

PEACE IN MIZORAM

(A Study of the Contributions of the Churches)

J.V. Hluna

Introduction

When the disturbance broke out in Mizoram in March 1966, the Indian Security Forces often disrupted and sometimes even dispersed church meetings in many villages. To mention the atrocities committed on the Mizos, I quote S. Lianzuala, MNF Secretary's Pamphlet published only four months after the outbreak.

So far my knowledge goes only in North Mizo District, the Indian army burnt down 21 villages and gutted 2133 houses, they raped 54 women, out of which 2 adult women and a minor girl died due to excessive copulation by a number of soldiers. They burnt 17 churches so far, and looted many other churches. They occupy 4 churches at present, the villagers were not allowed to worship there.

The Indian Army have driven away men towards the jails without giving any chance to them to explain their positions. Many were threatened with death, hanged upside down and suffered all kinds of tortures and as a consequence, many were deformed physically. They called the general public meetings in the church buildings, and used them for torturing and killing the inmates. They² even raped some girls inside the church buildings. When in May 1966, Mr. Chaliha, Chief Minister of Assam addressed the people of Mizoram at Aizawl, he said that they want Mizoram but not the people³ in it. Lalthangliana was surprisingly told of this. At the same time, the authorities resorted to large scale grouping of villages by force as one of the means of fighting the

insurgency. The main idea of this grouping was to cut off the resources of food supply to the MNF undergrounds and was conceived by the Army authorities.

While the atrocities of the Indian Security Forces were going on, the people of Mizoram were aware of the subversive activities of the underground Mizo National Front as they know that the MNF Home Minister ordered all the Mizo Government servants earning money from the Government of India within Mizoram to leave their jobs.⁴

The armed gangs of the MNF have resorted to looting, arson, kidnapping and various forms of coercion. They have also threatened the people of different areas with dire consequences if they refused to follow or support them. The Assam Government alleged that these unlawful activities forced the Government to call in Security Forces to restore law and order in the District. The Government affirmed that those Security Forces will remain there till these armed gangs are liquidated.⁵

Churches condemn the violent activities

The Presbyterian Church Synod felt that they had a role to play in diffusing the deteriorating situation in Mizoram by promoting good will and mutual understanding between the MNF and the general public and also between the Security Forces and the Mizo people. They, as the first step, issued a Pamphlet where they expressed very boldly that the church condemned the violent activities in Mizoram which was against the teachings of Gospel as well as the Human Rights.⁶

The Baptist Assembly of Serkawn in South Mizo District also followed the step taken by the Presbyterian Church of Aizawl. When they published their first pamphlet they openly charged the MNF as

responsible for the sufferings of the innocent Mizo public. At the same time, they requested them to stop all violence.

The "MNF Government" could not digest the contents of these Pamphlets and obstructed its circulation on the ground that the contents of the Pamphlets were against the desires of the "Government of Mizoram". They warned them that if the Church leaders do not obey their instruction, the "laws of the country" would determine their fate.

The Presbyterian and the Baptist Churches felt that a joint struggle for the cause would be more effective and so held its joint "Special Executive Committee" on 8.9.1966. The joint Church meeting issued another pamphlet to the members of the churches. They pointed out that the true spirit and the true teachings of Jesus Christ can only be found in the Holy Bible. They instructed the Christians to be cautious on this matter. They earnestly beseeched the Mizos, being all Christians, not to use violent means to safeguard their religious rights. The Church can never approve of the violent movement as a means of bringing about the Kingdom of God. They formed Christian Peace Committee and appointed three member delegation to deal with the peace matter. They were Rev. Zairema and Rev. Lalngurauva Ralte of the Presbyterian Church and Rev. Sawiluaia of the Baptist Church.

However, the MNF President not only objected to the Pamphlet but again issued another circular to add to the problems of the frightened overground Mizo Citizens. In his circular, he prohibited participation either as candidates or voters in any election conducted by the Government of India within Mizoram. Secondly, no Mizo should enrol his/her name in any census of India. Thirdly, he disallowed rendering of labour to Indian Security Forces and not only that, he ordered the people to

restrain themselves from giving any kind of help to the Security Forces either in cash or in kind. The order said that all those who disobey the instructions made by the "Government" should be treated as the enemy of the "Government of Mizoram".¹⁰ The Security Forces, at the same time, requisitioned forced labours and demanded water, firewood, fowl, etc. from the Mizos, wherever they went.

