional authorities within the framework of the modern state.

Unlike the other tribes of Northeast India, the tribal of Manipur are not covered under the provision of the 'Sixth Scheduled' of the Indian constitution. Instead, the Village Authority Act of 1956 is applied in providing the legal framework for the administration of village governance, while the Manipur District Council Act of 1971 is enforced for the constitution of the Autonomous District Council in the tribal hill areas. These formal laws provide the legal framework for constituting democratic political institutions in the tribal hill areas. But the tribal viewed these existing legal Acts lacks real autonomy, and they have been demanding the extension of the Sixth Schedule in the tribal hill areas.

In the context of the Tangkhul Naga, as the result of opposition, the application of such legal Acts in the village governance system had remained elusive in actual practice, while the structure and administrative functions continue to be largely dominated by traditional authority relations. However, in recent the decade, an interesting political development at the village level is also

emerging for the reformation of their traditional authority structures by the local people themselves. Understanding this political formation process is one of the main aims of the study.

II. METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

The exploration and examination of the Tangkhul Naga society are framed within the stance of interpretivism, in which the approach to understanding the political formation process is analysed by interpreting the social world through the lens of the local people (Bryman 2008:15-17). An ethnographic inquiry was carried out using qualitative research methods of in-depth interviews, group discussions, and participant observation. The fieldwork for this study was conducted from 2018 to 2020 in four villages (Chingai, Challou, Punge, and Langli) of the Ukhrul district, Manipur. The sites of fieldwork were selected based on the traditional regional division of the community¹ with a view of a representation of each region, and the responses of different villages to democratic principles and formal laws of the state. To understand the contemporary village political organization and the continuity of traditional authority in the Tangkhul Naga society, four group discussions and 82 face-to-face in-depth interviews were carried out, and also participated in two 'Khashim Kazip' (Village Assembly meeting).

III. TRADITIONAL AUTHORITY STRUCTURE OF THE TANGKHUL NAGA

The Tangkhul Nagas is one of the Naga ethnic groups residing in the contiguous frontier of North East India and the North-western region of Myanmar. The Tangkhul Nagas is one of the recognized Scheduled tribes predominantly residing in the Ukhrul district of Manipur, India, constituting

¹The pre-colonial Tangkhul Naga homeland was divided into eight regions namely Raphei, Somra, Rem-Khunyang, Vaikhang, Kamo, Kharao, Kathur, Khararoui (Shimray 2004:34).

up to 97 percent of the total district population². Apart from the Ukhrul district of Manipur, the Tangkhul Naga villages are found in other districts of Senapati and Thoubal of Manipur. They are also spread across the border in Myanmar, particularly in the Somra Tract (Vashum 2014).

In the discourse of tribal polity, traditional authority is often understood synonymously with the institution of chieftainship (Shimray, 2001). The institution of chieftainship is premised on the centrality of the chief in the village governance system, in which the power and authority relations are intricately linked to the land ownership rights. Among the tribes of Manipur, the traditional authority structure varies from one tribal society to another with their own indigenous system of village governance. Each of these tribal communities operates according to its own traditional and customary laws. In general, the Kuki and Naga societies differ in terms of power and authority relations. For the Kuki society, the chief of the village owns the land and assumes absolute authority in the village governance, while in the case of Naga society, the chief occupies a vital position but he doesn't own the village land and has no absolute authority in the village governance (Kipgen 2018; Horam, 2016).

In the context of the Tangkhul Naga society, clan relations³ constitute the primary basis of power and authority relations in the village, and the application of the notion of chieftainship as the central force to the understanding of traditional authority doesn't exactly mirror the traditional authority structure of the village. Here, traditional authority refers to the traditional village council locally known as *Hanga-shim*. The constitution of Hanga-shim can be understood in terms of clan relations, as the

members of the Hanga-shim are the representatives of each clan in the village.

The Institution of Hanga-shim

The institution of Hanga-shim is the principal political organization of the Tangkhul Naga society since the ancient past. The term Hanga-shim is a combination of two words Hanga (meaning clan-head representative) and shim (meaning house), and it literally means the 'house of clan head representatives'. The Hanga-Shim is also often interpreted and understood synonymously with the traditional Village Council and Village Court.

The structure and power relations of the institution of Hanga-shim can be understood in terms of clan relations. Prior to the colonial encounter, there existed no centralized political administration of the state but each village functioned as an autonomous political unit (Mills 1922:96; Horam 2016:77-78). The territorial space of the village in which they inhabit manifested the basis of village autonomy and identity. Each village as a political unit has a defined territorial boundary that separates one from the other. The territorial boundaries or jurisdictions between villages were typically demarcated by natural landscapes such as rivers, rocks, ridges, trees, etc. based on the oral traditions (Peter 2004:2).

