

# High Rates of Population Growth, Urbanisation and Literacy in Mizoram : How Do They Co-exist ?

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## I

### Introduction

The paper begins with a historical backdrop of formation of the state of Mizoram, a brief account of famine and frustration followed by mistrust with the then government of Assam of which it was a part and then the circumstances leading to the village re-grouping.

The paper then seeks to examine the factor responsible for a high population growth in spite of a high degree of urbanisation and literacy level, contrary to the experience of the West. Did the urbanisation then take place as an administrative fiat such as village re-grouping following insurgency ? Or was there some lacuna in the census definition ? Secondly, why not literacy help in checking fertility as it did in Kerala ? Besides,

was there any release of labour from agriculture to reflect a rise in labour productivity? We have, in trying to probe into these questions, and in analysing the situation in the light of our own field investigation and necessary secondary references, suggested a few hints. We have desisted from offering any definitive answer, for we feel this may be a fruitful area of further empirical research.

## II

### Historical Backdrop

Mizoram became a full-fledged state of the Union of India in 1987. Around 1890, after prolonged struggle of about four decades, it came under British subjugation. During this period spanning about 138 year the people of the area had to pass through very hard times occasionally under deterrent circumstances. Handicapped by inadequate road transport and primitive method of cultivation (slash-and-burn method, also known as Jhum) the people of the area had to face near famine situation causing immense hardship for the landlocked people. This, as we will see, had its political repercussions.

In the closing years of the last century – around 1898 Lushai Hills, as the area then was called, was tagged with Assam, and since then till 1972 remained as a district of Assam and administered as such. In 1954 the Parliament passed an Act to change the name from Lushai Hills to Mizo Hills as the people of different tribes in the hills would like to be identified as Mizos. In 1972 Mizoram<sup>1</sup> was made a union territory and in 1987 given the status of statehood. Prior to 1972 there was occasional lack of mutual trust between the Assam government and the Lushais which cause resentment among the latter. The Lushais put substantially, if not wholly, the responsibility of periodic food crises to the door of Assam government.

#### *British Occupation*

It was in 1849 that Lt. Col. Lister initiated steps to establish business relations between plains land of neighbouring Cachar

District and the people of Lushai Hills. Lister understood that in order to subjugate and administer the people of Lushai Hills it is necessary, at least initially, to establish a few outposts in the southern part of Cachar District. The Lushais naturally viewed this with suspicion. The so-called business interests could not be limited to the confines of trade only, but very soon raised its ugly head to grab political interests and thus exposed the real interest of the British to have political control over the Lushais-Burma (now Myanmar) area. Conscious of the superior fire power and skill of the British the Lushais were waiting for an opportune moment to retaliate. There was simmering discontent and suspicion against the British for about two decades.

In 1889 the discontent erupted into violence, the Lushais attacked Loharbund Tea Estate and burnt some areas in its vicinity. Perhaps this was their first skirmishes with the British for safeguarding their independence. However, the Lushais' attempt proved abortive, for soon Gen. Nuthal led an army of British soldiers to 'punish' the Lushais. The Deputy Commissioner of Cachar Edgar as a representative of civilian authority accompanied the military expedition. Fortunately for the Lushais the expedition was not successful due to incessant rain preventing further advance through the mountainous terrain. However, the Lushais continued to attack intermittently the neighbouring areas in the north including the tea gardens. In the winter months of the same year Edgar led a British Regiment Expedition Team through the hills to bring the Lushais to terms and convince them, through their superior fire power that it would be better for them to be friendly with the British. The objectives of the British expedition seemed to be :

- (i) to establish a contact with the Lushais through trade;
- (ii) to acquaint themselves with the terrain and topography of the Lushai Hills; and
- (iii) to establish a line of road communication between the south of plains Cachar and the northern and central part of Lushai Hills.

The British assumed to have achieved the second and third objectives, at least partially, but not the first one. For, two years later, in 1871 the Lushais attacked Ainarkhal tea garden

and took away 25 labourers as prisoners in their camps. Such intermittent but frequent assault seemed to have given opportunity to launch a counter-offensive against the Lushais. In the same year Gen. Bouchier led a troop of about 8000 British soldiers to Lushai territory. On 12 December 1871 the British troop reached Tipaimukh, and encountered the Luashais from practically all directions. The latter suffered reverses and sent messages to the British camp enquiring about terms of peace. The victors in turn explained the terms of peace to the Lushai Chief<sup>2</sup> and thus a treaty was signed with the Chief.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Foreshadowing of Famine*

As in other hill areas of the north-eastern region the method of cultivation in the hilly and terrain covered with bamboo and other forest is by means of slash-and-burn, popularly known as jhum. Initially the bamboo bushes and the undergrowth of other vegetation are cut from the hill slopes, allowed to dry and then burnt so that the resultant ashes act as fertilisers to the soil. Sometimes the burning of the bushes and undergrowth cannot be restricted to jhum areas only. The fire naturally spreads out beyond the area of cultivation and this causes loss to forest resources and damage to ecology and environment.

