

Autonomy Movements in Mizoram

Autonomy Movements in Mizoram

Edited by

R. N. Prasad

*Professor of Public Administration
Department of Public Administration
North-Eastern Hill University
Mizoram Campus, Aizawl - 796007*



VIKAS PUBLISHING HOUSE PVT LTD

F241
1556

VIKAS PUBLISHING HOUSE PVT LTD

576, Masjid Road, Jangpura, New Delhi-110 014

NE

954.166

PRA;3

Copyright © R.N. PRASAD, 1994



ISBN 0-7069-8350-1

GENU LIBRARY

Acc. No. 190654

Acc by *Amal*

Date 12/2/96

Class. *Am* 18/11/98

Sub. *Am*

Enter by *Am*

Subscriber

All rights reserved. No part of the publication may be reproduced in any form without the written permission of the publishers.

Dedicated to

Professor R. Lalthantluanga
Pro Vice-Chancellor
North-Eastern Hill University
Mizoram Campus, Aizawl
With warm affection and regards

academic excellence and scholarship, but also for 'selfless services' to the academic community. He has written a very inspiring, befitting and thoughtful foreword to my book, "Autonomy Movements in Mizoram".

My profound thanks are also to Mr P. Chakraborty, Chairman, MACT and Joint Legal Remembrancer, Government of Mizoram, Aizawl, for his personal involvement in the affairs connected with the seminar and particularly for the great interest he took in inspiring and persuading me to get these scholarly seminar papers published in the form of a book. He also took the trouble of getting the edited manuscript typed.

Mr C. Lalkima, Dr. S. Jzwaid, Mrs. Kalpana Das and Mrs. Lalneihzovi, esteemed colleagues in my department, deserve my heartfelt thanks for their unstinted help, support and cooperation in all matters concerning the seminar and the early completion of this study.

My thanks are also due to the paper writers/participants, whose contributions in the ultimate analysis, made the seminar a singular success.

I also accord thanks in my heart to my wife, Shanti Prasad, who observed a very helping attitude and adjusted a lot with my time and pre-occupation with this modest study.

I feel pleasure in conveying my hearty thanks to Pi Lalthlamuni (Tei), stenographer, Department of Public Administration, NEHU, Mizoram Campus, Aizawl, and Pi Vanlalsawmi, stenographer, office of the Chairman, MACT and Joint Legal Remembrancer, Government of Mizoram, Aizawl, for the final typing of the manuscript.

Aizawl, May 1994

R.N. PRASAD

Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	vii
<i>Preface</i>	ix
1. <i>Autonomy Movement in Mizoram</i> <i>V. Venkata Rao</i>	1
2. <i>Mizo Autonomy Movement - Formation of Autonomous District Council and Regional Council : Issues and Problems of their Operation</i> <i>R.N. Prasad</i>	11
3. <i>Autonomy Movement : A theoretical outlook</i> <i>Santanu Sengupta</i>	35
4. <i>Ideology and Ethnic Politics : A Study of Autonomy Movement in Mizoram</i> <i>K.C. Baral</i>	44
5. <i>A Note on the Concept of Autonomy</i> <i>Chandana Bhattacharjee</i>	55
6. <i>Autonomy Movement in Mizoram : A Study in Historical Perspective</i> <i>Romesh Buragohain</i>	62
7. <i>Basis of Autonomy Movements in Mizoram : Historical Background</i> <i>L.B. Thanga</i>	72

- | | | |
|-----|---|-----|
| 8. | Autonomy Movement in Mizoram :
A Historical Analysis
<i>Suhas Chatterjee</i> | 80 |
| 9. | Autonomy Movements in Mizoram
after Independence
<i>P. Lalnithanga</i> | 86 |
| 10. | Basis of Autonomy Movements in
Mizoram (Historical Background)
<i>C.L. Hminga</i> | 103 |
| 11. | Autonomy Movements :
A Case Study of the Mizos
<i>P. Chakraborty</i> | 109 |
| 12. | Hmar Autonomy Movement
<i>S.N. Singh</i> | 123 |
| 13. | The Maras Towards Autonomy
<i>R.T. Zachono</i> | 133 |
| 14. | Movement for Autonomy :
A Case Study of the Chakmas of Mizoram
<i>P. Chakraborty</i> | 157 |
| 15. | Mizo National Front Movement
<i>Lalthangliana</i> | 174 |
| 16. | Mizo National Front (MNF) :
Relations With Foreign Powers
<i>J.V. Hluna</i> | 189 |
| 17. | Impact of Autonomy Movements on
Economic and Political Transition in Mizoram
<i>Thangchungnunga</i> | 203 |

