

## **Young Mizo Association : Its history, features, some aspects and its role in transforming the Mizo Society**

**Sangkima**

### **Origin**

Until about a quarter of a century after the coming of the British, the bachelors' dormitory, called the Zawlbuk' was the most important agency in moulding the social life of the Mizos. But soon after the British administration was imposed in the land the Zawlbuk visibly lost its important position in the society mainly for the reasons that the powers of the chiefs, also the fountain head of Zawlbuk discipline, were comparatively reduced by the administration; christianity became an outstanding hindrance for a proper functioning of the institution; the introduction of formal education also turned the people to regard Zawlbuk as a stumbling block for over-all progress, and finally, the people who took active part in the first world War, too, contributed considerably to this effect.

Viewed from this developing trend, it could well be assumed that the Zawlbuk would not long remain important in the society. The assumption came true when there grew up among the people a strong resentment against Zawlbuk in the third decade of the Century. Having been convinced by the significant role played by Zawlbuk in the Society and to save the society from further deterioration, N.E. Parry, the Superintendent took the matter of Zawlbuk to his words and accordingly he issued a standing order in 1926<sup>1</sup> that Zawlbuk be maintained by every village as a living institution. His efforts in this drive was virtually ineffective for the presence of Zawlbuk in the society was almost non-existent in 1938. By this year, A. G. McCall, the Superintendent, convened a public meeting on 1 January at Thakthing, Aizawl with a view to pulsing the sentiments and attitudes of the people towards Zawlbuk. For this meeting to be an epoch-making episode, the meeting to the great surprise of some, unanimously resolved to discontinue Zawlbuk as an institution in its present form.<sup>2</sup> And consequently Zawlbuk began to be regarded in the Mizo society,

as an outdated institution.

The end of Zawlbuk seemed very certain in the minds of some sections of the people even long before the decision was made at the public meeting. These people were the missionaries, their colleagues and some local people. Contributing ideas and dwelling on their thoughts this elite group frequently met together at the missionaries' residence trying to evolve a formula for the formation of a suitable social organization that could have played the role of Zawlbuk in the society even after it was abolished. Their untiring efforts did not remain fruitless. Thus on a rainy day on 4 or 5 June, 1935, the same people congregated and discussed the same topic at length. After a long and thorough deliberation the meeting acquiesced with a name- *Young Lushai Association* after the *Young Welsh Association*.<sup>3</sup> The name was coined by Rev. David Edward, a Presbyterian Missionary. However, in October 1948 the association was given a new nomenclature as *Young Mizo Association*.<sup>4</sup>

The Association was officially inaugurated by organising a social meeting at the Nepali School, Aizawl, on the evening of 15 June, 1935. To mark the occasion, some educated Mizos staged the "Bishop's Candle Stick". The meeting also held an election of the office-bearers of the Association for the year 1935-1936. The following were elected :

- (1) Rev. L. Evans, a missionary - President
- (2) Miss K. Hughes, a missionary - Vice President
- (3) Ch. Pasena and Vankhuma, laymen - General and Assistant Secretaries respectively
- (4) Rev. David Edwards, a missionary - Treasurer

The Young Mizo Association (YMA) pledges three objectives to its members, viz.

- (1) To make the leisure Profitable,
- (2) To seek progress for Mizoram,
- (3) To uphold and honour the practice of Christian virtues.

The Constitution of 1935 called *Dah Bu* elaborated the objectives as :

*YMA will create an atmosphere so that youths may fully utilize their leisure in a profitable way and so that they may live a life proper and healthy. Imitating Christian ways of living in every respect, it should be a Christian-like Association. It should mainly aim at showing a manner that of Christ. This*

*Association would organise debates, discussions and drama. It would encourage games like hockey, football, badminton etc. It would also inspire the members to have indoor games and books to read at home.*<sup>5</sup>

In 1963, the Constitution called *Dan Bu* which had been framed in 1935 was revised and necessary alterations made thus affecting among other things, the motto as provided for in 1935. But when it was re-revised in 1972, they restored it again.<sup>6</sup> It has become a standing motto of YMA till the present day.

### **Some of its features**

The YMA is a free Association in which every grown up Mizo is entitled to be a member by paying membership fee the amount of which may vary from time to time. There was no age-limit. After the revision of the Constitution in 1963 a compulsory-clause was inserted saying that at least 12 years should be the age to qualify for membership of the Association.<sup>7</sup> Since its inception, the YMA has its own Constitution which governs its members. Having headquarters at Aizawl and recently sub-headquarters at Lunglei, every village in Mizoram is free to have a branch or branches depending on the size of the population. The General Conference which is held every year is the highest decision-making body. The YMA is the first and largest organization in Mizoram.