The Lushai forests are rich with bamboo which suffer two death cycles in a 50-year span—the second appears 18 years after the first. Due to an ecological aberration the bamboo flowers invite swarm of rats which multiply very fast. With the increase in the rodent fertility, first the bamboo plants and then the paddy crop is consumed by the fast growing rodent population with the result that only the outer shell of the crop remains in the field. The rodents die out equally fast due to liver disease the sign of which appears when a white spot is detected on it. Sometime later it flowers and this foreshadows the coming of a crop disaster : Lushais call it *Mao Tam*. However, more serious and catastrophic is *Thing Tam* which appears as if without any warning and people so to say are caught unawares. They are incapable of taking any precautionary measures for the coming disastrous days. Unlike *Thing Tam*, the years before the *Mao Tam*, the Lushais recall, used to be the time for the

preparation of coming catastrophe. The Chiefs would ask the farmers to choose fertile lands to get maximum output so that the surplus could be carefully saved for the coming hard days. *Thing Tam*, on the other hand, continued for three to four years. The distress is slow and long-drawn.<sup>4</sup> The persistent poor crops leave the cultivator frustrated. They lose their will power to fight the calamity.

Lushai Hills had to face the onslaught of famine situation a number of times during 1890-1959. One principal reason, as we have pointed out above, is the cultivation method (jhumming) which yields much less crop per unit of land than under wet-land cultivation (WLC) or settled cultivation. But then howsoever desirable and productive, the latter method cannot be adopted at ease in a hilly terrain dotted with high hills with little valley lands as in Lushai Hills. The other reason has been the communication difficulty. With no railway link and only one hilly road connecting the adjoining Cachar District of Assam, timely supply of foodgrains in the interior from outside became difficult causing much embarrassment to the administration.

#### *1959 Food Crises and Its Aftermath*

*Mao Tam* appeared perhaps for the last time in 1959. Agriculture did suffer for about 5 years thereafter. The then Assam government came up as usual with relief programme and was believed to have spent about Rs. 190 lakhs. However, a good portion of that amount was spent as transport and subsidy to facilitate import of foodgrains in the interior villages and another Rs. 13 lakhs for purchase of vehicles. Although these expenditures have helped to distribute imported grains in the villages, but at the same time the amount did not *directly* help in augmenting the quantum of food distribution. Yet in all fairness it must be said that without the transport subsidy the much needed foodgrains would not have reached to many deserving households. Itemised expenditure percentages were as follows.<sup>5</sup>

	<i>Amount</i>	
	(Rs. in Lakhs)	%
1. Purchase of foodgrains	73.61	38.7
2. Gratuitous relief	4.90	2.6
3. Relief work.....	28.00	14.7
4. Administrative support including purchase of vehicles, transport subsidy etc	83.49	43.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>190.00</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Briefly, as much as 44 per cent of total expenditure, even if the aggregate amount is considered adequate, had gone to meet the various administrative expenses a part of which (like purchase of vehicles and transport subsidy) normally should not have been borne from the famine funds. At least to this extent it may be said that money has not been spent for which it ought to have been done. If we analyse a little more we would find that in per capita terms the amount of relief was a pittance, more so because in a famine like situation everybody was almost equally affected in terms of foodgrains availability.

On the basis of 1951-61 population growth rate (3.57 per cent p.a.) the population in 1959 may be taken at 2,59,500. Assuming 30 per cent or about 77,850 persons were given some relief work to supplement their income, let us see for how many days and at what wage rate they could have been provided with jobs with Rs. 28 lakhs earmarked for relief work. Per capita expenditure of Rs. 36 would take away the entire amount. And even this amount would just suffice at best to provide employment for seven days at a wage rate of Rs. 5.14 per day. Perhaps even in those days a daily wage rate of Rs. 5.14 was not adequate enough to get a day's labour. In any case, if a household was to be substantially relieved surely a week's wage employment is not enough. If, for example, employment for 4 months in a year or 120 days was to be provided, then even at this low wage rate, the total expenditure would amount to Rs. 4 crore 67 lakhs. Instead only Rs. 28 lakhs were provided, which was quite insufficient even at the wage rate prevailing in 1959.<sup>6</sup>

The 1959 food crisis in Mizoram brought within its fold a sense of frustration and mistrust of its people in their relation

with Assam. The Lushais hoped that even if the food supply is not adequate, at least its adequate distribution, particularly in the rural areas would be ensured. But that was not going to be, for road communication in the interior villages and small towns were very much inadequate. This brought frustration. The mistrust between the government of Assam and the people of the Lushai Hills district development, due primarily to the failure of the former to respond to the needs of the latter. In 1959 when the bamboo flowering appeared, the Mizos sent an SOS to Assam government requesting for precautionary measures to guard against the onslaught of famine. The government of Assam responded by sending an entomologist. He collected specimens of bamboo and rat after camping at Aizawl for just one night. His findings were in the negative, that is, "that it did not appear (to him) that the rat, on consuming the seed of bamboo, had multiplied rapidly—a finding which would have been refuted by the (growing of) millions of rats even then devouring the crops in Mizoram."<sup>7</sup> The Mizos were surprised at the lackadaisical dismissal of their claim. The frustration and disbelief generated a sense of helplessness and then a realization that little can be gained by staying united with Assam. First a simmering discontent and then a sense of separation ultimately gave rise to political party formation to give vent to Mizo expectation.