The MNF instructed their Deputy Commissioner of Police to burn down the Election Office, Deputy Commissioner's Office and the Office of the District Council at Aizawl and, if possible, to kill some of the public leaders and officials without delay.¹¹ They also prohibited the Mizo people from entering the Indian "Concentration Camps" or Grouping Centres.

Thus the relations between the MNF and the Mizo Union party and its dominated District Council, also between MNF and the Churches became strained. In the eyes of the Indian Security Forces, to be a Mizo was more or less a crime. Things were thus going from bad to worse in Mizoram.

Meaningful Approach

At this critical juncture, Rev. Lalngurauva Ralte and his friends, Rev. Zairema and Rev. Sawiluaia came upon the scene. They took great risk when they went and appealed to both Government and Laldenga to reduce the current of the troubled waters that affected the general Mizo people. They first wrote to Laldenga, the MNF chief, through a special messenger. They informed Laldenga that the Churches were very concerned about the state of affairs in Mizoram. The Church believed that there must be some ways of restoring peace and security in Mizoram. The Church was of the opinion that they should have a talk over the matter

with the MNF President first, before approaching the Government of India. They therefore, requested him to indicate the time and place of the meeting not further off than a day's journey from a motorable road if the latter agrees with their proposal.¹²

Laldenga was positive on the issue and gave his assent to the proposal.¹³ The meeting was therefore held between the MNF President, Laldenga and the Church leaders in the month of September.¹⁴ The main trend of the discussions were:

The Church delegates expressed their disapproval of violence that has erupted in Mizoram which was contrary to Christ's teaching. Laldenga stated that to preserve their very existence, they had to declare independence, organised themselves into a "Government" and used force to prevent the Indian Government from any further control over them. He said that their actions were purely of self-defence. Laldenga claimed that they had taken to arms only as a last resort to preserve their existence. He asked the Church leaders to confine themselves to spiritual matters and warned them to be careful not to hurt the political ideological feelings of any section of his members. Expressing his appreciation of the church condemnation of violence, Laldenga demanded that the Church should also condemn the Indian Government for indiscriminate torture of civilian population of Aizawl town and other villages, use of incendiary bombs, burning of villages, raping of women, looting of villages, forcing of villagers to supply materials and food without payment, killing of domestic animals without payment, forcible restriction on the freedom of the people and curtailment of their human rights.

When the Church delegates raised the question of ceasefire and peace talks, Laldenga pointed out that any activities of the Indian Government in Mizoram "is an illegal activity". Unless India agrees

to cease all military activities, he said, the "Mizo Government" cannot agree to any cease fire. If, however, the Indian Government agrees to work out the principles of having a peaceful solution to the problem and give up the idea of using force against the MNF, they shall agree to a cease fire under certain terms.

The church delegation asked point-blank whether they (MNF) would reconsider their position and thus be agreeable to a high degree of autonomy within the framework of the Indian Constitution. Laldenga said "We were compelled to declare our Independence and secession from the Indian Union. Our decision is now irrevocable." He further said that the MNF want peace and shall be prepared to have peace talks with India as between the two Governments.

The opportunity to work out to bring normalcy and peace is now opened to the church. They continued their meetings with the MNF leaders and at the same time with the representatives of India like Deputy Commissioner of Aizawl, Commissioner of Cachar and Mizo District - B.C. Carriappa; Chief Minister of Assam, B.P. Chaliha; Union Home Minister, Y.B. Chavan; Union Home Secretary and Joint Secretary to the Prime Minister of India on several occasions. They exchanged the opinions of the warring parties and tried to bring them to the table for Peace Settlement.

Seeing the suffering and miseries which the Mizo people had gone through, and seeing that the Mizo people wanted peace and that the Mizo people no longer supported the continuation of violent activities, the MNF leadership viewed the situation and came out to Delhi and signed what had been popularly known as "First July 1976, Understanding or Agreement" which provided, among others, the following:

- (a) MNF gave up the struggle for independence and accepted a settlement within the framework of the Indian Constitution.
- (b) MNF acknowledged that Mizoram was an integral part of India.
- (c) MNF would henceforth abjure violence.

The above Agreement or Understanding was followed by suspension of operations by both sides, that is, MNF as well as Security Forces. For this, the Churches of Mizoram organized a special Church meeting on 5th July 1976, and offered prayers of thanks to God. Then the Mizo people began to enjoy the fruits of 'No Violence' and passed through comparatively peaceful times from then.

