

Mizoram, the 23rd State of the Indian Union is located in the north-eastern part of India. It is bounded by Bangladesh and Tripura on the west and by Chin Hills of Burma in the east and south. In the north, Mizoram has a common boundary with Cachar district of Assam and Manipur. The international border with Burma runs for about 435 kilometres and with Bangladesh for about 260 kilometres. Hence the location of Mizoram is quite strategic for India.¹

Mizoram was formerly known as Mizo Hills district. Still earlier it was called as Lushai Hills. In local language the area is called Mizoram or the land of the Mizos which has now become the official name. Mizoram continued to be a part of Assam till 1972 when it was made a Union Territory. Again, in 1987 Mizoram was raised to statehood on par with other states of the country.²

When the British came to Lushai (Mizo) Hills, they called the Mizos as Lushais. They were first known to the British as 'Kuki', probably a Bengali word meaning hillmen or highlanders.

-
1. Chib, S.S., North-Eastern India: Caste, Tribes and Culture of India, Vol. 8 (Ess Ess Publications, 1984, Delhi), p.300.
 2. Mizoram a Dreamland in the East, (Directorate of Information and Public Relations and Tourism of Mizoram, Government of Mizoram, 1989).

But these people called themselves 'Mizo', 'Mi' means 'man' and 'Zo' is taken to mean 'highland' and so Mizo means 'highlanders' or 'people living in high hills'. Mizo is thus a generic term and it stands for all the hillmen or highlanders in the Lushai (Mizo) Hills.

The origin of the word Lushai to which the district owed its name is not satisfactorily explained in the past. While the first part Lu is interpreted as 'head', the second part shai is taken to mean 'to shoot' and the word Lushai is thus said to define the 'characteristic of a Lushai as a head hunter'. Once again, shai is taken to mean 'long'. The equivalent of long, however, is sei also spelt in the past as shei and not shai. Truly speaking, the word Lushai is a corrupted pronunciation of the word Lusei.⁴ L.B. Thanga, a Mizo himself and a member of Indian Administrative Service, says:

There is no Mizo word as Lushai. This is purely a corruption of 'Lusei' which is the name of one of the many sub-tribes constituting the Mizos.⁵

Lusei is thus the name of a tribe of the many sub-tribes in the Lushai Hills. Formerly, the name of this area was the

3. Ibid.

4. Thanga, L.B., The Mizos: A Study in Racial Personality, (United Publishers, Gauhati, 1938), p. xii.

5. Ibid.

Lushai Hills District but now-a-days this area becomes one of the Constituent States of the Indian Union and is known as Mizoram.

There is no authentic record about the early history of the Lushais (Mizos). However, it is accepted that the Mizos are of Mongoloid stock. According to tradition, the Lushais came out of Chhinlung meaning 'Closed Stone', not a mythical rock as is believed by some, but out of a hole, in the ground, covered with a stone located in the east of Shan State in the Falam subdivision of the Chin Hills district in Burma. They migrated from this region of upper Burma in the 11th century under the pressure of the Chins and the pressure of over population. They passed through the Chindwin valley and the Chin Hills and finally came to the present habitat some time between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁶

The Lushai Hills is inhabited by a number of tribes which may broadly be divided into five major and eleven minor sub-tribes. The five major tribes are the Lusei, Ralte, Hmar, Paihte and Pawi. Also included were eleven minor sub-tribes known under the common name of 'Awzia'.⁷

6. Rao, V.V. "The Sociology of Mizo Politcis", in North East India: A Sociological Study, S.M. Dubey (Ed.), (Publishing Company, Delhi, 1978), p. 215.

7. Thanga, L.B. Op.cit., p. 5.

The Lusei is the ruling clan and consists of ten commoners' and six Chiefs' clans. Pachuau, Chawngte, Chhangte, Chuaungo, Hauhnar, Hrahse, Chuahang, Tochwawng, Vanchhawng and Chhakchhuak are the commoners' clans. The Chiefs' clans include Sailo, Rokhum, Rivung, Thangluah, Palian and Zadeng. Ralte consists of Khelte, Siakeng, Lelhchhun and Kawlni. Hmar is one of the tribes consisting of Lawitlang Zote, Khawbung, Ngurte, Thiak, Lungtan, Leiri, Banzang, Palhuang, Darngawn, Biahte, Hrangkhawl, Hmar, Lusei and Thahdo. Paihte includes Vuite, Dapzar, Paihte, Sukte, Thaute, Thaizang, Lamzang, Losau, Phunnawm, Phaileng, Din, Darbung, Demlo, Vangte and Zawng. Pawi consists of Hauhul, Hlawmchheu and Fanai.⁸

The eleven minor sub-tribes are Chawngthu, Chawhte, Ngente, Khawlhring, Khiangte, Pautu, Rawite, Renthlei, Tlau, Vangchhia and Zawngte.⁹

Like other hill tribes of North Eastern India, agriculture is the main stay of the Lushais. About 87% of the total work force of Lushai (Mizo) Hills is engaged in agriculture. The Lushais practised a special type of cultivation known as jhuming, that is, shifting cultivation.¹⁰ This method of culti-

8. Liangkhaia, Mizo Chanchin (Mizo Academy of Letters, Aizawl, 1976), pp. 9-21.

9. Thanga, L.B. Op.cit., pp. 6-7.

10. Chib, S.S. Op.cit., p. 309.

vation which is the backbone of the Lushai economy made the Lushais a migratory tribe. The Lushai villages are not stationary, they change places at regular intervals.¹¹

The principal crop grown by the Lushais (Mizos) is rice. Other crops like maize, ginger, sesamums and other vegetables are only secondary. The Lushais are labourious people and they love to work. All their activities revolve around the jhum operations and their festivals are all connected in one way or another with such agricultural operations. Lushais have three major festivals called Kut such as Mim Kut, Chapchar Kut and Pawl Kut.