Inasmuch as the village territory is the basis of village autonomy and identity, each clan in the village also possesses their own demarcated forestland inside the village territorial space. The possession of clan's land within the village territorial space provides the basis of their respective clan's identity in the village. In past, the geographic settlement pattern in a village was organized in terms of the clan-based arrangement, where respective clans occupied a specific locality called 'Tang'. Horam remarked on the significance of Tang as the "miniature villages within a village" (Horam 2016:73). The demarcation of the boundary between Tang went to the extent of erecting wooden walls and gates to separate one clan from another within the village. In this sense, the

² Ukhrul district has a population of 183,998 according to the Census report of 2011, Government of India.

³ The clan relations in Tangkhul Naga society reflect the notion of the segmental dimension of political organization. Sahlins employed the concept of 'segmentary system' to describe the socio-political organization of the tribal societies, in which a small unit of the household is joined to form a larger unit of lineage through levels of incorporation (Sahlins, 1968).

possession of the respective clan's land in the village is intricately linked to the identity of the clans in the village, which also reflect the basis of power and authority relations in the constitution of the Hanga-shim or traditional authority in the villages.

The strength of the Hanga-shim varies from village to village and its strength i.e. the constituting members of Hanga-shim is determined by the prevalence of clan in the village. Generally, a village of the Tangkhul Naga is composed of seven to ten clans (Angkang 1999:86). Each clan, with each representative, constitutes the Hanga-shim in every village. The chief of the village, locally known as 'Awunga' is the head of the Hanga-shim, and the clan heads, locally known as 'Shangkharar' are its members. It is also to note that the chief of the village is also the head of one of the clans in the village. The position of the chief and clan heads is permanent and hereditary in nature. However, in the case of clan heads, the position of the clan head in the Hanga-shim is also represented by one of their clan elders in his place from time to time, but with the consent of the clan head and his clansmen (Luikham 2013:131-132). Conventionally, each clan has one representative, but sometimes there are two or more representatives from a clan in relation to the size of the clan population in the village, in a manner that a clan with a larger population in the village has more than one representative. The idea of membership and identity of a person or a family is only identified on the ground of their clan affiliation⁴. Thus, the representation in the Hanga-shim is possible only through the channel of the

⁴Membership of a person is primarily determined by birth, while at the same time, a person can acquire membership of family and clan through the ritual of 'Shangzan kakhui'. The process of acquiring membership required the approval of the clan's head and clansmen. This ritual of Shangzan kakhui entails the killing of four-legged animals (pig or buffalo), where meats are cooked in one pot and shared as a symbol of brotherhood, and the act of 'oath of loyalty' to the family and clan is pledged in presence of all the clansmen. A person who acquired membership through the ritual of shangzan kakhui is considered as 'paisho' meaning the youngest member of the clan.

clan, and the clan that is not customarily recognized in the village cannot claim or become a member or representative in the village Hanga-shim. In this manner, because of clan power relations, the chief can neither nominate nor remove any clan representative under any circumstances.

Traditionally, the Hanga-shim functions as the highest decision-making body of the village, and the members of the Hanga-shim are endowed with power and authority to regulate the administration of the village under the application of customary laws and practices. Unlike the modern state structure, the village political organization has no systematic separation of power as the judiciary, executive, and legislature, but the village administration locally known as 'mawungphun' are placed under the authority of Hanga-shim. The mawunphun of the village includes all the concerns of the village, ranging from maintaining customary laws and social orders, civil and criminal trials, land disputes, imposing fines and punishments, religious affairs, and overseeing village territory among others.

Tradition and custom are used to legitimate the political authority of the Hanga-shim. The belief in the legitimacy of Hanga-shim by the people is not a mere product of the prescriptive force of traditionalism, but it also entails the notion of identity assertion that is linked to the clan's identity. The position and title of the chief and the clan heads that constitute the Hanga-shim are legitimized through oral traditions and the myths of origin and migration of their clan, with the belief that they are the direct descendants of the founding ancestors of their respective clans⁵. In relation to

⁵According to the oral tradition, their ancestors founded and established the villages after performing religious ceremonial rites. One of the particular religious ceremonial rites was the 'fire lighting rite' for consecrating the village land. This fire lighting rite involves the spilling of sacrificed animal blood on the new land followed by the lighting of the first fire in the new land. The lighting of the first fire symbolizes the birth of new life and a new beginning. It is believed that each clan was led by its own clan leader, and among these clan leaders, the one who performed the rites of 'fire lighting' become the chief of the village. (Shangrei 2014: 97; Shimray 2001: 61).

this belief, the title of the chief and clan heads is treated as sacrosanct and historical. Thus, the inherited title and position become a symbol of authority and also the basis of legitimacy.

