

Mizo Hmeichhe Tangrual: A Study in Perspective

Sangkima

Introduction

In Mizoram there are some sensible and responsible women voluntary organisation working ardently for the cause of women in the society. Prominent among them are *Mizo Hmeichhe Tangrual*, *Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawa Pawl* and *Puitu Hmeichhe Pawl*. These voluntary organizations have indeed been working for the general well-being of women, and their respective contributions are creditably remarkable.

Of these organizations, the *Mizo Hmeichhe Tangrual* forms an area of interest and is, therefore, taken up for a study. Founded in July 1946, it is the oldest women voluntary organization which celebrated its Golden Jubilee in July 1996. Within fifty years of its existence, the Tangrual¹ has made commendable contributions for the welfare of the people of Mizoram in general and for the upliftment of women in the society in particular. The *Tangrual*, therefore, has more importantly excelled all the other organizations speaking in terms of contributions for the common good of women community in the society.

Birth of the Organization

It is extremely difficult to conceive correctly the exact social and political status of women in the society fifty years ago now. Yet, we may form some ideas on it. By custom, women were socially dominated and they had no share in the family in cases of divorce, inheritance, succession etc. As a result, the custom was sharply criticised by an elite women group which began to emerge in the society only in the beginning of the present century. The primary concern of the group was how to improve and elevate the status of women in the society by removing their social disabilities. Thus they took a vow to rectify it by intensifying their fight when a social organization called "Young Lushai Association" later known as "Young Mizo Association"

was formed in 1935. They were much enlightened by this association and it kept on moving their fighting spirits.

Now, these educated women found it difficult to sit idle. The desires for reforms affecting women in the society drove them relentlessly. In this connection mention may be made of one locality in Aizawl town called Thakthing once became a centre of 'civilization' in Mizoram. In this locality, there lived three intimate friends: they were Lalthanzami who was before a Lady Health Visitor working in Calcutta, Hmingliani who later became a member of the second Mizo District Council and Kapthluai. These three, ladies occasionally met one another and discussed a variety of topics.³ On one occasion, Lalthanzami enlightened her friends on the workings of one women voluntary organization in Calcutta. When they came to know about it they had a strong crave for the same type of voluntary organization to work for women in Mizoram. Convinced with exigencies of the time Hmingliani readily suggested to form a voluntary organization and her friends gave assenting nod.⁴ Hence, they decided to convene a meeting to discuss the possibility of forming the proposed organization in a big way. Thus, a committee was called on 14th July 1946 in which educated women in the locality like (Mrs) D.E. Jones, Lalremi, Hautei, Rohmingliani were invited. From Kulikawn locality Dengthangpii alone was invited.⁵ At the same time they also extended invitations to some more women whom they thought would contribute meaningful and fruitful ideas for the organisation.

As planned, the first committee was convened on 14 July, 1946 at Mizo High School, Mission Veng, Aizawl. Started at 12 noon, the meeting was chaired by (Mrs) D.E. Jones and was well-attended. The meeting having passed a resolution thus formed a voluntary organization called "Mizo Hmeichhe Hmasawa Pawl".⁶ No other business was taken up for discussion but they had threadbare deliberations on the nature and modality of the founded organization. Then the meeting was adjourned until 16 July.

The next meeting as already fixed on 16 July was held at the same time and at the same place. The apparent purpose of the meeting was to formally shape the organization by holding elections to the office bearers and to do other matters. Having reconsidered on the previous decision, the meeting thus changed the name from that of the "Mizo Hmeichhe Hmasawn Pawl" to "Mizo Hmeichhe Tangrual."⁷ Henceforth, the association has retained its name till today.

Election to the office bearers was held the same day for a term of three years. They elected the following :

- | | | |
|-------------------------|---|----------------|
| (1) President | - | Lalthanzami |
| (2) Vice President | - | Biaki |
| (3) General Secretary | - | Sweet (Nusuii) |
| (4) Assistant Secretary | - | Thansiami |
| (5) Financial Secretary | - | Biaksiami |
| (6) Treasurer | - | Dr. C.L.Kimi |

Committee members were also appointed. With this, the first women voluntary organization was born in Mizoram. This women organization, the first of its kind, was the third organization in Mizoram after the Young Mizo Association and the political party 'Mizo Union' which was formed on 11 April 1946. The Tangrual was organised only when the permission of the Superintendent was obtained. (Mrs) L.L.Peters, wife of the Superintendent who was very much interested in such activities was appointed Patron the next year.

