

Modernisation of Mizoram

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Mizoram is a Union territory situated in the South eastern fringe of the eastern frontier of India. The territory is the proud sentinel to the defence of India in the international borders with two foreign countries - Burma in the east and Bangladesh in the west.

The Union territory of Mizoram - hilly terrain in the eastern part of India, covers 21,087 Sq. kilometres inhabited by a population of 3,22,390 according to the 1971 census. The hills of the territory are steep and separated by numerous hilly streams. It is divided into three districts, viz., Aizawl, Lunglei and Chhimituipui.

The Mizo people have been known under different names. The nomenclature of the word 'Kuki' was given to them by the neighbouring people. Mizoram has three types of population. The majority belongs to the tribes like Lusei, Hmar, Fanais, Tlanglans, Pangs, Pakis and Lakhers, who came to the area from the east and the north. There are other tribes like Reangs and Chakmas, who came from Tripura and Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Aizawl, the capital, is a sleepy hill top town commanding a majestic landscape. The town is connected with Silchar in Assam by a 145 Km road, which passes through countless bends and curves.

The Mizos are believed to have migrated from North-west China and spread over Burma, Assam and south-wards towards the Sea. In the 18th and in the beginning of the 19th century they settled in the hills to the north of the Surma Valley. They live in villages, each of which is ruled by a Chief, who is entirely independent. The chief is Supreme and he settles all disputes. He decides where the village is to cultivate and when and where it shall be moved. His house is the poor house of the community, and orphans and poor persons live there and get food in return for labour. The other

officials are the councillors, the blacksmith and the sorcemen.

The inhabitants of the hills are divided up into a number of families or clans. These clans are distinguished from one another by differences in sacrificial ritual and in some cases by differences in dialect. The principal subdivisions are the Luseis, who supply chiefs to nearly every village in the hills, the poor immigrants from the Chin Hills; the Hmar or tribes who have come from Manipur; and the Palte, Paithe, Thado and Lakher.

Prior to the advent of the British, the Mizos were accustomed to make periodical descents upon the plains; and in 1849 four separate raids were committed, one of them on a village within 10 miles of Silchar, in which 29 of the inhabitants were killed and 42 taken captive. These outrages were followed by an expedition led into the hills by Colonel Lister who in 1850 surprised and destroyed the village of Mullah, one of the chiefs concerned in the raid. This demonstration kept the Mizos quiet for some years; but in 1862 they broke out afresh, and the diplomatic efforts that followed had little practical effect. In the cold season of 1868-69 raids were made on Manipur and Sylhet and the Noarband and Maniarkhal tea factories in Cachar were burnt and plundered. In January 1871, another determined raid was made down the Hailakandi valley. The village of Ainakhal was burnt and 25 persons killed, the Alexandarpur tea factory was destroyed, a tea-planter - Mr. Winchester - murdered and attacks were made upon four other tea gardens with varying success. Raids were also made on Hill Tippera. Such violent and ferocious activities were followed by vigorous measures of repression, and in the cold season of 1871-72 two British columns were sent into the hills, one from Chittagong, the other from Cachar. This expedition was completely successful, and the peace of the Assam frontier remained undisturbed for the next 20 years.

In 1888 two serious raids were committed in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. In one the attacking party killed Lieutenant Stewart and two Corporals of his regiment; in the other they cut up the inhabitants of a village located only 8 miles from Demagfri. In 1889, Lianphuiga, a Mizo Chief devastated the Chengri valley on the Chittagong frontier. All these prompted British action and columns were despatched into the hills from Silchar and Chittagong during the following cold season. The captives were surrendered and the offending village

burnt ; but the British Government had realised that the only effective method of protecting this frontier was to establish fortified posts in the hills themselves. Stockades were accordingly erected at Fort Tregar in the South Mizo Hills and at Aizawl and Changsil in Northern Mizo Hills. A political officer Captain Browne, was stationed in the Northern Hills. In September 1890, the Mizos attacked the two stockades, and killed captain Browne and Lieutenant Swinton, the Officer-in-Command. Active operations were then commenced and within two months Aizawl and Changsil were brought under British control. In April, 1891 the South Mizo Hills which was under the control of an Assistant Political Officer under the Commissioner of Chittagong were formed into a District and placed under a Superintendent.