Mimkut or maize festival which is usually celebrated during the months of August and September after the harvest of maize. It is a festival expressedly dedicated to the memory of the dear ones who had departed from the earth. Chapchar kut is perhaps the most important of the Lushai kut which is celebrated with great funfare and eclat after they completed their jhum-cutting, the most arduous task of their jhum operation. Pawl kut or Harvest Festival is celebrated with great enthusiasm by singing, dancing and community feasting during December to January.

11. Chatterjee, Suhas. Mizoram Under the British Rule, (Mittal Publications, Delhi, 1985), p. 3.

12. Chapchar Kut, a Social Institution in the Mizo Society, (Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl, 1975), p. 15.

13. Ibid.

In the Lushai society, there was no class distinction and even no discrimination on grounds of sex. The Lushais' code of ethics or Dharma revolves round Tlawmngaihna meaning altruism, hospitable, kind, unselfish and helpful to others. Tlawmngaihna stands for that compelling moral force which finds expression in self-sacrifice for the service of others.¹² It is this spirit of Tlawmngaihna which guides their thoughts and action towards social life. The acceptance of Tlawmngaihna as philosophy of life goes a long way to shape the values of life of the Lushais and therefore provides a strong anchorage to sustain the social structure of its community-based organisation.¹³

The Lushais were a distinct community and the social unit was the village. Around it revolved the life of a Lushai. Every Lushai village possessed a Zawlbuk called Bachelors' dormitory located in a central place. Zawlbuk was the institution wherein all the young men of the village were shaped into responsible adult members of the society. It may, thus, be said that Zawlbuk played a real vital role in the shaping of the young Lushais into responsible members of the society as well as in the organisation and administration of the village. Again, it served as the most potent institutionalized mechanism of social control.

12. Chatterji, N. Zawlbuk as a Social Institution in the Mizo Society, (Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl, 1975), p. 15.

13. Ibid.

The Lushais are fond of dancing. Most popular dance is Cheraw or bamboo dance. This dance was performed to wish a safe passage and victorious entry into the abode of the dead called Pialral for a soul of a mother who died on child birth. Cheraw is a dance of skill and alert minds. Khuallam is another popular dance normally performed by men and women dressed in Puandum (traditional cloth with black, red and green stripes) with the accompaniment of a set of gongs known as darbu. Another dance called Chheihlam is a dance of joy and exhilaration performed with the accompaniment of a song called Chheih Hla.

The Lushais were wholly animists. They believed in one Supreme being called Creator or Pathian who was the overlord of men, and in demons or ramhuai who inhabited the streams, the hills and the trees. Ramhuai was attributed with illness and misfortune. Most of the Lushai religious energies were devoted to the propitiation of the evil spirits, who were supposed to be the cause of misfortune and illness. They had to be propitiated for health, good harvest and general well-being. The village priest or Puithiam offered sacrifices to this ramhuai according to their traditional rites. The Lushais believed that after death the soul went to the abode of the death or Pialral or Mitthi khua. They also believed that in Mitthi khua all the good things were available in plenty and those who entered into Mitthi khua live and enjoy eternal happiness without

having to labour any more and oblivious of the world they had left behind. The soul of the dead man was believed to pass through Rih lake, a natural lake located inside Burma, near Champhai, a bordering village of Lushai Hills/Mizoram.¹⁴

However, with the coming of Christianity and the introduction of education by the Christian Missionaries more than 50 per cent of them embraced the Christian faith and nearly 60 per cent of them are now literate. The Lushais have been enchanted to their new found faith with so much dedication and zeal that within a very short span of time the entire social life and their outlook on life after death have been altogether transformed and guided by Christianity directly or indirectly and their sense of value have also undergone a drastic change.¹⁵ Christianity has also brought modernism among the Lushais.¹⁶

Christianity helped the Lushais to eradicate many evil practices and customs like head-hunting, sacrifice, slavery, warfare system and inter-tribal feuds. It has replaced them with intellectual pursuits like the spread of western education, literacy and improved ways of living. As a result, the British Government regarded the church as an agency of education and

14. Mizoram: The Exotic Land of Highlanders, (Information, Public Relations and Tourism, Aizawl, 1987), p. 7.

15. Ibid.

16. Chib, S.S. Op.cit., p. 311.

other social services. Besides, the church was not only the religious and cultural agency in the remotest parts of a district but also an employment of the educated people who took to teaching and preaching as a black coated occupation. For a talented man, the favour of a church could mean financial assistance to enable him to reach the threshold of higher education in the plains. In this way the church became a centre of power and patronage in the Lushai (Mizo) Hills.¹⁷

On the other hand, the Christian Missionaries were responsible for adulteration of the Lushai culture and age-old customs and traditions. They only provided the means of seeking their religious conversion in the name of their hood-winking technique of dealing with the simple Lushais (Mizos). Apart from that there are numerous evidences to show that though administration and church were functioning in the Lushai Hills with the same object, that is, the consolidation of the British rule. The results of their operations were not fair in all respects. Thus, the strategy of administration was least interference with the existing order while the activities of the church were undermining their foundations. The inevitable result was a social imbalance that not only lingered but also became aggravated after India's Independence.¹⁸

17. Prasad, R.N. Government and Politics in Mizoram, (Northern Book Centre, New Delhi, 1987), p. 70.

18. Ibid. "The Changing Power Structure of the Political Institution of Chieftainship in Mizoram", The Journal of the North-East India Council for Social Science Research, Vol. 9, No. 11, October 1987, Shillong, p. 11.