Fabric of the Organization

The most interesting part in the history of the Mizo Hmeichhe Tangrual is found in the fabric of the organization. Like the other two organizations mentioned above, the Tangrual was growing very fast, and within a month of its formation it had branches in every locality in Aizawl town. Likewise, when a year was over there seemed to be no single village where a unit was not opened.⁸ The first committee formed Aizawl into two units. However, when the second committee was held the idea was abandoned and Aizawl town was divided into four units as (a) Dawrpui and Venghlui (b) Mission Veng and Maubawl (c) Thakthing and Venghnuai (d) Kulikawn and Tlangnuam.⁹ This organizational set up remained unaltered till 1948.

Significant changes, however, had taken place after that period. After the pattern of the Mizo Union Party, the Tangrual split up Mizoram into Blocks and the area of one Block was made into the size of the Pastorate of the Presbyterian Church. The decision to this effect was taken at the first conference held in 1948 at Thakthing, Aizawl.¹⁰

Every Block had its own administrative area within which the Block Conference was the sole authority. The officer bearers of each

Block were known as Block Officers. For the first time the Block Officers' Conference was held at Aizawl in 1949. The conference lasted for two days from October 12-13, 1949.¹¹ and it was convened expressly to apprise the officers of the position of fund being collected purposely for the construction of Maternity and Child Welfare Centre. They also wanted to inform The Officers of their difficulties in not starting the centre due to non-availability of a suitable site. At this juncture, the leaders at the headquarters, therefore, wanted to know the views of each unit through the officers on the matter. The leaders thus assured that members that the centre would soon be started whenever a suitable site was allotted to them by the authority. Then they met the Superintendent many a time for this purpose.

For the purpose of better administration Mizoram was again divided into two Divisions as North Lusha Hills and the latter covered the former South Lushai Hills including the Mara region. The arrangement was approved by the central Working Committee on 21 February, 1948.¹² In the Division level, the Divisional Working Committee formed by the President and the Secretary of each unit in Aizawl town and one delegate from each unit was the highest decision making body. This means that every unit in Aizawl town could send three members each to the Divisional Working Committee.¹³ The delegate representing the unit was to be selected by the unit committee. The same system was applied in Southern Division.

The highest decision making body, other than the Assembly and the Conference, was the Central Working Committee formed by the office bearers of the Headquarters and units in Aizawl town.¹⁴ This committee looked after day to day administration of the organization. In Northern Division, the members of the Central Working Committee and the divisional Working Committee were almost the same persons. The units were, however, represented by different persons, for their turn was made on selection basis.

Political Tinge

The Mizo Hmeichhe Tangrual was contemporary with the Mizo Union Party. As the influence of the latter was so great upon the former it would not be wonder if one dubs it as 'Women Wing' of the Mizo Union Party. However, they may be justified in joining active politics.

In the first place, there was intimacy between the leaders of the two organizations because some of the women leaders were the wives of the political party leaders. The male leaders thus deeply influenced their female counter-parts, Secondly, the women leaders were firmly convinced that their social and political demands would be implemented in a better fashion if they involved in politics. Thirdly, the contemporary political development thus induced them to actively participate in the local politics. So when the formation of the Advisory Council and the District Council were in the offing they categorically affirmed that they wanted to send their respective representatives in these two political forums so that they could work in more effective way for the betterment of women in the society.

For the first time, the Tangrual in its seventh session discussed how to join the Mizo Union party. After a long deliberations the meeting thus agreed to participate by sending its own representative in the party.¹⁵ Also, in 1947, they submitted petition to the Governor of Assam to make three reserved seats for women in the District Council if and when constituted.¹⁶ The most remarkable episode was made when a political decision was made in its session held on 23 August 1947. The resolution says, "This Association will take part in politics whenever it deems fit".¹⁷

Again, the political development in Mizoram took a new turn in 1938 when the second World War was about to break. At this juncture, the Government needed the unflinching supports and loyalty of the chiefs. Therefore, in order to please them a Chief's body known as 'Durbar' was appointed. At the same time, a new political development took place in 1949 when the Superintendent allowed 'Commoners' to participate in the body. This greatly worsened the on going strained relations between the chiefs patronised by the Superintendent and the commoners led by the political leaders. This resulted in the formation of a common body called "Advisory Council"¹⁸ in which the chiefs and the commoners were allowed to send ten and twenty three member representatives respectively. This was the first elected body in Mizoram.¹⁹

In the elections that followed four women candidates two each in Aizawl town and Lunglei town also contested. It is very interesting to note that in Aizawl town also contested. It is very interesting to note that in Aizawl town the official candidate of Mizo Hmeichhe

