Political Organization in Andro Village: Traditional Governance and Modern Dynamics

Gaikhulung S. Panmei[1], Ngathem Pungfa Singh[2*]

[1]Department of Anthropology, Dhanamanjuri University, Manipur
[2*]Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, Dhanamanjuri University, Manipur

***Corresponding Author:** Ngathem Pungfa Singh,
*Email: pungfa@gmail.com

Abstract

Political organization refers to the structured system of governance, authority, and decision-making within a society. In traditional communities like Andro, a village in Manipur, India, governance is deeply rooted in cultural heritage and collective decision-making. The political structure of Andro is centred on the *Piba*, a council of elders responsible for making communal decisions, resolving disputes, and maintaining social harmony. The *Piba* operates on principles of consensus and respect for tradition, ensuring inclusive governance that reflects the voices of all community members. At the heart of this governance system is the *Khullakpa*, the village chief, who holds a highly respected position in Andro's political and social structure. The *Khullakpa* is typically selected based on lineage or merit and serves as the primary authority in maintaining law and order, mediating conflicts, and overseeing cultural and religious activities. His leadership is complemented by a council of seven *Piba* members, who assist in decision-making and administration. This traditional system not only reinforces cultural values but also fosters a sense of unity and cooperation within the village. The governance model of Andro highlights the importance of traditional leadership structures in maintaining social cohesion and preserving cultural heritage. It exemplifies how indigenous communities balance authority, consensus, and tradition in political organization. By studying such systems, we gain valuable insights into alternative governance models that emphasize collective decision-making and respect for cultural traditions.

Key words: Political organization, Traditional governance, Andro village, *piba*, *Khullakpa*

Introduction

Political organizations play a crucial role in shaping power structures, governance mechanisms, and societal order across the world. The study of political organizations extends beyond formal state institutions, encompassing a diverse range of entities, including civil society organizations, grassroots movements, and transnational political networks. These organizations influence decision-making processes, policy implementations, and social cohesion at local, national, and global levels. Understanding the evolution and functions of political organizations provides valuable insights into how societies organize themselves, mediate conflicts, and maintain stability in an increasingly interconnected world. While modern political institutions are often characterized by centralized bureaucracies and legal frameworks, traditional governance systems continue to thrive in many regions, offering alternative models of political organization. Andro, a traditional village in Manipur, India, serves as a compelling case study of such indigenous governance structures. Governed by a *Piba*, or council of elders, the village adheres to a political system deeply rooted in cultural heritage, consensus-based decision-making, and communal participation. The *Khullakpa*, or village chief, holds a central position in this system, overseeing administrative functions, conflict resolution, and the preservation of cultural and religious practices. The Khullakpa is typically selected based on lineage or merit and is supported by a council of seven Piba members who assist in governance and policymaking.

In recent years, the governance structure of Andro has witnessed notable changes due to the introduction of the Panchayati Raj system in Manipur. This decentralized governance model has introduced a Gram Panchayat, which functions alongside the traditional council of elders. This dual system represents an intersection of indigenous governance and modern political institutions, reflecting the village's ability to adapt to contemporary political dynamics while safeguarding its cultural traditions. The coexistence of traditional and modern governance structures raises important questions about the resilience, transformation, and sustainability of indigenous political organizations in the face of external influences. By examining the political structure of Andro, this study contributes to the broader discourse on traditional governance systems, their role in maintaining social order, and their interactions with external political authorities. The research aims to highlight how such systems navigate the complexities of modernization while preserving their unique identity, thereby offering valuable perspectives on alternative governance models in a globalized world.