Around the same time Laldenga with the help of a splinter Congress group formed a political party known as Hill Peoples' State Party. Laldenga initially maintained good relations with Assam government which was reciprocated by the then Chief Minister B.P. Chaliha. But the expediency was shortlived. The 1966 armed revolt by the rebels turned the table against Laldenga. The Chaliha government thought it prudent to ask for the help of the army to quell the disturbance.<sup>8</sup> The army could ultimately succeed to suppress the commotion and turmoil, but in the process it obviously did leave a scar in the minds of the Mizos.

In such a situation the Security Forces have a natural proclivity to took youngmen with suspicion, for he may be actual or potential enemy of the state. As is common in villages able bodied men after their day long labour in the field assemble after sunset and spend sometime in gossiping and chatting.

Keeping an eye on every such potential enemy in far flung villages mostly in hill tops with little concentration of population proved extremely difficult for the Army. For them policing would be easier if people now scattered over many places could be concentrated at a few places in the vicinity of areas from where Army would be able to keep a constant vigil. Thus began the village regrouping operation : an operation with at least some temporary destabilising socio-economic consequences.

### *Village Regrouping*

Jhum cultivation—the mainstay of the people of Mizoram—takes place in the slope of the hill. The cultivators used to settle at a vantage point of the hill to have a watchful eye on their land. By uprooting the village habitation and regrouping the people on either side of the road the Army could maintain a strict vigil over the people, but obviously the arrangement had damaged not only the cultivation but also snapped a community bond considerably.<sup>8</sup> This had restricted the mobility of cultivators not only to oversee their cultivated land but also movement from one jhum field to another. The latter had restricted the jhum yield as jhum cultivation is not done in the same plot for many years consecutively. There is a cycle which of course depends on population pressure and internal demand. Population pressure has shortened the cycle to less than 10 years now making the jhum cultivation less sustainable.

Apart from lack of supervision in the jhum land, the other evil effect regrouping has been the restricted choice in selecting the jhum land. Jhum land requires a close watch requiring the cultivators to stay near the place of cultivation. Changing the place of habitat according to the convenience of the administration and not of the cultivators, naturally would have affected reproductivity. Thirdly, jhumias were more or less self-sufficient in normal years; their wants were few and hence less dependent on urban areas. With the village regrouping a low level equilibrium had yielded to urban-oriented consumerism.<sup>10</sup> Thus the laws on new habitation which aimed at severing the tribal relationship among its members and, more importantly, their sources of food and forest, seemed to have impaired the age-old tribal agriculture in Mizoram.

### III

## Population and Human Resources

### *Population Growth*

Covering an area of 21,081 sq. km and bounded on the north by the states of Assam and Manipur, on the east and south by the Chin Hills of Myanmar and on the west by Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh and state of Tripura, Mizoram occupies a unique position in the north-east India. It is unique in the sense that she suffers from a peculiar transport bottlenecks—the nearest railway lies at Silchar, 195 km away from the state headquarters Aizawl; its terrain does not allow even a smooth motorable transport. Landslide is a common phenomenon during rainy season.

The state is divided into three districts, *viz.*; Aizawl (12,588 km<sup>2</sup>), Lunglei (4,536 km<sup>2</sup>) and Chhimituipui (3,957 km<sup>2</sup>). In 1991 the total population in the state was about 6.9 lakhs of which urban population constitutes about 46 per cent. The population density was of the lowest in the region—33 persons per sq. km. (In Tripura population density is 263, in Assam 286 and in all-India it is 273). But the population growth rate should be a matter of concern to all. It has not only been high since 1920s, but remains considerably higher than the all-India growth rate (Table 23.1). It will be seen from the Table that in successive decades, *viz.*, in the '40s, '50s and in '70s the growth rates were substantially higher than not only the all-India rates, but also than the respective growth rate of the preceding decade. In the '90s the population growth rate was 39.7 per cent which was also much higher than the all-India growth rate (23.85 per cent). Although the last decade's growth rate has been less than that of the preceding (1971-81) decade, yet the rate should cause concern. Even an annual growth rate of 4 per cent would mean doubling of population in every 18 years. The population growth rates in other states of the region are equally disturbing. It is ironic that neither at the national nor at the regional level one does come across any time bound policy-oriented action programme for the region which is consistently recording a

much higher rate than that of the other parts of India. One may speculate that the existing favourable land-man ratio may account for the complacency.

**Table 23.1**  
**Decadal Population Growth Rate (%) 1921-91 All-India and Mizoram**

Decade	Growth Rate (%)	
	Mizoram	All-India
1921-31	26.42	11.00
1931-41	22.81	14.22
1941-51	28.42	13.31
1951-61	35.61	21.51
1961-71	24.93	24.80
1971-81	48.55	24.66
1981-91	39.70	23.85

Source : North-Eastern Council, Basic Statistics of North-Eastern Region, 1995, (Shillong, 1995).