Tangrual supported by the Mizo Union party was opposed by its own President Lalsangpuii backed by another political party called United Mizo Freedom Organization (UMFO). The contest, however, had a serious consequence upon the organization. Lalsangpuii and her women supporters borrowed Rs.111.4.0 from Chhotelal Seth and Co., Aizawl, to meet the expenditures on petroleum used on election day. The company asked the Tangrual to repay the borrowed money. The latter replied that they had no knowledge about it. Then legal issue followed. The matter was brought to the law Court and the borrowing party was asked to repay the same amount.²⁰ Meanwhile, in Lunglei town (Mrs) Remthangi, official candidate of the Tangrual defeated her UMFO rival (Mrs) Laziki Sailo.

In spite of these elections, the tension between the Chiefs and the Commoners remained tense. To stop the deteriorating situation the women organization thus pleaded for peace and asked the Superintendent to bring normalcy in Mizoram.²¹

In 1957 a new political chapter was made again in the history of the Tangrual when its President Hmigiani, wife of Thanhlira ex-MP was nominated by the Governor of Assam as member of the second Mizo District Council. Her nomination was the outcome of the choice made through secret ballot among the members of the Central Working Committee. She got the highest vote by securing six votes.²² In 1962 she was again selected for nomination but this time she surrendered the seat to her colleague Malsawmi of Zarkawt, Aizawl.²³ Since then the Tangrual gradually alienated herself from active politics and when the political disturbance broke out in 1966 the idea was completely dead. After this event, no effort could get momentum to garner fresh attempt on political activities.

Attempted Reforms

As stated elsewhere, the objective of the Mizo Hmeiche Tangrual till 1966²⁴ was to promote the status of women in the society. Thus, the Tangrual, in its fifth meeting held on 14 September 1946 adopted the following resolutions.²⁵

- (1) The Superintendent be requested to accept 'Will'. The 'Will' made before death should be valid.

- (2) Suppose a husband died before having any issue, in such case the family property be divided into two equal parts between the husband's family and the wife.
- (3) A female issue who had no brother be allowed to inherit her father's properties.
- (4) A women who had sex after the death of her husband be no longer treated as committing 'adultery'.
- (5) In case of divorce children be allowed to live with either the father or the mother.

The first conference held in 1948 had a serious discussion on Mizo custom concerning women. The marriage price and the illegitimate child were the main agenda of deliberations. On the marriage price the conference categorically decided that women should have no price. Regarding the illegitimate child the conference demanded its abolition in the society. Another important case involving a man who failed to marry a girl who became pregnant after having sexual intercourse with him was taken up. After a long debate it was also concluded that such a man should give a fine of Rs. 80.²⁶

On 30 October 1952 a Special Assembly was convened to have, among other things a whole review on the customs which had been discussed in 1950. The Special Assembly has, however, a special significance in the history of the Tangrual. Having been convinced that there could be no uniform view on the marriage price, the Assembly thus left the matter to the choice of an individual person or party.²⁷

The last General Assembly which took up the customs was held on 14 February 1956. In the Assembly *thian man* (a price paid to the bride's maid), *lawichal* (a price paid to a leader of the bride's party) and *numan* (a marriage price shared by the matter of a bride) were hotly debated. On the first two items, the Assembly agreed with what the District Council had already amended. But, in case of *numan* it raised the amount to Rs. 20. But this came as only a suggestion for Tangrual was only a recommending body. So all the decisions taken on customs by the Tangrual could only be implemented by the District Council which was inaugurated only on 25 April 1952. It was the District Council which made necessary revisions and amendments to the customs. Hence, when Hmingliani became a member of the District Council in 1957 she played a significant role especially with regards

to issues relating to women. The Assembly also approved a fine of Rs.40 given to a mother by a father of illegitimate child.²⁸

Welfare Works

Besides social and political endeavors, welfare works were also taken up by the Mizo Hmeichhe Tangrual. We shall now discuss in brief the various welfare works and projects which were taken up by the organization during the period under review.