IV. Implications of Formal Laws in the Tangkhul Naga Village Governance

The introduction of the formal laws in the hills (tribal areas) of Manipur began after the British annexed Manipur in 1891. The tribal areas were also brought under the British colonial administration, however, a separate administrative unit between the valleys and the hills was maintained. The hill areas came under the administration of the British crown through the President of Manipur State Durbar, who was a British ICS officer. Whereas, the valley areas were under the control of the Manipur maharaja, who claimed absolute ownership of land and collected land revenue within his territory i.e. in the valley. It was during this colonial period the British for the first time introduced formal laws in the hill areas of Manipur. The Chin Hills Regulation (CHR) of 1896 was applied and the house tax of rupees 3 was imposed in the hill areas (Shimray 2009:91). Through this regulation, for the first time, the process of centralization and bureaucratization of administration in the village governance system began. The chiefs of different villages were given the title 'headman' and they were assigned to assist the District Commissioner as the auxiliary agents (Shangrei 2014:101). At that period of time, the people did not understand the legal implication, but at the same time, the chiefs were empowered with the role of bureaucratic position within their respective village jurisdiction to collect house tax and to maintain the internal affairs on behalf of the British.

In the course of the colonial period, the village administration to a great extent was allowed to function according to their customary laws and traditional practices in their respective villages as long as they paid their house taxes (Fernandes & Borgohain 2017). However, the introduction of

bureaucratic relations in village governance gave way to the institutionalization of chieftainship. This has impacted the existing traditional authority relations, particularly in the Tangkhul Naga villages. The legal empowerment of the chief in villages by the British also marked the evolution of the village chief as dominating figure in the power relations, as against the existing traditional authority structure. In fact, this colonial administrative policy had impacted the balance of power relations between the chief and the clan heads that constitute the Hanga-shim in the Tangkhul Naga villages.

In the post-independent period, with the policy of integrating a democratic framework in the tribal hill areas, the parliamentary Act known as the Manipur (Village Authorities in Hill Areas) Act, 1956 was passed and was implemented in 1957. This Act legally provides the provision for the constituting 'Village Authority' (VA) in every village in the hill areas, and also introduced the provision for election of the members of the VA based on adult franchise for the first time, while making the chief of the village as the ex-officio chairman of the VA. The Act was introduced with the objective to accommodate traditional authority in the VA structure by recognizing the position and authority of the chief in the village while providing democratic space for the election of its members.

However, in the case of Tangkhul Naga society, the constitution of VA posed a structural conflict with the existing institution of Hanga-shim. Recognizing only the village chief and not recognizing the clan heads in the making of VA not only undermines the clan's power and authority relations but also disintegrates the structural relations of clans that constitute the Hanga-shim. Because of this, in actual practice, the framework of VA remains largely elusive in the villages. The reality is that besides the use of the term 'Village Authority' instead of Hanga-shim in the official transactions and paper works the structure and composition of Hanga-shim under the guise of VA continues to persist. In fact, the composition of the so-called VA in the village is still constituted by the traditional authority structure of the clan's

representatives that is headed by the chief of the village as against the provision of the Act i.e. to elect the members of the VA.

Again, in 1967 another Act was passed called the 'Manipur Hill Areas (Acquisition of Chief's rights) Act', which attempts to abolish the institution of chieftainship in the hill areas. This Act authorized the state to acquire the rights, title, and interest of the chief in relation to land rights by paying compensation (Sanga 2012). The Act though passed could not be implemented because of the strong objection of the chiefs and the Hill Areas Committee (HAC)⁶.

Further, a two-tier system was also brought in with the parliamentary legislation called the 'Manipur (Hill Areas) District Council Act' of 1971 for the creation of six Autonomous District Councils (ADC) in the tribal areas (Kshetri 2006). Although this Act is beyond scope of traditional authority and legitimacy at the village level, it is necessary to note the ongoing struggle of the tribal in the larger context, at the district and state levels. This provision for District Council has been a source of political conflicts. The tribal have been opposing the District Councils since its inception, but despite the oppositions, it came into effect in 1973. The District Council under this Act lacks real executive, legislative and financial power. The district administration exercises supreme control over the District Council in such a manner that the District Councils have to submit any proposal such as framing of rules and regulations, bye-laws, developmental work, or any executive or judicial matters to the district administration for approval. Again, the district council does not possess the

financial, administrative, and functional powers of effective local self-government (Bhatia 2010).