The Lushais live in villages. A Lushai village consists of clusters of houses usually set on the top of ridges of a hill. It is strongly fenced 'with several rows of bamboo spikes outside it'¹⁹ in order to get a good defensive position. Lt. Colonel T.H. Lewin describes the Lushai village as:

a confused mass of houses thickly scattered over the hill-side, and nearby all on different levels. The village was surrounded by a palisade of enormous logs, as thick as the leg of an elephant and ten feet high. The entrance lay through a stockaded passage, thickly studded with downward-pointing bamboo spikes, and defended by two heavy doors of rough-hewn timber, so thick as to be practically fire and bullet proof.²⁰

Again, a typical Lushai village consists of an assemblage of houses with the Chief's house at its centre. Each village is an independent unit ruled by a Chief.

In the Lushai Hills, each village used to be an independent unit under the concentrated power of its Chief or Lal.²¹ The Lushais did not appear to have state-like institutions. However, they had a form of polity for maintenance of internal stability and meeting external threats under the leadership of the Chiefs. Thus, the institution of chieftainship had been so firmly embedded in the early history of the Lushais.

-
19. Shakespeare, J. The Lushei-Kuki Clans, Part I, (Firma KLM Pvt Ltd., Calcutta, Reprint, 1975), p. 19.
20. Lewin, T.H. A Fly on the Wheel or How I Helped to Govern India (Firma KLM Pvt Ltd., Calcutta, Reprint, 1977), p. 197.
21. Pakem, B. "The Changing Power Structure of the Political Institution of Chieftainship in Mizoram", The Journal of the North East India Council for Social Science Research, Vol. V, No. 11, October 1981, Shillong, p.1.

The Chief was the sovereign authority in the village. The chieftainship was hereditary. Traditionally, the youngest son became Chief in the event of death of the father-chief. Though the Chief was the supreme administrative head, he would not assume absolute power in the administration of the village. He discharged several functions along with his council of elders or Upas - affecting the life of the people. These elders were selected or nominated by the Chief himself. Thus, their mode of government may be said to be a democracy by arrangement.²² The Chief could neither misuse his power nor oppress his people. If his subjects were dissatisfied with him, they had the right to move to another Chief's territory. Thus, the power of the Chief were circumscribed by the people of his village. In the administration of the affairs of the village, the Chief and his Upas were guided entirely by Lushai custom.

22. For details see, Animesh Ray's book Mizoram: Dynamics of Change (Calcutta, Pearl Publishers, 1982), pp. 30-31.

Further, Captain T.H. Lewin writes that among these hills tribes we find an actual existing system in practical working, which might well be classed among the visions of Utopian Philosophy. Their mode of government may be described as a democracy tempered by disposition. The right of rule is hereditary, that is only men descended from a certain family can be Chiefs. It does not however follow that all members of this ruling race should be chiefs; on the contrary, it is only those who are specially gifted and endowed with the capacity of drawing men to them who become so. A Chief's power is measured by the number of his fellows, and, as the people who follow him are perfectly free agents, it is natural sequence that the fittest or sometimes the most fortunate is the most powerful. Captain T.H. Lewin, Progressive Colloquial Exercise in Lushai Dialects, Calcutta, 1874, p. 79.

The Chief was a kind and helpful ruler in the village. He looked after the villagers as his own children. He was the leader and defender of his subject and the villagers were bound by custom to obey him. On the other hand, as had already been stated, if the Chief ruled over his subjects with an iron hand, they would move to another village or Chief. J. Shakespeare said that:

The Chief was, in theory at least, a despot; but the nomadic instinct of the people is so strong that any Chief whose rule was unduly harsh soon found his subject leaving him, and he was therefore constrained to govern according to custom.²³

Thus, the power of the Chief was very much circumscribed. Since the Chief was guided entirely by custom, the quantum of powers exercised by him depended on personality. A strong Chief controlled practically everything while a weak Chief was guided almost entirely by his Council of elders or Upas.

All matters of village administration were decided by the Chief along with his council of elders. With the elders the Chief transacted the business of the administration of his village. Again, the Chief along with the elders decided all matters connected with his village. He tried both civil and criminal cases. In fact, he was the appellate authority.

23. Shakespeare, J. Op.cit., p. 43.

The Chief was the owner of a particular land within which his village situated. However, there was no sense of landlordship. The Chief used to allot a plot of land to each family for cultivation for a period of one year. The cultivation is a migratory character and therefore the Lushais always move in search of suitable land for cultivation at intervals of about five years. Actually, it is this search for land for cultivation that has brought the Lushais to their present habitat.²⁴

The Lushai Chief had enjoyed a number of privileges and rights. The privileges which the Chief enjoyed were the Fathang or Paddy tax which was payable in kind to the Chief and amounted to six or ten baskets of paddy per house per year; Sachhiah or Flesh tax - leg of every wild animal shot or trapped by any of his villagers; Khuaichhiah or Honey tax - honey collected by any villagers from within the Chief's land; Chichhiah or salt-tax - a due on salt collected from salt well on his land; Salam or fine - a due known as Salam from the party who lose the case in the Chief's court and Lal in sak or building of the Chief's house with free of cost.

The Chief had also a number of bawi, such as Inpuichhung bawi, Chemsen bawi and Tuklui bawi. Inpuichhung bawi were those

24. Baveja, J.D. The Land Where the Bamboo Flowers, (Gauhati Publication Board, 1970), p. 62.

who took refuge in the Chief's house for want of food. Chemsen bawi means 'a man who became a slave on account of bloodshed,'²⁵ while the Tuklui bawi were those who were captured in wars.