Contributors

Miss Chandana Bhattacharjee
Research Fellow
Anthropological Survey of India
Shillong

Rev. Dr. C.L. Hminga
Serkawn, Lunglei, Mizoram

Dr. J.V. Hluna
Head, Deptt. of History
Pachhunga University College
Aizawl, Mizoram

Dr. K.C. Baral
Reader, Deptt. of English
NEHU, Mizoram Campus
Aizawl _ 796 007

Shri L.B. Thanga, IAS (Retd)
Reed Mount, New Luangmual
Aizawl, Mizoram

Shri Lalthangliana
Chief Tutor
S.C.E.R.T. , Chaltlang
Aizawl, Mizoram

Shri P. Lalnithanga, IAS (Retd)

Chanmari, Aizawl - 796 007

Mizoram

Shri P. Chakraborty

Chairman, MACT & Joint

Legal Remembrancer

Govt. of Mizoram

Aizawl

Shri P. Chakrobarty

Chairman, MACT & Joint

Legal Remembrancer

Govt. of Mizoram

Aizawl

Prof. R.N. Prasad

Head, Deptt. of Public

Administration, North-

Eastern Hill University

Mizoram Campus, Aizawl - 796 007

Dr. Romesh Buragohain

Reader in History

Department of History

Lunglei Government College

Lunglei, Mizoram

Shri R.T. Zachono

Executive Member

Mara District Council

Saiha, Chhimitpuoi District

Mizoram

Shri Santanu Sengupta, U.G.C.

Teacher Fellow

Deptt. of Political Science

Dibrugarh University

Dibrugarh, Assam

Dr. Suhas Chatterjee

Siva Bari Road

Silchar (Assam) 788002

Dr. S.N. Singh

Head of the Deptt. of Political Science

Cachar College, Silchar (Assam)

Shri Thangchungnunga

Senior Lecturer

Deptt. of Economics

North-Eastern Hill University

Mizoram Campus, Aizwal - 796007

Prof. V. Venkata Rao

Professor Emeritus

Gauhati University

Guwahati, Assam



Statistical Data of Mizoram

Population of Mizoram (1991 census)

Total - 6,89,756

Males : 3,58,978

Females: 3,30,778
6,89,756

Density of Population - 32.77

:- 921 female per 1000 male

Literacy Rate:

Total : - 82.27/-

Males : 85.61/-

Females: 78.60/-

Number of Districts of Mizoram:- 3

1. Aizawl District
2. Lunglei District
3. Chhimituipui District

Number of Sub-Divisions - 9

Number of Rural Development Blocks - 20

Number of Autonomous District Councils - 3

(Viz Lai District Council,
Mara District Council and
Chakma District Council)

Number of Villages having Village Councils - 671

Number of Towns : - 22

MIZORAM

TRIPURA

BANGLADESH

AIZAWL

LUNGLEI

SAIHA

BURMA



NORTH-EASTERN STATES

ARUNACHAL
PRADESH

ASSAM
GUWAHATI

NAGALAND

MEGHALAYA

MANIPUR

TRIPURA

MIZORAM



Impact of Autonomy Movements on Economic and Political Transition in Mizoram

Thangchungnunga

It is indeed paradoxical for the Mizo people to have witnessed the eclipse of the one political party, which has every right to look back with pride upon its past and to have seen the rise of political parties, which have come into existence as a loose collection of men becoming active on the eve of an election in order to line up voters behind a given candidate. A. MacDonald was sympathetic to the cause of Mizo unity and took an initiative to form the Lushai Commoner's Union on April 25, 1945 at the time when any kind of political activity was kept at bay. This council was represented by one member of the Chief's representative and one commoner from each circle. However, the commoners boycotted the council on the ground that it was overrepresented by the chiefs and formed, later, a full-fledged political party known as the "Mizo Union Party". While the Colonial Policy had been to consistently legitimise and uphold the authority of the traditional chiefs, the Mizo Union Party was arrayed against the traditional rights and privileges of

the chiefs. It was this fact, or the dream of liberation, which lifted them out of themselves, upon which they focused all their passions and energies.

