

Role of Missionaries in Mizoram Education

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The subjugation of the Lushais and the occupation of their land by the British in 1890 was only the fulfilment of their imperial interests in that direction. But the Lushai hills being hilly without much economic potentiality the British administrators kept themselves confined to the maintenance of law and order by putting a stop to head-hunting, inter-tribe and inter-village feuds and warfare and other primitive and revolting practices. In so far as other social systems were concerned the Government followed a policy of non-inteference and allowed the chiefs to continue their rule over their small territories under the British authority.

But very soon the old ways began to change shaking the foundation of Mizo society. It all started with the entry of the Missionary into Mizoram in March 1891 when the Rev. William Williams of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists' Foreign Mission in the Khasi Hills made his first missionary visit to Aizawl. Although allowed to stay only for a month he still preached the Gospel to the Mizos through a Khasi interpreter. He was convinced that Mizoram was a very prospective field for missionary activities and made appeals to the Christian missions to adopt it as a mission field. Three years after in 1894 the Arthington Foreign Mission founded by Arthington deputed two pioneer missionaries, J. H. Lorrain and F. W. Savidge to Mizoram. They arrived at Aizawl on 11th January 1894 the date which is still remembered in Mizoram as the beginning of the Gospel there. By their hard work and indefatigable zeal they preached in spite of many odds, including the problem of communication with the outside world. They soon learned from their experience that conversion through the medium of a foreign tongue was the most difficult job. They, therefore, devised systems to reduce the Mizo language to writing by using the Roman script, translated a hymn, Luke, John and Acts of the *Bible* and even started a school. They also wrote A Grammar and Dictionary of the Lushai Language, which later on became the foundation of education in Mizoram. ¹

In 1897, came Rev. D. E. Jones of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists Foreign Mission and worked together with the two pioneers for a few months before the latter left for England in December 1897. Jones followed the footsteps of Lorrain and Savidge by re-opening the school started by them. He was joined

by Edwin Rowlands, an experienced teacher, who took over the charge of education to his care. This is how education began in Mizoram under the care of the Missions and since then remained under them throughout British period.

Later on, the missionaries divided Mizoram, for speedy evangelical works, into two halves - the North and the South. The former was assigned to the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists' Foreign Mission and the latter to the London Baptist Missionary Society. Accordingly, D. E. Jones and Edwin Rowlands settled at Aizawl, and Savidge and Lorrain, after their return from England in 1903, settled at Serkawn near Lunglei, and began their religious work side by side with education. This they did in close cooperation and mutual understanding.

The main Educational objectives of the Missions can be summed up as follows : In aim and plan, the great thing before the Mission has been evangelization. To them the Gospel alone could restore the ruined tribal society. In order to properly communicate the Gospel, they felt the necessity that preaching must be followed by their understanding of the Bible. Hence arose the absolute necessity of giving education to the Mizos. In this way, in Mizoram, education became the handmaid of religion. The Missions began their school-work as soon as they could find any convert in a village. They also engaged Mizo teacher-evangelists in their works. In order to free their mind from the age-old beliefs and practices, they tried to promote ideas of liberalism, democracy and freedom not only among men but also among Mizo women. Soon the Missions' efforts bore fruits. Along with conversion of the Mizos to Christianity, the number of schools increased and education began to spread to the villages.

Till 1903, however, the Government was wholly indifferent towards the education of the Mizos, and for that matter, towards the educational activities of the Missions. It was only in that year that the Government began to encourage the educational efforts of the Missionaries by the sanction of grant-in-aid to schools opened by the Missions, exemption from *Kuli* (forced labour) of those Mizos who passed Class-IV standard, grant of scholarships to brilliant students and issue of free rations, at first to the sons of the chiefs and afterwards to others who could not afford to support themselves.² In 1904, the Government also handed over the military children's school established in 1893 and gave the whole educational administration to the Missions with effect from 1st April, 1904 by appointing Rev. Edwin Rowlands, as the first Honorary

Inspector of Schools, for the whole Mizoram,³ and later on, Rev. Savidge, Honorary Inspector of Schools to take the charge of the South separately.

In March 1903, the Government accorded sanction, for the first time, for the award of 8 Lower Primary Scholarships annually of the value of Rs. 3/- per month tenable for two years on condition that the scholars should teach for one year after the expiry of their scholarships. The number of scholarships as well as the amount remained unchanged upto 1947. The only change was the extension of tenure from 2 years to 3 years in 1930-31 and the abolition of compulsory teachership for the scholarship holders.⁴ However, in 1915, ten special Lakher Primary Scholarship were introduced. In the sphere of the secondary education, special Middle Scholarships of Rs. 10/- per month tenable in the Government High School, Shillong were introduced in 1907. In 1909, the number was raised to 10 but again reduced to 7 in 1934 upto the end of the British rule.