Always on the look-out for new pastures, there were occasions of internecine feuds amongst the Lushais, which gave rise to the system of chieftainship. The first known Chief was to be a Lusei named Zahmuaka whose descendants ruled over vast areas of the Hills. Little was known about them to the outside world till the middle of the nineteenth century, when the Lushais raided the plains of Cachar, Sylhet and Chittagong Hill Tracts, particularly when the kings were weak and imbecile.

It was these raids and plunders which provoked punitive expeditions from the British. A number of punitive expeditions (1884, 1871-72)²⁶ were sent into the Lushai Hills. When the British moved into the Lushai Hills, the Chief fought the British with all the might at their command. However, the Lushai Hills came under the control of the British administration in 1891. The intention in annexing the Lushai Hills was for the protection of the plain areas of Assam.

25. Thanga, L.B. Op.cit., p. 25.

26. For details of punitive expeditions in the Lushai Hills, see A.S. Reid's book, Chin-Lushai Land (Calcutta, Firma KLM Pvt Ltd., Reprint 1976), and also R.G. Woodthorpe's book The Lushai Expedition 1871-72 (Gauhati, United Publishers, Reprint, 1980).

For general administrative purpose the Lushai Hills was divided into two districts, that is, North Lushai Hills with headquarters in Fort Aijal (Aizawl) and South Lushai Hills with headquarters in Fort Lungleh (Lunglei). The North Lushai Hills was under the immediate charge of the Superintendent of the Hills whereas the south one under a police officer. Public works were in charge of a District Engineer and a Civil Surgeon was stationed at Aijal (Aizawl). Again, the North Lushai Hills was subdivided into twelve circles and the South Lushai Hills into six circles. In each of these circles an Interpreter was posted, through whom all orders were transmitted to the village Chiefs and who was responsible for seeing that these orders were carried out.²⁷

By annexing the Lushai Hills, the British administrators made use of the service of the Village Chiefs for maintaining law and order and also for administering the villages. The British authority left the internal administration of the village to the Chief or Lal. The Chief would settle all disputes except murder and rape which were to be referred to the Superintendent, allocate land for cultivation to the villagers, feed and care for the poor and give shelter to those seeking refuge.

27. Allen B.C., Gait E. A., Allen C.G. and Howard H.G. Gazetteer of Bengal and North East India, (Delhi, Mittal Publications, Reprint 1984), pp. 465-466.

28. Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation (I), Section 2. Government of India, Notification No. PLX 393/70-Pt dated September 7, 1970.



In 1898, the north and south Lushai Hills were amalgamated as one district under the charge of a Superintendent. Later, the district was declared an Excluded Area under the Government of India Act 1935 and was placed directly under the Governor of Assam, the Act of Provincial Legislature being inapplicable to the district unless specifically extended by the Governor.

The British Government was intensely concerned with the protection of the boundaries of the hill areas. Hence the British Government decided to define the boundary unilaterally. Thus, the boundaries of all the plains districts of Assam with neighbouring hills areas inhabited by the independent tribes were determined by an imaginary line called the 'Inner Line'. This line was to be guarded by a chain of posts and beyond it only political relations with the tribes were to be cultivated.²⁸ The Inner Line separating the area from the rest of India restricted the entry of people other than the natives of the district. The purpose of this system was to safeguard the culture and social customs of the Lushais and to encourage them to develop themselves according to their own competence and genius.

The British Government prohibited all British subjects from going beyond the 'Inner Line' without a pass from the Deputy Commissioner, Cachar.²⁹ This regulation continues even

28. Ray, Animesh. Op.cit., pp. 42-48.

29. Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation 1873, Section 2. Government of Assam, Notification No. PLA 393/70-Pt dated September 7, 1970.

today in Mizoram. The continuation of this system has been allowed by the government mainly to prevent economic exploitation and the loss of ethnic and cultural identity of the tribes (Mizos).

With the introduction of British administration in the Lushai Hills, the position of the Chief had undergone a drastic change. At the initial stage, the British Government considered it convenient to administer the Lushai Hills through the Chiefs. It was also realized that it would be possible to run the administration of the district without great expenses if the Chiefs' rule was carried on and maintained. When the British took over the Lushai Hills there were about sixty Chiefs, but in 1940 the number rose to more than 400,³⁰ as the British authority created a number of new Chiefs.³¹

Once again, when the British established its sovereignty in the Lushai Hills, the Chiefs were made the representatives of the British Government. The Lushai Chief was, therefore, responsible for all that went on in his village. The Chief was made to deal with almost all types of case. In every village,

30. McCall A.G. The Lushai Chrysalis, (Firma KLM Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, Reprint 1977), p. 215.

31. The reliable persons and even some of the Government officials were appointed as Chiefs for an efficient as well as effective administration of the Lushai Hills. But, since in the absence of definite rules, policies and checks by the Government there was no statutory binding on their successors.

there was a village writer or Khawchhiar appointed by the Superintendent to help the Chief. 'Formerly, there was no village writer or Khawchhiar. This post was created by the British when they occupied the Hills.'³²

The British administration weakened the position of the Chiefs by vesting the lands occupied by the Chief in its own hand and also by curtailing certain traditional rights of the Chiefs. This lowered the position and prestige of the Chiefs before their people.³³

On the other hand, with the coming of the British into the Lushai Hills, modern education was introduced and the people had therefore been getting educated. They had also access to outside Lushai Hills and as a result they learned the art of democracy. In addition to this, some of the Chiefs misused their rights and powers. Thus, because of modern education and the introduction of Christianity, there emerged a new class in the Lushai society which articulated the feeling of resentment of the people against the activities of the Chiefs.