### *Population Growth and Jhumming : A Vicious Circle*

Almost three-fourth of land surface is covered with forests which ought to play an important role in giving economic and ecological support to the state and its people. However, the forest revenue data reveal that bamboo and cane yield relatively more revenue than that from the commercial wood.<sup>11</sup> In 1988-89, for example, the state had earned Rs. 14,13,000 from the sale of the former species as against Rs. 9,57,000 from the latter. In any case, a revenue of Rs. 24-25 lakhs is not adequate even to earn any income net of other expenses from a forest area of 712.7 thousand hectares owned by Forest Department. It needs to be pointed out that in Mizoram, from ownership angle, almost an equal area is available with the village council, the revenue data of which is not available with us. Most of such area is used for jhumming wherein the jungle clearing cycle depends on the need for raising food crop which in turn depends on population pressure. In areas meant for jhum cultivation timber wood for commercial exploitation is not generally grown.

Whatever bamboo and cane bushes exist are also burnt during the jungle clearing phase. New plants are not harvested at regular rotation, and, therefore, often age of such plants during clearing or cutting phase cannot synchronise with their full economic potential.

In the burning process of jhum land ecology is affected. Ecology defined as a system of the product of the joint and interdependent evolution of living organs and of the physical and chemical constituents of the earth's surface—the ecosphere is said to be irreplaceable. If the system is destroyed it could never be reconstituted by natural process or by human effort. Population growth puts excessive pressure on ecology and biodegradation. Elements such as pesticides, detergents, plastics, a variety of toxic metals and gases, radio-isotopes etc intrude on the natural environment and thus tend to throw major segments of the ecosystem out of balance. Thus unchecked population growth has puts a tremendous cost, although often implicit in nature. Market prices of many products such as wood, air, water etc. the production process of which involves injury to the ecosystem do not reflect real cost. Unless cost of the damage can be recovered from the damage—causing party, the actual or market price becomes less than the social cost; the latter includes the cost of damage to the society.

This characteristic, known as external diseconomy, encourages undue and unrestricted destruction of natural resources since the motive of the agent causing destabilisation of the ecosystem is reaping temporary gain only. The present gain weighs heavily than that of the future. In this way, external diseconomy encourages population growth, apart from other well-known reasons. Population pressure in turn leads to problems of congestion which again causes environmental degradation. The vicious circle would go on unless population growth is held in check.

#### *Urbanisation Without Industrial Base*

A few factor that have been found to have a favourable impact on population growth (that is, a quantitative check and a qualitative improvement) in the West are : a change in the occupational structure, industrialisation, commercialisation of

agriculture, urbanisation, literacy especially of the female etc. Of them, two factors, *viz.*; urbanisation and literacy rates are *prima facie* favourable in the state, and, therefore, it may reasonably be argued that they should have some favourable influence in checking population growth. But as we have seen above, this was not the situation in Mizoram. This calls for some inquiry.

**Table 23.2**  
**Population Growth Rate in Rural and Urban Mizoram**  
**During 1951-91 (%)**

<i>Decade</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>% of Urban Population to Total Population</i>
1951-61	33.09	102.86	5.34
1961-71	17.00	166.20	11.36
1971-81	26.24	222.61	24.67
1981-91	- 0.04	161.01	46.10 (25.71)

*Note* : Figure in parenthesis shows all-India percentage.

*Source* : NEC, Basic Statistics, *op cit.*

Population growth is affected by urbanisation for the simple reason that the latter helps spreading education facilitates, accessibility to health care, reduces infant mortality and causes improvement in housing and living condition and a vertical occupational shift. All these, *cet. par.*, help in limiting population growth. But as is evident from Tables 23.1 and 23.2 the high rate of urbanisation could not slow down population growth rate. Paradoxically, Mizoram exhibits on exceedingly high rate of urbanisation with an equally high population growth rate. One reason for this apparent contradiction seems to be that the so-called urbanisation, as we have seen before, is mainly the result of village regrouping which did not emerge from any industrial location but arose out of administrative reasons. Secondly, Indian census defines an urban area in somewhat technical way where even some subjective considerations cannot be entirely ruled out. For example, apart from three objective criteria, *viz.*, a minimum population of 5000 persons a density of 400 persons per km<sup>2</sup> and three-fourths of the workforce belonging

to non-agricultural occupation, there are certain undefined urban features which, if found present in a certain area, may over rule any of the objective criteria.<sup>12</sup> Finally, rapid growth of so-called urbanisation in Mizoram in recent decades has been "achieved" without worth mentioning structural shift in occupation. Some shift in occupational mobility has taken place towards service sector through creation of government jobs, but this was due to small size of the state and a fat administrative apparatus having little correlation with other economic sectors of the state.

**Table 23.3**

**Rural-Urban Population Distribution by District, 1981 and 1991**

State District	Population Persons ('000)			% of Urban to Total Popn.		% Growth Rate 1981-1991		
	T	R	U	1981	1991	T	R	U
Mizoram	689.7	371.8	317.9	24.67	46.10	39.70	-0.04	161.01
Aizawl	478.5	218.8	259.7	28.63	54.28	40.38	-10.07	166.13
Lunglei	111.4	66.9	44.5	19.89	40.00	28.79	-3.53	158.97
Chhimituipui	99.9	86.2	13.7	10.57	13.69	50.37	45.12	94.97