Nationalism generally involved a sense of mission, which postulated dedicated service to a universal ideal of liberty, of the spirit, of ethical rebirth. Not long after India succeeded to get rid of the foreign yoke, the Mizos began to feel that they were in bondage and deprived of all economic benefits. Just as the chiefs had been regarded as the symbol of exploitation and oppression by the older generation, the Legislative Council had been looked upon as a puppet government, whose actions were designed to spoil Mizo nationalism. One of the best known advocates of independent policy was Laldenga, an accomplished orator, who headed the party from the very date of its birth on April 2, 1960. In a span of four years, they could have bagged two seats out of the total of three seats; and by 1966 they could have drawn Mizoram into a revolutionary war of independence. Men, who fought for freedom, identified themselves so wholly with the cause that they were able to fight for it with relentless ferocity and ruthless disregard of those who took another view or wavered and vacillated.¹

When they fought with the great zeal for freedom, seasoned politicians of the Centre decided to carry out bombing raids on several centres of uprising as experience warned them that a cautious approach to Naga insurgency failed to dampen the religious spirit. So the first bombing by the Indian Air Force on fellow citizens was witnessed in Mizoram. A fierce and gigantic military operation throughout the length and breadth of Mizoram convinced the MNF leader that his guerilla force was no match for the Indian Army, and as the years drew by, the dream of freedom drifted to the remotest possibility. When the prospect of independence looked bleaker, it was thought pointless to go on sacrificing more lives. Having been convinced of the futility of the endeavour, the MNF leaders agreed to return to India from abroad to initiate peace talks in 1975. It was in these periods

of uncertainty that the Indian National Congress emerged as a strong party in 1967 out of the troubled situation created by the MNF². Similarly, the People's Conference Party made capital out of the insurgency in 1975 and won the sympathy and support of the Government of India for its antiLaldenga policy.³

With a view to forestall the tide of politics moving in favour of any other party, the Congress (I) began the MNF peace talks before the 1984 election. Though the party was not trusted to do better in giving a moral guide to public policy, the people, anxious to end a prolonged state of violence and bloodshed, were more than willing to give mandate to this party. Once they were voted to power, their appetite for material improvement had gone out of control and the very mention of their electoral promises created a bewildering issue. They promised the electorate that their victory in the election would signal the return of normalcy, and they would be ready to pay any price for the long cherished hope of the suffering civilians. In the midst of such an exuberant hope, the public read a sign in the air that a peace settlement would take place within six months from the installation of the Ministry. To quote Sethi, "In India no one has learnt how to give up power once he has acquired it".⁴ One should, therefore, not expect the Congress Party to give up power voluntarily or see itself ruined by interference from outside. Shakespeare also observed the intoxication game of power in the following words :-

Then everything includes in power,
Power into will, will into appetite,
And appetite, a universal wolf;
So doubly seconded with will and Power,
Must make perforce and universal prey,
And, last eat up himself.

Troilus & Cresida

Even after two years, there was no sign to indicate that peace talks were seriously coordinated. In the meantime, the sitting M.P. and party president, Lalduhawma, pleaded

vehemently with the Ministry that it would be in the interest of the party to find a peaceful solution to the longdrawnout insurgency, which had turned sorely into confrontation between peaceful citizens and underground forces. Peace was no doubt the number one election commitment of the party and the issue on which the party was voted to power. It might be so painful to give up power that without resort to tactical pressure, even a share of fractional seats in the legislature could not have taken place. As the party was reeling under a violent split, a room could have been found to accommodate the MNF leaders, and this was an indispensable condition of their complete return to normal life. Until the historic peace accord was signed on the June 30, 1986, the door was shut and sealed against Mizo unity and meaningful conduct of economic policy. A nation divided against itself cannot stand. It was in the fitness of things that the peace issue reverberated in successive political dialogue to wake up politicians to realism, and finally the hopes of Mizo people were not shattered.