In 1892, Mr. Mc Cabe, the Political Officer of North Mizo Hills, was attacked by a party of the Mizos. Captain Shakespear, the Superintendent of the South Mizo Hills, heard of the attack on Mr. Mc Cabe and marched northwards to his assistance. But the Mizos made constant attacks on the army camps, attempted Lunglei, threatened Demagiri, cut the telegraph wires and spread themselves over the line of communications. Captain Shakespear was reinforced by a column despatched from Burma, and the combined forces checked the Mizo attacks. At the end of the year in 1892, a punitive expedition was sent to the Mizo Hills, which was re-inforced with a column sent from Aizawl. All these military actions ultimately succeeded in bringing the rebellious Mizo villagers under control and in 1898 both the North and the South Mizo were combined together and brought under Assam Administration as a District.

On April 1, 1898 the British Government notified retention of the existing system. Under these rules the administration of the Mizo Hills was vested in the Chief Commissioner of Assam, the Superintendent of the Mizo Hills, his assistants and in the Chiefs and the headmen of the villages. The chiefs were held responsible for the behaviour of their people and the Superintendent and his assistants were to uphold the authority of the Chiefs to the best of their ability.

Circle System

In 1901 Circle System was introduced in the Mizo Hills District to exercise more control over the Chiefs and strengthen

ning the administration's grip on the territory. The whole district was divided into 18 circles, 12 in Aizawl subdivision and 6 in Lunglei subdivision. Each circle was placed under the charge of a circle interpreter (CI), who with a chaprasi (Peon) lived at some central spot within his circle. All orders of the Superintendent would be transmitted through the interpreters and they were held responsible for carrying out of the orders by the chiefs and the people. They would send fortnightly reports of all events occurring within their circles and would report regularly on the state of the crops. In each village a man was selected by the chief as the village writer. He was exempted from paying house tax and from doing compulsory work, like work on the construction of village paths. Lists of houses in the villages were prepared by the writers and checked by the circle interpreters and the touring officers. The interpreters were the channels of communication between the chiefs and the people on the one hand and the Superintendent and the Subdivisional Officer on the other, and it was envisaged that in course of time they could be given petty executive powers. This was modified in 1907 when administration started direct dealing with the chiefs.

Inner Line

Inner line was an imaginary line. This demarcated the boundaries between the plain districts of Assam and the neighbouring hill areas inhabited by the independent tribes. Under section 2 of the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873, a regulation framed for the peace and government of eastern districts on the eastern frontier of Bengal and the Governor-General in Council notified the "Inner Line" on the southern frontier of the Cachar District. Under the provisions of the above section the government prohibited all British subjects from going beyond the 'Inner Line' without a pass from the Deputy Commissioner of Cachar. The restrictions on the entry of the outsiders inside the Mizo Hills were reinforced by invoking the Chin Hills Regulations of 1896. This is in force even today in the Union territory of Mizoram.

Non-Regulated System

The administration of the Mizo Hills was based on the non-regulated system. This system envisages emergence of a very powerful single authority who could combine in himself

the powers of a Collector, a Magistrate and a Judge. This system had the wholesome effect of bringing the authorities well within the reach of people.

Government of India Act, 1919

Under the government of India Act, 1919, the Governor-General in Council, with the previous sanction of the Secretary of State in Council, could declare any territory in British India to be a 'Backward Tract'. On January 3, 1921, the Governor-General in Council declared the Mizo Hills as 'backward tracts.'