Source : NEC, Shillong, Basic Statistics of NE Region, *op cit.*

Unlike Western experience, urbanisation in Mizoram has not been accompanied by industrialisation and a perceptible rise in labour productivity in agriculture and industry and the external economic opportunities that they gave rise to. There has been no historically evolved causal mechanism in urban agglomerates due to clustering of manufacturing activities except to some extent in the vicinity of Aizawl town and to a much lesser extent in other two district towns. Some labour force may have been released from agriculture, but this was not due to a rise in productivity as much as due to village regrouping forced upon the people. The rapid growth of urbanisation does not seem, therefore, to have been induced by vigorous economic expansion. Although it was well-known that due to topography, communication bottlenecks inherent in remote hilly areas and shortage of basic raw materials it was not possible to set up

large scale industrial units in the state of Mizoram. But even cottage and SSI Units did not develop to any desired extent. This is evident from sectoral employment data. In 1961, 6,600 persons (accounting for 5.3 per cent of state's total working population) were engaged in this sector, but in 1991 both the absolute number and the proportion declined respectively to 3,600 and 1.2 per cent. An absolute decline in number suggests the state of deterioration of the cottage and SSI Units.<sup>13</sup>

**Table 23.4**  
**Workers by Main Occupation in Mizoram, 1961-91**

	Number ('000)				% change		
	1961	1971	1981	1991	1961-71	1971-81	1981-81
Total workers	125.7	151.6	206.0(a)	290.3	20.6	35.9	40.9
of which	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)			
(i) Cultivators	109.5	126.6	145.5	178.1	15.6	14.9	22.4
	(87.1)	(83.5)	(70.6)	(61.3)			
(ii) Agri. Lab		0.6	5.1	9.5	—	750.0	86.3
		(0.4)	(2.5)	(3.3)			
(iii) Household incl.							
manufacturing	6.6	0.8	1.8	3.0	-87.9	80.0	66.7
	(5.3)	(0.5)	(0.8)	(1.0)			
(iv) Other workers	9.5	23.6	53.6(b)	99.7(c)	48.4	127.1	84.9
	(7.5)	(15.6)	(26.0)	(34.3)			

Notes : Figures in parentheses show percentages.

(a) equivalent to main workers

(b) include mining, quarrying, construction, trade, transport, storage and communication etc.

(c) include marginal workers

Source : Government of Mizoram, Statistical Handbook 1974, and NEC Secretariat, Basic Statistics (Various Issues) of NE region, Shillong.

Whether or not a high rate of urbanisation in Mizoram (46 per cent in 1991 against all-India's 25.7 per cent) relative to the degree of economic development is "an expression of the severity of the agrarian crisis," as Myrdal has pointed out in connection with South-East Asia<sup>14</sup> is a question that deserves some

explanation. However pending that, one may be reasonably certain that urban growth in the state in recent decades has not been a function of the expansion of the industrial base.

Let us now see if there was any release of labour force from agriculture to the secondary sector, and if so, was it done to any rise in the productivity of agriculture? To begin with, we will take up a broad occupational classification of working population in the state during 1961-91 as revealed in the decadal census data.

The Table 23.4 shows that there was no sign of any decline in the agricultural occupation during the last 30 years. In fact the absolute number of cultivators has significantly increased from 109.5 thousand in 1961 to 178.1 thousand in 1991, and that of agricultural labour from 0.6 thousand in 1971 to 9.5 thousand in 1991. Although the proportion of total working force in agriculture has come down from 87 per cent in the '60s to 61 per cent in 1991, but when compared against absolute increase we find that a substantial rise had taken place since the '60s both in the rank of cultivators and agricultural labourers.

#### *Sub-Marginal Land Holding : An Emerging Trend*

It is worth noting here that generally in tribal society entrusted with state power 'landlessness' should be a rare phenomenon. Landlessness in the literal sense may of course be absent, but endowment agricultural land for many may be little or insignificant so that one has to take up employment as a wage labour in agriculture. The present author conducted two field surveys in two different periods of time and found sufficient evident of marginal and sub-marginal agricultural holding. The first one was taken up in August 1985 in and around Lungdai a small upcoming semi-urban area 25 km north of Aizawl town on the Silchar-Vairengte-Kolasib-Aizawl highway. A sample of 74 households were covered, and among various other information, the average land possession pattern of sample households by occupational pattern was taken, and it stood as follows.<sup>15</sup>

<i>Occupational Class</i>	<i>Average Landholding in Bigha in Linear Scale</i>
Jhumias	6.22
Salaried Class	3.34
Casual labour class	3.43
Traders (Petty)	1.92
All classes	4.99

The other one was conducted in all the three districts of Mizoram in two successive years, 1987 and 1988. The survey showed that between 17—19, 19—23, and 24—42 per cent of households own land of the size less than 1 (one) acre in Aizawl, Lunglei and Chhimgtuipui districts respectively.<sup>16</sup> Interestingly the people in the faraway districts seem to be more deprived. This could be one reason for the capital town Aizawl pulling people towards it from the outlying districts (See, Table 23.5).

**Table 23.5**  
**Land Distribution by Size and Districts 1987 and 1988**  
**(Land Size in Acres)**

<i>Land Size</i>	<i>Districts and % of Households</i>					
	<i>Aizawl</i>		<i>Lunglei</i>		<i>Chhimgtuipui</i>	
	1987	1988	1987	1988	1987	1988
Less than 1	16.92	19.24	18.75	22.74	24.20	42.16
1 < 3	46.16	64.02	40.79	32.44	39.14	14.18
3 < 5	28.46	12.96	24.67	33.44	16.37	5.97
5 < 7	4.23	2.10	11.51	6.02	12.45	23.13
7 < 10	1.14	0.84	3.29	5.35	4.63	5.97
10 +	3.08	0.84	0.99	—	3.20	8.58
	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
	(260)	(239)	(304)	(299)	(281)	(268)

Source : Field survey

Note : Figure in brackets indicate number of households covered in the field survey.