### **Some of its aspects**

In order to understand the different aspects of the YMA the whole movement may be divided into two periods - the period from 1935 to 1948 in which YMA was regarded as having religious and political tinge, and the period from 1948 to the present day, in which the Association was free from the influences of any other organizations. Now the YMA can be safely taken to have three distinct aspects viz. the religious, political as well as social aspects. We may now examine these different aspects one by one.

### **The Religious Aspects**

As noted earlier, the founding fathers were all missionaries and their close associates, who were mainly drawn from the church workers and public figures. During the first few years the leaders of both the Church and the YMA were almost the same people. For this the influences of the church upon the YMA were inevitably strong. In its form and behaviour YMA had similarities with the Presbyterian church. As the motto had been clearly laid down, the founding leaders wished the association to go hand

in glove with the church. One deplorable fact was that to be one of the office-bearers, one must be a full church member. This was effective until the constitution was revised in 1950.<sup>8</sup> The Church seemed to have a soft-corner for the YMA by allowing it to incorporate supplementary news about it under the caption "appendix" called *Thubelh* in their monthly official organ called *Kristian Tlangau*. The *Kristian Tlangau* was first published in 1911 and the YMA got its *Thubelh* included in August 1935.<sup>9</sup> The inclusion further indicated that the two organizations had many things in common. However, the church authorities stopped the system in 1954 instantly<sup>10</sup> the reasons for which were not definitely known.

The YMA confined its activities within the purview of the Presbyterian Organization. As it appears in the 1937-38 programme, YMA set apart every Monday as *YMA Zan* meaning "YMA night" after the pattern of the Presbyterian Church's *Zan Inkhawm* meaning "Evening Service". On such occasions, they heard speeches and sometimes held group discussions on selected topics, and sometimes they organised debates." They could not however, go on like this pattern for a long period of time and gradually the practice became non-existent. During the period when these two organizations had close cooperations, there was a feeling of being at home and active participation in the organization for each other faith's because the association was too much dominated by the Presbyterians.

Cordial relations between the two organizations were weakened when the appendix called *Thubelh* was stopped. Further the mutual understanding became strained when the YMA increasingly intensified its secular character more than even before. Whatever the case may be, the underlying fact was that the Church had considerably loosened her hold over YMA ever since the formation of the Political Party in 1946.

### The Political Aspects

During the same period when YMA was influenced by the Church, the association was political in its outlook. Political consciousness which had been fomented and then suppressed since the third decade of the 20th Century was revived at the time when YMA came into being. Since political activity was prohibited by the British, the formation of YMA was a boon for the Mizo leaders who were always looking for a chance. Between 1935 and 1946 the leaders (the Mizos), being enlightened by then, turned

their social zeal into political resentment against the chiefs and their mentor - the British. This political zeal had thus prevented them to conceal their feelings towards the authorities. They, therefore, began to express their feeling.

A serious encounter between the authorities and the leaders first occurred in 1945 when YMA organised an informal meeting in which McDonald, the Superintendent, was also present. In this meeting the latter was informed straightway that the people now wanted a democratic system in Mizoram.<sup>12</sup>

A similar situation happened when a General Conference was held at Aizawl in March 1946. One of the items in the agenda was "how to deal with the 'Forest' in Mizoram"<sup>13</sup> by which term they meant the British. When the item was taken up for discussion, the chairman, a missionary, left the meeting instantly in protest against what he termed as "beyond the purview of the YMA".<sup>14</sup> The chairmanship was then resumed by Rev. Chhuhkhama only when the members agreed that they would never take up such item for discussion since YMA was a non-political body.