While in the Sixth Schedule, the Autonomous Councils are empowered with degree of legislative, judicial, and executive power (Kshetri 2006), and Autonomous councils are empowered to recognize or established local or village level bodies of self-governance of different forms, which may be of traditional or legal-rational authority structure (Burman 2006). As the provision of the Manipur District Council Act lacks autonomy and traditional space for self-management, the tribal had been demanding the extension of the Sixth Scheduled in the tribal areas of Manipur for decades. Because of this demand, the tribal boycotted the District Council election for over two decades from 1989 to 2008. In 2008, the 'Manipur (Hill Areas) District Councils' (Third Amendment) Act' was passed in the State Legislative Assembly. And the fresh election was carried out in 2010, despite the opposition from the tribal on grounds of 'procedural lapses' and 'irregularities' (Bhatia 2010).

The case for the extension of the Sixth Scheduled has been forwarded by several high-level government committees in the tribal hill areas of Manipur. For instance, the National Commission for Reviewing of the Indian Constitution in its report submitted in March 2002 recommended for extension of the Sixth Schedule. But the Government of Manipur continues to delay the extension of the Sixth Schedule in the tribal areas on grounds of 'local adjustments' and 'amendments' (Bhatia 2010).

Again, in August 2021 the HAC has proposed a new bill, the Manipur (Hill Areas) Autonomous District Council Bill, 2021 bill against the existing the Manipur (Hill Areas) District Council Act, 1971 to provide more autonomy to the HAC and Autonomous District Councils with regards to the administration and Management of the hill areas. But this new proposed bill has become another source of political contention between the tribal and the state, and the bill is yet to be tabled in the State Legislative Assembly. While the election of the District council is put on hold once again. All this

⁶In the exercise of powers conferred by Article 371(c) of the constitution of India, the then-president V.V. Giri through the Presidential order of 1972 provides the provision for the constitution of the 'Hill Area Committee' (HAC) in the Legislative Assembly of the State of Manipur. The HAC is empowered to protect and safeguard the rights and interests of the Hill people i.e. the tribal of Manipur, and the Governor is entrusted with special responsibility to ensure the functioning of the HAC (The Manipur Legislative Assembly (Hill Area Committee) Order, 1972

ongoing struggle, contestation, and conflict has only curtailed and hampered the overall economic development in the tribal hill areas.

Contesting Legitimacy

In the eye of the State, the state itself is the source of a repository of power and authority possessing all the rights to exercise supreme authority within its territorial space (Ray 1996). The apparatus of State authority is based on the bureaucratic principle of legally established norms where the command of power and authority has to be devolved from the top to bottom and functions on the framework of impersonal relations. In relation to this, the State with its legislative power has introduced and enacted formal laws to constitute the legal-rational authority in the tribal areas of Manipur. The State government at its disposal has employed means of economic, monetary resources as well as coercion, which Michel Foucault calls “governmentality” to institutionalize them into governable subjects (Li 2007). These formal laws, the Manipur (Village Authorities in Hill Areas) Act, 1956, and the Manipur Hill Areas (Acquisition of Chief’s rights) Act, 1967 have been passed to regulate the administration of the village without providing autonomy and traditional space in the tribal areas of Manipur.

In this manner, the state exercises its powers by introducing formal laws as opposed to that of the existing traditional authorities. But such exercise of power has not necessarily resulted in the institutionalization of the state authority or precluded the existence of traditional authorities in the villages. The persistence and continuity of the socially sanctioned traditional authority against the legally sanctioned authority of the state remain an opposing force in the village governance system. The fundamental question lies in the notion of legitimacy. With different legitimizing sources of authority, the legitimacy of legal-rational authority and traditional authority draws its validation from different sources (Ray 1996). The sources of

legitimacy in traditional authority rest in the sanctity and embodiment of traditional customs and values that have been passed down from one generation to the next. Whereas in the case of state authority, the legitimacy of authority rests on the idea of legality of the established rules that is modeled on a bureaucratic administrative structure (Weber 1978).

Further, linked up with identity politics, the people viewed the apparatus of the formal laws as a mechanism of external force that is imposed to undermine their traditional institutions which they believe would relegate the rights of the hereditary offices, and they feared that the disintegration of the traditional authority structure will eventually reduce their village autonomy, land rights, and their identity. They also considered the Village Authority Act as the projection of the dominant culture of Meitei⁷ that is imposed upon them by deliberately ignoring the existing traditional customs and practices of the people. Because of these, the Tangkhul Naga have been resisting the existing Acts and their implementation. The Tangkhul Naga Long (TNL), the apex body of the Tangkhul Naga, has opposed and categorically rejected this Village Authority Act in the Tangkhul Naga villages terming it as anti-tribal and outdated Act. The Tangkhul Naga Wungnao Long (The Tangkhul Naga Headmen Association)⁸ has also opposed to this Act as well.