Although technically in a tribal society land and forest is

a common property resource (CPR) and, therefore, landlessness may appear to be a contradiction, yet this phenomenon, at least as far as economic gainful activity is concerned, is gradually emerging even in some other north-eastern tribal society.<sup>17</sup>

A similar phenomenon of marginal and submarginal holding and even some landlessness is now seen in Mizoram. Population growth, on the one hand and so-called urbanisation, on the other, has put excessive pressure leading to sort of privatisation of land under category E, that is, land that remains after meeting the requirement of the state and/or District Council for reserved forests, protection of wild life etc. (Category A & B) and also of requirement of village councils including unclassified revenue forests and jhum lands (Category C & D).<sup>18</sup>

Land—the primary resources for raising crop for subsistence is becoming a scarce commodity even in the land of sparsely populated hilly areas. This is due to demographic pressure implying more claimants of limited land resource which is put to more effective and economic use. As a result it is not unusual to come across landless or sub-marginal households even where land should technically and customarily be a CPR. The only difference between the scenario in plains and that in the hilly region of the NE region is not the absence or presence of CPR, but that unlike in the plains area a tribal household in the north-east tribal state has not yet been dispossessed of a homestead.

Evidence, therefore, does not suggest there was any release of labour from agriculture. The 'Push' factor that may be present due to the marginalisation of the Peasantry does suggest that rural-urban migration has taken place in the state.

#### *Literacy and Other Inputs for Human Resource Development*

Literacy plays a crucial role in bringing about a check on quantitative expansion and improvement in the quality of human resources. It is now well-known that one important reason for a substantial reduction in the population growth in Kerala (1.34 per cent in 1981-91) was a high literacy rate including female literacy (total 89.81, male 93.62 and female 86.17 per cent during 1981-91). Looked from that angle, we do not find literacy rate in Mizoram is equally responsive, although the rate is almost at

par with that of Kerala (Mizoram literacy rate : total 82.27, male 85.61 per cent and female 78.60 per cent during 1981-91). Like the so-called urbanisation, literacy rate too did not appear to have any influence in population control. Mizoram's population growth rate during 1981-91 has been 3.34 per cent p.a. against Kerala's 1.34 per cent. Why a high literacy rate did not have any influence in controlling population growth, or in other words, what are the factors that acted in opposite direction and how strong they are? These are the questions that require further probe. However, within the scope of the present paper, one may put down a few relevant points in this connection which may help the proposed query.

First, about the definition of literacy. Indian census authority seems to be liberal on this score. The respondents above the age of four are merely asked if he or she could both read and write. It is possible that census authorities have had great difficulty in monitoring individual entries when every person was questioned rather than a 10 per cent sample as was in 1951 census. Further, it is possible that the data may be inflated since the prestige attached to literacy has increased. Therefore, it is possible that when there is no close monitoring or scrutiny of entries many half or semi-literate may claim to be literate. Ordinarily literacy is understood to indicate an elementary ability to read and write, and according to UNESCO's definition, "a person is literate who can with understanding both read and write a short simple statement on his everyday life."<sup>19</sup> What is missing from Indian census literacy data is the rider "reading and writing a short simple statement on his everyday life."<sup>20</sup> This clause is important, for this added attribute would help to improve the skill formation by sharpening his understanding faculties. A related question of literacy rate influencing favourably in checking population growth rate is an improvement in the quality of life for which an elementary education and a rule of three R's. are equally important components.

Perhaps we are yet to get an answer : What distinguishes Mizoram from Kerala? Census definition on literacy must be same in all states. What could then be the causes of high birth rates in Mizoram ? When Kerala's case is compared with the BIMARU states (Bihar, M.P., Rajasthan and UP) it is seen that:

- (i) the decline in the infant mortality rate (IMR) in Kerala is one important reason for the fall in death rate, and, therefore, the urge to have more babies is less;
- (ii) the social welfare inputs and the historical reason for the egalitarian health policies and programmes in Kerala;
- (iii) close link of female literacy rate; and
- (iv) decline fertility rate despite a strong son preference in Kerala.<sup>21</sup>

In the ultimate analysis, in any population control policy women have to be involved in accepting it as the key players. They have to have informed choice in contraceptives, small families, health care facilities, *real* cost of rearing up and educating their children and its opportunity costs. They would also want control over their life situation, sustenance, safe work place, sanitation and environment, a secure living place, a harmonious gender relations and a violence free societies.<sup>22</sup>

It is essential to distinguish between the two terms: population and human resources. To what extent the former will transform the latter would depend on its quality which in turn is determined by level and quality of education, accessibility to health care facilities, doctor—and hospital bed population ratio, general standard of health etc. All these qualities individually and collectively determines labour productivity.

How does Mizoram stand in regard to health care facilities Tables 23.6, 23.7 and 23.8 would give some indication.