Review of Literature

Political organizations are fundamental to the structure and functioning of modern societies, influencing governance, policy-making, and representation. Scholars have extensively analyzed the forms, functions, and significance of political organizations, highlighting their role in both democratic and traditional governance systems. This review synthesizes key scholarly contributions on the nature of political organizations, their evolving roles, and their intersection with traditional governance structures. Political organizations exist in various forms, including political parties, interest groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and social movements. Katz and Crotty (2006) describe political parties as structured entities that contest elections, shape policy agendas, and hold government positions. They argue that parties serve as essential intermediaries between the state and the public, facilitating political participation and ideological representation. Baumgartner and Leech (1998) further emphasize the role of interest groups, which advocate for specific societal concerns and attempt to influence legislative and executive decision-making. These organizations, though not directly involved in elections, shape public policy by lobbying policymakers and mobilizing public opinion. NGOs also play a crucial role in governance, particularly in areas where state institutions are weak or ineffective. Keck and Sikkink (1998) highlight how transnational advocacy networks leverage international pressure to address human rights violations, environmental concerns, and social justice issues. Similarly, Schmitter and Karl (1991) assert that civil society organizations contribute to democratization by promoting citizen engagement and accountability. Social movements, on the other hand, often emerge in response to perceived injustices or governance failures, mobilizing grassroots efforts to challenge power structures (Tilly, 2004).

Political organizations contribute to democratic governance by ensuring representation, mobilization, and accountability. Pitkin (1967) conceptualizes representation as the process by which political actors advocate for the interests of constituents, ensuring that diverse voices are included in decision-making. Kingdon (1984) argues that policy influence is one of the primary functions of political organizations, as they shape legislative agendas and executive decisions. Political parties and interest groups, for example, engage in agenda-setting, framing policy debates, and mobilizing support for legislative initiatives (Dalton, 2008). However, political organizations are not without criticism. Mills (1956) contends that they can perpetuate inequalities by concentrating power in the hands of elites, thereby marginalizing underrepresented communities. Crouch (2004) introduces the concept of "post-democracy," where democratic institutions exist but are largely controlled by economic and political elites, limiting genuine citizen participation. Despite these challenges, political organizations remain crucial for democratic stability, providing institutional frameworks for political engagement and governance.

Beyond modern political organizations, traditional governance structures continue to play an essential role in various societies. In many indigenous communities, political authority is organized around councils of elders, hereditary leadership, and consensus-based decision-making. Sinha (2006) examines the political organization of Andro village in Manipur, India, where governance is administered by the *Piba*, a council of elders that makes collective decisions, resolves disputes, and ensures social harmony. The *Khullakpa*, the traditional village chief, holds significant authority, overseeing religious and administrative affairs while acting as a mediator between the community and external authorities. Recent studies have explored how indigenous governance structures adapt to modern political influences. Singh and Devi (2018) analyse the impact of India's Panchayati Raj system on traditional leadership in Manipur, noting that while the system introduces elected governance, it coexists with pre-existing traditional institutions. Similarly, Xaxa (2019) highlights the resilience of tribal governance structures in India, where customary laws and traditional councils continue to function alongside formal state mechanisms. These studies suggest that rather than being replaced by modern institutions, indigenous governance structures often integrate elements of formal political systems, creating hybrid models of governance. The coexistence of traditional and modern political organizations presents both opportunities and challenges for governance. Chakrabarty and Pandey (2021) argue that hybrid governance models, where traditional institutions interact with modern state mechanisms, can enhance local participation and cultural continuity. However, they also caution that power struggles between traditional leaders and elected representatives may create governance conflicts. Nongkynrih (2020) explores similar dynamics in Northeast India, demonstrating that while indigenous councils maintain legitimacy, state-imposed political institutions often undermine their authority. Given the increasing interaction between indigenous governance and formal political structures, further research is needed to assess their impact on inclusivity, equity, and community resilience. Future studies should explore how these hybrid governance models contribute to sustainable development and democratic deepening, particularly in culturally diverse regions.

Materials and Methods

The fieldwork in Andro village utilized qualitative research methods to examine the village's social organization, cultural practices, and traditional customs. Data collection involved a combination of group interviews, personal interviews, direct observations, and focus group discussions. This multi-method approach ensured a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the community's way of life. Primary data were gathered primarily from traditional village leaders, including the *Khullakpa* and *Piba*, who provided insights into governance structures and cultural practices.

Secondary data sources included scholarly journals, magazines, and newspapers, which offered contextual information on prevalent ailments and traditional treatments. Additionally, relevant information obtained from credible online sources supplemented the study, enhancing the breadth of the analysis.