In addition, from 1903, the Missions also received recurring grants, building grants, grants for the teachers' pay and for the education of Mizo chiefs' sons. But the amount of grants was rather small, about Rs. 14,590/- annually between 1910 and 1920, and Rs. 15,740/- annually after 1920 till India's Independence. The cost incurred by the Government on the education of the Mizos had thus never exceeded 16 paise per head of population per year.

The Education in Mizoram, thus, left in the hands of the missionaries which included general administration, inspection, managements, appointment of teachers, curriculum-setting and examinations, etc. The Government only made grants and offered scholarships. This policy of the Government followed in Mizoram was not fully consistent with the policy followed in other parts of India.

In India, Education was under the administrative control of the Home Department of the Government of India till 1910. In that year, it was transferred to a separate Department of Education under one of the members of the Viceroy's Council with an annual grant from the Imperial Council.⁵ In view of the rising tide of nationalism, the Government of India Act, 1919 made education a 'transferred subject'. Consequently, since January 1921, education had been entrusted to the hands of Indian ministers responsible to the local legislatures. Despite this change, the Government of India continued to give general directions regarding the policy to be followed.⁶ The British Government adopted religious neutrality as the fundamental principle of their rule and therefore

scrupulously forbade any form of religious teaching, direct or indirect, in schools and colleges which had received financial support from the Government.⁷

On 6 January, 1921, the Governor-General-in-Council, under Section 52 of the Government of India Act, 1919, declared the Lushai Hills as a backward tract.⁸ Later on, by the Section 92 of the Government of India Act, 1935, it became an Excluded Area. Whereas in other parts of India, education became a transferred subject under the responsibilities of Ministers, Mizoram being an Excluded Area, education remained in the hands of the missionaries. The Missions were also recognized as the primary agency for the spread of education among the Mizos till Independence. Even in other hill areas of Assam the position was somewhat different. In the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the Welsh Mission had been looking after education till 1930, in which year the Mission gradually started handing over some of their schools to the Government. In the Garo Hills, there were only Mission schools till 1902 but from that year, the Government started schools and this system of having two types of schools continued.⁹ In the Naga Hills, the Missionaries operated all the village schools till 1907. But in that year the Government of India took them under their own charge.

As a result of the policy followed by the Government in Mizoram education went hand in hand with Christianity, and the progress of Christianity was accompanied by an increasing degree of education. Since the mission education provided essentially Christian instruction and access to Christian scripture, the missionaries had been trying to convert the Mizos into Christianity since their advent.

The education introduced by the Missionaries in the hills also had its own limitations. As the bulk of the funds for the education of the Mizos had been offered by the Missions, it was only natural that the school teachers had been selected with due regard to their standing with the Mizo church. As a result, the selection of teachers had always been based on theological background. The Mizo students thus remained basically under theological teachers till the end of the middle standards during the missionary period. Consequently, the Mizo students in general did not have solid ground in mathematics and science which had been the hall-marks of modern outlook till recent years. Those students who were able to take the matriculation course at a high School and above outside Mizoram had the opportunity to find a different system.

The *Duhlian* dialect known to all the sub-tribes of Mizoram was standardised by the missionaries in 1894 and it became the medium of instruction except in the Middle English School where English was used. Since then it has been enriched and refined with the incorporation of foreign words such as 'calendars', 'school', 'pencil', 'chabi', 'pak', 'telephone' etc etc. from English, Hindi or other languages. With the advance of time many more foreign words have been borrowed and used as their own. This language is known as the *Mizo tawng*, or the language of the Mizos. All this has brought greater unity and understanding among them.

The missionaries were also the pioneers in female education in Mizoram. In the face of strong opposition from menfolk for the education of the girls whose services were required more at their homes, the missionaries persisted in their efforts and ultimately succeeded. The few girls like Nui, Saii, Pawngi and Ziki who had been educated and baptised as early as 1903, became the chief instruments of the missionaries. The missionaries opened schools not only for general education of the girls but also for vocational and practical subjects like sewing, tailoring, weaving, etc. which were of practical use for the Mizo women, Such schools became popular and attracted Mizo women to education.