1. Health and Sanitation

From the very beginning of its existence the Tangrual gave great importance to public health and sanitations. The first General Assembly deliberated the subject and passed, among other things, the following resolutions²⁹

- (a) Houses and Utensils should be kept clean.
- (b) Extreme care should be taken while disposing human excretories

The resolutions are landmarks in the history of sanitation in Mizoram because their resolutions gave general awarness to the public. They also received good and wide publicity when the delegates carried them home to their respective places. Since then, cleanliness and proper sanitaions occupied a more important place among the Mizos.³⁰

2. Weaving Competition

The Tangrual also organised weaving competitions so as to promote weaving among women. After setting up weaving centres at certain places in Mizoram, the Headquarters supplied the entres with raw materials.³¹ The competitions were confined to different designs of Mizo *puan* (woven cloth), *iptechei* (coloured satchel), neckties etc. The finished items were brought ot Aizawl and selections were done by the appointed judges.³² Prizes were given accordingly. Sometimes, they also held separate competitions with typical Mizo weaving. This means that weaving was done with cotton grown locally. In this way the *Tangrual* popularised weaving among Mizo girls and helped them in knowing techniques of weavings.³³

3. Maternity and child Welfare Centre:

Attempts were made to establish the centre at an early stage. But owing to various reasons it was established only in 1954. For the first time in 1948, the committee decided to open a Maternity and Child welfare clinic which would be named as "Mizo Hmeichhe Tangrual Hriatrengna".³⁴ They started collecting funds for this purpose. But to collect enough money to start with the Centre was not an easy task. Meanwhile, a correspondence came from Provincial Red Cross Society, Shillong, offering the Tangrual its readiness to bear half of the expenditures towards the maintenance of the Centre.³⁵ The offer came as a bolt from the blue for they had never expected such a generous gift from any source. This gave an impetus to this proposed project and they arranged a special fund raising programme by fixing amount to an individual member.³⁶

Now the clinic in the centre was started with the help of the Society by appointing a visiting Midwife to look after the centre being attached to the clinics of Lalthanzami, a qualified Health Visitor who was running her own clinics. The centre had to be shifted as soon as the Tangrual had its own building.³⁷ It appears that the Visiting Midwife was engaged till 1951. After that, the Tangrual employed regular Dhais whose trainings were sponsored by them.³⁸

At that time, there were only very few medical workers whose services could be utilized, Now, knowing the medical need and the health care of the people the Tangrual asked the Government of Assam to open and start a Dhai Training Centre at Aizawl. The Government conceded it by opening a centre at the Civil Hospital.³⁹ Among the first batch, ten candidates were selected and three of them were solely sponsored by the Tangrual. Stipends were given by the Society.⁴⁰ When completed there one year course they were posted at villages in the different parts of Mizoram. At a time when the services of Doctors were not available easily the role and the services of doctors were not available easily the role and the contributions of the Dhais were so significant.

Again, new page in the field of Welfare Works was opened when Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India visited Mizoram on 4 April, 1953. Hmingliani, Rohmingliani and Hauveli had an interview with the Prime Minister and asked him to extend financial help for the on

going project. The Prime Minister assured them that he would do the needful through the Government of Assam. So, a few months later the amount of Rs. 5000 was released through the Deputy Commissioner of Mizoram.⁴¹ In the meantime they had already collected Rs.500.50, with this amount the Tangrual started the construction works for the centre. The work was done by J.Lianchungnunga and he completed it in 1954. When the work was over the Welfare Centre was shifted from Lalthanzami's house. The new building popularly known as "Tangrual Damdawi In" (Hospital of Tangrual) was used for the purpose till 1973.⁴² Doctors, Nurses and Compounders who rendered selfless services for this 'Damdawi In' since its inception were all Government employees who were working at the Civil Hospital, Aizawl. Their services were arranged in turn by the Civil Surgeon himself with the permission of the Government of Assam.

4. Loin Loom and Tailoring Centre

Besides weaving competitions organised by the Tangrual, weaving centres were also opened at different places in Mizoram with a view to popularising weaving among women. It was started with three looms and the cost of one loom was Rs. 10.⁴³ They also started a Tailoring Centre in the same building. A training period for both the centres was six month and ten trainees were recruited.⁴⁴ The centres were inaugurated on May 1962. When the first batch of the trainees completed their course, a certificate distribution ceremony was held on 19 February, 1963 in a big way by inviting some government officials and public leaders, too. The centre at Aizawl and similar other centres established in the cillages were all abandoned after 1966 disturbances in Mizoram.

5. Motherless Babies Hom

Economic hardships caused by the revolt in 1966 directly affected pregnant women and children. As a result, the number of orphans was rising at an alarming rate. Moreover, they had already abandoned all their weaving centres due to the event of 1966. These two factors thus mooted them a new idea to open an orphanage at Aizawl. So the house was inaugurated in 1969 and Linkhumi was chosen as its lone worker.⁴⁵ But before she could start the work she was sent first to the Presbyterian Church Hospital at Durtlang to undergo a training so as to have a first-hand knowledge on child caring etc.⁴⁶ Thangsavnga of Samlukhai

village was the first to be admitted in the house. As he was not healthy, he died soon after he was admitted in the house. At present the home can cater the maximum number of 10 (ten) at a time. Till now the house has admitted 73 children.