The Mizo Hills as Excluded Area

Excluded areas were the tracts where any advanced form of Government was not a possibility because of the backwardness of the area. These areas would be administered by the Governor himself. The Mizo Hills became an Excluded Area and were excluded from the Government of India Act of 1935 which gave Federal Status to India. There was no major development, political or administrative, after 1935. In 1940, the Mizos aspired for something better. They did not like to be labelled for ever as a backward people. At the same time, they would not like to be swamped by the people from the plains. In 1942 the then British Superintendent McCall convened a conference of the chiefs and requested them to join in a total defence scheme against the Japanese. The scheme involved guerilla hostilities, abandoning villages, denying food and water to the invaders, blowing up communications and collection of information. The chiefs agreed to act according to the scheme. The people of every village arranged hide-outs inside thick jungles to which they could withdraw when the enemy came into their areas. Secret stores of food were built up. Young men were trained in preparation of ambushes and blockades. McCall was recalled in 1943 and in his place Mr. Macdonald was appointed as British Superintendent. Macdonald had fully organised the Mizos for defence against the advancing Japanese. The posters and wartime slogans spoke about Imperialism, Aggression and Independence. The Mizos became fully aware of international names like those of Churchill, Hitler and Stalin. They also became familiar with names like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas

Bose who were fighting a battle for the Indian Independence. The political events brought about a keen desire amongst the educated Mizo youth to organise themselves into a political party. This became urgent as at the end of the war they heard rumours that the white man was expected to leave the country and hand over the area to the Indians themselves. The educated Mizo youth did not want the British to leave in the first instance. They also did not desire the power to be handed over to the Mizo chiefs.

The newly educated Mizos were slowly turning against the chiefs who used to rule the villages with an iron hand. The chiefs were opposed to all Christian teachings as these interfered with the traditional Mizo life. Christianity however was fast gaining ground amongst the people and the converts were equally intent upon filling up the gap, should the British leave the country. The Mizos then had no concept of the Indian Nation. They were thinking only of their own fate. The then British Superintendent, Mr. Macdonald, was reported to have blessed the creation of the Mizo Union, the first political party in the district, which took its birth at the end of the Second World War. Mr. Pachhunga was elected as the first President of the party. When the Indian Independence came in 1947, the Mizo Union was told about it. The fate of Mizo Hills was tied with Assam since the district was a part of the province. Assam provided links with rest of the country. The term 'excluded area' attached to the Mizo district was in a different context. The 1935 constitution had called certain tribal areas of India as excluded areas, so that no local self-government was given to them. The British were interested in keeping the areas away from the popular rule and directly under the governors or their political agents. The term excluded areas did not mean that the areas were outside India.

The Mizo Union, however, decided to remain a part of Assam and sent its assent to the Governor of Assam. The Union was also affiliated to the Indian National Congress. This decision of the Mizo Union to remain within India did bring out another political party which called itself United Mizo Freedom Organisation. The party was backed by Mizo chiefs who were hostile to the Mizo Union. This Party under Sri Lalawia, who later became a parliamentary secretary in the Assam Government, then demanded the merging of the Mizo Hills with Burma. While the Mizo Union flourished and

took power in the shape of heading the newly created District Council, UMFO, under Sri Lalmawia later joined the Eastern India Tribal Union which was born in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills.

The Bordoloi Sub-Committee

A Sub-Committee of the Constituent Assembly, the Bordoloi Sub-Committee, carefully studied the administrative set up in these areas, particularly in the perspective of conservation of the tribal way of life and at the same time making it possible for the tribal people to participate fully in the political life and the administration of the State, along with the rest of the people of the State. The Sub-Committee recommended a set-up for the administration of the hill areas, based on the concept of regional autonomy in all matters affecting their customs, laws of inheritance, administration of justice, land, forest, etc. Under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, the Mizo Hills was made an autonomous hill district. There was to be a District Council consisting of not more than 24 members, of whom not less than three-fourths should be elected on the basis of adult suffrage.

District Council

With the coming up of the District Council, the post of the high powered Superintendent was abolished. The area was put under a Deputy Commissioner with much curtailed powers. The different departments under him were decentralised. Shillong and New Delhi came more and more into picture in relation to the Deputy Commissioner and the Chief Executive Members of the District Council. The office of the chief was abolished by the newly created district council. The chiefs were compensated in cash for the loss of their tributes and powers. Since the voice of the people was very strong the chiefs had no choice but to accept their fate calmly and take whatever compensation was calculated and given to them.