Unfortunately, the MNF men could not make a clear cut decision to honour the commitment made on 1st July 1976. Their Headquarters, at the beginning of 1979, raised a new slogan "Nothing short of full sovereignty". On 1st June 1979, the MNF Headquarters issued a notice to the effect that the 'Non-Mizos must quit Mizoram by 1st July 1979'; thereby cancelled or nullified the July 1, 1976 Agreement. They continued to indulge in violent activities from time to time. The peace dialogue with Delhi was also disrupted. Therefore, Laldenga was expelled from India by January 1982. He then exiled himself in the United Kingdom.

Second Phase

Soon after Laldenga was expelled from India, there occurred several violent incidents. In the process, the MNF caused loss of lives and sufferings to the people of Mizoram and in response to this, the Security Forces tightened their duty and this added to the anxieties of the Mizo common people. The insecured public life greatly hampered

the progress of developmental works in Mizoram. The Chief Minister of Mizoram, Brig. T. Sailo, in his Radio broadcast on 18.6.1982, appealed to all people of Mizoram including the Church leaders to try to seize every opportunity to contact those "misguided brethren" (MNF) and try to guide them along the right path. He said, no Christian having true faith¹⁶ in God will allow such a rancour to prevail.

The Lt. Governor of Mizoram, Admiral S.N. Kohli, at the advice of Brig. T. Sailor, convened the Church leaders' meeting and requested them to voice against the MNF violent activities. Therefore, all the 10 churches in Mizoram organized themselves into a Committee in June 1982, representing 85 percent of the whole population of the State. The Committee appointed 3 delegates to work out for Peace in Mizoram. They were, Rev. Lalsawma, Presbyterian, as Chairman; Rev. V.L. Rawna, Seventh Day Adventist, as Secretary and Rev. (Dr) P.L. Lianzula, Baptist, as Member.¹⁷

The Church Leaders' Committee at its first approach towards peace made an appeal in "complete agreement and with one accord" to the people of Mizoram requesting all the people including MNF, the Government of India and their Security Forces stationed in Mizoram in the name of God to give prayerful attention to their declaration. The appeal was as follows:¹⁸

1. Let all people strive anew to put an end to armed conflicts in Mizoram. We appeal to the public and all leaders of political parties to seek above all else, unity of all people in accordance with the will of God. And we appeal to the Government of India as well, to reopen fresh avenues for Talks with the Mizo National Front.

2. Human life as created by God is of the utmost value and only God can create life. Therefore, anyone who has no respect for life is the enemy of God. Killing and bloodshed, as means to achieve political ends, or whatever ends, is in direct contrast to the Gospel of Jesus Christ which we all acclaim. So we ask all men not to temper with, but to safeguard, human life at all costs, and never to resort to killing or violence.
3. We appeal to all the Armed Forces to build up good relationship with the public, and to refrain from operational excesses. It is best for all if forced labour, threat, torture and extortion from the people be completely avoided even in the most remote villages.

The Church Leaders earnestly requested for the co-operation of all people in making the above appeal effective. They further requested all the local churches to organize public prayer meetings on all Sunday and Saturday evenings all over Mizoram and read out the above appeal to the members of the church. Therefore, this appeal reached all walks of life within Mizoram and New Delhi.

Ever since the Church Leaders' Committee has been formed, they had been working with their level best for the restoration of peace in Mizoram. Believing that the best solution for the political problem prevailing in Mizoram would be the renewal of the talk between the Government of India and the MNF representatives, the Church Leaders tried to meet the Prime Minister of India three times - October 1982, April 1983, and June 1983, but unfortunately, the Church delegates could not have the privilege of meeting her (Indira Gandhi) in person.

However, the Church delegates met Laldenga two times in his Surrey residence of London; the first meeting was on the 1st March 1982, with Rev. V.L. Rawna, Secretary of the Delegate, and the second time was on the 25th June 1984, by Rev. Lalsawma, Chairman of the delegation and Upa Chalhna, Member of the Church Leaders' Committee. In the second meeting, Laldenga was convinced of the need to renew the talk. When the Church Leaders conveyed Laldenga's reaffirmation of the 1976 Agreement and his willingness to resume the peace dialogue, to the Prime Minister, the latter insisted on the written document to this effect from Laldenga. When the Prime Minister received the same from Laldenga, she invited him to New Delhi on the 24th July 1984. By November of the same year, the talk was resumed under the supervision of the new Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, who was never keen on the issue before.

