

## Mizo Problems Leading to Insurgency

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Mizoram was formally brought under British administration on 6th September, 1895.<sup>1</sup> Since then the people have turned to paths of peace and made considerable progress in all spheres of life. Except for communication difficulties, it was a country where widows or orphans never lacked helping hands. Even the poorest could bury their head in their own homes by merely expressing the wish, though this might involve four or five days journey. No dacoit party ever existed nor locks adorned the doors of the villages. Even the so-called criminals were so faithful and honest that their guards could leave them alone in jungles to collect firewood while they enjoyed in tea-shops, drinking or gossiping.

Over 90% of the people now profess Christianity and have given up their old values completely.<sup>2</sup> They are now fired with new ideas. The Christian teaching of universal brotherhood of men, as children of the same Father, God, has gripped their imagination and a number of them have left the comforts of their own homes and the society of their own friends to help uplift their less fortunate brothers in their neighbouring states. In spite of their dark back-ground of head-hunting and practice of inhuman cruelties to their neighbouring people there never was any serious damage to property or loss of life and calling for the use of arms to restore law and order. Not before the present insurgency, in the whole history of administration was it necessary to impose curfew on the citizen. How is then such a peace loving people so suddenly rose up in arms against the Govt. of India under which they have enjoyed so much more freedom and privileges than any other Indian citizen? What made the professed followers of the 'Prince of Peace' to resort to such wide-spread acts of violence? What were the factors that promoted the rapid growth of the MNF party, which within three years of its existence, could capture 2/3 of the seats for the then Mizo District in Assam State Legislature and in five years could gain enough weapon and smuggled arms from foreign sources to stage a revolt against the armed might of India? Political, socio-economic and psycho-religious questions are involved and

an attempt will be made here to answer these questions.

There was no political party and the ordinary man had no voice in framing laws and administrative policy of their country. When the 1935 Constitution of India was introduced Mizoram was not included though it was one of the British districts like those of other Indian States. A few youngmen of Aizawl expressed their desire to be included in the Assam State Legislature,<sup>3</sup> but the move was ruthlessly turned down. The British thought that the Mizos were yet too ignorant and would burn their own fingers.

Then came the great political problem at the time of India's independence. They were - what should be the future status of the country - whether it should join hands with India, Burma or Pakistan; choose to be crown colony under the British or become an independent State. If the people had demanded with one voice, one might suppose that it would have been possible, through a referendum like the one held in Sylhet District, for the Mizo Hills to break its relations with India or something else. The Mizo Union, the first political party, born on April 9, 1946,<sup>4</sup> grew in popularity and almost 55% of the population were enrolled as its members, were in opinion for joining hands with India.<sup>5</sup> A party set up to popularise the idea of union with Burma could not make much headway.

What form the internal administration of the District should take, was the next important question. There emerged, however, a definite scheme for the future administration of the country from the 'People's Representatives'. This envisaged complete autonomy in internal administration, while India would have control of arms, defence and foreign affairs. Until economic self-sufficiency was achieved the Indian Government was to give a regular fixed amount of grant for development and administration.<sup>6</sup> This scheme was designed by Mr. A. R. Macdonald, the Superintendent of Lushai Hills in those days. The Mizo Union, in its Assembly, rejected the scheme completely and refused to take part in the proposed election.<sup>7</sup> This was the first political blunder the Mizos committed, the leaders failed to lead the mob, but were made to carry out their wishes. The Mizo Union spread propaganda that the draft Constitution of Macdonald was harmful to the interest of the common people, and that the people shall have to remain under the rule of their tyrant Chiefs.<sup>8</sup> The Congress Party leaders had no difficulty in influencing the Mizo Union leaders to consider the British administrators as the number one enemy. For this reason all representatives, including the Mizo Union,

Chiefs and other outstanding leaders made the decision to join Indian Union on condition that the Mizos would have a right to 'opt out of Indian Union after ten years if they wish to do so.'