The resentment of the people against the Chiefs led also to the birth of a political party, that is, Mizo Union. The

32. Lalrimawia, "The Lushai Chief", Historical Journal of Mizoram, October-December 1982 and January-March 1983, Vol.II, Book 2 & 3, Aizawl, 1983, p. 15.

33. McCall A.G. Op.cit., p. 202.

Mizo Union emerged with definite objective of improving the political condition of the people and establishing good relations between the Chiefs and the people. It also aimed at democratising the machinery of administration of the village.

The Mizo Union demanded that a Chief should rule the village not through the elders or Upas appointed by the Chief himself but elected by the people. However, after sometime the Mizo Union having not satisfied with this demand, appealed further to the British authority for the abolition of Chieftainship itself which culminated in its abolition in 1954.

But the resentment against the Chiefs was regarded by the British as opposition to the British authority. On the other hand, the Mizo Union aroused the feeling of the people against the Chiefs. With the initiation of the Mizo Union, the people went to the extent of damaging the gardens of the Chiefs and their supporters and also stoned their houses as well. However, the British Government supported the prevailing system of administration of the village by the Chiefs. Thus, this conflict between the Mizo Union backed by the common people and the Chief supported by the British authority continued even after the end of British rule in India, 1947.

Before and after the commencement of the Indian Constitution, a sense of uncertainty and apprehension about their poli-

tical future gripped the minds of the educated leaders of the Lushai Hills. It was a fact that during this period the Lushais aspired for something better. Truly speaking, they were thinking in terms of separation from India. The Mizo Union and other organisations like Mizo Hmeichhe Association, Ex-servicemen Association demanded as widest autonomy as possible for the Lushai (Mizo) Hills. Finally, the Lushai Hills District Council was created in 1952 along with United Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Garo Hills, Naga Hills, North Cachar and Mikir Hills as provided under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. Thus, to some extent, the aspiration of the people for political power was fulfilled.

The institution of the District Council was a completely new and untried experience for both the district and the State (Assam) and the going was rather difficult and unsteady during the initial period.³⁴ The District Council started functioning with twenty members, 18 elected and the rest nominated. The members of the District Council were selected on the basis of adult franchise.

The District Council which was dominated by the Mizo Union abolished the institution of chieftainship and in their places, created democratically elected body, that is, village

34. Bawichhuaka, H.K. "Mizoram Panaroma (Upto U.T.)", Mizoram News Magazine, Issue No. 1, August 1984, Aizawl, p. 27.

councils in the villages. The District Council, however, soon came into criticism due to its limited role within a decade. People became dissatisfied with the working of the District Council due to lack of adequate financial assistance from the Government of Assam. Even the Mizo Union was not satisfied and therefore demanded a separate State within the Indian Union.

In 1959, there was famine called Mautam which ultimately resulted in armed revolt against the Government of India. This famine was a phenomenon occurring at the interval of fifty years, marked with flowering of bamboos and incredibly high proliferation of rodents, which swarmed the jhums and devoured all the crops. The result was a widespread famine. To relieve the needy people the Government supplied free food in the district. However, the people felt that the Assam Government did not pay adequate assistance to the district. Many voluntary organisations were thus formed to alleviate the distress of the people. One of such organisations was the Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF), which turned itself into Mizo National Front (MNF) in 1961 with the objective of attaining independence and sovereignty for the Mizo Hills.³⁵

Motivated by the political aspiration and compelled by awareness of the existing economic and political backwardness,

35. Heralding Mizoram State, (Information, Public Relations and Tourism, Aizawl, 1987), p. 4.

the Mizo National Front Movement founded by Mr Laldenga, gained unprecedented popularity. For achieving its goal, the Mizo National Front took arms on February 28, 1966, and thus insurgency broke out in the Mizo Hills.³⁶

This insurgency paralysed the administration of the village and the district as a whole for sometime. The district was also declared a disturbed area and security forces were inducted to deal with Mizo National Front Movement.

With a view to facilitate the operations of the security forces, to offer protection to the villages and to give opportunities for better extension services, villages were brought together and grouped along the motorable roads. The grouping villages were called Progressive and Protected Villages (PPV) but later changed to Group Centres, looked after by an Administrative Officer who was assisted by Extension officers for various developmental activities.³⁷

Thus, by realising the political unrest, the Government of India enacted the North Eastern Re-organisation Act 1971 and subsequently under the provision of this Act the Mizo Hills District was again Christened 'Mizoram' and made a Union Territory on January 21, 1972. As a result, the Mizo District Council

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

was abolished in 1972 and Mizoram was divided into three districts, namely - Aizawl District, Lunglei District and Chhimitui District. The Pawi-Lakher Regional Council was also trifurcated into Pawi, Lakher, and Chakma District Councils. It may thus be said that Mizoram has witnessed vast constitutional, political and administrative changes during the period under study.

In short, the administrative development in the State could be traced from the traditional village administration headed by the Chiefs who continued till 1954 when their offices were abolished. The village administration was taken over by the District Council, a modern democratic political institution, functioning within the then composite State of Assam. But in 1972, the administrative pattern had undergone a significant change with the upgradation of the Mizo Hills District into a Union Territory of Mizoram with its own popular government.

consumption. That is to say, the non-existence of any socio-economic differentiation among tribal population is believed to be the characteristic feature of these societies. This view is commonly held both by the political leaders and the academics. While conceding that these societies are not stratified into distinct groups and classes, it is argued that the concrete reality cannot uphold such assumptions. A scientific study of this society

will enable us to delineate the emerging trends in the socio-economic formation in Mizoram. This is crucial for the

In the pre-British period, the Lushai (Mizos) were a close-knit society with no class distinction from social, religious and economic point of view and no discrimination on grounds of sex. In the Lushai Hills, there was no land-holding system and hence no private ownership of property. In these days a man had to produce himself the material means of livelihood. There was also no impact of money and market economy among the Mizos. However, with the advent of the British administration, the Mizo society began to undergo rapid changes in all aspects of their social life. This trend continued more vigorously since India's independence.