Since the introduction of the Village Authority Act of 1956 and to this day, the extent of the Village Authority Act had remained elusive in actual application and practice at the village level. But from within, with the penetration of democratic principles, the Tangkhul Naga society is undergoing the process of democratization of traditional authority in recent couple of decades.

⁷ For instance, section 3 (56) of the Village Authority Act imposed the use of Manipuri language in the proceeding of the village court.

⁸Tangkhul Naga Wungnao Long, Office Memoranda, 2019.

V. The Internal Struggle for Political Space in the Tangkhul Naga Village Polity

This section examines the internal struggle in the Tangkhul Naga villages for the democratization of traditional institutions. The modern forces that have entered the society through various agencies on one hand and the continuity of traditional institutions on the other hand have become a contentious issue, particularly in the governance system of the village.

Since the colonial encounter, the society has undergone tremendous changes and modifications in various dimensions of their traditional institutions. The dynamic of the political development in the villages can be attributed to various factors. Besides, the introduction of formal laws of the state, there is also a link between the degree of “political development and the size of the population” (Evans-Pritchard and Fortes 2005: 7). The apparatus of the Hanga-shim appears to be only operational for a small-scale and illiterate population that functions majorly on interpersonal relations based on traditional customs and values. However, with an increasing population of the village and the diffusion of modern values of democratic principle, monetary economy, and education various new roles and functions have entered the society in which the customary law and traditional wisdom are unable to accommodate the larger population and provide greater rationale or expertise on legal or technical domains in the prospects of village social organization such as development, infrastructure, education, health, and the likes.

As such, in the process of accommodating the increasing population and modern values, the Hanga-shim has become ineffective in running the village administration. Firstly, the issue emerges at the structural level where the Hanga-shim accommodates only the chief and the clan elders of the village in the power and authority relations. Traditionally, the extension of political rights is not inclusive to all the adult members of the village, as it excludes and denies any political rights to

unmarried men⁹. Secondly, there is also a lack of congruence between ‘traditional or tribal ideals of leadership’ and ‘the actual behaviour of leaders’ (Bee 1999). The dominance of the chief in the decision-making process that is coupled up with the rampant corruption and mismanagement of government funds in the name of Hanga-shim emerged as the major source of contention in almost all the Tangkhul Naga villages.

Although people’s belief in the legitimacy of Hanga-shim has not necessarily been degenerated in the sense that the title and position (chief and the clan heads) still remain intact and valid, however, beyond the bearing of tradition, there is also a growing concern about the scope and function of the Hanga-shim. Given the ineffectiveness of the Hanga-shim in relation to its structure, and the incongruence of ideal qualities of the traditional leaders and their actual behavior, the need for reforming the Hanga-shim also emerged along the way. The process of reformation started, more specifically in the last couple of decades with the emergence of the institution of Khashim (Village Assembly) and this institutionalization of Khashim has also led to the evolution of dual administration that integrate tradition and democracy in the village governance system.

Institution of Khashim (Village Assembly)

The institutionalization of Khashim in Tangkhul Naga villages has provided a democratic space for the villagers to participate in the decision-making process. The term Khashim is a combination of two words i.e. Kha (meaning village) and shim (meaning house) and literally means the ‘house of the village’. In the past, the institution of Khashim

⁹Traditionally, the parameter of maturity (and responsibility) in the Tangkhul Naga society was measured (equated) in terms of one’s marital status. Customarily, the political space is limited only to a married man in the village as they believe that “Marriage is a sign of maturity” and thus, only a married man can enjoy the political rights and can become a member of the Hanga-shim village, or can have a political voice in the village (Shimray, A.S.W., 2011, p.163).

has a vague connotation as it existed on a blurred borderline with the institution of Hanga-shim, where the Hanga-shim itself encompassed the institution of Khashim in terms of its organization and functions. However, in contemporary time the village Khashim also known as Village Assembly has been institutionalized in every village, and it serves as the highest decision-making body or legislative body in the village.

During fieldwork, it is observed that the institutionalization of Khashim has laid the foundation for the democratization of traditional authority. It is through the institution of Khashim that the village power and authority relations that had been limited only to the chief, clan heads, and elders under the institution of Hanga-shim has been widened, in a way that the political rights have been extended to all the adult males. Adult males of 18 years and above are deemed as a member of the Khashim and are entitled with equal political rights to participate in the Khashim Kazip (Village Assembly meeting) of the village. All the members of the Khashim have equal rights and voices in the decision-making process¹⁰.