Findings

Traditional Leadership: The political organization of Andro village has undergone significant evolution, integrating both traditional and modern elements. At the core of this system is the *Khullakpa*, the traditional village chief, who holds the highest position of authority. Historically appointed by kings, the Khullakpa is now elected by the village elders. His primary responsibilities include overseeing village administration, maintaining social order, and preserving cultural heritage. Assisting the Khullakpa is the *Phamdao Ningthou*, a council of seven members who play a crucial role in governance. Each council member has designated responsibilities, many of which are tied to the maintenance of the sacred fire dedicated to *Panam Ningthou*, the village deity, symbolizing spiritual well-being. Supporting this leadership structure are key administrative and ceremonial functionaries, including the *Lupllakpa, Khunjahanba, Khabamlakpa, Yupanba, Pakhanglakpa*, and *Nahalakpa*, each tasked with specific duties that contribute to the village's governance and ritual practices. Social Organization: The village is structured into two primary social groups, *Nahalup Pana* and *Ahallup Pana*, which organize community life and oversee religious and ceremonial activities. Major families in the village belong to extended clans, including *Phanjaobam, Chingakham*, and *Salam*, collectively forming around sixteen extended family units. Each family is affiliated with one of the two Panas. For instance, the *Chingakham* family belongs to *Ahanlup*, while the *Khunungmayum* family is part of *Nahalup*. Each *Pana* operates a separate administrative unit known as the *Shang*, responsible for managing religious ceremonies and social functions. Membership in a Pana is formalized six months after a man's marriage, at which point he is required to offer either one hen or 100 rupees as a ceremonial fee to the affiliated Shang, signifying his official integration into the community's social framework.

Based on their traditional system of village administration, seven distinct positions are designated according to their specific functions. The current roles and responsibilities associated with each position are outlined in the table below.

Post	Name & Age	Responsibilities	Department/ *Shang*	Selection Criteria	Tenure and Salary
Khullakpa	Shagolshem Chandra Singh (64)	Chief administrator, overall controller, resolves conflicts, serves God "Panam Ningthou"	Ahallup pana (Dept. of Senior Citizen)	At least 50 years old, Knowledge of Meitei mayek, not hereditary or elected by people	Holds position as long as trusted (No salary)
Luplakpa	Phanjoubam Maimu Singh	Next in power to Khullakpa, looks after Ahallup, Nahalup, Meihoulup, manages Meihoupham	Nahalup pana (Dept. of Youth)		
Khunjahanba	Vacant	Elderly person, resolves disputes among Kyamba, Mouyamba, Khoupomba, solves village crises			
Khabamlakpa	Puthem Tomal	Married males (6 months), looks after Khabam pana			
Yupanba	Ningthoujam Naba	Performs duties related to ritual events, offers wine to God, provides wine for events			
Pakhanglakpa	Aseibam Pakchao	Looks after youth (Khangjen), controls youth behavior			
Nahalakpa	Chingakham Gopal	Looks after unmarried women (Ningol macha)			

Customary Law Enforcement: The enforcement of customary laws in Andro village has evolved over time, balancing traditional practices with modern governance. Traditionally, individuals who violated customary laws were subjected to a unique form of punishment: they were made to kneel on a banana leaf while being struck on the back with a *Phibun*, a cloth-made whip. The *Khullakpa*, as the highest authority in the village, played a crucial role in maintaining law and order, a responsibility that continues to be respected today. In contemporary times, punitive measures have shifted from

physical punishment to monetary fines imposed by the traditional governing body. If an offender is unable to pay the prescribed fine, they may face social exclusion, including expulsion from the village, as a consequence of their actions. However, serious offenses such as murder and major crimes are now directly reported to law enforcement authorities. This integration of traditional legal practices with modern legal systems allows Andro village to preserve its cultural heritage while adapting to contemporary legal and governance structures.