Mizoram was one of the districts of Assam, it was felt that Mizos and other Hill tribals should still be protected from exploiters and given a chance to develop themselves according to their own genius because the tribals were economically and educationally more backward than the rest of India. The Constituent Assembly set up a sub-committee to look into this. Everybody cooperated in giving evidence expressing their ideas and wishes. However, when the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution was framed from the recommendation of the sub-committee, everybody was disappointed; hardly any of their ideas or wishes were included. To add to their disappointment, opinions were expressed among the politicians of Assam to remove the special provisions for the Khasis and the Mizos and they were considered sufficiently advanced to march on equal footing with the rest of India. Not only this, when the Assamese language movement started and when Mr. Chaliha, the then Chief Minister of Assam, was forced by mob pressure to make Assamese as the State official language, the tribals were more alienated. They already suspected that the Assam Government manipulated Central Government grants for tribal areas and used some of it for development of other areas. Appointments in the State services were much easier with knowledge of Assamese. It was said that tribal young men found it easier to pass the All India Public Service Examination than to pass Assam Civil Service Examinations. These things precipitated and gave momentum to the demand for creation of a Hill State.

In Mizo district people got more and more disappointed with the District Council as well as the Assam Government. As more non-Mizos came into the district, more social problems cropped up. The District Councils have no jurisdiction over the non-tribals. The Council being managed by Mizo Union Party thus spent its energies more on party politics than the wider interest of Mizoram, and the people as a whole. They failed to give sufficient attention to the increasing number of students studying outside the District. They neglected to safeguard the interest of their people in the neighbouring districts. All these led to general disappointment in their leadership. The time was ripe for the emergence of a new party and the opportunity came when the Mautam Famine hit the district in 1960.

Laldenga took over the leadership of the Anti-Famine organisa-

tion and moulded it into a political organisation, changing its name to Mizo National Front (MNF).<sup>10</sup> It was easy to convince the people that the Government was half-hearted in the Famine Relief. Laldenga propounded a separate nation theory and his MNF spread rapidly, more so in areas where famine hit hardest. Within three years of its existence the MNF party captured two of three seats for Mizo District in the State Assembly.<sup>11</sup> The MNF proclaimed independent Sovereign State of Mizoram.<sup>12</sup> They had pressed Delhi to grant independence to Mizos, a thing which Delhi was unwilling to do. In such a situation, the thing they thought should be done was to create power by force and this they did with some amount of success at the beginning. But after a decade the MNF realised the practical difficulties in the creation of such a small independent State and sought the solution of the Mizo problem within the Indian Constitution.

In order to have a deeper understanding of Mizo problems several things need clarification. The most important question is this. Why do the Mizos or Nagas have such a deeper feeling of separate nationhood? Is there any foundation in the accusation that the Missionaries or Christianity have alienated their minds?

That the Nagas, the Mizos or other hill tribes of north east India are ethnologically different from the rest of India, is a scientific and historical fact. They are of Mongolian stock and are physically, culturally, religiously and linguistically different from that of Aryans or Dravidians. While India claims to be a strictly secular State at the top, the man in the street is not very much conscious of it. Communal relations show a very little improvement and many began to wonder if we were not better off during the British period. What they asked, is this freedom we have, when a man cannot even eat the food (meaning beef) he likes? The Naga and Mizo problem is an extreme instance to the urgent need for closer integration. They asked where lies the so-called mainstream of national life - in Hindi or Hindu or whether in one political party through which the Govt. of India tries to create national integration?

To the *Vais*, these Mizos were *Jungli wallah*, dog eaters, semi-human beings, not much above monkeys unfit even to sleep on their verandahs. They were not allowed to drink from the common well and everything touched by them became polluted. Children hooted at them. They were sensitive enough to feel the insulting gesture and despising tones, the condescending attitude they encountered. To the Mizos all *Vais* appeared as wily cheats, whose words or promises cannot be depended upon.

In their declaration of Independence the MNF makes several accusations against the Government of India one of which deals with religious discrimination. The first Christian Missionaries came to Mizoram in January, 1894,<sup>13</sup> but spread rapidly throughout Mizoram. Some revivalists, for example, one Pastor Chhawna and others, predicted and saw visions which were definitely encouraging to some political ideals. Government often conducted public examinations on Sundays, official dignitaries visiting Mizoram on Sunday - these were interpreted as deliberate to restrict their freedom of public worship for those involved officially. Nehru himself visited on 3rd April, 1953 i.e. Sunday.<sup>14</sup> Restrictions of Missionaries' entry into their District was interpreted as an attempt to restrict Christian enterprise.<sup>15</sup> So the MNF brought out the religious issue. They considered India to be a land of the Hindus and the Mizoram of the Christians.<sup>16</sup>

It has been claimed that Assam is the most neglected State in India. The then Mizo District was undoubtedly the most neglected and undeveloped district in undivided Assam. The financing of the Government development schemes was one such scheme that would be drawn up and approved, but financial sanction would not come until toward the end of the year. The scheme then has to be completed before the end of the financial year so that a certificate of utilization can be obtained. This was necessary in order to draw the money, which must be drawn that year otherwise it may not be there in the next year. So certificate of completion were supplied (perhaps even without the scheme having been started) and the money drawn. Having the money provides the temptation to proceed no further with the scheme, and they pocketed the money for personal use. This created a restlessness for easy money and was further encouraged by corruption. To get things done at Silchar, the only door for Mizo people to the rest of India, they found corruption more widely prevalent to their great expense. This created exasperation and a desire to deal as little as possible with 'Vais'.