Generally, there are two general Khashim Kazip annually; Yearly Assembly and Half-Yearly Assembly. Apart from these, an emergency village meeting is also called from time to time when certain issues or problems arise in the village. The office-bearers of the Khashim consist of Speaker, Deputy Speaker, Secretary, and Joint Secretary. And they are duly elected by the members of the Khashim. This democratic principle in electing the office-bearers of Khashim has not only provided the sense of exercising their political rights in the village political space but also made them active agents in the decision-making process. Given the equal platform, any member can raise any concerns and issues of the village, or any member can submit

¹⁰ The researcher participated in the Khashim Kazip at Chingai village on the 30th and 31st of December, 2019. This Khashim kazip was a special Assembly meeting for the approval of village riyans (constitution). The articles of the riyans were read line by line by the Speaker of Khashim, which was followed by discussion and debate.

an agenda to the Speaker for discussion and debate. While the decision and resolution on any matter passed by following a simple majority rule system, and typically, members of the Khashim raised their hand to see the majority in passing any form of resolution. Generally, the discussion and debates revolve around the issues of village development, community land, forest usage and social issues relating to alcohol and drugs.

Further, the institutionalization of Khashim has strengthened the village political organizational structure into systematic and formal relations, and has served as the springboard for laying down village *Riyan* and encoding *Shiyan-Chikan*¹¹. The democratization of traditional institutions is evidently manifested in the *Riyan* of different villages in which traditions and democratic ideals are integrated, in a manner that the framework of the *Riyan* entails the idea of dual administration in the village governance¹².

Integration of Tradition and Democracy

As discussed in the above section, the institution of Hanga-shim is the principal political organization in Tangkhul Naga society since the ancient past, but in the last couple of decades, the society has witnessed certain changes in the village polity. The interface of tradition and democracy has opened up a wider political space that is paving way for the democratization of the traditional authority structure of the society. With the institutionalization of Khashim, the rigid structure of Hanga-shim has been broken down. The extension of the political rights to the adult male in the village creates a new space for political discussion and reformation. The aim of building a more effective village governance

¹¹ The village riyans is the constitution of the village where it defines the composition and administrative structure of the village, its distribution of power and authority, and its membership among others, while the Shiyan-Chikan is the customary laws and practices of the village.

¹² The idea and the provision of dual administration can be seen in the *Riyan* of Chingai village, Somdal village, Maren village, Kalhang village etc.

system that accommodates both tradition and democracy emerged as the core basis of the reformation process. Although this reformation process is not without friction among the people themselves particularly in defining the extent of authority and function of Hanga-shim.

During the fieldwork, many of the respondents expressed their concern over the administration of the Hanga-shim in overseeing and implementing various government-led development programs, schemes, and projects in the village. The people particularly the educated and the younger generation are in favor of constituting a separate administrative body, particularly for village economic development. They are of the view that the scope of the Hanga-shim is limited and exclusive, in the sense that it does not accommodate every adult male and also the drives of democratic institutions and values. It is interesting to note that most of the respondents uphold the sanctity of tradition and define the function of Hanga-shim in its customary and traditional relations, but at the same time they are also viewed that Hanga-shim should not extend beyond the domain of traditions.

In the studied villages, the village polity is characterized by the integration of democratic principles in the traditional authority structure. The beginning process for the accommodation of democratic principles in traditions is not without frictions in the villages. Although the deterioration of the Hanga-shim has begun since the colonial encounter, the major eruption of internal conflict against the Hanga-shim began in the early 2000s when the government of India launched a scheme called 'Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act' (MGNREGA)¹³ in the villages and rural areas of India. During this period, these villages witness widespread discontent against

the Hanga-shim on account of transparency and accountability in implementing and utilizing the scheme. The Hanga-shim at the village level while implementing the scheme, corruption and misappropriation of MGNREGS scheme become rampant. Because of this ineffectiveness and lack of inefficiency in overseeing the scheme and other related resources, the villagers began to question the institution of Hanga-shim and started to call for reformation of Hanga-shim.

However, the reformation process also resulted in internal conflict among the people in the initial period. The village communities were divided into two social groups, one group that wish to maintain the status quo of Hanga-shim and the other that strive to reform the Hanga-shim. In this internal struggle, the elements of kinship and clan relation became a strong force in the mobilization process.