Table 23.6

**Hospital and Hospital Beds in Mizoram Rural and Urban 1980 and 1992**

Period	Hospital (NOS)			Hospital Beds (NOS)			Hospital Beds per 1000 Persons
	R	U	T	R	U	T	
January 1980	6	3	9	320	337	657	1.33
January 1992	4	10	14	136	992	1128	1.63

**Table 23.7**  
**Primary Health Centres and Sub-Centres in Mizoram 1980 and 1993**

	Primary H.C.	P.H. Sub-Centres	Total	Rural Population per PHC/Sub-centre
March 1980	16	132	148	1984
December 1993	38	244	282	1318

**Table 23.8**  
**Doctor and Doctor Population Ratio in Mizoram :  
 1983 and 1991**

	Government Doctors (Nos.)	Doctor-Population Ratio
December 1983	106	1 : 4981
December 1991	146	1 : 5000

Source : Tables 23.6, 23.8, same as in Table 23.1

A reading of the Tables reveal that the number of hospitals in the villages has declined, and the same in the urban areas improved significantly bringing an aggregate increase from 9 to 14, and that in the hospital beds from 657 to 1,128 (an increase of 72 per cent) during 1980-92. However, in spite of this increase the hospital bed per thousand population has just marginally increased from 1.33 to 1.63 during the same period, or by 0.30 per cent only.

Secondly, the number of primary health centres and sub-centres has increased substantially from 148 to 282 during 1980-93 (an increase of about 90.54 per cent). The increase seems to have been adequately watched the population increase in rural areas so much so that the population-PHC ratio showed a perceptible improvement in 1993 relative to 1980. It should be of interest to note here that in this respect Mizoram is favourably placed *vis-a-vis* other Indian states. As against an average rural population covered by each PHC in UP (29,648 persons), Bihar (33,962 persons), MP (36,949 persons), Andhra Pradesh (37,896

persons), in Mizoram each PHC, on an average, caters to the need of 1,318 persons only (1993). However, real test of accessibility lies in the availability of hospital bed and timely diagnosis and treatment in hospitals. From Table 23.8 it is seen that the availability of medical doctor has not improved much during 1983-91 period.

#### IV

#### **Concluding Observation**

Mizoram is passing from a traditional subsistence economy into a profit seeking market-oriented economy. But in the absence of any plantation or manufacturing industry the human resources are being absorbed in service sectors such as teaching, bureaucracy, medicine etc. A few intermediate forms in the tiny sector with local capital and market outlet coexist with large-scale industrial products coming from outside the state. The coexistence seems to reflect a dichotomy of the economy between traditional and modern sectors and an economic cleavage resulting into economic development of the state that remains localised and non-diversified.

To summarise about the demographic pattern in Mizoram, let us reiterate that unlike in Europe and later in Japan, in India, in general and Mizoram in particular, the gap between the birth and death rates has been widening resulting in sort of population explosion. The decline in death rate was slow but visible due to health care measures, but birth rate has not shown any perceptible decline resulting in widening gap between the two rates causing an increasing imbalance between population and natural resources. Expansion of hospital beds and PHCs and attempt to raise the living standard and literacy have helped to lower mortality rates and will continue to do so. The fundamental problem is poverty. To minimise its scar the problem has to be tackled in right earnest, *inter alia* by educating the people that birth control is one important means towards that end.

**Notes and References**

1. The literal meaning of the word is the people of Mizo Hills living in hill tops.
2. The chieftainship occupied an important and privileged position among the Lushais. Although not democratically elected, the chief was held in high esteem among the tribals for giving personal attention to the people's common problems *viz.*, allocation of cultivable, particularly of jhum land according to certain norms (such as family needs and working members in the family) and distribution and maintenance of what is known as common property resources (CPRs) etc. In the individual proprietary rights, the chiefs were not looked up as feudal lords, yet they assumed the responsibility of distribution of CPRs and taking up other public activities for his people. The chieftainship which was in existence long before the British occupied the territory was abolished in 1954.
3. Ghosh, Sujit K., (1988) Lushai Expedition and Haricharan Sharma—A Native Bengalee in Cachar in *Proceedings of North-East India History Association*, Ninth Session, Guwahati, 1988, pp. 159-63; Bhattacharjee, J.B. (1977), *Cachar Under the British Rule in North-East India*, New Delhi.
4. Usually three species flower during this period, and they are Rawthing (*Bambusa Tulda*), Rawnal (*Dendrocalanus Loggispathus*) and Rawngal (*Cephalostachyum Capitatum*). The flowering comes in batches and the invasion of rats comes to its peak during the third or fourth year.
5. Rangasami, Amritha (1978), 'Mizoram—A Tragedy of Our Own Making' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, XIII—15 (April 15), pp. 660-61.
6. It may be relevant to point out here that in a similar situation in 1972 the Gujarat Government spent Rs. 4 crore 28 lakhs for almost an equal number of people (2,60,000) for relief work at Godra Tribal area in Panchmahal.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 659.
8. According to some political analysts, initially Chaliha was not unfavourably disposed towards Laldenga, for the latter blamed the District Council for the food crisis, and not so much the Assam government. However, Chaliha seemed to have kept a close watch over Laldenga's attempt to spread hostility. Brig. Sailo, on the other hand, put the entire responsibility for the crisis to Assam government.
9. Nunthara, C., (1981), 'Grouping of Villages in Mizoram : Its Social