Another instance of the fact that the YMA was politically motivated was an occasion when *Chanchintha Dak* was started to be sent to the people in Chin Hills of Burma, through a joint effort of both the church and the YMA. The main consideration that urged the leaders of the YMA to participate in such a humble job was humanitarian in nature. During the Second World War the people in Chin Hills, who were ethnically akin to the Mizos, suffered from untold miseries. This came to the notice of both the church and YMA and consequently, the two parties held a joint sitting on 25 February 1946 at Sikulpui (Boy's M. E. School). The meeting decided to send "gospel mail" to Burma on two different routes. The motive on the part of the Church was to avail itself of the situation both to preach the goodnews to the people of Chin Hills and to spread the Mizo language outside Mizoram. The leaders of the YMA were very active because they wanted to see the Mizo language spread far and wide.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, they wanted to do some good work to show that they sympathised with them. According to R. Vanlawma, the then Secretary, the real motive, besides doing good deeds and showing a brotherly love towards them, was a political end : that of creating the idea of "Greater Mizoram".<sup>16</sup> Seeing that over 300 boxes had been delivered the Church then stopped the project when it detected a political motive behind the cause. "YMA, therefore", concludes R. Vanlawma, "is the beginning of political Party".<sup>17</sup>

## **The Social or Neutral Aspects**

The YMA was maintaining its neutrality as a social organization ever since 1949. Now the YMA has no reason to think otherwise when the political party was formed in 1946 and when all its ethnic aspirations were conceded to by giving the YLA a new name, that of YMA. Thus the YMA has successfully emerged as a strong and undisputed neutral organization after passing through critical and uncertain juncture and overcoming various problems. Now being the largest social organization in Mizoram, the YMA is striding forward without any political or religious tint doing what it ought to do and opposing what it considers harmful and detrimental to the healthy existence of the Mizo society.

### **Role of the YMA in transforming the Mizo society**

In order to understand the important role played by the YMA in changing the society, we may briefly give an account as follows :

During the first decade following its formation, the YMA did remarkable work for the society. The leaders of the YMA were all educated and because of this the programmes were all up to standard. During the first few years, the YMA gave more attention to the subjects like debates, group discussions and drama. This they did to broaden the outlook of the Mizos in general and to evolve more progressive ideas among its members in particular. Every Monday they organised group discussions and debates perhaps alternately and through this regular feature they learnt the art of public speech.

The next foremost step taken up by the YMA was in the field of public health and sanitation. It encouraged cleanliness and of helping their fellow-men, thus imbibing habits of mutual help and understanding. It taught its members how to keep utensils and their houses and the surroundings clean. Public sanitations were stressed by constructing public lavatories and pit-latrines at different places in Aizawl.

In the eyes of the people in general, the spirit of the so-called *Tlawngaihna* (chivalry) declined in the society. Attempts were made by the YMA to inculcate the spirit of *Tlawngaihna* which had been practised in the society before the English occupation in its true sense to all its members. Efforts were also made by the YMA to make all the members realise the real value of *Tlawngaihna* in the life of every citizen and to give up selfish ends in word and deed. It also stressed that every member should be a good and useful citizen by contributing the most through his own effort.

It urged all the members to work with dedication towards the preservation of the old good customs, practices and traditions of the Mizos which have relevance to their own time.

Attempts were also made to popularise the Mizo tobacco with a slogan that smoking Mizo tobacco was much cheaper than cigarettes. Songs were composed to make the people admire the local produce. One such popular song runs thus :

*Mizo Vaihlo hi zuk ching la,  
Tuber mai, aw Sangau, zurpui leh kauzing ;  
Sen a tlem a hrisel a, zoram thil a ni bawk a,  
Tul berah chuan Lengi zial tir ang che.*<sup>18</sup>

which means-

*Cultivate the habit of smoking Mizo tobacco,  
The sweetest being Sangau, Zurpui and kauzing brands ;  
It's economical, harmless, and besides it's Zoram origin  
But for the sweetest flavour, ask your fiance to roll it.*

The effect of the drive was so significant that in 1936-37 no cigarettes and *bidi* were available at Aizawl.

The most remarkable work done by the YMA was *Chan-chintha Dak* meaning "a good-will mission or Gospel mail". In this *Dak*, they collected books, hymn books, text-books and old as well as new cloths etc. These collections were sent in boxes to Chin Hills. As the boxes had to be carried all the way long by men, so it caused many villages to be involved in it.

In 1944 the present Government High School was established after an active and full sacrifice on the part of the YMA. They mobilised public opinions so that they might contribute donations generously. The response was so significant that the YMA collected Rs. 25,453/- for the initial starting of the school.<sup>21</sup>

The branches of the YMA were not left behind in the field of social transformation in the village level. There were many contemporary branches in the villages which were also set up in 1935.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, it is no wonder that developments had reached through Christianity into the far flung areas almost half a century before. However, their ideas and activities had a limit because their environmental influences played a big role.