Till the early sixties, the Eastern India Tribal Union and Mizo Union were the only two main political parties in the district. The EITU stood for a separate hill state, composed of the hill districts of Assam. The MU was busy with local administration and local problems. Their representative in the Assam Assembly, Sri A. Thanglura, was a member of the Assam Government as Chief Parliamentary Secretary. Later, the EITU also

joined the Chaliha Cabinet in 1957. Sri Lalmawia was made a Parliamentary Secretary. All went well with the district till 1959, when the area was gripped by a severe famine following the flowering of the bamboos. The same year some Mizos, which included Sri John F. Manliana, formed a Mizo Cultural Society. The society suddenly converted itself into a 'Mautam Front' or famine front. The society organised demonstrations, Processions and meetings during the visits of the Chief Minister of Assam, Sri B. P. Chaliha and Tribal areas Minister, Captain Williamson Sangma. The front asked for food for Mizo Hills. During this period, a gentleman known as Sri Laldenga, who worked in the District Council in the humble capacity of an Assistant, gained plenty of prominence. He was found to be a good speaker who could sway the people with his emotions and tears. The Mizo Famine Front also brought out a daily paper called 'Mizo Aw' (Mizo Voice). It was edited by Sri Laldenga. He also became the President of the Front. The Front turned itself into Mizo National Front on the 12th October, 1962. The same year the Front tried its luck at the elections to the District Council. Laldenga, John Manliana and Vanlawma of the front failed to unseat their MU opponents.

In 1960, the Assam Assembly adopted the Assam Language Bill which was not accepted either by EITU or MU. In spite of the fact that the Bill safeguarded the tribal languages at district levels, the provisions were opposed by the political parties in the tribal areas. The parties which had participated in the Chaliha Cabinet withdraw their members. The year also saw the birth of the All Party Hill Leaders Conference at Shillong. The constituent members asked for separation from Assam. During this interval, the Mizo National Front was consolidating its position. Laldenga visited the entire Mizo Hills to get support for his demand of independence for Mizo Hills. He also twisted the meaning of the words 'excluded area' attached to the district in the British days. He challenged the right of the framers of the Indian Constitution to alter the 'excluded area' status of the district. To put his plans into action, he caught hold of some Mizo youngmen and ex-service personnel in the district.

By 1963, Laldenga had gathered enough force to fight the MU in bye elections. In 1963 two independent nominees namely John F. Manliana and Lalmawia (of Lunglei, not to

be confused with Lalmawia of EITU) defeated the MU candidate Saprawnga and Bawichhuka. Lunglei and Aizawl West seats were thus taken by the MNF out of the three seats in the Assam Assembly. The third seat was still occupied by Sri R. Thanhlira who did not vacate it as demanded by the All Party Hill Leaders Conference, of which he was a member. This seat also fell vacant following Sri Thanhlira's appointment as a Member of the Assam Public Service Commission. The MNF contested it again. Rosanga of Sairang road lost it to Chhunga of the Mizo Union. The Mizo Hills District thus passed into a political confusion with the MNF holding two seats in Assam Assembly and the MU holding full power at the district level. Laldenga's group contested the village council seats also. However, a majority was obtained by MU with the Indian National Congress getting a few villages. On the basis of election results and the party's popularity, the MNF demanded the dissolution of the District Council. He and his group soon found out that in a democracy duly elected bodies could not be dissolved by the government in a despotic manner. Laldenga took another extreme step. While he openly declared that his movement was non-violent in nature and opposed to the cult of violence as proposed by the dissident Mizo leader Vanlawma (who had founded another party called Mizo National Council with a few volunteers), he took secret steps to get into touch with the intelligence department of East Pakistan (present Bangladesh). In the early part of December, 1963 he with his Vice-President, Lalnunmawia and Sainghaka, a Central Government employee of the Accountant General, Assam, crossed over to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) for talks with the Pakistan agents. Sainghaka had arranged contacts through the Assistant High Commissioner of Pakistan at Shillong. The Pak agents gave him the necessary help. He was given hard cash for propaganda, and all the promises for training his volunteers to revolt against India. It suited the Pak agents to harass India on her borders. While returning from East Pakistan (Bangladesh) Laldenga and Lalnunmawia were arrested by the police who got wind of their visit. Sainghaka eluded arrest by hiding in the forests. Laldenga and Lalnunmawia were lodged in the jail at Silchar in the Cachar District. Following the arrest of Laldenga and Lalnunmawia, a high powered delegation of the MNF met the Chief Minister of Assam for their release. This followed a written petition