There was no or little opposition to education in general after 1920s. No doubt the aged people who did not understand the real value of education raised their voice against education. But such opposition could not retard the progress of education in Mizoram. The increase in number had given the educated men and women an impetus to read books, magazines, journals, etc. and this helped them to widen their outlook in all spheres of life, and made them aware of their political, social and economic conditions. Education has instilled flexibility into the Mizo mind and made them to look forward towards further development and progress. There is now no possibility for the Mizos to retain or to return to their old tribal way of life. It is education that is preparing the Mizo youths to effectively live in this new and changing social order. They came into intimate contact with modern advancement in arts and science and mass-media like Radio, Television, Cinema and Newspapers.

Under the initiatives of the Missions and the encouragement of the Government there had been good response of the common people to education as shown in the following statistics¹⁰.

Year of census	General population	No. of literates	Percentage of literates	Trend
1901	82,434	771	0.93	-0,5
1911	91,204	3,635	3.98	+ 3,88
1921	98,406	6,183	6.28	+ 8,27
1931	1,24,404	13,320	10.70	+ 12,65
1941	1,52,786	29,765	19.48	+ 17,04

In the first two Censuses the response of the people to education as comparatively higher than their response to Christianity. The main reason was perhaps the people were now conscious of the need of education.

The number of schools and the students at the beginning of 1948 stood thus:!!

Schools	Aizawl Sub-Divisions		Lunglei Sub-Division	
	No. of Schools	No. of Students	No. of Schools	No. of Students
Primary schools	136	12,369	123	3,668
Middle schools	11	1,117	11	1,007
High schools	1	284	1	145

There was a kind competition to learn, to read and to write. On many occasions messengers had been sent with letters from one place to another, and they were told of the contents of the letter they carried. After a letter was received by the addressee, its contents was read to the messenger who would know whether the letter was understood or not. The art of reading and writing was a completely new and fascinating experience to the villagers, and when they realised it, they became more anxious to learn the art and pass it on to others. The missionaries sent many youths, who were found to have the opportunity of visiting different villages and sometimes they opened temporary school for two or three months. They brought the rudiments of education to the people who had never seen a book. Moreover, each new convert wanted to read the *Bible* and the hymn books prepared by the missionaries. Therefore, the progress made on education was chiefly due to the missions,

The coming of Christianity and education brought a great change in the Mizo society. The animism of the Mizos who believed in supernatural beings and spirits to whom they offered sacrifices in order to propitiate them, was now transformed to Christianity by doing away with such beliefs.

Christianity and education chased away blind faith, superstitions, sacrifices and replaced them by better exercise of the reasoning power, understanding the facts and using will power. Head-hunting which was once considered holy as well as heroic deed has now ceased to exist. The Mizos found moral and spiritual instructions laid in the *Bible* very much appealing to their heart and embraced the new religion. Now all the Mizos throughout the length and breadth of Mizoram have adopted Christianity.

Education brought to an end the chieftainship. It made the people aware of the faulty administration of the chiefs and desirous of a better mode of administration. As a result of the demand, though the British at first took a policy of non-interference in the matter of administration of the chiefs, they gradually started curtailing the function and the powers of the chiefs. With their powers gradually reduced, the chiefs, however, remained as the nominal heads of their respective villages till 1954 when the government of Assam, by an Act passed in the Assam Legislative Assembly abolished the institution of chieftainship¹². The District Council with a body of elected and nominated representatives was thereupon formed and drew towards local self-government. This silent change from the rule of the chiefs to the rule of a democratically constituted council was possible because of the dissemination of education among the Mizos.

When the famine broke out throughout the Mizo Hills in 1960 because of *Mautam* (flowering of bamboo) that occurred in the previous year, little effort was enough on the part of any political leaders to mobilise these people against the Government which was supposed to be responsible for their sufferings and sorrows. A section of the Mizos became politically alive of the situation and desired to be independent of the Indian Union. The uprising that took place in the land of the peace-loving Mizos brought for them more distress during the years that followed. Mizoram was, therefore, born as a Union Territory to be administered by the Lieutenant-Governor on behalf of the President of India since 21st January, 1972. With the signing of the "Mizo Accord" between Government of India and Mizo National Front (MNF) leader, Mr. Laldenga on 30-6-1986 the insurgent Mizos therefore eschewed

violence and came to live a peaceful democratic life.

Democracy has struck firm root in Mizoram. There is now a growing trend and interest among the Mizos towards a greater participation in the national events. From the backward and isolated existence, the Mizo people now forged ahead to march in step with the mainstream of national life.

It must be admitted that the missionaries had rendered herculean services towards the education of the Mizos. Their efforts were crowned with remarkable success. Had it not been for their enthusiasm, the Mizos could never have afforded to reach their present position.

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