It is a commonly held view that the tribal societies are homogeneous and unstructured units of production and consumption. That is to say, the non-existence of any socio-economic differentiation among tribal population is believed to be the characteristics feature of these societies. This view is commonly held both by the political leaders and the academics. While conceding that these societies are not stratified into distinct groups and classes, it is argued that the concrete reality cannot uphold such assumptions. A scientific study of this society

will enable us to delineate the emerging trends in the socio-economic formation in Mizoram. This is crucial for the understanding of the various stages in the development of administration and its role in the socio-economic development of the State.

Against the background stated above, the following trends are noted - the uneven distribution of land among the individual households and the consequent emergence of private ownership of land, private capital, expansion of trade and introduction of money and market economy and the emergence of an educated and westernized middle class. It is, thus, clear that the class-like formations have already come into being in the society. Thus, social stratification based upon private ownership of land has also become a reality.

In the pre-British period, each Lushai village was ruled over by a Chief who was independent of the other. The Chief was the sole centre of authority in the village. He administered the village along with his council of elders appointed by the Chief himself. The Chief was also helped and assisted by village officials namely - the Ramhual (advisers to the Chief with regard to jhum cultivation), the Tlangau (village crier who informed the public of the Chief's orders), the Puithiam (priest who offered

religious sacrifices) and the Zalen (richmen who helped the Chief in time of scarcity of food).

As head of the village, the Chief enjoyed the privileges of Fathang (paddy tax, that is, six tins of Kerosene oil), Sachhiah (meat tax, that is, a fore-hind leg of the animal trapped or shot), Chichiah (salt tax, that is, salt collected within the Chief's area), Khuaichhiah (honey tax, that is, honey collected within the area of Chief) and Salam (fine imposed upon a person who was found guilty in the dispute). The Chief had also the right to order capital punishment, to seize food stores and property of the villagers who wished to transfer allegiance to other Chief, propriety right over lands; to tax traders doing business within his jurisdiction; right to freedom of action in relation to appointing his son as Chief within his land; to attach the property of his villagers when he wished and right to help bawi who were by custom not open to redemption.

The Chief was all-in-all in the village. His word became law. He settled all disputes with his council of elders. While dealing with the cases, the Chief had to take care of the custom, tradition and usage of the land. The Chief had also a number of bawi (almost equivalent to slave). The bawi were categorized into three groups

such as Inpuichhungbawi (those who were driven out by want of food and shelter took refuge in the Chief's house, Chemsenbawi (criminals who took refuge in the Chief's house and became the property of the Chief) and Tuklut bawi (person who, during war deserted the losing side and joined the victorious Chief by promising that he and his descendants would be bawi). Besides these bawi, the Chief had also a number of Sal or captives who were captured in war and raids. It may be stated here that much of the position of the Chief depended on the bawi custom which was an institution of dependence of certain categories of persons on the Chief.

In fine, the Chief looked after the villagers as his own children. The relationship between the Chief and the people was mainly depended upon the character of the Chief's administration and its role in contributing to the well-being of the people. In fact, the village administration under the Chief before the advent of the British was generally benevolent in character.

However, the character of the village administration had undergone a change when the British annexed the Lushai Hills in 1891. The British found each Lushai village as mini-state ruled over by its own Chief. Being shrewd imperialist, the British felt the necessity of retaining

the chieftainship for the maintenance of the internal administration of Lushai Hills. Again, the British thought it expedient for the sake of their own administration of the area (that is Lushai Hills) to invest the Chief with real power and allow him to run the administration of his village as large a measure of autonomy as practicable. The British authority used to be only a de-jure administrator of the district while the defacto administration was left to the village Chiefs. In fact, the Chiefs were made the representatives of the British authority in their own land. The Chiefs became more powerful under the British rule, but in practice they were subordinated to the British authority even in customary matters.

By annexing the Lushai Hills, the British authority divided the whole Lushai Hills into two districts - North and South Districts for smooth administration. Later on, the two districts were amalgamated as one district under the charge of Superintendent with headquarters at Aijal (old spelling for the present Aizawl). The British introduced a new policy of 'Inner Line Regulation' by which foreigners were controlled from entering into the Lushai Hills without prior permission. This system was introduced in order to safeguard the culture and social customs of the Lushais and to encourage them to develop themselves

according to their own competence. This system continues even today to prevent assimilation from the plains as well as to prevent economic exploitation.

Under the Government of India Act 1935, the Lushai Hills was treated administratively as one of the excluded areas over which the provincial Ministry had no jurisdiction. Thus, as an 'Excluded Area', the Governor of Assam as an Agent of the Governor-General-in-Council was invested with authority over the district. The expenditure incurred in the Lushai (Mizo) Hills was also not voted by the Provincial Legislature because the district had no representation in the Assam Legislature. The district was also not represented in Central Legislative Council before India's independence. In fact, the British wanted to keep the Lushai (Mizo) Hills away from the popular rule or under the Governors and their political agents. However, the British Government failed to provide autonomous administration for the Lushais (Mizos) to manage their local affairs according to their own genius and ability. By following the policy of administrative isolation, the British hindered the Lushais to come into contact with the rest of India which had a large political influence on the minds of the people.