by Laldenga and Lalnunmawia for their parole so that they could meet the Assam Government officials and explain their visit to Pakistan. The parole, as permitted by the Defence of India rules was granted. Laldenga and Lalnunmawia admitted that they had crossed over the border to meet some Mizo citizens who were citizens of Pakistan. In a letter they explained their activities. They also promised that they would confine their legitimate political activities within the constitutional limits. Laldenga also verbally explained to the government officials that independence was his goal, but it was a slogan with the hope that some political power would be given to the district. He gave very conflicting statements about his behaviour. He, however, clearly said that he was a loyal Indian and sorry for the technical violation of the border. No one imagined that a political leader of his status who was widely respected in his area was concealing the truth. He later explained to his Mizo friends that he had written the letter in question to hoodwink the government. He said that he stood by his earlier declarations of independence for the area. He always sang different songs - one of loyalty to India and the other of the revolt. The MNF outfit lay low for a couple of months, but went ahead with its preparation for revolt. Laldenga was raising battalions after battalions of his volunteers. He also devised a blue uniform for his men. He then started sending out batches of young Mizo volunteers to East Pakistan (Bangladesh) for training in arms. The batches went out and came back in great secrecy. However, the news leaked out that the MNF was preparing for an armed struggle. Laldenga was told frankly by the Chief Minister of Assam that if he started any trouble he and his movement would be crushed with a severe hand.

Laldenga kept on expressing his innocence and blamed his hot headed youngmen for trying to indulge in violent activities. During the later part of 1935, Laldenga was quite scared of the monster to which he had given birth. His efforts to slow it down were of no avail. During the Indo-Pak fighting of 1965 he was under a great pressure from his volunteers to start the trouble in Mizo Hills. He held his hand back as he said he was not fully prepared. Meanwhile, the government was also preparing to face the situation. The Mizo areas were being searched for arms from Pakistan. The units of Assam Rifles were chasing the people who were hiding arms.

Laldenga then perhaps realised that the game could not be concealed for long. He formed his own shadow government and styled it 'Mizoram Sorkar'. Following office bearers were secretly announced :

President	:	Laldenga
Vice-President	:	Lalnunmawia
Finance Secretary	:	Lalkhawliana
Defence Secretary	:	R. Zamawia
Home Secretary	:	Sainghaka

Other members like Lianzuala and Ngura were also given some 'government' posts. John F. Manliana was later made 'Chief Justice' of Mizo Hills. In December 1965, and January 1966, the MNF had organised a massive fund collecting drive. Contributions were taken by force from the people. The MNF volunteers went about the towns and villages to collect money for the party. The MNF even hired a costly house in Aizawl town and established its headquarters there. The party had the complete set-up of a modern office.

January 1966, revealed the first real clue to the aggressive nature of the party. An MNF office bearer from Lunglei known as Laimana was assassinated near Aizawl town. Automatic weapons were used to kill him. He was dubbed as a secret agent of the Assam Government. He was accused of passing on information about MNF arms to the local police officials. He was, however, given a grand funeral. Laldenga in his funeral speech regretted the murder of Laimana. He said that Laimana was an MNF agent who was responsible for giving them information about the activities of the government. No one really knows the truth about the murder of Laimana for the dead tell no tales.

The month of February 1966, was full of hectic activities by the MNF. The inner circle of the party had decided to start the disturbances. The government offered them no excuse to start the trouble. At last the proposed movement of a battalion of Assam Rifles to the Mizo Hills, which was originally raised for the area but was diverted somewhere else, provided the MNF with the necessary excuse. The MNF spread out wild rumours that the battalion was being sent to the District to smash the party. But as the events later proved it was a grand pretence.