Even in the village level, the activities of the YMA covered a wide range. Every village did not have the same pattern in introducing changes but the areas and nature of operations were more or less similar in every respect. In some villages the branch-YMA devoted their services towards repairing and clearing jhum-road and village spring. In the same manner they cleaned the vil-

age and its surroundings. YMA also extended help to the poor and the needy in a village. They built the houses of poor widows and weeded her jhum if the need arose.

In some villages YMA possessed properties like scissors, iron (*istiri*), pot, cups, enema-pump etc. for public purposes. Sometimes they charged fee for use, but the case might be different in different villages. The system is still kept up elsewhere.

They also paid attentions to public health and sanitation. One common feature in the task of uplifting the social life of the people in the villages in the early years was to offer a mark of respect and honour to any "service-men" who hailed from the village. The same honour was done to students and Government employees.

After 1940 there was a better cooperation and mutual understanding between the Central and the branches when the latter started joining the former.<sup>23</sup> In doing this, they became closer.

In 1948 Central YMA organised a "song-composing competition" with the object of getting more songs in vernacular and to popularise them. The prize-winning song is the most common song among the Mizos until today.<sup>24</sup>

The General Conference held in 1951 resolved to make an appeal to all its branches to necessarily observe one day in a year as *thil tha tih ni* meaning "day of self-sacrifice". Every branch was instructed to work for an individual person or the general public. The next year the Central YMA again issued public appeal to all the branches not to organise any games on Sunday. While the YMA was doing good works for the society some unhealthy trends were also in the limelight. Members who indulged in such unhealthy games like Gambling were liable to be punished by losing his membership.<sup>25</sup>

When *Mautam* (famine) broke out in 1959 the sufferings of the people knew no bounds. In response to a request put forth by the *Zoram Famine Relief Committee* the General Conference in 1959 appealed to all the branches to sacrifice all it could in relieving the famine-stricken people. The response was positive.

It has been stated that the YMA is the largest organization in Mizoram. It now plays a leading role in effecting changes and reforms in the growing society. A few concrete examples may be cited here in order to know how powerful the YMA is in the society. The General Conference held at Serchhip in 1980 passed a resolution to the effect that whenever a death occurred a black flag be flown to indicate the event and in the same manner a white flag on a happy occasion like marriage.<sup>27</sup> The impact of the YMA



on the life of the society is that this has been a practice over the whole of Mizoram.

In fact, the branches are more effective and instrumental in their respective localities in this regard. The welfare of the people in the locality rests in the hands of the branch-YMA. It can exercise its power even to the extent of controlling *zu* (local rice-beer) in the village. It can take action against an individual for his anti-social activities.

#### Abbreviations used

AR	- Aizawl Record Room
CYMA	- Central YMA
YLA	- Young Lushai Association
YMA	- Young Mizo Association

#### References

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3. Hrangiaia, "Kum 1935" (The year 1935) *YMA Thanchinbu* (Magazine), 1982, p. 3.
4. *Kristian Tlangau*, January 1947, "Thubelh" (Supplement) p. 2.
5. *YMA Dan Bu* 1935, Article 2.
6. C. Lalropuia, *Y. M. A. Chanchin* (History of YMA) CYMA, Mizoram, Aizawl, 1985, pp. 27 & 30.
7. *YMA Dan Bu* 1963. 8. *YMA Dan Bu* 1950, Article 1:6
9. C. Lalropuia, *op. cit.* p. 2.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, p. 5
12. R. Vanlawma, *Ka Ram Leh Kei* (My Country and I) Zalen Printing House, Aizawl, 1972, p. 84.
13. Chaltuahkhuma, *Political History of Mizoram*, B. Press, Aizawl, 1981, p. 23.
14. *Ibid.*
15. C. Lalropuia, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
16. R. Vanlawma, *op. cit.*, p. 81.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
18. C. Lalropuia, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
19. The song was composed by Vankhama in 1935.
20. Hrangiaia, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
21. C. Lalropuia, *op. cit.* p. 8.
22. *YMA Thirna*, 1965, Statistic S. No. 53, 59, 61, 64, 76, 169.
23. C. Lalropuia, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
24. *Kristian Tlangau Thubelh*, November 1948, p. 8.
25. *CYMA Pamphlet*, dated 27. 5. 1952.
26. *YMA Executive resolution* No. 2 of 28.8.1955.
27. General Conference Resolution No. 8 of 1980.