- and Economic Impact' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, XVI-30, pp. 1237-38.
10. Guhathakurta, S.N., (1987), "Emergence of a New Working Class in Mizoram : A Marxist Note" in *Emerging Pattern of North-Eastern Economy*, ed. V.S. Mahajan, Deep & Deep Publications, New Delhi, pp. 252-55.
  11. Apart from different species of bamboo, cane and some medicinal plants, important timber wood available for commercial exploitation are Sal (*Shorea Robusta Gaerin*), Chamal (*Artocarpus Chaplasha*), Gamari (*Gamelina arborea*) etc.
  12. I am grateful to Dr. Pabitra Giri of Calcutta University Centre for Urban Economic Studies, for this information. The usual disclaimer applies.
  13. A slightly different employment figure is available from the SSI Registered Units. Employment data for four consecutive years from 1985-86 are 1,349 (1985-86), 1794 (1986-87), 1960 (1987-88) and 1763 (1988-89). See Government of Mizoram, Statistical Handbook, Aizawl (1989), Table 14.4, p. 67.
  14. Myrdal, Gunnar (1968), *Asian Drama : An Inquiry Into the Poverty of Nations* (Pelican), Vol. I, p. 468.
  15. *Report on Lungadai Village Survey (1986)*, Dept. of Economics, North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU), Mizoram Campus, Aizawl, (mimeo) Tables 3.2 (p. 37) and 5.1 (p. 51).
  16. *Poverty, Unemployment and Development Policy in North-Eastern Region (Phase II, Mizoram)* (1993) an ICSSR sponsored study, Dept. of Economics, NEHU, Shillong, (mimeo).
  17. *Poverty, Unemployment and Development Policy in North-Eastern Region (Phase I, Meghalaya)*, (1983) an ICSSR sponsored study (conducted by the present author), Dept. of Economics, NEHU, Shillong, M.K. Sukumaran Nair, "Agaraiian Relations and Transition in Meghalaya," (1983), a Ph.D. thesis submitted to Dept. of Economics, N.E.H.U., Shillong Nov., (mimeo).
  18. It should be understood that unlike other parts of India (usually non-tribal area), land in the tribal areas of the north-east cannot be owned any more by non-tribals nor can be transferred among the non-tribals. But no such bar usually applies (other than the prescribed land-use pattern or policy) among the local tribals, e.g. Mizos in Mizoram or Khasis and Garos in Meghalaya etc. In Mizoram we came across during the course of our field investigation a few irregular cases of land settlement which had allowed some persons to accumulate wealth on land transfer transaction. Some tribals were reported to have got away with illegal use of land.

Land types in the village as over the whole of Mizoram may be arranged in some spectrum according as whether the state or a village community of the individual has over-riding control over it.

*Type A*: Land comprising fully or partially protected state or District Councils owned or reserved forest, wild life sanctuaries where the state has unfettered rights.

*Type B*: Land comprising that part of "safety supply reserve forest" owned by District Councils, and over which the Village Council or individual will usually have no control.

*Type C*: Land would include ownership in "safety supply reserve forests" by Village Councils which may allow contractor to fell trees for commercial use. Next down the ladder is the type D land designated usually as "unclassified revenue forests" by Village Councils. Such land or a part thereof may be allocated to jhumias. Further down the line and out of the unclassified land, Village Councils may allot through "Garden Passes" or "Pattas" land for house construction. This type may be categorised as type E and leased to the allottees. To the extent it may be released for a consideration, this type is the nearest approximation to the freehold land of elsewhere in the country—Lungdai Village Report, *op cit*.

19. Myrdal, Gunnar, *Asian Drama, op cit*, Vol. III, pp. 1670-71.
20. The present writer conducted a field survey in 1997 among 840 sample agricultural households in 84 villages spread over three subdivisions of Burdwan district of West Bengal. *Inter alia*, there was a structured question relating to educational level of every member of the sample households in the 6 + age group. To our surprise, we found that as many as one-third of the total members in the 6 + category are illiterate. The matter is referred to here for one simple reason that the district was earlier said to have achieved universal literacy. Obviously if "reading and writing a short simple statement on every day life," criterion would have been taken the percentage of illiteracy would have much more.
21. Lingam, Lakshmi (1994) "Women, Population and Development Question" in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 29-3, pp. 85-6.
22. The overall attitude toward family planning in Mizoram was not different from the rest of the country. While women from the better off households were found to be in favour of small families which would maintain better health, enjoy more freedom and devote more time to their children, others were opposed to family planning. They were of the opinion that undergoing operation for birth control would have adverse repercussion on one's health and serious reduction in work capacity.

Men were mostly non-committee on this, but some of them while opposed to vasectomy did not seem to mind eligible women undergoing tubectomy operation.

The above information is given on the basis of sample survey 74 families from Lungdai village in Mizoram which at the time of survey (1985) had neither any family planning guiding centre, nor facilities for family planning. All the village had was a small primary health centre manned by a person with short training who could provide some standard medicines. For serious ailment villagers had to go about 20 km. away to a missionary hospital - Lungdai village survey, *op cit*, p. 39.