To add to this, the Cachar Forest Department claimed a portion of land measuring about 509 Sq. miles of *Lushai country* and beyond the southern boundary of Cachar district of British India. This portion of land was known as the Inner Line Forest Reserved.<sup>17</sup> Absence of clear boundary demarcation between Mizo District and Cachar District led to border disputes. When the Mizo District Council gave permits to some Mizos settled in land falling within this Inner Line belt, the Assam government objected and evicted

them and went to the extent of harassing and arresting some of them.<sup>18</sup> A question of this seriousness could be explosive and the MNF lost no time in stirring the Mizo sentiments against the 'Vais' in all issues.

Education was in the hands of the Missionaries for a long time. The British administration paid little or almost no attention to the education of the tribes. Maintenance of law and order was their primary concern.<sup>19</sup> They objected to higher education for Mizos for fear of producing 'black-coated gentlemen' unemployed. The main aim of missionaries was to make people able to read their Bible and other Christian literature.<sup>20</sup> Soon after independence Government took control of all educational programmes and opened more educational institutions. Neither the missionaries nor the Assam Government introduced Science and Technical education. While the primary aim of Missionaries was successful by achieving second to Kerala in India's literacy percentage, no job-oriented education was introduced so far. Of the 40 and odd 'MNF Senators' over half of them were either unemployed graduates or discontented in their post hold.

On health matter, there were only two Hospitals and six dispensaries to serve 8000 square miles area of land with a population of nearly three lakhs.<sup>21</sup> In the whole district before 1960 there were no more than 12 doctors at a time. People had to depend mostly on travelling Pharmacists. If people have felt neglected at all, it was in this department the neglect was felt most.

The rivers in Mizoram, to the eyes of the Govt. of Assam were not suitable for navigation or hydel project. Railway lines or Air transport had been out of question. The only alternative is road transport. No good road also was established. The main supply line, Silchar-Aizawl road, was not yet metalled during the Mautam Famine of 1960. Lunglei and Champhai could hardly be reached by Jeeps and they were fair weather roads. The poor communication system in the district hampered the supply of Government relief. The road in Mizo Hills before taking up of the work by the BRTF were extremely bad.<sup>22</sup>

Nirmal Nibedon wittingly remarked the Govt's new road project like this :

*"If the bridge of the Brahmaputra came up only after a Chinese aggression and the Border Roads Task force went all out in building roads in the Naga Hills after the insurgency, again it would be rebellion in the Mizo Hills which could infuse a new sense of urgency into the road building programmes. It was only in*

May 1967 that a project was launched to intensify road construction actively in the strife-torn mountains."<sup>22</sup>

Laldenga's trump card was demand for Mizo integration, i.e. Union with the Mizos of Manipur, Tripura in India and in Burma and Pakistan. The strategy made him the hero of romantic reaction and mobilized the extremist elements. The Indo-Pak War of 1965 opened up his opportunities. At the end of the year, Government decided to reinforce the armed forces stationed in the district. When Laldenga was returning from Pakistan he was arrested but was released reportedly, through the intervention of the then Chief Minister, B. P. Chaliha, after Laldenga had given an undertaking of good conduct.<sup>24</sup> The situation after Laldenga's release can be seen from Chaube's *Hill Politics* as shown below :

"On February 24, 1966 Governor in his address to the Legislative Assembly expressed satisfaction at the overall law and order situation. An opposition leader from Cachar, Tarapada Bhattacharya, made specific reference to the deteriorating situation in the Mizo Hills the next day".<sup>25</sup>

Throughout February, 1966, there were reports of MNE actively carrying arms and organising hostile propaganda about the district. Near mid-night on the 27 February a hand grenade exploded. Few took serious notice of it which was followed by the outbreak on the next midnight i.e. 28.2.1966.

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