Two days before the trouble started, the MNF representative in the Assam Assembly John F. Manliana, was recalled

by Laldengak to Mizo Hills. The attack on the Aijawl treasury began at midnight on 28th February 1966. Simultaneously the Lunglei treasury and the outposts at Demagiri Champhai and Kolasib were attacked. The SDO of Lunglei together with some officials, were captured by the MNF volunteers. Demagiri fell too. Champhai went the way of Lunglei. The Assam Rifles at Aizawl held out. Within hours of the armed revolt by the MNF, the Indian troops were on their way to relieve the Assam Rifles at Aijawl. Within a few days time the MNF was driven to the jungle. The trouble in Mizo Hills is next confined to guerrilla fighting. Many Mizos suspected by the MNF to be connected with the government have been shot. John F. Manliana surrendered to the government on 31st December 1966 at Momchera together with his three body guards and a Senthal captive. He had been granted amnesty by the government. Sainghaka, the so called Home Minister of the 'Mizoram Government', was captured a few months later from a hideout near Aizawl. Many other MNF leaders have either been killed in action or are behind bars. The party has been declared illegal.

H. V. Pataskar as Chairman of a Commission visited Mizo Hills. He suggested that the Mizo Hills should be taken over by the Union Government as a centrally administered area. The Commission could not, within the term of reference, deal with the political and the other important aspects of the situation. But on the grounds of geographical location, political and economic aspirations, ethnic affinity, international border and the fact of the neighbouring areas of Tripura and Manipur being Union Territories, it was reported that Pataskar favoured the idea of converting the district into a Union Territory.

There was a temporary July in 1968 and the major part of 1969. But towards the end of 1969 about 150 to 200 armed Mizo rebels entered Mizo district from the Chitagong Hills Tracts. These armed people in groups of three to five persons infiltrated deep into the interiors with light arms and sleeping bags. Their presence increased the anxiety of the administration which was facing the problem of acute food scarcity in the district. There were incidents of clashes between them and the security forces. One Major of the Indian Army and six other armymen were killed in Marpara area in the border of the Mizo Hills with East Pakistan (Bangladesh) on the night of February 16, 1970 in an ambush by the armed

gangs. It was reported that the Mizo the Naga and the Kuki insurgents camping in East Pakistan (Bangladesh), were being reared up by China as a joint military command to aid extremist movement in North-Eastern India. Their number was estimated at 1,500. The insurgents took up a programme of intensified guerilla activities. On July 2 1970 a large number of armed Mizos crossed from East Pakistan (Bangladesh) into three border villages of Tripura and opened heavy mortar and machinegun fire as a result of which three persons died, seven were injured and the central Reserve Police Camp was damaged. They were believed to have crossed from the Sajrange where Pakistan was maintaining a large number of training camps for them.

There were reports of hostile activities by small batches of rebels who infiltrated into Mizo District. In a mopping up operation by the security forces in August 1970 six rebels were killed and 31 others were captured. The documents seized from the captured hostiles revealed that they had returned with specific instructions from the Pakistan authorities to sabotage road communications, blow up bridges, ambush army convoys and stimulate the moribund secessionist movement with the help of the leaders of the out-lawed Mizo National Front. Two explosives were recovered from the premises of the Deputy Commissioner's bungalow at Aizawl. Timely detection prevented a serious explosion. As a large number of people turned up to celebrate the Independence Day at Aizawl an explosion took place in a nullah (drain). Another explosion took place near the bungalow of the Assistant Deputy Commissioner at Saiha. All these incidents revived the hostile atmosphere throughout the whole district. During the Christmas of 1970 Mahendra Mohan Choudhury, Chief Minister of Assam visited Aizawl and expressed the State Government's keen desire to accelerate economic development of the district.

In 1971 by an amendment to the constitution (The Constitution's 27th Amendment Act, 1971) The Mizo Hills was declared a Union Territory.

The formation of Mizoram Union Territory is due to various factors, ethnic, geographical and cultural. The Lushai Hills was historically not a part of the Ahom kingdom. For administrative convenience the Lushai Hills was attached to Assam in 1898. At that time ethnic factor was not considered. The British were anxious to administer the conquered terri-

tories as cheaply as possible. They were more concerned with the maintenance of their authority but with the progress of time the divisive forces asserted themselves. The result is the formation of Union Territory and modernisation of Mizoram.

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