Since then, Mizoram embarked upon a new era under the leadership of the MNF, where leaders had sacrificed the better part of their life to the cause of Mizo society and who had also been convinced of that the separatist movement was too costly. The people trusted them to be much less vulnerable to corruption in view of their readiness to suffer want and misery. Once again the hopes of the people were betrayed by the democratic Government of the MNF since the lure of money also proved to be irresistible.

The Process of Denationalisation

The concept of denationalisation may be defined as a process of change in mental attitude that tended to despise one's national traits or traditional ethos in preference to other cultures and to imitate rather than to create.⁵ In the new atmosphere of political liberty, the modern elites were engrossed in a venomous attack on the traditional rights and privileges of the chiefs. In fact, their political movement was

initially kindled by their intense desire to curtail the chief's powers and rights.⁶ With such an objective at the forefront of their political movement, they could easily win the confidence of the people and score landslide victory in the first District Council election in 1952. Almost suddenly a society based on status, on authority coming from divine sanction, on hereditary privilege, disintegrated and gave way to a society based on social mobility, individual initiative and popular election.

It has been rightly stated that under the impact of revolutionary ideas, man became conscious of his right.⁷ The primitive community held together by unquestioned traditional institutions and customs, burst asunder into classes and parties. Deep inside the minds of a Mizo, there was a feeling of emptiness under his animistic religion, and when Christianity was preached by the missionaries, he readily accepted it as a right and superior religion. Once the Mizo people abandoned their old religion and accepted Christianity, they began to look with disgust at their traditional values through the glasses of their new masters, and began to uncritically imitate new prowestern values.⁸ The combined effect of new political status and religious faith led them to transform rapidly and they were soon caught in a contradictory situation one traditional and the other 'western'. Such being the case, they were in the continuous process of denationalisation.

The Mizos were caught at that moment between the two contraposing ideals, their leaders were no longer sure what they wanted. They could not spell out any clear-cut political goal except that of curtailing the chief's power. Even when the eclipse of the empire was so imminent, they debated on whether to join the Indian Union or Burma, and on whether to remain under colonial rule for another three to five years, during which they would learn how to run their own government. In the midst of this confusion, the torch of Mizo nationalism was dimly lighted by R. Vanlawma. He addressed a solemn meeting of political representatives held at Aizawl

in early 1947, and urged them to rise up to the occasion, saying, "Now is the time to fight for independence".⁹ In his attempt to foil the motion, Vanthuama argued, ¹⁰ "If we are independent, where will we get salt and iron ore to make our farming equipment, and how are we going to make money?" As the debate went on, opponents seemed to have lost ground since most of those at the meeting spoke in favour of independence. But they did not want to accept defeat passively, and instead, they went to the people proclaiming, "If we are independent, the Chiefs will not be abolished and if we join India, they will be immediately abolished".¹¹ They wisely went by the counsel of time, carefully looking to bring home the point that faced the greatest anxiety of the people. As a result, they could come out victorious in the maze of political intrigue. For the revolutionary movement, however, the sticks were yet damp and wouldn't catch fire.

At that moment of transition, the people felt that they were about to recover their true being, the pure authentic self which suppression and iron rule of the colonial power had buried. Unfortunately, their close contact with the West and the outsiders influenced the minds of the political elites so much that they had lost much of tribal life, and lacked an enthusiastic readiness to join in cooperative endeavour. Fierce political rivalry has been continuously witnessed among the Mizo people. People have now felt an irresistible impulse to go away because politicians are not pledged to a strenuous way of life but tending to blow hot and cold rather than fighting against the corrupt structure of society in which they live. Some of the religious leaders also cannot be absolved of the accusation to waver and vacillate according to the wind of politics.