Modern Administration: The introduction of the Panchayati Raj system in 1964 brought significant changes to the governance of Andro village, marking a shift from traditional leadership to a more structured municipal administration. With the establishment of the Nagar Panchayat, judicial and administrative functions were transferred from the *Khullakpa* and his council to the newly formed Panchayat, limiting their authority to religious and customary roles. This transformation became more pronounced after the abolition of the Manipur royal dynasty following the state's merger with India in 1949. The Nagar Panchayat system ensures a more democratic and inclusive governance structure, with elected representatives playing a key role in decision-making. Andro is part of an Urban Local Body (ULB) framework, consisting of 12 municipal councils under the Andro Assembly Constituency. The municipal councillor, a crucial figure in local governance, has multiple responsibilities, including legislation, policy-making, budget oversight, and community engagement. Councillors contribute to formulating and amending local laws, reviewing zoning regulations, and overseeing public health policies. They play a pivotal role in budget planning, ensuring that resources are allocated efficiently for infrastructure development, public safety, and essential services. Additionally, they advocate for local interests in council meetings, engage with residents through public consultations, and oversee the delivery of municipal services such as waste management, public transportation, and emergency response. Through collaboration with state and federal governments, councillors secure necessary funding for development projects and represent Andro's concerns in regional and national discussions. Community organizations, particularly the Andro Youth Club and the *Meirapaibis*, play an essential role in the village's social structure. Established in 1970 by uniting 15 local clubs, the Andro Youth Club is a significant platform for community leadership, addressing social concerns, fostering development, and organizing cultural events. The club's key members, including the *Khullakpa*, the Councillor, and the *Meirapaibis,* work collectively to promote social welfare and strengthen village ties. The *Meirapaibis,* or women leaders, have a profound impact on governance and community well-being. They actively participate in decision-making, advocate for women's rights, and address issues such as education, healthcare, and domestic violence. Through their leadership, they serve as mentors for younger generations, ensuring the preservation of traditional customs while empowering women in Andro's socio-political landscape.

Discussion

The findings from this study contribute to the broader discourse on the coexistence of traditional governance structures and modern political institutions, emphasizing their role in shaping political organization and community life in Andro village. The intersection of these governance models presents an intriguing case of resilience and adaptation, affirming arguments made by Chakrabarty and Pandey (2021) regarding the ability of hybrid governance models to enhance local participation while maintaining cultural continuity. However, as Nongkynrih (2020) cautions, such interactions can also create conflicts of authority, which is evident in the shifting role of the Khullakpa and the traditional council after the introduction of the Panchayati Raj system. Traditional leadership in Andro, as represented by the Khullakpa and the Piba council, exemplifies the enduring influence of indigenous political structures. This aligns with Sinha (2006), who underscores the significance of customary governance in maintaining social cohesion. The hierarchical yet community-driven nature of the village's governance mirrors observations made by Singh and Devi (2018), who found that traditional leadership in Manipur continues to function alongside elected bodies, rather than being entirely replaced by them. The integration of these systems highlights a process of political negotiation rather than outright displacement, reinforcing Xaxa's (2019) argument that indigenous governance structures are not necessarily in decline but are instead evolving.

The evolution of customary law enforcement in Andro, shifting from physical punishments to monetary fines and, in serious cases, formal legal intervention, signifies an adaptation to modern legal frameworks. This transition supports Keck and Sikkink's (1998) notion that local governance structures often adjust their mechanisms to align with broader human rights discourses while preserving their unique identity. Similarly, the continued role of the Meirapaibis and the Andro Youth Club in social governance reflects the argument by Schmitter and Karl (1991) that civil society organizations play a crucial role in democratization by promoting civic engagement and accountability. These grassroots organizations not only sustain traditional practices but also empower marginalized groups, particularly women, in decision-making processes, which is crucial for fostering inclusive governance. The study also highlights the challenges posed by the dual governance system. While the Nagar Panchayat facilitates structured political participation and resource allocation, it has also diminished the authority of traditional leaders in legislative and judicial matters. This supports the concerns raised by Mills (1956) and Crouch (2004) regarding power concentration and elite control within political organizations, where elected bodies may prioritize bureaucratic governance over indigenous leadership. Furthermore, as Pitkin (1967) emphasizes, political representation should ideally reflect the interests of all community

members. In Andro, the overlapping roles of the traditional council and the municipal administration raise questions about representation, authority, and the long-term sustainability of this hybrid model.

