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Title of the thesis: Study of community involvement in local governance: A case study of few Local Clubs in Imphal East and Imphal West District of Manipur

Abstract:

The current paradigm of governance in the literature of public administration includes people-centred policies, pro-poor policies and partnerships, recognizing participation as a central concern of development approaches. Of the non-state actors, the revival of the idea of community since mid 1990s is partly a reaction to the individualizing effects of neo-liberalism as a dominant form of state policy. This was based on the 'social capital' approach which attempts to capture the constructive collective action or pro-social features of communities.

The present study attempts to explore the potency of a neighbourhood organisation existing in a *leikai* (a helmet/locality/Mohallah) among the *Meitei* community in Manipur. Using exploratory and ethnographic tools, this thesis tries to trace the emergence of the *leikai club* in its present form in a *leikai*. It seeks to understand the resultant impact of an intersection between informal traditional institutions with that of modern formal system keeping in mind the notion of community governance.

Each village consists of many *leikai* which is the smallest unit of a residential neighbourhood space. It is a social unit of naturally developed hamlet. In fact the idea of belonging, its cultural meaning and symbols is embedded and built in a social unit space of '*leikai*' with regard to the *Meitei* community of the Imphal valley. The space of a *leikai* has a structural and behavioral value which can be understood through its system of kinship, social

norms and ritual. Another aspect of *leikai* space would be the kind of solidarity extended to a physical space for a pseudo kinship structure. With such socio-cultural background, there exist as many *leikai clubs* (neighbourhood organisation) as many *leikai* in the *Meitei* settlement areas of Manipur forming the social capital institution. Historiography reveals these *leikai-clubs* were known for active participation in the social, economic, cultural and political life of the state which is now part of their lived world. In its present form each *leikai club* is named differently as they are a registered society under the Manipur Co-operative societies Act 1860.

In spite of the presence of an undemocratic ethos at times which goes beyond the mechanism of the law of the state, it has sustained and maintained to gain public support. The *leikai club* has emerged as a relatively pluralistic, communitarian and consensual in membership, objectives and decision making. This community-centered activity did not emerge simply as a way to compensate for a lack of state involvement but these community elites acted in their own interest and those of their locality, making no distinction between them. They have a strong sense of taking the initiative and achieving excellence in skills that may be needed in society. The participation in local affairs particularly by the elites came to be based on group and community interest rather than on those of private individuals and families. However there remains a big challenge for the state in what role these *leikai-clubs* can play as partnership in governance and development and how they can relate to the other institutions of governance and public administration has to be clearly sorted out.