Along with the attainment of political freedom, there came a multiplicity of organisational units within political parties and an elected village council which in some capacity replaced the chief. This was perhaps the most important institutional change facilitating the expansion of political base. Hundreds of new opportunities were thus created for

local elites to gain more direct access to political power. To the modern elites, Politics has come to mean a strategic game of maintaining their position in power. They have had closer and more direct contact with the outside politicians and lifted bodily their political tactics which have moulded the moral fibre of the tribal people more and more into the likeness of an alien culture.

Party system has now been the most discernible division existing in the society and the most important criterion on which distribution of patronage is allotted. It is those privileges of access to party boss, allocation of developmental funds and the administration of governmental regulations, which have attracted the aspiring elites to seek power first in the part. In the words of Myron Weiner, "Proximity to either the Prime Minister or her son was widely understood in India to be a measure of political influence".¹² While this is an established culture within the Congress Party in the Centre, the infection spread to the State with amazing rapidity that the party bosses in the State units wooed the Prime Minister with all the impression they could make to win her confidence and approval. Since the Chief Ministers in Congress (I) ruled states hold power at the behest of Prime Minister, they lack the popular base to mobilise support for new policies.¹³ In Mizoram today, the culture of national politics has permeated across a wide spectrum of political ideology from the faith that money is power rather than in the maxim that knowledge is power. What the Mizoram experience in the last election, was a testimony to this belief that being a centrally patronized party is the best course of Mizo political existence. Election posters of the Congress and the Janata Dal candidates have been impressed with the pictures of their Central leaders. It is expected that people will sympathise with the parties on the strength and influence of the Central leaders. Their hope is firmly fixed on the role of Central leaders rather than on the spirit of patriotic service to the wellbeing of Mizo people.

Just a decade ago, in 1981, Nirmal Nibedon observed the inevitable estrangement of public feeling through the high handedness of military operation in the following words. "The psychological backlash was also immense. The implementation of "Operation security" with military precision created a deep and unhealing scar, like a cancer in Mizo soul. Its rigid enforcement, involving a measure of force, only increased the Mizo's alienation from the rest of the country and intensified their animus towards all things Indian. It was hardly possible otherwise".¹⁴ It appears now that the horror of insurgency only dimly flickers in the memory of a young Mizo and he is not incurably wounded. He is looking intently to the source form where he will get his material wellbeing. Money can heal quickly the past wrongs and humiliations. Though politicians pander to the base motive of the mob by harping on the cruel exploitation and discrimination suffered by the tribal people at the hand of outsiders, the ordinary man in the street feels that this is nothing more than mere rhetoric. Cultural infiltration has perhaps gone too deep in the minds of the new generations that it might not be possible to make them aware to their surroundings.

In the traditional society of the Mizos, the chief could induce his subjects to comply with the law of the land by guiding and providing simple incentives. Coercion played a very insignificant role on the running of administrative machinery except on the issue of criminal offences. In contrast, Myron Weiner said,¹⁵ "In India, controls, regulations, licensing, compulsory procurement, and compulsory savings are among a variety of coercive mechanisms used by the Govt. to induce compliance with its objective. It is also presumed that individuals are more likely to comply with authority if they are required to do so than if they are rewarded for doing so. Authority is conceived as command: it is exercised by demanding compliance, not by inducing people through rewards". Mizo mentality used to be rebellious against coercive intervention but now is insensitive to the adaptation of this

culture. Just as it happened in the Centre, the rulers here develop a tendency to treat administration as their personal affair while, in turn, officials treat their administrative responsibilities as an extension of their loyalty and duty to the rulers. The spirit of nationalism is almost totally lacking in both the manager and the managed.

Economic Consequences

To those who advocated an independent Mizoram at the time of freedom, nothing less than independence appeared to have a desired dimension as the instrument and guarantee of corporate survival. They feared that their identity as a race would be erased from the face of the earth if their land was made freely accessible to superior tribes. There is still a lingering fear of being assimilated, and politicians, at different times, express concern about the large influx of Chakma refugees into Mizoram. While they are alive to the danger of political domination by the fast multiplying population of outsiders, none appear to think seriously about the business games and economic exploitation which have caused the society to rot inexorably. An extremely egalitarian society, based on voluntary teamwork and mutual help, changed almost suddenly into a managerial society, split into those who command and those, who are commanded.