Despite these challenges, the governance system in Andro offers valuable insights into how traditional leadership and modern administration can function symbiotically. As Dalton (2008) argues, political organizations play an essential role in agenda-setting and policy-making, a function that both the Khullakpa's council and the Panchayat continue to fulfill in different capacities. The village's ability to sustain its traditional structures while engaging with contemporary political mechanisms exemplifies a model of adaptive governance, one that is particularly relevant in regions where indigenous identities remain strong. To sum up, Andro's governance model demonstrates the dynamic interaction between tradition and modernity, affirming the resilience of indigenous political organizations. Future research should explore the long-term implications of such hybrid governance structures, particularly in addressing the socio-political aspirations of younger generations and marginalized groups. As Kingdon (1984) suggests, policy evolution is a continuous process influenced by multiple actors, and Andro's case highlights the necessity of ongoing dialogue between traditional leaders, elected representatives, and civil society organizations to ensure a governance system that is both inclusive and culturally rooted.

Conclusion

The governance structure of Andro village represents a dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity, where the Khullakpa and his council continue to play a vital role in preserving cultural and religious customs while coexisting with democratic institutions. The introduction of the Panchayati Raj system in 1964 marked a shift in administrative authority, transferring judicial and developmental responsibilities to elected representatives within the Nagar Panchayat. This transition has facilitated greater community participation in governance while ensuring that customary traditions remain integral to the village's identity. Andro's ability to adapt its governance framework to modern administrative structures while maintaining its indigenous leadership reflects its resilience and commitment to cultural continuity. The evolution of customary law enforcement in Andro further highlights the village's capacity to balance traditional and contemporary governance practices. While historical disciplinary methods once upheld social order, modern legal principles now influence the administration of justice, with monetary penalties and law enforcement interventions replacing physical punishments. Additionally, grassroots organizations such as the Andro Youth Club and the Meirapaibis play a crucial role in sustaining social harmony, advocating for community welfare, and preserving cultural heritage. These organizations not only support the governance framework but also empower local voices, ensuring an inclusive and community-driven approach to leadership. Ultimately, Andro's governance model exemplifies an adaptive and resilient system that integrates traditional leadership with modern political institutions. As the village navigates emerging challenges such as infrastructural development, demographic shifts, and evolving political dynamics, its ability to maintain this balance will be key to its sustainable growth. This study underscores how Andro's political organization, influenced by broader socio-political contexts, serves as a testament to the strength of community-based governance, where cultural preservation and progressive administration coexist to meet the changing needs of its people.

References

1. Baumgartner, F. R. and Leech, B. L. (1998). *Basic interests: The importance of groups in politics and in political science*. Princeton University Press.
2. Chakrabarty, B. and Pandey, P. (2021). *Traditional institutions in contemporary societies: The case of India*. Routledge.
3. Crouch, C. (2004). *Post-democracy*. Polity Press.
4. Dalton, R. J. (2008). *Citizen politics: Public opinion and political parties in advanced industrial democracies* (5th ed.). CQ Press.
5. Keck, M. E. and Sikkink, K. (1998). *Activists beyond borders: Advocacy networks in international politics*. Cornell University Press.
6. Kingdon, J. W. (1984). *Agendas, alternatives, and public policies*. Little, Brown.
7. Katz, R. S. and Crotty, W. (Eds.). (2006). *Handbook of party politics*. Sage Publications.
8. Mills, C. W. (1956). *The power elite*. Oxford University Press.
9. Nongkynrih, K. (2020). Traditional institutions and electoral politics in Northeast India: The case of the Khasi-Jaintia Hills. *Studies in Indian Politics*, 8(2), 213-221.
10. Pitkin, H. F. (1967). *The concept of representation*. University of California Press.
11. Schmitter, P. C. and Karl, T. L. (1991). What democracy is... and is not. *Journal of Democracy*, 2(3), 75-88.
12. Sinha, A. C. (2006). *Beyond the bamboo curtain: Manipur, Chiang Mai, Mandalay*. Akansha Publishing House.
13. Singh, A. K. and Devi, R. K. (2018). Traditional political institutions and Panchayati Raj in Manipur: A study of Andro village. *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences*, 8(5), 674-684.
14. Tilly, C. (2004). *Social movements, 1768-2004*. Paradigm Publishers.
15. Xaxa, V. (2019). *Politics of tribal development: A sociological perspective*. Sage Publications.