With the British occupation of the Lushai Hills, the Christian missionaries began to enter into the Lushai (Mizo) Hills. The Christian missionaries introduced education and gave 'Roman' script to the Mizo language and the Mizos became educated and thus Christianity changed the social structure of the Mizos. This ultimately led to the idea of having democratic form of government. Thus political consciousness is of a relatively origin with the foundation laid by the Christian educated missionaries.

Although the village administration was left to the Chiefs, the Superintendent laid down the following responsibilities over the Chiefs - The Chief was responsible for all that went on in his village. All orders affecting a village in any way would also adjudicate all civil disputes among the people of his village. He would also dispose of all criminal cases, except those involving heinous crimes. Such serious cases of a heinous nature would be referred to the Superintendent. The Chief should also be responsible for ensuring that records were kept of the following matters - all births and deaths, all movement of people, all changes in licensed guns. Most of the rights and privileges had also been suspended. This was done in order to meet the exigencies of the situation.

The British had also made a change in the mode of succession of chieftainship. Instead of the youngest son, the eldest son succeeded to the office of the father-Chief but the property of the father Chief would go to the youngest son. The main objective of the British policy in this regard was to obtain the Chief's loyalty towards the British administration.

In short, the British did not make much changes in the administration of the village since they (that is, the British) followed a policy of non-interference. The only difference was that the traditional administration of the village was like a form of democracy tempered by disposition while the British made use of the services of the Chiefs to legitimize its rule. This British policy was popularly known as indirect administration which was more or less similar to that existed in British colonies in Africa.

On the other hand, the Chiefs became oppressive towards their people. Their rule was unbearable for the commoners. The commoners, however, could do nothing as the opposition towards the Chiefs was fully safeguarded by the British Superintendent. The British Government regarded the opposition to the Chief's rule as the opposition to the British authority. Thus, the British gave

security to the Chiefs. Under the British rule, some of the Chiefs ruled the villagers autocratically. As a result, the people began to develop a kind of hostility towards the Chiefs. This led to the emergence of political consciousness among the people which resulted in the formation of political parties like Mizo Union and the United Mizo Freedom Organization (UMFO). The Mizo Union was opposed to the Chiefs who were enjoying the patronage of the British authority and in fact, it stood for the abolition of chieftainship. The Mizo Union also demanded the widest autonomy for the Lushai (Mizo) Hills within the Indian Union. At the same time, the United Mizo Freedom Organization put forward its objective of the Lushai Hills joining Burma. Unlike the Mizo Union, the UMFO supported the Chiefs. For example, Lalmawia, the son-in-law of one of the Chiefs, was elected as President of UMFO. While demanding better status, the two political parties fought each other on the issue of the abolition of chieftainship which was the political issue of the day.

After India's independence, the emerging educated section of the society demanded adequate provisions for the protection of their political, social and economic rights. There were also people who thought in terms of an independent Mizo territory. Some organizations wanted

the unification of the entire Mizo inhabited areas in India and Burma under one unified political system. All these demands, in fact, emerged out of the desire for preserving and protecting the Mizo identity.

Meanwhile, the Constituent Assembly of India deliberated upon the problems of the hill districts of Assam which resulted in the setting up of Bardoloi Sub-Committee to assess the opinion of the people over the Constitutional status of their areas in India. On the recommendation of the Bardoloi Sub-Committee, the Constitution of India provided for a Sixth Schedule under which a District Council for each hill district of Assam should be created to safeguard the interests of the hill people and their customary way of life. Accordingly, the Lushai Hills District Council was inaugurated in April 1952. In the southern of the Lushai Hills, the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council was also inaugurated the following year, that is, April 23, 1953. In the first election to the Lushai Hills District Council, the Mizo Union won the majority of the seats and thus run the new administration.

Under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India, the Lushai Hills District took over allotment of land for house-sites; forests; regulation of jhumming, control and allotment of land for other

agricultural purposes; establishment of village councils; inheritance of property; marriage and social customs; money lending and trading by non-tribals; fisheries; management and control of markets and assessment and collection of land revenue. It was also empowered to collect taxes on land and building; trades, etc. Thus, the Lushai District Council started functioning as the major executing agency for most of the development works in regard to development of rural water supply, rural communications and other local development and self-help schemes.

The District Council consists of twenty four members including the nominated members. It is a cabinet system of government with an executive committee headed by the Chief Executive Member and two Executive Members appointed by the Governor on the recommendation of the Chief Executive Member.

The District Council is a modern political institution where the hereditary Chief has no place. The first political party which dominated the District Council was the Mizo Union which was a strong anti-Chiefs' organization. The Mizo Union strongly demanded the abolition of chieftainship. On the other hand, the Chiefs were not reconciled to the possible abolition of their offices.

non-tribal) Regulation 1952. As per the Regulation, non-

However, the Government of Assam passed an Act called the Assam Lushai Hills District (Acquisition of Chiefs' Right) Act, 1954. Accordingly, the rights and interests of all the existing 259 (two hundred and fifty-nine) Chiefs in the area covered by the Mizo District Council were acquired by the Government of Assam and handed over to the Mizo District Council on April 1, 1954. In case of the Pawi-lakher Region the rights and interests of the existing 50 (fifty) Chiefs were handed over to the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council on April 15, 1956.

The District Council enacted the Lushai Hills District (Village Council) Act in 1953 and subsequently constituted Village Councils in every village in place of the traditional institution of chieftainship. The village council which is a democratically elected body, has to look after the best interests of the village as a whole. The village administration is entrusted with the Village Council. It has also the power to administer justice in the village. In fact, the Village Council is now the only institution in which the village level administration is entrusted.

One of the most important Regulations of the District Council was the Lushai Hills District (Trading by non-tribal) Regulation 1953. As per the Regulation, non-

tribals were not allowed to carry on business in any commodities in the Lushai Hills without prior permission from the District Council. This regulates and controls trading by non-tribals in the Lushai Hills till today.