Before insurgency took roots, Mizoram was comparatively better off since almost all the villages were selfsufficient or produced enough for living. When Mizoram had just started to recover from the shock of Mautam famine, again it plunged into a seething pot of guerilla warfare. Life was completely disrupted, and as Rev. Zairema told us,¹⁶ "The complete destruction of the property which they had built up after years and years of hard labour and their forcible transplantation in a new environment left the people in a sort of daze." Though they felt that they had vision of utopia and struggled for that, in the face of hunger, poverty, wretchedness and fear, men were not able to summon the necessary resources to suffer, struggle and die. A puritanical

society that preached moral virtues of the highest order and was virtually free from the sin of robbery, fell prostrate before the temporal needs of the stomach. The care for feeding hungry mouths appears to occupy the innermost place of their mind and they begin to accept and justify deviation from a sound principle in order to squeeze public money.

As it was the case with hunting societies, our forefathers were faithful to their stated beliefs. With the advent of civilisation, change has come to us in the name of progress. In one dramatic generation, we have leaped ahead and abandoned, to a great extent, useless appendages¹⁷ such as family, sociality, belief, love, hope and so forth, for the very good reason that in our social context these militate against survival. The tribal Iks in Uganda have shown that they can do without these appendages for they have replaced human society with a mere survival system that does not take human emotion into account.¹⁸ The surface of our society looks bad enough, hunger and poverty can be seen and the trickery perceived and the political games are well enough. Even then, no one consciously protests against mishandling of power. This is perhaps happening because men are brought together in one party or another by selfinterest alone.

It is beyond any dispute to say that Christianity has done much good and brought general enlightenment to the people. It still unites large blocks of society, but with diminishing efficiency, and all are increasingly rent with internal schism. Of course, this has nothing to do with the efficacious effect of religion on the individual, but it has been used more and more as some kind of anaesthesia. Another even less laudable role played by our religious groups is to lend support to the State or give tacit approval to its policy even when this is in direct conflict with its own principles. It is through economic compulsion that the Church has often sought Government financial assistance or extending of public facilities of different kinds. As such, the Church also feels obligated to stand behind the government in its endeavour to patch up administrative lapses.

Mizoram has for long continued to live and survive on relief, subsidy, and grants of different kinds donated by the Government of India for emergency and rehabilitation schemes. As a result, it has been turned into a perpetual basket case, and farmers leave their fields to rot just trying to snatch money from the Government. This development has created a parasitic tendency among rural folk as well as town's people. There is still the old paternalistic attitude from the donor of assistance, who feels that his duty is filling stomach without inquiry into whether this is really necessary, whether it will really help the people, and without any adequate supervision of how it is done. In this way, we have seen that the famine relief given from time to time was an example of good intent gone wrong. We have now all strived to get a good chunk of share from those floating funds at the expense of our humanity. The Mizos are on the upbeat and have taken up the challenge.

Reference

1. Talmon, J.L. *"Israel among the Nations"*. (1970) Weidenfell and Nicolson.
2. Lalchungnunga, K. *"A Mizo village"* (1988) unpublished Ph.D Thesis, Gauhati University.
3. Ibid
4. Sethi, J.D.; *"India in Crisis"* (1975) Delhi, vieleus.
5. Laldena ; *"Christian Mission and Colonialism"* (1988) Vendrome Institute, Shillong
6. Ibid.
7. Opcit, Talmon, J.L
8. Opcit, Laldena
9. Vamson ; *'Zo History'* (1987) published by the author ; Aizawl, Mizoram.
10. Ibid
11. Ibid
12. Myron Weiner(ed) *"India, a Rising Middle Power"* ; 1977
13. Ibid
14. Nibedon, N, *"North-East India, The Ethnic Explosion"* (1981) Lancer Publishers, New Delhi.

- 15. Opcit, Myron Weiner.
- 16. Rev.Zairema ; "God miracle in Mizoram", (1987) Synod Publication Board, Aizawl Mizoram.
- 17. Turnbull, Collin ; "The mountain people" (1972) Jonathan Cape Ltd. 30 Bedford Square, London, WCI.