The initiation for the reformation of Hanga-shim was particularly for economic development and equitable distribution of economic resources, but in the process it became a clash of families and clans. However, in the course of time, the Hanga-shim was reformed by defining its scope and extent of authority and at the same time, a new body was also created for overseeing economic development in the village. This development can be viewed as the evolution of dual administration in the village governance system. Here, the idea of dual administration in the village polity entails the arrangement and separation of power and authority between the existing traditional authority of 'Hanga-shim' and the newly created body known as the 'Village Development Council' (VDC). Under this system, the powers and functions are shared among these bodies. The framework of the VDC embodied democratic ideals where its chairman and members are duly elected based on adult suffrage. The structure of the VDC consists of a chairman, secretary, and executive members. Its main function is to oversee the economic development and projects of the village. On the other hand, the Hanga-shim continues to exist side by side with the chief of the village as the head and the representative of the clan as the members. While

¹³ In 2005 the Government of India passed National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (now renamed as the 'Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act' or 'MGNREGA') which was launched in 2006. Under this Act, 100 days of wage employment is guaranteed to secure the livelihood of rural people.

continuing to serve vital roles in the customary domains of land and forest rights, the justice system (customary village court), cultural festivals, and safeguarding customary laws.

The system of dual village administration is an interesting development in contemporary times. At this point, it is not certain, and too early to examine the efficiency, effectiveness, and stability of this dual administration in the village. But this pattern of political formation process can be viewed as the integration of traditional authority and legal-rational authority, where its powers and authority are shared and separated accordingly that accommodate both the aspects of tradition and democratic ideals in the village governance system of the Tangkhul Naga society.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

This article has examined how the political formation process in Tangkhul Naga society in Manipur is ensnared within the political fabric of contested legitimacy of traditional authority against the State legal-rational authority framework on one hand, and the development of a legal form of legal-rational authority based on the democratic principle from within on the other hand. The study has argued that the source of legitimacy of traditional authority and legal-rational authority of the state draws its validation from different sources, and the legitimacy of traditional authority in the Tangkhul Naga society continues to remain central because of the belief of the people in traditional authority as the legitimate authority. The contestation in the legitimacy of authority and the struggle for internal autonomy with the State and the conflict among themselves have hampered the overall development. Thus, it is equally important to understand the traditional space in order to bridge the gap in power and authority relations by decentralization and devolution of power within certain frameworks of socially sanctioned authority and legally sanctioned authority that can balance the degree of autonomy

in the village governance and the extent of state power.

Further, in the recent couple of decades, with an increasing population and the spread of democratic ideals, the integration process of traditional authority and legal-rational authority has emerged from within. This has given rise to the evolution of dual administration in the village governance system. The dual administration system has opened up a wider political space that accommodates both tradition and modernity and has also paved the way for the democratization of traditional institutions. However, at this point, the democratization of traditional institutions is unable to break the shackles of clan's identity and the centrality of the clan in the power and authority relations. Because of this, the extension of political freedom and space to women still remains a far fetch idea in the village polity.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Pradyumna Bag for his unwavering guidance.

REFERENCES

- [1] Angkang, S. 1999. *Hau (Tangkhul) Customary law* (Hau Shiyau Chikan). Imphal: Modern Press.
- [2] Bee, Robert L. 1999. "Structure, Ideology, and Tribal Governments." *Human Organization* 58(3):285-94.
- [3] Bhatia, Bela. 2010. "Justice Denied to the Tribals of the Hill Areas of Manipur." *Economic and Political Weekly* 45(31): 38-46. Retrieved August 09, 2019 (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/20764362>)
- [4] Blau, P. M. 1963. "Critical remarks on Weber's theory of authority." *The American Political Science Review* 57(2): 305-316.
- [5] Bryman, A. 2018. *Social research methods*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- [6] Burman, B. R. 2006. "Creating Consternation." *Economic and Political Weekly* 41(34): 3645-3647. (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/4418607>)
- [7] Chingai Village. 2021. "Chingai Kha Riyan (Constitution of Chingai Village)." Chingai
- [8] Fernandes, W. 2007. "Tribal Customary and Formal Law Interface in North-Eastern India: Implications for Land Relations." *The Course Hero*. (n.d.). Retrieved April 11, 2022 (<https://www.coursehero.com/file/41907118/walter-fernandes-paperdoc/>)
- [9] Fernandes, W. and Borgohain, B. 2017. *Rethinking Autonomy, Self-determination, and Sovereignty: Search for Peace in Northeast India*. Guwahati: North Eastern Social Research Centre.
- [10] Fortes, M., & Evans-Pritchard, E. 1940. *African political systems*. London: Oxford University Press.
- [11] Green, L. 2012. "Legal Obligation and Authority." In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2012). Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University. (<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/legal-obligation/>).
- [12] Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India. 2011. *District Census Handbook, Ukhrul. Series 15 Part XII B*.