The dialogue unnecessarily dragged on and caused untoward incidents again in Mizoram. The patience of the Church Leaders was not lost by now. They selected six representatives and sent them to Delhi to put bold and heavy pressure on both Laldenga and the Prime Minister to conclude the talks. These leaders were encamped at New Delhi during April 5th to 15th, 1985. They met all men involved in the peace dialogue including the Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, Laldenga and the Mizoram Congress (I) leaders like Chief Minister, Lal Thanhawla, Education Minister, Rokamlova and a Member of Parliament, Silvera. The Church leaders had the opportunity of explaining their real stand on this issue to the Prime Minister. They claimed that they were not advocating the MNF cause as such. They were rather advocating the wish of the people that there should be peace in Mizoram. Their only view was that a peaceful solution to the Mizoram problem could not be achieved without taking the MNF elements into account. They

believed that there was the prospect of finding a common ground agreeable both to the whole of Mizo society and the Government of India. They said that they were all apprehensive of the stalemate situation which was created by prolonged discussion which would in turn, further deteriorate the worsening situation. The Church leaders asked the Prime Minister as to why the Centre was silent to the voices of the Church leaders so long. The Prime Minister then coolly and impassionately promised to speed up the dialogue.

At long last the peace dialogue was successfully concluded by signing the "Memorandum of Settlement" between Laldenga and the Union Home Secretary, R.K. Pradhan on the 30th June 1986. All MNF undergrounds came overground and gave up their arms to the Government of India. Peace and normalcy returned to the land. The people of Mizoram welcomed back their valiant fellow Mizos with open arms. It is significant to note that slogans, festoons displayed revealed the innermost desire of the Mizo people for peace. However, it was also noticed that some over jealous enthusiasts put Laldenga in a most emotional way as the "Father of the Nation" or as "Moses" in the Bible. Be that as it may, the Peace Accord really marked the beginning of a period of peace in Mizoram which continues till today.

Rev. Lalsawma praised God and said "How Great is the Lord! How much we should praise him", because "God is our refuge and strength, a tested help in times of trouble" who saved his children from ruin and restored peace in Mizoram. It was the answer of God to the prayers of his people, he claimed. He thanked the members of the churches for their ceaseless prayers, supports and donation of Rs.40,000/- for their mission with which only the Church leaders could move either to London or to New Delhi.

Notes & References

1. Lianzuala, S., Secretary, Ministry of Information, Broadcasting and Publicity, "Government of Mizoram", **Pamphlet**, June 1966.
2. Tlangchhuaka (ed.), **Mizoram Politics**, MNF Hqrs., 1974, p.19.
3. Lalthangliana, MNF Foreign Secretary, **Letter to Stanley Nichols Roy**, General Secretary, APHLC, No. 20(1)EA/66 dated Aizawl, 13 March 1967.
4. Sainghaka, MNF Home Minister, Order No. G.1/66 dt. 5 March 1966.
5. Government of Assam, Directorate of Information and Public Relations, Shillong, **Pamphlet** No. AGP(I & P), No. 8/66 dt. 22.4.1966.
6. **Church Pamphlet**, Aizawl, dt. 12.3.1966.
7. Mizoram Baptist Church, **Appeal** to the MNF and Volunteer dt. 30.5.1966.
8. Home Minister (MNF), **Letter to Synod Leaders**, dt. 16.3.1966.
9. Presbyterian and Baptist Churches of Mizoram, **Kohhran Thuchah**, dt. 8.9.1966.
10. (MNF) **President Circular**, No. MS. 3(VIP)/66/89 dt. 22.12.1966.
11. (MNF) Home Minister, **Order**, No.3 GM(H)/Con/67/91 dt. 3.1.1967.
12. Church, **Letter to Laldenga**, Camp: Mobile dt. 6.9.1966.
13. Laldenga, **Letter to Church Leaders**, No. MGG(4-PO)/66/22 dt. 17.9.1966.
14. Hluna, J.V., **Church and Political Upheaval in Mizoram**, Mizo History Association, Aizawl, 1985, pp. 112-120.
15. 1 July 1976, Understanding/Accord between India and MNF.
16. Sailo, Brig. T., **Speeches and Writings**, Information and Public Relations Department, Government of Mizoram, Aizawl, April, 1983, p. 119.
17. Mizoram Churches Leaders' Committee, **Letter to MNF Vice President**, Aizawl, 28 September, 1982.

18. Churches' Appeal to the People of Mizoram, June, 1982.
19. An interview with Rev. Lalsawma, Chairman, Church Delegation.
20. **Ibid.**