The District Council also passed the Lushai Hills District (money-lending by non-tribals) Regulation 1953, which discouraged money lenders' entry to the district. In fact, this Regulation was hardly practicable because such business of money-lending was not common in Mizoram.

By enacting the Lushai Hills District (House sites) Act in 1953, the District Council empowered the Village Council to allot land for the construction of houses and other non-agricultural purposes. This Act continues even today. The Pawi-Lakher Regional Council did not pass any legislation on this subject.

As regards the administration of justice, the District Council passed the Lushai Hills Autonomous District (Administration of justice) Rules in 1953. Accordingly, Village Council Courts in the villages, two Subordinate District Council Courts one at Aijal (Aizawl) and the other at Lungleh (old spelling for the present Lunglei) and one District Council Court at Aijal (Aizawl) were created to try cases between the parties belonging to

Scheduled Tribe or Tribes within the jurisdiction of the District Council. In the Pawi-Lakher Region, Village Council Courts and one Regional Council Court were constituted. The power and functions of these courts were identical with that of the Lushai Village Council Courts and District Council Court respectively.

In addition to the above, the Lushai (Mizo) Hills District Council enacted a number of Rules, Acts and Regulations for promoting socio-economic development as well as protecting the distinct identity of the people. Thus, in accordance with the provisions of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India, the District Council administered the entire Lushai (Mizo) Hills, whereas each Lushai Village was ruled over by hereditary Chief before the formation of the Lushai (Mizo) Hills District Council.

Though the District Council has been entrusted with development functions, however, it could not effectively implement them due to inadequate financial assistance from the Government of Assam. As a result, the people of the Lushai (Mizo) Hills aspired for better socio-economic and political status. Even the Mizo Union which dominated the District Council, demanded a separate political status 'statehood' for the Mizos within the Indian Union. The Mizo Union mobilized the people and moulded

public opinion in favour of Mizoram State. The Mizo Union leaders submitted a number of memoranda demanding statehood for Mizoram.

During this period, a famine called Mautam took place which ultimately resulted into armed revolt against the Government of India. This happened because the Assam Government was not prompt in taking relief measures which caused serious discontent among the Mizos. Mizo National Famine Front was formed to help the needy. Later, this social organization turned itself into a political party, that is, Mizo National Front (MNF) with the objective of gaining an independent State for Mizoram which later spearheaded the insurgency movement in the State in March 1966. Thus, due to the united efforts and political skill of the Mizos the Government of India agreed for political settlement and came out with the proposal to constitute the Mizo Hills into a Union Territory. As a result, Mizo Hills District was upgraded to the status of a Union Territory of Mizoram, on January 21, 1972 under the provisions of the North Eastern Areas (Re-organisation) Act, 1971.

Thus, a new era of administration was ushered in in Mizoram. The Mizo District Council was replaced by a Legislative Assembly consisting of thirty three members including the nominated members. The first general election

to the Mizoram Legislative Assembly was held in April 1972. Thus, the Mizoram Legislative Assembly was constituted on April 29, 1972 and on this date the Mizo District Council stands dissolved. For the convenience of administration, Mizoram was then divided into Aizawl District with headquarters at Aizawl; Lunglei District with headquarters at Lunglei and Chhimtuipui District with headquarters at Saiha. This was, again, done to facilitate implementation of developmental programmes. The Pawi-Lakher Regional Council which existed prior to 1972 was split into Pawi, Lakher and Chakma autonomous District Councils with headquarters at Lawngtlai, Saiha and Vaseitlang respectively. The Rules, Regulations and Acts framed by the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council are to remain in force under all these three new District Councils till amended by the corresponding District Councils.

By having an elected legislature and a responsible popular Government, Mizoram is no more a regulatory one enforcing law and order alone as had been the principle and practice during the British rule. It is now an instrument of socio-economic development. The political powers are also in the hands of the Mizos. Administration in Mizoram is streamlined to meet the demands of the growing and traditional society. Thus, administration plays a

significant role in solving the problem of integration and participation. Thus, it is clear from the study that the administrative pattern had undergone a significant change with the transformation of the Lushai Hills District into the Lushai (Mizo) Hills Autonomous District Council and to Union Territory of Mizoram in 1972.

On the whole, the study investigates the various changes in the administrative structure from the village traditional administration to Union Territory administration. This study is the first of its kind because no serious attempts were made so far. It is true that few research articles were written and published before, but the treatment of the subject is too scanty and limited. This study therefore tries to probe beyond what was done before by delving deeper to arrive at wider and concrete conclusions.

The findings of the study are very clear. In short, we found that -

- (a) in the past the traditional administration of the village was run by the Chief;
- (b) there was a tremendous impact of the British administration on the Chiefs and their powers;
- (c) a slight difference between the British and the traditional administration existed;

- (d) there were a number of factors leading to the formation of the District Council in the Lushai (Mizo) Hills;
- (e) the character of District Council administration and the Assam State administration differed greatly from one another; and
- (f) there was some kind of improvement under the Lushai (Mizo) Hills District Council administration than before, when the area under study was under the then Composite State of Assam. There was further development in the area after the creation of a Union Territory of Mizoram.

However, the present study tries to answer many important issues, it has, no doubt, its own limitations and constraints. Many other areas of enquiry are still left to be covered. They are, we feel, beyond the purview of the present study. Therefore, we would like to mention a few more important areas of enquiry which need to be seriously taken for further study. In a nutshell, these issues are like - the role of Bureaucracy in the administrative development in Mizoram State and emergence of representative institutions in Mizoram require further research in the future.