6. Working Women's Hostel

The Tangrual is also looking after a new project of Working Women's Hostel at Aizawl. The building was constructed out of funds received from the Ministry of Social Welfare Department, New Delhi. The Department sanctioned Rs. 298,500/- as grant and the same was released in five instalments. Deed of Agreement was executed on March, 1975.⁴⁷ The construction work was completed in 1979 and the Hostel was officially inaugurated on 1 March, 1980. In the beginning it could accommodate 30 hostelers, but now after being extended it can cater 40 women altogether. Till now the hostel has accommodated 464 hostelers.

Besides, the Tangrual also made valuable contribution for the good of the general public. When Mautam famine occurred in 1960 the organization did remarkable works by helping the Government agencies in distributing vitamins, enema, gin etc. for the needy people. These were done by the branches.

Conclusion

Being the first among the women organization in Mizoram, the Tangrual, since its inception, has made remarkable achievements in its struggle for the ideals of women in the society. In fact, the achievement made in different aspects were made mainly through their active participations in the politics. The main issue which strongly influenced them to actively involve in politics was the denial of the right to inheritance and succession. The customary right which they claimed and pricked them most was the right to inheritance. They left no stone unturned to get this right extended to them. In this connection, the contributions of Hmingliani as a member of the District Council thus extended the right to inheritance to women. Their participation in the Mizo Union convention held at Senvawn in 1949 by sending two of their members is another indication that the Mizo Hmeichhe Tangrual was very much interested in politics. At the same time, they also made many remarkable achievements in other fields, too. In fact,

their overall contributions for the benefits of women in then society has been marvelous.

Note and References

1. In subsequent writing the 'Mizo Hmeichhe Tangrual' will be referred to as 'Tangrual'.
2. Hmingliani, 'Mizo Hmeichhe Din Hmun' in Mizo Hmeichhe Tangrual Souvenir, Aizawl 1986, pp 12-13.
3. The Mizo Hmeichhe Tangrual on the occasion of its Golden Jubilee Celebration, published a Cyclostyled Write-up entitled "Mizo Hmeichhe Tangrual Golden Jubilee (16.7.1946-16.7.1996)" p.1. Hereafter, it will be referred to as "Golden Jubilee".
4. *Ibid.*
5. The Minute Book is still intact, See the Committee Minute of 14.7.1946. Hereafter the Minute Book will be referred to as "The Minute" only.
6. *Ibid.*
7. The Minute of 16.7.1946.
8. Biaksiami: Mizo Hmeichhe Tangrual, Aizawl, 1982, p.2.
9. The Minute of 16.7.1946.
10. The First Conference was held on January 26-28.1948. See the Minute of 26-28.1.1948.
11. The Minute of 12-13.10 1949.
12. The Minute of 21.2.1948.
13. The Minute of 29.3.1949.
14. The Minute of 16 7 1946.
15. The Minute of 19.9.1947.
16. The Minute of 28.5.1947.
17. The Minute of 23.8.1947.
18. Chaltuahkuma : Political History of Mizoram, Aizawl, 1981 pp. 57-67.
19. *Ibid*, p. 68.

20. The Minute of 19.1.1951.
21. The Minute of 11-12.3.1949.
22. The Minute of 2.2.1957.
23. The Minute of 7.4.1962.
24. After 1966 the Tangrual was very much reduced. Now, it exists only with Office-Beareres and a few Committee members. It has no branches.
25. The Minute of 14.9.1946.
26. The Minute of 26-28.1.1948.
27. The Special Assembly Minute of 30. 10. 1952.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Biaksiami; *op.cit*, p.8.
30. Golden Jubilee; p.4.
- 31 The Minute of 15.11.1949.
32. Golden Jubilee; p.4.
33. *Ibid.*
34. The Minute of 7.10.1948.
35. The Minute of 10.-11.3.1949.
36. The Minute of 9.4.1949.
37. The Minute of 17.5.1949.
38. The Minute of 13.4.1951.
39. Biaksiam: *Op, cit*, p.14.
40. Nuzawni, The first batch of the trainee. Interview held on 14.9.1996.
41. Golden Jubilee; p.6.
42. *Ibid.*
43. The Minute of 24.2.1962.
44. The Minute of 7.4.1962.
45. Golden Jubilee; p.7.
46. Biaksiami; *op, cit*, p.23.
47. *Ibid.* p.29.