- (https://censusindia.gov.in/2011census/dchb/1408_PART_B_DCHB_UKHRUL.pdf)
- [13] Haugaard, Mark. 2018. "What Is Authority?" *Journal of Classical Sociology* 18(2):104–32. doi: 10.1177/1468795X17723737.
- [14] Hodson, T.C. 1911 [2013]. *The Naga Tribes of Manipur*. New Delhi: Low Price Publication.
- [15] Horam, M. 1975 [2016]. *Naga Polity*. New Delhi: Sunmarg Publishers & Distributors.
- [16] Kingson, A.S. 2014. "Village Council in Tangkhul Areas of Manipur Conflicting Traditional Authority and State Laws." Pp. 108-123 in *Encountering modernity: Situating the Tangkhul Nagas in perspective*, edited by Vashum et. al. New Delhi: Chicken neck.
- [17] Kipgen, N. 2018. "Land Laws, Ownership and Tribal Identity: The Manipur Experience." Pp.111-126 in *Marginalities in India: Themes and Perspective*, edited by Bhattacharyya and Basu. Springer.
- [18] Kshetri, R. 2006. *Districts Councils in Manipur (Formation and functioning)*. New Delhi: Akansha Publishing House
- [19] Kumar, Nikhlesh. 2005. "Identity politics in the hill tribal communities in the North-Eastern India." *Sociological bulletin* 54(2): 195-217. (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/23620497>)
- [20] Li, T. M. 2007. Governmentality. *Anthropologica*, 49(2): 275–281. (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25605363>)
- [21] Luikhram, T. 1961 [2013]. *Wung (Tangkhul) Naga Okthot Mayonza*. Ukhrul: Kachingmi Ragui.
- [22] Manipur Legislative Assembly. Recommendation of the Hill Areas Committee, Manipur Legislative Assembly, 2021 on the Manipur (Hill Areas) Autonomous Bill, 2021. Press conference.
- [23] Mill, J.P. 1926. "Certain Aspects of the Naga Culture Reviewed." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 56: 27-35.
- [24] Peter, P. (2004). *Wung Hau Tangkhul Customary Law*. Ukhrul: VVD
- [25] Ray, D. I. 1996. "Divided sovereignty: Traditional authority and the state in Ghana." *The Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* 28(37–38): 181–202.
- [26] Sahlins, M. 1968. *Tribesmen*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- [27] Sahlins, M. 1999. "Two or three things that I know about culture." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 5(3): 399–421. Retrieved April 20, 2020 (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2661275>)
- [28] Sanga, R. 2012. "The Manipur (Village Authority in Hill Areas) Act, 1956." Retrieved April 19, 2021 (<https://zogam.com/articles/articles-i/politics/1378-the-manipur-village-authority-in-hill-areas-act-1956.html>).
- [29] Shangrei, J. 2014. "Traditional Political System of the Tangkhul Nagas: Chieftainship and its Discontent." Pp.89-107 in *Encountering modernity: Situating the Tangkhul Nagas in perspective*, edited by Vashum et. al. New Delhi: Chicken Neck.
- [30] Shimray, A.S.W. 2001. *History of the Tangkhul Nagas*. New Delhi: Akansha Publishing House.
- [31] Shimray, U. A. 2004. "Ecological Setting and Economic Systems of the Nagas: A Case Study of the Tangkhul Nagas of Manipur." PhD Thesis, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.
- [32] Shimray, U.A. 2008a. "Land Use System in Manipur Hills: A Case Study of the Tangkhul Nagas." Pp. 88-112 in *Land, People and Politics: Contest over Tribal land in Northeast India*, edited by Fernandes and Barbora. Guwahati: Bhabani Offset & Imaging System Pvt. Ltd.
- [33] Somdal Village. 2019. "Somdal (Shongran) Kha Riyan." Somdal
- [34] Tangkhul Naga Wungnao Long. 2019. "Office Memoranda." Ukhrul.
- [35] "The Manipur (Village Authorities in Hill Areas) Act, 1956" Legislative Department | Ministry of Law and Justice | GoI." Accessed April 17, 2022. (<https://legislative.gov.in/actsofparliamentfromtheyear/manipur-village-authorities-hill-areas-act-1956>)
- [36] "The Manipur (Hill Areas) District Councils Act, 1971" Legislative Department | Ministry of Law and Justice | GoI." Accessed April 17, 2022. (<https://legislative.gov.in/actsofparliamentfromtheyear/manipur-hill-areas-district-councils-act-1971>)
- [37] The Manipur Legislative Assembly (Hill Area Committee) Order, 1972.
- [38] Vashum, R. 2014. "Terrains of Tangkhul Society: An Overview." Pp. 9-27 in *Encountering modernity: Situating the Tangkhul Nagas in perspective*, edited by Vashum et. al. New Delhi: Chicken Neck.
- [39] Weber, M. 1978. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- [40] Xaxa, V. 2008. *State, society, and tribes: Issues in post-colonial India*. New Delhi: Dorling Kindersley (India) Pvt. Ltd.